

## **ABSTRACT**

### ***Life in Towns After Rome: Investigating Late Antique and Early Medieval Urbanism c.AD 300-1050***

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Through extensive use of primary and secondary material, this study examines the development of the late classical and early medieval town across three regions of north-western Europe in order to map physical and functional urban change and to identify the key factors linking a spatially and temporally broad study area. The three diverse but complementary areas of investigation consist of Britain, a region with a relatively tenuous, discontinuous urbanism, Gaul, with its persistence of urban functions and populations throughout the period of study, and Scandinavia and Ireland, regions revealing a late urbanism.

In each core chapter the archaeological and documentary data for towns are reviewed followed by presentation of key case studies. Selected for their level/quality of investigation, these provide the essential platform for a wider discussion of urban roles between c.AD 300-1050.

The thesis establishes that urban form and developmental trajectories were highly intricate, with considerable temporal and spatial diversity and, as a result, towns demonstrate strongly individualistic histories, with a heavy dependency upon setting, role(s) and, above all, human presences. Despite this variety, the emergence of royal authority, the Christian Church and inter-regional market economies are recognised as fundamental and consistent factors in the establishment, and continued existence, of a stable urban network.



**LIFE IN TOWNS AFTER ROME: INVESTIGATING  
LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL  
URBANISM *c.*AD 300-1050**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Leicester**

**by**

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## INTRODUCTION

Towns are, by their very nature, complex socio-economic structures involved in constant transition and change and, as such, defy simplistic monocausal explanations regarding their origins and developmental sequences. Later Roman and early medieval European urbanism is no exception to this rule, and the substantial spatial, temporal and theoretical scope of this research guarantees considerable conceptual and logistical challenges for archaeologist and historian alike.

The period AD 300-1050 is, indeed, a pivotal one and the object of considerable debate concerning the question of urban continuity from the classical to medieval epochs. Whereas the rich and lengthy ancestry of Mediterranean urbanism with its successive Greek, Phoenician and Roman influences guaranteed the continued evolution of towns beyond the classical period, north-western European urban life was a comparatively new development whose very existence was threatened by the disruptions of the later Roman Empire. The demise of Rome's vast Western Empire, combined with political and economic fragmentation and the imposition of new powers in 'Germanic Europe', can be seen to have severely damaged urbanism. Although AD 500-1050 witnessed urban nadirs, impacts were variable, and the period was increasingly characterised by the regeneration and redefinition of towns and, indeed, the development of new urban forms. The late tenth and eleventh centuries are notable in this respect regarding events in Ireland and Scandinavia, regions wherein the emergence of towns was a distinctly belated development in comparison to the former Roman provinces of Britain and Gaul. Hence the necessity of extending the period of study to AD 1050 in order to chart the foundation of such towns as Dublin and Schleswig. The towns of this considerable time span are, however, the subject of extensive academic debate, with dispute centring upon their form, value, roles and contents. In the light of this controversy, north-western European archaeology offers considerable potential to re-assess urbanism in the period AD 300-1050. This thesis sets out to review the burgeoning corpus of data and to establish the true character of towns beyond the classical period.

Key themes that will be addressed include the issue of what, precisely, were the post-classical towns, and to what extent and why did their classical pasts endure? Who

organised and regulated these survivals or directed new functions and objectives? Are specific resultant urban types and features recognisable or is it problematic to seek 'models' in the urban forms that emerge from AD 400? Is it, indeed, viable to classify towns in typological groups or should they always be viewed as purely individual and distinctive units, comparable to others solely in terms of basic administrative and religious function?

In order to investigate the diverse and wide-ranging developmental trajectories of late Roman and early medieval urbanism operating across north-western Europe, three distinct case study regions have been selected in order to avoid the insularity of approach characterising the majority of previous studies. The areas of investigation thus consist of diverse but complementary areas of study, namely Britain, Gaul, Scandinavia and Ireland.

**Britain** is a region demonstrating a relatively tenuous, discontinuous urbanism, with substantial and widespread late Roman urban depopulation and failure, but continuing elite secular and/or ecclesiastical presences, fragmented Church influence and, subsequently, a powerful urban revival with the *wics* and *burhs*. **Gaul**, on the other hand, displays a marked persistence of urban functions and populations throughout the period of study, processes aided by enduring secular elite occupational and institutional involvement, increasingly in the medium of episcopal office, and an increasingly powerful Church that served to impact significantly upon urban fabric and economic functions. Subsequently, town-based Carolingian and Norse administrations reinforced centralised political, religious and economic urban functions. **Scandinavia** and **Ireland** have been selected for two reasons. Firstly, both lay beyond the decaying Roman world and thus lacked an inherited urban 'culture'. Secondly, the interlocking factors of kingship, state formation processes, trade and the Christian Church proved crucial to the subsequent development of a wealthy and stable form of urbanism, despite the prolonged absence of secular and ecclesiastical administrations from the towns. The early and significant involvement of the Irish Church in trade and market activities prompted the development of the region's first proto-urban sites and, subsequently, towns. Emergent Scandinavian royal houses took considerably longer to harness economic activity via the creation of market centres and, ultimately, towns, despite their paradoxical 'assistance' in the revival of urban life in Britain and elsewhere.

Drawing extensively upon both archaeological data and contemporary written materials, key towns will be drawn from each case study region in order to examine their developmental sequences and to raise the fundamental problems of urban character and function (Chapters 2-4). This will form a preliminary stage to determining the general influences serving to drive town evolution at the level of the individual study area. Subsequently drawing from results from these various regions, analysis will be taken a stage further in order to identify the broad agents and agencies serving to influence urban development (Chapter 5). Proceeding from a summarisation of key debates and problems of recent and ongoing research, a range of research objectives and questions are proposed as pointers for future early urban studies which will be equally applicable to provinces of the former Roman empire as to those regions beyond its frontiers (Chapter 6).

As will be demonstrated, urban form and developmental trajectories across the three case study regions during the period AD 300-1050 display both considerable intricacy and spatial and temporal diversity, with marked dependency upon setting, function and, notably, human presences. The end result was towns with highly individualistic histories. Despite this variety, however, I will argue that the disparate regions were linked across the late antique and early medieval periods by a series of key common functional and thematic threads, namely, royal authority, the Christian Church and inter-regional market economies.

As a final preliminary to the investigation of the first of the three case study regions, a series of key questions are raised for consideration, issues that early urban researchers are increasingly attempting to address:

- What constitutes urbanism and/or a town?
- Is patterning evident in urbanism?
- Who and what enable the process of continuity to be undertaken?
- What factors serve to drive urban change?
- What physical structures and institutions endure?
- Who and what dictates persistence or maintenance of the above?
- Who or what determines social and economic regulation?
- Are individuals and social groups visible in towns?
- Do the above serve to physically impact on the urban fabric?

Chapter One will introduce the evolution of debates regarding such aspects of urbanism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### IMAGES OF AND APPROACHES TO THE POST-CLASSICAL TOWN

#### 1.1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter details past and present urban research agendas and introduces a number of themes that will feature prominently in the following chapters. The range and complexity of perceptions of and attitudes towards the towns and urban life which have characterised debates past and present will firstly be briefly outlined prior to an examination of the range of available archaeological and historical data sets.

Research has long since moved away from the traditional perception of a sequence comprising of the flourishing classical towns, late Roman decay and resultant urban collapse prior to a ninth-century revival, an image largely based on limited documentary data and minimal archaeology. As will be seen, the mapping of urban change across continental Europe from c.AD 300-1050 is no small task. Changing social and urban strategies throughout this period resulted in an evolving sequence of town forms, beginning with the later classical city. From the mid-third century AD, economic and political developments obliged a progressive shift in public munificence away from the construction and upkeep of the familiar range of Roman public buildings and facilities such as baths, fora, theatres and water supply systems, towards the practicalities of defensive circuits. Accordingly, the identification of the town with a particular form of idealised life (Liebeschuetz 1992: 2) is likely to have been progressively eroded.

In seeking to counter such attrition, however, the Church played an increasingly significant role in the emergence of a diverse urbanism, developments aided by its close urban ties. It is in these twin fundamental aspects of defence and religion that we see the greatest divergence from the 'classical city' urban model and its redefinition to a new, medieval form.

## 1.2: THE TOWN, URBAN LIFE AND POPULATIONS: DEFINING POST-CLASSICAL URBANISM

At its most fundamental level, the debate regarding post-classical urbanism has been consistently characterised by an ongoing search for the definitions of a number of complex, interrelated key themes. What factors are required to be present for a settlement to merit the title of 'town'? Any response is likely to be as closely associated with the question of settlement roles and functions as with physical characteristics. Can the functions of a ninth-century *burh* be said to have significantly differed from those of a fourth-century *civitas* capital, and will this serve to influence the bestowing of the title 'town'? Can true 'urban' life be said to have existed during the so-called Dark Age period and, if so, was it necessarily inherently inferior to its late classical counterparts, or simply adopting a different guise? Is it, perhaps, more valid to talk of life within former towns rather than town life *per se*?

The question of urban definition has been debated long and hard since Pirenne (1939), and remains a primary research goal today. Clearly, without a reasoned definition of the town one cannot begin to assess the degree of survival and continuity of the urban structure from the Roman into medieval periods. The development from the late 1960s of excavation programmes in British towns such as London, Southampton and York followed Winchester's lead in introducing fresh data and perspectives to increasingly stale discussions centring on checklists of physical criteria including street grids, defences and markets (Vince 1990; Morton 1992; Hall 1988a). More recently, frustration amongst certain academic archaeologists with the seemingly interminable quest for the perfect urban definition (e.g. Whitaker 1995), coupled with humanist and Marxist approaches, has led writers such as Martin Carver to introduce a theoretical element to the debate. The intention has been to downplay the prominence given by Hodges and others to economic function and instead to emphasise the concept of the town as an outcome of political choices (Carver 1993: 5).

### **1.2.1: Towns and Urban Life: Past Attitudes and Perceptions**

Society's perceptions of and attitudes towards towns and urban life have been subject to constant change since the late classical period. This section briefly charts the changing perceptions and relative qualities, merits and moral worth of towns/cities and of life therein as expressed by both ancient (Section 1.2.1) and modern (Section 1.2.2) populations and authors. These will, hopefully, provide a useful backdrop to the discussion and theorising that follows.

#### **(i) Towns and Urban Life: Ideals and Civic Pride**

To classical writers such as the fifth-century BC Thucydides urban life was synonymous with civilisation, representing stability, security and prosperity in antithesis to barbarity and chaos. The Greek and Roman city also served as a provider for the well-being of its inhabitants, a view reflected in the Roman writer Pausanias' comments on Panopeus in Phocis (Owens 1991: 1), with streets, fora and public buildings serving as a physical expression of this idealised view of communal life. Ideals such as these inspired praise poems from a number of classical writers, notably in the case of Gaul and eulogies by late classical authors such as Ausonius and Paulinus of Pella on the subject of Bordeaux, in the case of the former his work stemming from pride in his home town:

Your walls form a square, and with towers jutting so high that they penetrate the clouds overhead. Inside, one admires the roads that criss-cross the town, the orderly houses, the broad squares that merit their name; then the gates which serve in a straight line the crossroads and, at the centre of the town, the milk of a river supplied by a fountain.

(Ausonius: *Ordo Urbium Nobilium* XIV: 140-5, quoted in Higounet 1973: 49, trans. Kipling)

Arles, double town, open your kindly hospitable gates  
you enrich other peoples, other towns, you profit Gaul and Aquitaine.

(Ausonius – quoted in Congès 1980: 10, trans. Kipling)

In certain instances civic pride in the urban past – although seemingly not nostalgic – is also evident in these works, as in the eighth-century bishop Alcuin's poem

detailing the Roman heritage of his native York, or Cassiodorus' description of classical Rome:

York, with its high walls and lofty towers, was first built  
by Roman hands.....to be a general seat of commerce by land and sea alike

(Alcuin: *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, line nos. 19-21)

It is evident how great was the population of the city of Rome, seeing that it was fed by the supplies furnished even from far off regions...the vast extent of the walls bears witness to the throngs of citizens, as do the swollen capacity of the buildings of entertainment, the wonderful size of the baths, and that great number of water-mills.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* XI: 39, to Vitalianus AD 533-5)

Certain Gallic writers viewed the town as a physical expression of contemporary moods, manifestos and corporate investments, as in the case of the pink walls of Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, or the late Roman walls of Le Mans and their painted geometric motifs (Esmonde Cleary *et al.* 1998: 354):

Bourges, Le Mans, avec Limoges  
Furent autrefois les quatre villes rouges

(Du Chesne quoted in Biarne 1987: 46)

In addition, a number of texts place emphasise upon the towns as prosperous, economically vibrant places, as with fifth-century Arles:

The town is so happily situated, the commerce there is so active, the merchants go there in such great numbers, that they drain off there all the products of the universe...all the riches of the Orient, Arabian perfumes, Assyrian delicacies...

(Honorius, AD 418, quoted in Congés 1980: 10, trans. Kipling)

Arles, double town, open your kindly hospitable gates: Arles, Rome of the Gauls, who has as neighbours on one side Narbonne, on the other Vienne, opulent colony of the Alps. The torrential course of the Rhône cuts you in two: but, with a boat bridge linking one shore to the other you form a broad route; by the Rhône you receive merchandise from all the Roman world: nevertheless, you do not keep these goods for yourself, for you enrich other peoples, other towns, you profit Gaul and Aquitaine.

(Ausonius, *Ordo* 20 quoted in Congés 1980: 10, trans. Kipling)

Despite its clearly idealistic nature, the existence of a populous and thriving trading settlement in post-Roman Anglian York is apparent from Alcuin's poem:

To York from divers peoples and kingdoms all over the world,  
they come in hope of gain, seeking wealth from the rich land,  
a home, a fortune, and a hearth-stone for themselves.

(Alcuin: *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, line nos. 35-7)

## (ii) Towns and Urban Life: Symbols of Decadence

The Roman empire and, by association, its towns also engendered unfavourable attitudes amongst certain early medieval and modern writers, with the writings of the sixth-century Gildas and eighteenth-century Gibbon deeming the system's collapse to have stemmed jointly from decadence and Christianity:

For the fire of vengeance, justly kindled by former crimes, spread from sea to sea...in the midst of the streets lay the tops of lofty towers, tumbled to the ground, stones of high walls, holy altars, fragments of human bodies...with no chance of being buried, save in the ruins of their houses...

(Gildas: *Concerning the Ruin of Britain*: 24)

The edifices of Rome were exposed to...ruin and decay; the mouldering fabrics were easily overthrown by inundations, tempests and earthquakes: and the monks, who had occupied the most advantageous stations, exulted in their base triumph over the ruins of antiquity.

(Gibbon: *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: V: 31)

Certain peoples and regions were, moreover, deemed more suited to towns than others, as with the twelfth-century Gerald of Wales' unfavourably opinion of Ireland and the Irish:

Mankind progresses from the forest to the field, from the field to the town, and to the social condition of citizens; but this nation, holding agricultural labour in contempt, and little coveting the wealth of towns, as well as being exceedingly averse to civil institutions – lead the same life their fathers did in the woods and open pastures.

(*The Topography of Ireland, III: Of the Inhabitants of Ireland, X: Of the Character, Customs and Habits of the People of Ireland*)

### (iii) Towns as Places of Awe and Fear

As regards the post-Roman British towns, the perception gained from Anglo-Saxon sources is of populations shunning the former Roman centres, at the same time as their suggestion of a certain regard for the monumentality of Roman buildings and, by association, their creators:

Fate has smashed these wonderful walls,  
This broken city, has crumbled the work  
Of giants. The roofs are gutted, the towers  
Fallen, the gates ripped off, frost  
In the mortar, everything moulded, gaping,  
Collapsed. The earth has clutched at rulers  
And builders, a hundred generations rotting  
In its rigid hands...  
...It was a shining city, filled with bathhouses,  
With towering gables, with the shouts of soldiers,  
With dozens of rousing drinking halls,  
Until fate's strength was swung against it...  
...Here was wealth, silver,  
Gems, cattle, land, in the crowning  
City of a far-flung kingdom.

*(The Ruin, line nos. 1-8, 21-4, 35-7)*

Even in Gaul, a region of strong urban continuity, respect and awe for the town is evident, as in Gregory of Tours' description of later sixth-century Dijon:

It is a fortified place with very strong walls, built in the middle of a pleasant plain...Four gates face the four quarters of the world, and thirty-three towers guard the circuit of the walls, which are of squared stones to a height of twenty feet, and above of smaller stones, the total height being thirty feet with a thickness of fifteen. Why the place is not styled a city I cannot say.

*(Gregory of Tours: History of the Franks III: 19)*

### (iv) Towns as Propagandist Symbols

In addition to being places variously meriting admiration, awe and censure, the classical and medieval towns were subject to active manipulation on the part of rulers and administrations. As previously stated, the dedication of praise poems to such towns and cities as Aquileia, Arles, Bordeaux, York and Durham stemmed in part

from a genuine sense of civic pride on the part of their authors. To a large extent, however, such texts should be viewed as idealised visions, commissioned and written by aristocratic bishops, with personal agendas of seeking to boost their own image as well as that of their town. In terms of the *actively propagandist* use of towns, however, the Ostrogothic king Theoderic of Italy (AD 489-523) offers the clearest case. Stemming from his belief in himself as a lawful successor to Roman rule, the king sought inspiration and legitimation from ancient Rome (Johnson 1988: 96), resulting in the aggrandisement of the Ostrogothic capital of Ravenna in deliberately imperial style. Theoderic's (re-) construction work extended to Gallic as well as Italian towns, including Arles:

I am hastening to restore to splendour the ancient monuments. For so it will come about that, while the city's fortune is founded on its citizens, it shall also be displayed by the beauty of its buildings. Therefore, I have sent a certain quantity of money to repair the walls and aged towers of Arles.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* III: 41: King Theoderic to all the Landowners of Arles c.AD 510, winter)

Theoderic paid particular attention to the restoration of the heavily symbolic city of Rome, funding extensive reconstruction of the city's imperial residences, aqueducts, sewers and wall circuits (Johnson 1988: 77), for which works he was particularly concerned to be remembered by posterity:

Past princes should owe me their praise: I have conferred long-lasting youth on their buildings, ensuring that those clouded by old age and decay shall shine out in their original freshness.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* I: 25: King Theoderic to the Distinguished Sabianus c.AD 507-12)

In seeking to emulate the Roman tradition of building to last, Theoderic also emphasised the necessity of careful *design and upkeep* of buildings:

It is useless to build firmly at the outset if lawlessness has the power to ruin what has been designed: for those things are strong, those things enduring, which wisdom has begun and care preserved. And therefore, greater attention must be exercised in conserving than in planning them, since a plan at its outset deserves commendation, but from preservation we gain the glory of completion.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* I: 25: King Theoderic to the Distinguished Sabianus c.AD 507-12)

### **1.2.2: Towns and Urban Life: Modern Attitudes and Perceptions**

A tacit underlying assumption remains in certain academic quarters that the sub-Roman period witnessed the final demise of a sophisticated, high quality urbanism, and that what followed could never match up to that which had gone before. Even a cursory examination of the evidence demonstrates, however, that later Roman towns were most definitely *not* static structures but were subject to significant change – intentional or otherwise – from the third century onwards, notably in the Western Empire. Since the early 1990s writers such as Dominic Perring and Steve Roskams have attempted to examine changing uses of space within Roman towns. Perring and Roskams have sought to demonstrate how, in the later empire, municipal nobility were increasingly attempting to control public activities and restrict general access to certain areas of the town. The suggestion is made that changes to private housing, public buildings and the introduction of defensive circuits represent a desire for increased seclusion on the part of secular elites (1991: 286). Such a view does not, however, place sufficient emphasis upon the role of defensive measures as a response to a perceived heightened threat resulting from an increasingly beleaguered empire. The late classical town can, therefore, be viewed at the very least as significantly different from at its first- or second-century height and no longer a true reflection of the ideal of the town as a physical expression of an idealised communal lifestyle (Liebeschuetz 1992: 2). ‘Ideal’ is, perhaps, problematic as a label, but it does at least signify an expected urban package in the Roman heyday.

Faulkner similarly perceives a distinct change in the character of late Roman towns, but to the extent of claiming the emergence of an entirely *new* form of settlement. With reference to changes in private and public building construction in a number of English towns, notably Colchester and Verulamium, he pinpoints the period *c.*AD 250 to *c.*325 as having marked a crucial (but not catastrophic) juncture in urban development, the appearance of the ‘post-classical’ town (Faulkner 1996: 79). In the wake of the apparent abandonment of the towns by the landowning class in favour of their rural estates, Faulkner characterises the remaining populations comprising of administrative, military and religious officials and attendant support service populations (1994: 115).

Whilst according with current academic opinion regarding the continued functioning of towns as regional centres of authority into the late Roman period (Faulkner 2000: 48), this approach *is* problematic in that it runs the risk of abandoning one convenient label or model (the 'classical' town or the 'Dark Age' town, for example), in favour of another. The reality is that urban development is far more complex, transitional (and elusive) than such simplistic terms imply.

What are we to make of the 'Dark Age' town? In addition to having their origins in an idealised vision of the classical city, unfavourable attitudes towards the early medieval town have their roots deep in modern societies' at best ambivalent and frequently hostile attitudes towards their own towns and cities (Mumford 1961; Short 1991). The result is the reflection of such views on past societies' urban centres. Hence Mumford viewed Rome as an example of unbridled expansionism, exploitation and materialism that he saw as a direct parallel to twentieth-century western cities and a morality tale for a decadent modern society (Mumford 1961: 239). In certain instances this analogous process extends to the manipulation of that past to ideological or political ends, as with Mussolini's use of ancient Rome and its Empire as a model for the legitimisation of Fascist policy (Guidi 1996). If such attitudes are held towards the Roman city, it is unsurprising to find that somewhat jaundiced attitudes towards pre-eighth-century towns, in particular of those on the peripheries of the empire such as Britain and Gaul, continue to exist amongst the academic community. The outspoken Richard Reece (1992: 143) is particularly dismissive of late and post-Roman British towns whilst at the same time incautiously seeking to downplay any notion of enduring value on the part of the earlier classical town:

The Roman Empire had been a passing fancy in the real development of Britain, and towns were one of the sorts of beads that the natives first considered and then rejected.

What, then, constitutes a sub-Roman town? Archaeology is increasingly revealing evidence of continuing presences in the relict classical towns, although on a significantly different scale and form to what had gone before, usually involving timber rather than masonry construction and with considerable shrinkage of occupied areas within the

Roman defensive circuits. Certain regions clearly demonstrate continuity of occupation through into the eighth- and ninth-century economic and demographic revival, most notably northern Italy, albeit on at a reduced level, whereas others reveal incontrovertible evidence for a hiatus in occupation. Thus Halsall maintains that Metz was actually deserted between the fifth and sixth centuries, reviving in the seventh (Halsall 1996: 252), whereas only a handful of British towns, including Canterbury, Lincoln, Cirencester and Exeter, show any coherent – albeit disputed – indications of occupation into the sub-Roman period. Even the urban core of Wroxeter, with its exceptional evidence of timber buildings focussed on the site of the former Roman basilica, appears to have been eventually abandoned during the sixth century, its open character revealing its subsequent failure to revive (Barker 1997 *et al.*) (see Section 2.3.1). Whether or not this sub-Roman occupation represents ‘genuine’ urban life remains open to debate, but it remains the case that certain individuals were *choosing* to remain within these walled towns and, in consequence, is strongly suggestive of the perpetuation of urban life into the immediate post-Roman period.

Similarly, in Italy, the regular refurbishment of churches and other public buildings in Verona and the adaptation of certain zones such as the forum and theatre for housing strongly suggests that, at least in this case, the town was undergoing a process of privatisation, not abandonment (Carver 1993: 41). Once again we have here the notion of conscious choices being made, of *changing strategies* regarding the use of space.

Britain seemingly mirrors the continental pattern of intramural royal/aristocratic and/or ecclesiastical presences with associated church/palace complexes, as at York, London and Winchester (Dixon 1992: 152). The scarcity of sub-Roman construction work beyond hints of repair work to relict Roman structures in combination with evidence from towns such as Exeter indicate that, prior to the tenth century, occupation at best constituted the habitation of Roman ruins (Strickland 1988: 117) (Section 5.2.3). Such evidence would support the view of these centres having been occupied by a few aristocratic individuals and associated service populations in intramural areas otherwise abandoned or given over to agricultural production. Until the development of the *wic* the town would, therefore, remain a low population, high status centre whose existence

would have been entirely reliant upon the continued presence a small, cultured aristocratic elite; if they suffered, so too would the town (Perring & Roskams 1991: 290).

The central explanation for the continued existence of former Roman towns into the medieval period undoubtedly stemmed from their roles as regional administrative, religious and political centres. Since the Roman period, town development was effectively dependent upon local conditions and the initiatives of regional officials (Isaac 1992: 269). Whether secular and/or religious leaders remained where they did out of political expediency or as a result of the towns' positioning on long-standing, possibly pre-Roman foci, remains open to question. When, however, a local ruler or bishop chose to relocate, as appears to have been the case at Wroxeter in the eighth century, the single factor guaranteeing its continued existence went with them. Nonetheless, the survival of virtually all Rhenish and Gallic *civitates* and the majority of *castra* into the post-Roman period testifies to continuing involvement of nobility in urban affairs, notably in the guise of episcopal office in towns such as Cologne, Trier, Mainz and Worms (Simms 1992: 25). It is, therefore, difficult to exaggerate the impact of Christianity upon such towns as the need of urban populations for leadership combined with the demand for continued maintenance of the urban fabric to produce distinctly Christian townscapes (Loseby 1996: 45). Arles (Section 3.2.1) retained its role as Ausonius' 'little Rome of Gaul' via its progressive Christianisation (*ibid*: 64), whilst Tours (Section 3.2.3) persisted as a centre of religious administration despite the loss of its civil and military functions (Gallinié 1988: 59). Alternatively, certain towns survived in the guise of local administrative centres, as with Tarraco in north-eastern Spain (Keay 1996), whilst the high survival rate of northern Italian urban life is similarly accountable to their strongly administrative and aristocratic character (Ward-Perkins 1988: 23).

Clearly, then, the key to urban survival was the *possession of a clear function or role*, be it administrative, religious or political. It is also evident that these were places with relatively low populations, little or no economic or market activity, and with little emphasis placed on public utilities or spaces. Nevertheless, it seems abundantly clear that they were performing the role of central places, administered by aristocratic and/or royal individuals and an active Church. The glories of the Roman towns should not blind us to

the fact that what followed surely *were* urban centres, albeit radically different from and almost certainly less spectacular in character than what had gone before. This distinctiveness should be acknowledged as representative of changed strategies towards and changed qualities of urbanism by post-Roman townspeople, policies that should not be perceived as inherently inferior to those of the Roman period.

### 1.3: DATA SOURCES

As noted, the sheer expanse of geographical area and lengthy time span involved, coupled with variations in data form and survival, explains the continuing dearth of broad-based early medieval urban studies. Research is still too frequently fixed at the local level, often at the expense of viewing the town in its wider socio-economic setting. The recent expansion of systematic urban archaeological coverage into regions such as Italy and Spain, coupled with results from Britain, France and the Scandinavian countries, regions with well-established excavation research traditions, has resulted in an exponential growth in archaeological data. Stemming from this, the 1990s have witnessed attempts to view late imperial and early medieval towns such as Cherchel, Luni, Wroxeter and York in their broader regional contexts. Regrettably this has frequently resulted in coverage of insufficient depth to explore fully the subtleties and nuances of the data and issues involved, such as changing patterns of urban activity and differential survival rates of archaeological data. Moreover, such studies continue to be rare, highlighting a continuing need for research centring on study regions of sufficient size to allow adequately detailed examination of urban patterning as well as enabling the wider regional context to be properly observed.

The broad spatial and temporal scope of early medieval urban research guarantees the researcher considerable quantities of documentary source materials, architectural survivals and archaeological data. The sheer bulk of this accumulated data, in particular as a result of the exponential growth of urban excavation over the last two decades, coupled with regional imbalances in terms of the form and availability of this information does, however, present significant logistical problems. Difficulties are further

compounded by a series of factors, any combination of which have the potential to influence or skew knowledge of urban development:

- *Availability of archaeological and historical data.* Constraints acting against this may include a lack of (usually developer) funding and variations in research agendas across space and time.
- *Varying physical accessibility of the archaeology.* Difficulties frequently arise in attempting to investigate archaeological deposits that are often deeply stratified and inaccessible beneath standing buildings.
- *Differential survival of historical and archaeological data.* The latter is largely governed by the degree of subsequent urban development, a factor linked to differing attitudes towards and perceptions of the urban heritage by subsequent populations.
- *Artificial patterns of regional variation arising from the above.* These range from variability at the single archaeological excavation level, via zoning of activity across a single town, to variations between towns across single regions and inter-regional urban patterning.

Prior to the establishment of an archaeological presence in north-western European towns and cities, beginning with Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s, documentary source materials provided the principal source of information regarding early medieval and, indeed, Roman urbanism. Regrettably, source material survival across Europe varies greatly within, as well as between, regions, and is frequently scarce and of poor quality. Prior to the introduction of archaeology to the research equation, the result was a reinforcing of the notion that certain provinces witnessed widespread town collapse, in particular peripheral regions such as Britain and Gaul, whilst in the Mediterranean region, Italy in particular, the urban tradition proved more tenacious. Such a broad approach inevitably masks the subtle nuances of variation visible even within a single town or city.

In certain instances sources can provide an overly simplistic or exaggerated impression of the character of towns, as with the image conveyed of post-Roman peoples totally avoiding the former Roman towns by the Anglo-Saxon poem 'The Ruin' (Dixon 1992:

146). Archaeology is increasingly demonstrating that this was frequently not the case. Conversely, the eighth- and ninth-century poems of praise to the civic glories of such Italian cities as Verona and Milan (Ward-Perkins 1988: 25) should not be entirely taken at face value; what were the agendas of their authors? Vivid accounts such as these are, however, rare, and it is generally the case that written evidence throws little light on the character of a town and size of its population beyond the fact of its urban status (Ward-Perkins 1996: 6). Specifics such as the papal lists detailing church construction and repair work surviving from Rome (Delogu 1988) are, regrettably, rare.

As regards relict structural remains, the strength and durability of Roman building techniques makes it likely that, in the majority of the former Roman centres, a range of both communal and private masonry buildings would have survived into the medieval period. Similarly, the Roman defensive circuits and street grids in a number of English towns, including York, Lincoln and Exeter, served to influence and constrain medieval development. A lack of secure dating evidence may, however, cause problems when attempting to distinguish between the adaptive reuse of buildings and the exploitation of abandoned structures for construction materials.

Although documentary materials and relict structural remains are clearly of value, archaeology without doubt constitutes the most useful form of data currently available to the urban researcher. Extensive rescue excavation throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s in a range of British towns gradually evolved during the 1980s into controlled research-driven programmes of archaeological investigation operating in tandem with planning guidelines in order to prevent further losses of archaeological deposits without adequate recording provision. Scandinavia has a similarly lengthy tradition of urban research, with comparable moves towards legislative protection of archaeological deposits and resultant shifting of focus towards investigation of suburban areas (Broberg & Hasselmo 1992a: 13).

Urban archaeological coverage has subsequently expanded to include regions lacking such lengthy research traditions, with France following the British lead in the early 1970s (Tours, Orleans, Metz, Marseille). Despite its well-known and extensive remains of

abandoned Roman cities, most famously Pompeii, Ostia and Herculanium, Italy's medieval past has only comparatively recently become the subject of archaeological investigation through excavations in such towns as Brescia, Milan and Verona. Along with eastern European countries such as Hungary and Poland, Spain is a still more recent arrival on the scene, with a series of rescue excavations revealing late classical-early medieval occupation sequences in towns such as Barcelona, Cartagena, the Grau Vell, Gijon and Tarragona (Keay 1996: 18).

The end result of this exponential growth in archaeological data, in combination with the documentary material and relict architectural evidence, is a somewhat confusing picture of regional imbalances of data form and availability. Despite possessing what is probably the most comprehensive system of archaeological coverage in Europe, with a network of local and national professional bodies, tangible evidence for unbroken urban continuity in Britain remains elusive and contentious. In general, Roman architectural survivals into the post-Roman period show little evidence of maintenance and continued use, with the exception of a few small-scale adaptations such as the ninth-century reuse of a partially standing Roman structure for industrial purposes in the Brooks area of Winchester (Scobie *et al.* 1991: 37). The situation is further exacerbated by the almost total lack of surviving contemporary documentary material, resulting in a continuing lack of academic consensus on the nature of very early medieval urbanism. Although it appears clear that there was a final move away from the former Roman towns around the sixth century, increasingly sophisticated excavation techniques have revealed that, in centres such as Wroxeter and St. Albans, individuals *were* choosing to remain, if only for a brief period. The Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian royal and trading settlements of the eighth century onwards are considerably better understood.

Conversely, Italy has provided convincing evidence for the continued existence of the great majority of towns beyond the Roman period. The various papal lists and other official documents are extremely valuable in terms of information regarding the official status and administrative, religious and political functions of a town as well as detailing construction, conversion and repair work to physical features of the townscape such as churches, aqueducts and defences. Physical evidence such as Theoderic's restoration of

Ravenna, Pavia and Verona provides a useful foil to the occasional excesses of contemporary accounts and their lists of buildings and public utilities extolling the civic virtues of a town. More importantly, they are beginning to reveal details of individuals largely absent from source accounts. Written materials are, however, largely silent regarding specifics such as population size and makeup, the character and extent of private housing and the uses to which particular urban zones were put. The survival of Roman street grids in Italian towns, in the Po plain in particular, is, however, suggestive of dense occupations (Ward-Perkins 1988: 20). Hence the growing role of archaeological excavations such as those carried out within the area of the former Roman forum at Luni which demonstrated its change of use during the early fifth century from a public area to one of private housing (Potter 1987: 211). Although these and similar discoveries at Verona indicate less tangible urban conditions than in the Roman period, the impression is one of resilience and a higher standard of urban life than in most of Europe due to the towns' continuing dual function as administrative and aristocratic centres (Ward-Perkins 1988: 23).

Whereas Britain has a wealth of archaeological data yet almost totally lacks source materials and evidence for unbroken occupational sequences and, conversely, Italy has substantial documentary, topographical and archaeological evidence for town survival, Gaul lies between the two extremes, a number of its towns possessing reasonable documentary evidence as well as substantial archaeological data sets. As David Hill demonstrated in his general survey of urban survival rates across the European region between AD 400 and 1000, French documentary evidence shows a comparatively high rate of towns continuing in the capacity of episcopal seats (Hill 1988a), once again demonstrating the role of the Church in town continuity. A number of central and southern French towns have been the subject of archaeological investigation since the early 1970s, frequently assisted by documentary survival and topographical analysis. Tours offers one of the best-understood late Roman-early medieval developmental sequences (Section 3.2.3), the city retaining its role as religious administrative centre focussed on the cult of St. Martin (Galinié 1988: 59). To the south, Arles (Section 3.2.1) possesses a particularly rich body of evidence due to its comparatively sizeable assemblage of documentary material in addition to having been the subject of extensive

archaeological investigation (Loseby 1996: 46). However, the number of French early medieval towns that have received the level of attention afforded to Tours, Orleans and Arles remain few in comparison to their numerous British counterparts. If, however, their extensive bodies of documentary materials and burgeoning assemblages of archaeological data were to be combined with Britain's extensive and lengthy archaeological research traditions, the complexities of the north-west European early medieval town might be better understood.

Ironically, the shortcomings of the British data – by turns elusive, insecure and tantalisingly interesting – provide greater stimulus for academic debate, in addition to the engendering of considerably more positive attitudes towards European post-Roman towns than those held by certain of their European colleagues, in certain cases actually viewing them as superior to their classical predecessors (Ward-Perkins 1997: 169). The greater survival rate of the Gallic data, however, offers less opportunity for dissension, whilst in Scandinavia, interest is greater due to the fact that debate centres on the issue of urban origins rather than of persistence *per se*.

The above discussion has served to illustrate the sheer range and number of possible variables serving to influence (i) urban evolution and decline and (ii) our knowledge of these developments. Consequently it may be more apposite to tackle these issues with a general, across-the-board approach. Ideally the issues would be best addressed at the regional level in order to fully demonstrate the range and diversity of urban strategies, but time and space necessarily imposes limits. Hence a number of key factors will be detailed which are deemed to be, via either their absence or presence, the major driving factors prompting the continuity or decay and abandonment of a town. Subsequently an attempt will be made to identify those groups and individuals behind these developments.

## 1.4: EVOLVING MODERN DEBATES AND PERSPECTIVES

Early urban studies have witnessed a number of significant developments over the last thirty years, most notably through the introduction of archaeology to the debate and the resultant exponential growth of research data from a range of northern European and western Mediterranean towns. As the research agenda has adapted and expanded in order to incorporate new data, agendas and viewpoints, the overall picture has become increasingly complicated and varied, and has, accordingly, made increasing demands on the researcher. The general developments of the past thirty years will be set out here as a preliminary to the outlining of current perspectives and possible future research directions.

Urban studies in the first half of the twentieth century were dominated by discussion amongst historians of the role of towns and trade patterns in the European economy using newly emerging economic and documentary evidence in addition to the older tradition of topographical analysis. Pirenne, in particular, sought to emphasise the vital importance of trade in the economy (Samson 1994: 110). The economic models of the Roman consumer city and its medieval counterpart, the service city that featured large in these debates had their roots in the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. To all three authors, interest in these models lay solely in terms of their relevance to the origins and rise of the modern capitalist city (Whittaker 1995: 11). The ancient city was deemed theoretically irrelevant, the city having assumed importance in its own right during the medieval period (Saunders 1986: 15). The significance of these authors' work lay in its forming the theoretical basis for the subsequent work of Pirenne and others.

Prior to the development of urban archaeology during the 1960s and a consequent heightened awareness of the pre-Conquest town, debate continued to be effectively polarised on the one hand between discussion of the classical city and, on the other, of its – clearly both structurally and functionally very different – high medieval counterpart. Discussion largely revolved around Ennen's *Kritererienbiindel* approach and attempts to define and classify towns through the drawing up of checklists of required urban criteria (regular street patterns, mints, markets, defences etc.). In addition to provoking enduring

controversy until well into the 1970s, this somewhat limited approach placed heavy emphasis upon administrative, political and economic urban roles at the expense of the investigation of social activity. Although this was to a great extent due to the shortcomings of available data, the approach proved insufficiently flexible to chart adequately the changing character of the later Roman town. Whereas substantial bodies of documentary records enabled the building up of reasonably detailed accounts of the post-Conquest English town, the paucity of source data exacerbated a research bias towards the Mediterranean.

Consequently the belief in a total collapse of urban life at the close of the Roman period remained virtually unchallenged until the 1960s, a view encouraged by sources such as Gildas' apocalyptic accounts of destruction and a continuing lack of archaeological data. Wheeler was alone in his advocating of continuity for London (Brooks 1986: 77). This notion of a complete break between the classical and medieval worlds with their fundamentally different consumer and producer/service cities served to further discourage interaction between the ancient and medieval historian – a gap occasionally still discernible in ambivalent attitudes towards the evidence (Reece 1992).

During the 1950s and 60s British archaeological studies witnessed a significant change in emphasis from investigation of the substantial (largely rural) corpus of Anglo-Saxon burial evidence towards the Roman and medieval towns (Webster 1986: 120), the process speeded by the pressures of post-war development and increased public awareness of the resultant destruction. Lack of interest in the post-Roman period coupled with a failure to recognise the frequently intangible remains frequently resulted in the destruction without record of archaeological levels, as occurred at London's Billingsgate Bathhouse excavation (Vince 1990: viii).

Biddle's establishment of the Winchester Research Unit in 1961 marked a significant shift away from the concentration of archaeological coverage of a single period towards the examination of the town or city as a single archaeological unity, the Winchester prototype being rapidly followed by Southampton and Oxford (Jones 1984: 16). Despite their rapid spread the urban units continued to operate largely as rescue bodies working in advance

of development until well into the 1970s when planning legislation began to curtail unbridled destruction. Growing awareness of the subtleties of the post-Roman archaeological record combined with increasingly sophisticated excavation techniques produced a growing interest in early medieval occupation sequences in a number range of European towns. Regrettably, Britain has never gained a state archaeological body along the lines of the French model, established during the 1970s.

Ironically, the frequently ephemeral nature of the archaeological record served to promote the notion amongst archaeologists of a complete break in urban life during the fifth or sixth century, whilst historians chose instead to emphasise continuity of urban functions across into the eighth century and beyond. In Britain debate centred on the supposed abandonment layers, the dark earths, and in Italy over discrepancies between the documentary and archaeological evidence (La Rocca 1992: 161). Excavations at Luni in Italy in 1974 obliged excavators to change earlier opinion regarding the continued use of Roman masonry buildings into the seventh century, revising this to one of structural discontinuity (Ward-Perkins 1996: 8). An element of continuity was, however, highlighted in the presence of timber housing covering the area of the abandoned forum. During the 1970s further programmes of urban excavation were instigated across a range of European towns and cities, including Tours – from 1975 – Trondheim, Dublin, Brescia, Grenoble, Gloucester, Ribe, Bergen and Lund. As with their British precursors, they suffered significant unrecorded destruction of archaeological deposits before the introduction of protective legislation (Carver 1993: 8). A growing sophistication in British excavation techniques served to draw attention away from the former Roman centres and provided the first substantial physical evidence for new (proto) urban foundations in the form of the Middle Saxon *wics* such as *Hamwic* and *Lundenwic* and, subsequently, the *burhs*, including Winchester.

These newly emergent Anglo-Saxon towns were found to fit uncomfortably into established criteria for either the Roman or post-Conquest town. By 1976 the proliferation of archaeological data obliged Biddle to admit that there was no longer a commonly accepted definition of urbanism, and proposed a further list of twelve required criteria in order to accommodate these new additions (Biddle 1976: 100). In so doing he

viewed the fifth-century evidence from Winchester, London and Exeter not as indicators of a late Roman urban decline and collapse but rather as evidence for unbroken continuity into the post-Roman period in the guise of central places of settlement and administration (*ibid*: 104). Hence they constituted direct parallels to Bonn, Trier and Tours for secular and religious central places and, as such, served to gradually shift discussion away from simplistic listings of physical urban elements towards a debate emphasising town roles, functions and the search for a social dynamic (Roskams 1996: 263). Similarly, by 1984 Haslam felt able to suggest that the development of Saxon towns involved a process of continuous development rather than of abrupt change, a process underway since the seventh century at the earliest (Haslam 1984: xvi).

Throughout the 1980s, large-scale research excavation projects served to further highlight increasingly complex and varied regional patterns of both town adaptation and survival of form and function, and decline, collapse and eventual re-emergence. By the time of the *Rebirth of Towns in the West AD 700-1050* conference of 1986, the academic consensus was that archaeology had taken the place of history in setting the research agenda, obliging an early re-examination of evidence for the early medieval period. Previous models of simple continuity or discontinuity were clearly no longer sufficiently flexible to encompass the diverse range of emerging scenarios. The new model proposed for the decade envisaged a progressive late Roman urban decline and an eventual early medieval rebirth (Hodges & Hobley 1988: x).

## **1.5: CURRENT THEMES**

If the urbanism debate of the 1980s was characterised by discussion of urban economic functions, the current position is, perhaps, one of an even greater lack of consensus than at any time in the past, with considerable pessimism that a theoretical model can ever be agreed for the ancient city (Whittaker 1995: 9), and authors such as Samson (1994: 109) calling into question the very notion of creating urban definitions.

In such a scenario, the introduction of Marxist, sociological and humanist angles to the urban debate may represent a way out of the impasse, attempts being made to move away from economic theory and to place increased emphasis upon the actions of individuals or social groupings in the urban context. The extensive programmes of excavation of the trading emporia, including Southampton, Ipswich, York, Dorestad and London that characterised the 1970s and 80s increasingly focused attention on the prominent role of these new foundations in the eighth- and ninth-century economic revival. However, whilst acknowledging the central role of such centres in systems of production and exchange, Marxist authors such as Samson question their importance in terms of town origins. The significance for Samson of *wics* lies in the fact that they formed the basis of the capitalist city and a resultant symbiotic town-country relationship involving the exploitation of urban workers. Furthermore, Samson downplays the role of demographic or economic decline in the demise of towns, claiming it to have largely been the result of decreased exploitation of peasants and slaves by secular leaders (Samson 1994: 124). The human aspect is further emphasised by Roskams in his call to recognise towns as the end product of social developments and not in themselves as generic social process or reality (Roskams 1996: 264). Towns – in this case pre-Conquest York – are viewed as theatres of social contention, ‘a field of action where class conflicts are played out’ (*ibid*: 279).

As regards the concept of the town as a place wherein the *urban past* is itself exploited, studies in nationalist archaeology have highlighted the means by which a state system may manipulate a past society in order to serve its own political ends. Mussolini's glorification of Italy's ancient Roman heritage as a weapon of Fascist policy via the use of archaeological excavation and scholarship offers one of the clearest such examples of nationalist propaganda (*cf.* Guidi 1996). If the Marxist viewpoint of urbanism is viewed as a denial of the role of the individual in favour of the group, then it is clearly in diametric opposition to the humanistic approach and its emphasis on particular human actions. Whereas Roskams views the urban stratigraphic sequence as the physical record of successive generations' struggle with political institutions (1996: 285), Randsborg regards it and history in general as consisting of thousands of decisions which are

detectable only as the consequences of individual actions. They cannot be accommodated in generalised structures or principles (1989a: 15).

In reality the mapping of the physical manifestations of particular actions by individuals is extremely problematic given the variability of data form and patterns of survival; crucially, this approach avoids any attempts at constructing patterns or commonality of human action. The importance of the humanistic approach lies in its avoidance of over-generalisation concerning the physical manifestations of human actions, archaeology demonstrating the degree of variation in such factors as land use and settlement density within an individual settlement. Consequently there is a constant risk of over-generalisation; individual towns or zones thereof should be examined solely on their own terms before attempts are made to place them in their wider context.

The recent work of archaeologist and historian Ray Laurence on Roman Pompeii offers a potentially valuable new angle to the urban debate involving the charting of political, social and trade activities within their spatial urban context (Laurence 1994: 11). Unlike Randsborg and Roskams, Laurence views the Roman city as a product of its society and one that, because city decision-making involved rural populations, cannot be separated from its hinterland (*ibid*: 139). His approach is, however, in general accord with 1980s and 90s Marxist and humanist models in its dissatisfaction with simplistic consumer/producer city models and a perceived reduction of all social activity to its economic function (*ibid*: 140).

Similarly, Dominic Perring maintains that an examination of the spatial arrangement of a town should provide some indication of its social organisation. Studying the later Roman town, he highlights a move in the later Empire away from public cohesion and the inclusion of the individual in an urban society towards a policy of exclusion by elites through increased control of public access and activities (Perring 1991: 274). It seems likely that similar attempts at exploring the changing use of public and private space could usefully be applied to the early medieval town, notably to those experiencing adaptation of their urban landscapes from secular public to Christian and/or private, aristocratic use.

Martin Carver has briefly touched on the early post-Roman period in his wide-ranging study *Arguments in Stone* (1993) wherein he proposes that changes in a town's arrangements of buildings, spaces and activities represent changes in the political mood or policy of the day. Marxists such as Roskams decry this approach for the emphasis it places upon individual human thoughts and actions (Roskams 1996: 279). Whereas Roskams maintains that Carver's approach cannot hope to explain precisely where past societies' attitudes derived from, Carver (1993: 17) holds that it is ideology that is the driving force in a society. These ideologies are taken to have directly impinged upon the town and found expression in physical remains. Both are in agreement, however, in rejecting Hodges' emphasis on economic evolution and, instead, advocating the primacy of political choice. Carver's thinking represents a significant advance from the concept of 'continuity' as advocated in the eighties by Hodges and Hopley, which he rejects in favour of a model that emphasises the role of conscious, positive choices on the part of medieval urban groups. The adaptation of the forum and theatre of seventh-century Verona to private housing represents a deliberate policy whereby the city was not undergoing *abandonment* but *privatisation*. Similarly, the emergence of the emporia is taken to represent an eclectic investment strategy by local powers (*ibid*: 50).

Despite their fundamental disagreements, Carver and Roskams both belong to a general movement seeking to play down the primacy of economic activity and to emphasise the role of human actions; in such a scenario notions of catastrophic urban failures do not hold. Their differences lie in the extent to which individuals were choosing their own destinies. Whereas Roskams perceives the town as an arena wherein one class confronts another in a constant state of tension, Carver highlights the post-Roman period as a time of deliberate – and changing – choices and strategies being made by *individuals*. Both viewpoints would seek to explain the variations in urban structures – whether within an individual town or across a region – through the subtle permutations and variety of human action and behaviour.

Carver's belief in the primacy of ideological and political forces in the urban context means that the town cannot be defined by a wall and leads him, along with Hodges, to highlight the need to examine urban hinterlands (Carver 1993: 33; Hodges 1996: 286).

To a large extent imbalances in hinterland studies reflect those of the towns themselves. On the one hand the heavily exploited landscapes of certain regions (Britain, France, Germany) mean that hinterlands are far less understood than their urban centres that have frequently been the subject of sustained archaeological coverage. On the other, high survival rates of many towns of Roman and medieval origin into the modern period in, for example, Italy, have resulted in a continued poor understanding of their earlier development. The agricultural use of their environs, however, has frequently enabled extensive and sustained survey work such as the Italian *Ager Tarraconensis* survey. Similarly, the ongoing Wroxeter Hinterland project, instigated in 1994, offers a rare opportunity to view a British Roman town in its proper social and economic context due to the exceptional combination of an absence of subsequent development or disturbance (Section 2.3.1).

## CHAPTER TWO

### SOCIETIES AND TOWNS. CASE STUDY I: ENGLAND c.AD 300-900

#### 2.1: INTRODUCTION

##### 2.1.1: Chapter Aims

This chapter provides the first in three surveys of post-classical towns in north-west Europe. Britain is valuable in charting the loss, disruption and residuality of urbanism after Roman withdrawal and the subsequent Saxon-directed urban revival. The generally accepted sequence of events regarding pre-Conquest Romano-British towns is of rapid fifth-century collapse in the Roman network. Royal-controlled trading emporia or *wics* supplemented a progressive urban revival during the eighth and ninth centuries and, subsequently, a network of fortified centres (*burhs*), both of which in many cases developed into towns.

Several inherent complications serve to constrain research into early English urbanism, namely the availability and differential survival of archaeological and historical data, variations in the physical accessibility of the former and artificial patterns of regional variation arising from the above. Archaeology is, however, increasingly demonstrating the inadequacy and over-simplicity of the stated traditional model, revealing in particular the persistence in towns such as Winchester and York of some form of occupation well into the so-called Dark Age/early Saxon period. As will be seen, this activity may be the direct result of deliberate choice on the part of aristocratic or, possibly, royal individuals and/or groups, resulting in redefinitions of the urban fabric. We need to question, however, whether this was an attempt to cling onto Roman culture or else to use the town as a means to legitimate rule (Carver 1993: 61; Millett 1990: 222; Roskams 1996: 266).

This chapter opens with a review of the sources of evidence available to the urban

researcher and sets out the problems inherent in the study of late Roman and early medieval towns. In Section 2.2, the research methodology here employed in the mapping of urban evolution and the resultant classification of twenty towns into separate groupings is outlined, prior to a brief description of their individual developmental sequences. Three principal case studies are then detailed in greater depth in Section 2.3. Proceeding from this, an attempt is made in Section 2.4 to present the aforementioned developments in diagrammatic form. The chapter closes, in Section 2.5, with a summary of the evidence and with a final discussion.

### **2.1.2: Sources of Evidence**

By comparison with Gaul, contemporary written source materials relating to late Roman and early to middle Saxon England are severely lacking. For the later Roman period, the province only merits a few generalised mentions in official accounts regarding administrative structures and, from writers such as Ammianus Marcellinus, military activities (Higham 1992: 51). Epigraphic materials are scarce at best, with very few funerary epitaphs. As regards the proto-Saxon period, there is an almost total absence of material, with the exception of the unfavourably biased retrospective accounts of the seventh-century Gildas in his *Concerning the Ruin of Britain (De Excidio Britanniae)* and, in the following century, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. However, a number of Anglo-Saxon and subsequently, Scandinavian writings provide valuable insights into a few specific towns. York is especially well-represented, with the eighth-century texts of Alfrid's *Life of Luidgar*, and Alcuin's praise poem *The Bishops, Saints and Kings of York* indicating the presence of an Anglian *wic* prior to its discovery by archaeologists. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of Alfred* provide further insights into York's political and ecclesiastical history. Less favourably, an image of a deserted and ruinous Roman town, probably Bath, is offered in the c.AD 700 poem *The Ruin*, whilst the twelfth-century praise poem *Durham* presents an uncomplimentary comparison between the contemporary town and its glorious Anglo-Saxon past (Hamer 1970: 33).

Whilst the body of English documentary sources available to the urban researcher

is, therefore, severely limited both in terms of quantity and the inherent biases of its compilers, the region is extremely rich in archaeological data, stemming from over thirty years of unit-based excavation. Driven by town centre redevelopment schemes and pioneered by the Winchester Research Unit, a number of towns were subject to extensive programmes of rescue excavation during the 1960s and early 1970s. During the 1990s archaeological coverage progressively gave way to long-term, research-driven programmes of archaeological research such as the English Heritage-funded urban archaeological strategies, operating in tandem with government-backed planning guidelines in order to minimise further losses to archaeological deposits. Coupled with the effects of the 1980s economic slump, the net result has been a fall in substantial town centre excavations and a shift towards the investigation of suburbs and urban hinterlands, the latter pioneered by the University of Birmingham's multidisciplinary Wroxeter Hinterland Project (<http://www.bufau.ac.uk/newsite/home.html>).

A certain number of the larger excavations are, however, in the process of being published, recent subjects including Leicester's Causeway Lane (Connor & Buckley 1999) and Wroxeter's baths basilica (Barker *et al.* 1997). In addition, synthetic studies have focussed on, amongst others, Cirencester (Darvill & Gerrard 1994), Chester (Ward 1994) and Lincoln (Colyer *et al.* 1999).

### **2.1.3: Research Methodology (Figure 1)**

The starting point for the study of the development of late Roman and early medieval English towns is the mapping of urban physical elements and functions across time. Consequently, drawing upon published archaeological literature concerning twenty English towns, the resultant data are presented in tabular form (Figure 1), in a format which mirrors that utilised previously in urban studies (for example, Carver 1987, Jones & Bond 1987, Jones & Wachter 1987). The list of towns included is neither total nor comprehensive, since for certain Roman and Anglo-Saxon towns too little tangible information is available. Accordingly, for the sake of brevity and clarity as well as of simple logistics, the emphasis is placed on those urban centres with the greatest potential for answering questions concerning

character and function. In order to map the changing patterns of individual physical components and activities, the 600-year data range is divided into four phases:

- **Period A** (Late Roman/Sub-Roman): *c.*AD 300-450.
- **Period B** (Sub-Roman/Early Saxon): *c.*AD 450-600
- **Period C** (Christian Early Saxon): *c.*AD 600-750
- **Period D** (Middle Saxon): *c.*AD 750-900

This study enables three broad categories of town to be defined (Section 3.1.5), mirroring classifications used by Brooks (1986). To achieve this, it is essential first to review current knowledge regarding the component physical criteria of a sizeable sample (twenty) of English towns. These data form the basis for discussion and for selection of those towns best suited as case studies in analysing later Roman and Anglo-Saxon urbanism. A single town is then selected from each of the three groups for detailed examination in order to demonstrate the range of urban forms and strategies extant across England during the study period. Reference will, however, be made to other towns during the course of the discussion.

This exercise is intended as a means of establishing the changing nature of human activity in the urban context from *c.*AD 300 to 900. This forms the basis for the next stage of analysis, which examines the roles of these towns and activities therein; only after this need consideration be made of whether (or when) these places can be defined as 'towns' during this period.

#### **2.1.4: Town Types and Strategies: Classes A, B & C**

Preliminary analysis of the corpus of twenty towns enables their grouping into three principal classes (Section 2.2). These may be defined as follows:

##### **Class A (Towns): 'Failed' Towns**

A small proportion of towns in Roman Britain failed and did not re-attain urban status. Caistor-by-Norwich, Silchester and Wroxeter represent instances of towns

Site	Colonia	Civitas Capital	Wic	Burh	Defences	Gates	Street System	Housing	Suburbs	Forum	Baths	Amphitheatre	Aqueduct	Palace	Dark Earth	Temples	Church(es)	Cathedral	Minster	Monasteries	Cemeteries	Pottery production	Other Industry	Shops	Market	Mint	Waterfront Structures	
Caistor-by-Norwich					A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A?				A	A				A	A						
Canterbury		X		X	AD	A	A	BCD		A	A	A?	A?	B/C	X	A	A	BCD		BCD	AB	A	A	A	C?			
Chester			X	X		A		D							X		C?D									D		
Chichester		X		X	A	A	A	A			A	A			X						A							
Cirencester		X		X	A	A	A	A				AB?			X	A?					A		A					
Exeter		X		X	A(D?)	A?D?	AD?	A	A	A	A	A	A		X		B?C?D	A?	C	CD	ABCD	A?	A					
Gloucester	X				AD	AD	AD	A			A		A	D	X	A?	CD		CD	CD	A	A	AD					
Ipswich			X		D		CD	D							X						CD	B?C	B?C				CD	
Lincoln	X		?	X	A	A?	A	A	A	A	A		A?		X	A	ABC?				ABC?	A	A	A				
London	X		X	X	AD	A	ACD	ACD	A	A	A	A	A?	D	X	A	ACD	CD			ACD	AD	ACD	A			ACD	
Northampton			X	X									C/D?				C/D	C?/D?		C/D							ACD	
Silchester		X			A	A	A	AB		A	A	A				A	A?	A?			A		A					
Southampton/Claudentum					A			A									A?	A?										
Southampton/Hamwic		X			CD?		CD	CD									C?				C	C	C/D				C	
St. Albans					A	A	A	AB?	A	A	A	A	A(B?)								A		A	A				
Wareham				X	D	D	D										BCD		CD	C/D?								
Winchester		X		X	AD	AD	AD	ACD	ACD	A				CD	X	A	CD	CD	CD	CD	ACD	ACD	A				(C?)D	
Worcester			X	X	AD			D							X		A-C?	C			B?		A					
Wroxeter		X			A	A	AB	AB?	A				A			A					AB		AB?	AB?	A?		A?	
York	X		X	X	ACD	A	ACD	AB?CD	A				A?	C?	X		(C?)D	CD		C?D	AD	C?D	AB?CD				A?	CD

PERIODS A: c AD 300-450 B: c AD 450-600 C: c AD 600-750 D: c AD 750-900

Figure 1: English Towns c.AD 300-900: Key Physical Elements and Activities

failing to survive far beyond the close of the Roman period or to rejuvenate beyond village level at a later date. Noticeably, however, their names indicate the recognition by the Anglo-Saxons (*-caestar*) of both their defensive circuits and Roman origins. The principal causes of the demise of Class A towns appear to stem from marginalisation in the context of emergent Anglo-Saxon power foci (Wroxeter, Silchester), the loss of strategic role (Aldborough) and weak Roman urbanisation (Caistor-by-Norwich). Archaeology, in these instances, has much potential for elucidating processes of disruption and decay.

### **Class B (Towns): 'Re-Emergent' Towns**

This second category consists of those sites of Roman origin, which re-emerge during the Anglo-Saxon period as *wics* and/or *burhs*, and includes Canterbury, Chester, Cirencester, Exeter, Gloucester, Lincoln, London, Winchester and York. Towns in this grouping are known to have been urban centres in both the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods due in large part to their (continuing?) roles as religious and/or secular central places. Their nature in the intervening period, however, is not wholly clear. The emergence of certain of these towns as trading settlements and/or defensive sites during the seventh to ninth centuries was at the instigation of royal/ecclesiastical groupings based in the former Roman centres, forming a dual arrangement of elite residential and commercial foci. Consequently they are here deemed to be distinct from those towns established on virgin sites (Class C towns) where a royal or Church presence is not discernible.

### **Class C (Towns): 'New' Towns**

The third grouping of towns, which includes Ipswich, Southampton, Wareham and, possibly, Oxford, consists of settlements established during the Anglo-Saxon period as *wics* and/or *burhs* on virgin sites – although in certain instances this may also have been the location of an early Roman fortification. Local royal houses instigated these foundations for the specific purposes of control and exploitation of regional trade patterns and manufacturing activity through riverine and coastal settlements (the *wics*) or defence (the *burhs*). Their specialist economic and defensive function(s) and sitings serve to differentiate them from Class B centres. As such Class C towns represent the re-emergence of urbanism in a *new order* that was increasingly concerned with the control of burgeoning industrial and trading

patterns. Central to discussion of these sites is the issue of *when* and *how* such *wics* became towns. Investigation of these towns remains largely at the archaeological level, as illustrated by Ipswich (Section 2.3.3).

## 2.2: TOWN SITES

### 2.2.1: Class A (Towns): 'Failed' Towns

The *civitas* of **Caistor-by-Norwich** (*Venta Icenorum*) appears never to have expanded sufficiently to occupy its grid, only half of which was subsequently enclosed within a wall circuit. Following their destruction by fire, Caistor's baths and forum site appears to have remained derelict for as long as a century before rebuilding in the late third century. Despite its east coast location, the general impression gained is of a town which was maintaining a somewhat precarious existence; Wachter argues that Icenian involvement in the Boudiccan rebellion may have had a permanent impact on the local population (1995: 243). The cemetery east of the town continued in use throughout the fifth century prior to the town's presumed final abandonment (*ibid*: 255). Re-examination of the evidence from Atkinson's excavations of 1930 has effectively discredited Gildas' account of the massacre of Caistor's inhabitants by early fifth-century Anglo-Saxon raiders (Darling 1987).

A number of houses with courtyards are known from later Roman **Silchester** (*Calleva Atrebatum*), along with evidence for a range of industrial and trade activities; the town's forum and basilica were the focus of metalworking during the third and fourth centuries. Significantly, the town may also have had a Christian church (*ibid*: 285). If, as has been suggested on the basis of a possible baptistery, this was indeed a fourth-century cathedral (although as yet no evidence has been forthcoming of associated Christian cemeteries), its status as bishopric clearly did not outlast the Roman period. Its final late fifth-/early sixth-century abandonment indicates Silchester's lack of any religious or secular administrative function that might have assisted either its continued existence or subsequent revival. Indeed, recent excavations in the town have prompted speculation regarding the town's final

desertion. The excavators suggest that the cutting of a series of pits containing pottery vessels and a dog skeleton across between the fifth and seventh centuries represents a deliberate act of spoilation of the Roman town on the part of emergent Anglo-Saxon administrations in order to suppress a potential rival power base (Fulford & Clarke 1999: 180). In the absence of parallel scenarios, this must remain an (albeit intriguing) speculation.

As the subject of a substantial and on-going programme of archaeological research, Wroxeter naturally provides the principal case study for this class of town (see Section 2.3.1).

## **2.2.2: Class B (Towns): 'Re-Emergent' Towns**

Although **Lincoln** (*Lindum*) is known to have been an episcopal centre at the time of the Council of Arles in AD 314 (*ibid*: 145), it is uncertain whether it retained this function beyond the late Roman period. However, the presence of the fourth-century church of St. Paul-in-the-Bail at the centre of the forum, both apparently in use concurrently, indicates official sanction on the part of the secular Roman authorities towards the Church (Eagles 1989: 207). Moreover, the existence of an associated (later) cemetery suggests the continuing presence of a Christian community at the heart of the town from the Roman period through to the fifth and sixth centuries (Yorke 1993: 141). A number of churches have been proposed as precursors to the tenth-century cathedral, notably St. Mary-le-Wigford, as yet without any degree of consensus (Vince 1993: 4). Bassett has suggested that the head minster church of the bishops of Lindsey was relocated to the north of the Witham before the Conquest, possibly to the site of the church of St. Mary Magdalene (1989: 31). In terms of secular authority, the appearance of the British name Cædbæd in the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogy of Lindsey may point to the presence of a king in sub-Roman Lincoln (Eagles 1989: 207). Further credence is lent to the notion of Lincoln having continued to function as a central place by the fact that Lindsey constitutes the sole eastern English Anglo-Saxon kingdom to be named after a former Roman town. Moreover, the town has a direct association with Paulinus' first convert in the region, Blæcca (Yorke 1993: 141).

As regards subsequent developments, a severe lack of tangible occupation evidence prior to the laying out of the Anglo-Scandinavian town in the late ninth century has led to suggestions that sizeable urban estates occupied Lincoln's upper city area. Comparable properties are known to have been in existence in the post-Conquest city (Young & Vince 1992: 386), from which a system of religious and/or secular administration may have operated. Stocker and Vince have recently proposed that the late eleventh-century Bishop Remigius was responsible for construction of a strongly fortified tower residence within the Norman castle, a structure symbolic of his pre-eminence in the town (1997: 231).

Excavation has failed to reveal the existence of a Middle Saxon *wic*, despite the existence of the riverine suburb of Wigford. This has led Yorke to propose a twin *emporium/villa regalis* arrangement as recognised in Wessex at Winchester and *Hamwic*, suggesting that its trading *wic* was situated on the banks of the Humber at Winteringham (Yorke 1993: 147). Bassett argues for a (more credible) scenario of a trading settlement, located at Wigford, co-existing with the adjoining pre-existing settlement, mirroring the *Hamwic/Hamtun* arrangement (Bassett 1989: 17). The presence of so-called dark earth deposits across the upper and lower cities, with the implications of agricultural activity, suggests that Lincoln was supporting no real density of population prior to the tenth century. Nevertheless, the urban fabric and, perhaps, religious/ administrative structures are likely to have endured sufficiently well in order to influence Lincoln's subsequent revival (Steane & Vince 1993: 77). The survival of a possible royal genealogy and the fact that the region had a bishop's seat (at Lincoln) argues for the Lindsey region having had the status of kingdom (Foot 1993: 138) prior to its seventh-century domination by Mercia and Northumbria (Eagles 1989: 212).

Despite the fact that the defences of **London** (*Londinium Augusta, Lundenwic, Lundenburh*) were maintained until the late Roman period and the town fitfully occupied until the fifth century, the traditional view is of a general fourth-century decline (Wacher 1995: 109). However, discoveries in the 1990s of substantial late Roman masonry buildings, notably a *horrea*, church or even cathedral, in the south-eastern part of the town, offer the possibility of a somewhat more vigorous late Roman town (Sankey 1998). As regards the post-Roman period, recent

environmental analysis of an unusually complete sequence of dark earth deposits from Newgate has indicated that this area of the town underwent abandonment until around AD 1000 (Watson 1998: 105). Middle Saxon finds have been recovered from over thirty excavations in the Covent Garden area, confirming the existence of a trading settlement centred on the Strand, west of the former walled Roman town and its supposed seventh-century cathedral church and royal hall (Cowie & Whytehead 1989: 706). Founded in the late seventh or early eighth century, the *wic* appears to have expanded rapidly to cover an area of around 60ha. Excavations at the Royal Opera House site revealed a 25m section of road with at least seven gravel remetalings, suggesting a gridded street system (Cowie 1996). Work on the waterfront site of Bull Wharf at Queenhithe (1990-95) provided indications of the beachmarket, documented for the AD 890s and associated with the ninth-century *burh* centred on the walled Roman area. Excavations within this circuit at Poultry revealed a possible cattle market associated with the Alfredian town in the form of a 50m to 60m-square cobbled area, approached by a sunken way (Rowsome 1996).

London's early ecclesiastical history remains poorly understood. The recent discovery of a substantial church on Tower Hill, constructed between AD 350 and 400 and destroyed by fire in the fifth century, may represent London's first cathedral (Denison 1995: 4). However, if the bestowal of bishopric status on London in AD 604 – a mere seven years after Augustine's arrival in Kent – stemmed from a need to reassert Christianity in England (Vince 1990: 10), this would imply a break in a Church presence. If a Christian community was indeed present in London between the fifth and seventh centuries, it may indicate a scenario similar to that known from Gaul whereby former Roman administration centres (re) emerged in the post-Roman period as centres of Church organisation. Despite continuing archaeological investigation of pre-Conquest London, it will be some years before statements can be made with any degree of confidence regarding the recently-identified middle Saxon and, in particular, Anglo-Scandinavian towns. Consequently it is deemed to be unsuitable as major case study material for the purpose of this research.

**Winchester (*Venta Belgarum*)** appears to have witnessed a fundamental change during the mid-fourth century, with demolition of town houses and accumulation of

dark earth in association with ironworking waste over a large part of the townscape. Contemporary with this, the town's defences were strengthened and the extramural cemeteries continued to expand. Biddle offers a reverse analogy between the late fourth- and late seventeenth-century city. Whereas in the later period Winchester rose in importance as a county society town following the collapse of its textile industry and commercial functions, the Roman town was being cleared of housing in favour of industrial activity. In both periods it remained an administrative centre with aristocratic and royal appeal (1983: 114).

The lengthy intervening period between the end of the Roman period and the late ninth century foundation of the Alfredian *burh* remains poorly understood. However, the fact that Winchester eventually emerged as the capital of Wessex offers a strong case for the retention of its central place role throughout (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 10). Nor is it clear whether its functions were royal and/or ecclesiastical in nature at this time, with debate largely centring on the interpretation of documentary evidence. Biddle envisages a royal *and* ecclesiastical community in the former Roman town between the seventh to ninth centuries, consisting of large open spaces, some under cultivation, with royal residence, church community, walled private houses and a service population (Biddle 1976: 450). Yorke, on the other hand, argues for a sixth-century hiatus (1982: 79). Indeed, her belief that *Hamwic*, not Winchester, was the royal regional centre during this period leads her to speculate that the decision to establish a diocese at Winchester in the AD 660s, and so prompt resettlement of the city, was made not by the West Saxon royal house but the Church.

In the case of **Canterbury** (*Durovernum Cantiacorum*), the public areas of the late classical town underwent dramatic functional change between the late third and early fifth centuries, including the erection of timber-framed buildings over metallated street surfaces and on the site of the public baths. The temple precinct may have become the site of a market. The town has been subject of extensive excavation and possesses the most substantial body of post-Roman archaeological evidence; around 30 Anglo-Saxon sunken-floored buildings were constructed on the site of the Marlowe Theatre between the fifth and seventh centuries (Wacher 1995: 202). Perhaps initially housing incoming *fœderati*, they raise the possibility of continuous

occupation within the walled area into the Anglo-Saxon period or, if not, of the narrowing of the gap between the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon occupations to as little as 20 years (Brooks 1988: 99). In addition, it is possible that Augustine was attracted to a royal centre; Bede makes mention of Bertha, the Christian wife of King Aethelbert of Kent having worshipped at a church outside Canterbury. In this respect it would be in accord with other examples of seventh-century minster churches mostly being established at royal centres (Drewett *et al.* 1988: 305). Excavation in the north-western part of the town has revealed traces of both the probable service quarter for the cathedral and royal palace complex dating from around AD 597 through into the ninth century, and a contemporary settlement in the south-eastern quarter of the town (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 12). Canterbury retained a strongly rural character into the Saxo-Norman period, with archaeological evidence reflecting documentary evidence for certain areas of the town being given over to cultivation both within and without the walled area (Drewett *et al.* 1988: 303).

One of the strongest cases for Roman-Saxon continuity derives from **Exeter (*Isca Dumnoniorum*)** and its Christian cemetery set out within the area of the Roman forum. The later Roman town's apparent lack of overt wealth has been suggested by Todd as being due to its location on the periphery of the Durotriges' tribal territory, lending a strongly Celtic character to the city's hinterland (1987: 214). The characteristic accumulations of dark earth over the latest Roman levels may represent material left subsequent to the clearance of derelict Roman masonry structures (Bidwell 1980: 87).

Possibly the seat of a bishop during the fourth century, it may have retained this role beyond the Roman period (Allan *et al.* 1984: 389). Although this followed demolition of the civic centre and clearance of the site (Wacher 1995: 342), the fact that the late fifth- or early sixth-century burials were aligned with the Roman basilica suggests the possibility of the latter being converted for the purpose of Christian worship (Brooks 1990: 24). The excavator suggests a scenario comparable to that envisaged at Silchester whereby a vacant plot of land was donated to the Church in order that a less Romanised population might be buried in close proximity to the celebration of the Christian sacraments (Bidwell 1979: 113).

Consequently Christianity may have constituted the major strand of continuity in the centre of Exeter from the late fourth century onwards, although the character of this occupation evidently changed substantially throughout this period.

To date, however, the town has yielded no material of sixth-century date, including a total absence of amphorae and Mediterranean fine wares found on other contemporary sites in the south-west (Holbrook & Bidwell 1991: 14). Contemporary documentary evidence does, however, point to the presence of a Christian community in the city by the seventh century (although not necessarily on this same site). The life of St. Boniface states that he was educated at a monastery in the city, later tradition claiming a foundation date of AD 670 (*ibid*: 24). Furthermore, there was need for a reconstruction of the later minster church during the seventh century that possibly overlies the Roman cathedral-church.

As regards the area beyond the confines of the Cathedral Close and its religious community, extensive excavations carried out during the 1970s supports the view of the intramural area being devoid of settlement between c.AD 400 and the foundation of the Alfredian *burh* (Allan 1984: 353, Holbrook & Bidwell 1991: 14).

**Gloucester** (*Colonia Nervia Glevensium*) presents no such indications of the persistence of either administrative functions or permanent occupation beyond the Roman period, with an apparent break between the mid-fifth century and the establishment within the Roman walls of the abbey of St. Peter in AD 680. This may, however, be in large part due to the substantial erosion of this stratigraphy by subsequent occupation (Heighway 1983: 3). Extensive dark earth deposits suggest only sporadic industrial or agricultural usage of the former town prior to the laying out of a street system in the tenth century (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 42). Elements of the Roman town do appear, however, to have survived into the early ninth century as ruinous structures, to the extent that Nennius was able to describe Gloucester as ‘a great city’ (Heighway 1984: 364).

Similarly, the history of **Chester** (*Deva*) between the abandonment of the Roman legionary fortress and the establishment of the Aethelflaedian *burh* in the early tenth century is extremely obscure, and provides few indications of the site being utilised

for permanent occupation. Documentary evidence does, however, hint at the fortress persisting as some form of civilian territorial unit into the sub-Roman period, in which case the *principia* would be a logical base for such an administrative central place function. If this is so, a tenth-century church dedication to St. Peter at Chester is taken by Strickland to imply a situation of religious continuity on this site, possibly from as early as the fourth century, in a situation analogous to that of St. Paul-in-the-Bail at Lincoln (Strickland 1988: 115).

By the early seventh century Chester may have emerged as the seat of a branch of the Cadelling royal dynasty, hosts of a synod in Chester soon after AD 600 and participants in the battle of Chester in AD 616 (Thacker 1988: 119). The site came under Mercian rule and, according to twelfth-century tradition, was the location of an extramural minster, founded by King Aethelred. By AD 893 it is described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a 'deserted city in Wirral' following Danish raiding and occupation of the site. However, the allusion in the same text to the town's wealth implies that Danish occupation of the city was only temporary, and that an Anglo-Saxon settlement must have been located close by (*ibid*: 120). Archaeological evidence for late Saxon occupation implies that Aethelflæd may have been responsible both for the protection of the pre-existing extramural settlement and, in addition, for the reoccupation of the legionary fortress (*ibid*: 121).

Aside from the aforementioned possibility of an administrative/religious presence in the former Roman centre, there continues to be little or no evidence for use of this area prior to the ninth century (Ward 1994: 118). The area south of the fortress has, however, produced evidence of cultivation; excavations at Lower Bridge Street produced evidence of plough activity before the construction of timber buildings associated with the laying out of the Aethelflaedian *burh* (Mason 1985: 2). Ward has proposed a scenario of settlement shift comparable to that at Southampton/*Claudentum* in order to explain the absence of pre-Aethelflaedian occupation, whereby the Mercian town may have been located to the south-east of the fortress on a bluff overlooking the River Dee. Such a claim is lent support by the presence of St. John's, one of the town's most important medieval churches (Ward 1994: 119).

The laying out of the *burh* is likely to have involved the extension of the Roman circuit south and west to the Dee to form a single defensive enclosure enclosing the fortress and the area of Anglo-Saxon settlement to the west. Despite the fact that many parts of the fortress are likely to have been crowded with crumbling Roman masonry structures, activity appears to have centred on and intensified across this area rather than in the open space to the west (Carrington 1995: 6). The overall impression is of occupation scattered amongst field boundaries and animal pens, making the best use of resources and influenced overall by the relict Roman town (Strickland 1994: 17), the substantial survival of which is highlighted by their featuring in fourteenth-century writings (Strickland 1988: 109).

Chester's significance, therefore, lies in its clear indications of the powerful topographical influence being exerted on the Saxon and medieval town by a relict Roman street system and associated buildings. As such it highlights the necessity of considering structural survivals from earlier developmental phases in addition to subsequent modifications to the urban fabric (Carrington 1995: 6).

As a *civitas* capital and very likely one of only four or five provincial capitals, late Roman **Cirencester** (*Corinium Dobunnorum*) appears as a town of considerable importance and wealth, reflected in its fourth-century sculptural and mosaic workshops (Holbrook 1994: 78), high quality town houses and imported metalwork (Wacher 1995: 314). The town does not appear to have suffered the gradual decline visible in the majority of later Roman towns but to have retained some semblance of civic order into the fifth century. The heavily worn forum piazza surface was subjected to regular cleaning and the roadside ditches filling with silts from street traffic until *c.*AD 430 (*ibid.*: 322). Furthermore, flood prevention work was being carried out on the defensive circuit at the north-eastern (*Verulamium*) gate into the fifth century (Wacher 1976: 15). Fourth-century dark earth accumulations overlying house demolition deposits coupled with unusual coin loss patterns may indicate that in its final stages Roman Cirencester was assuming a more rural aspect (Holbrook 1994: 76).

Wacher postulates that the Roman amphitheatre may have been converted into a fortified enclave for the surviving population during the sub-Roman period (*ibid.*:

322), in which case it may reflect a policy of fortification evident in the Gallic amphitheatres at Nîmes and Arles (Wacher 1976: 17). Consequently the amphitheatre may have served as a chieftain's base or place of safety prior to the Battle of Dyrnham in AD 577 (Gerrard 1994: 88). Finds evidence for bronze metalworking and weaving within the former town point to some form of continuing activity, possibly arising either from its siting on a major river crossing or because of a lingering association with a (possibly administrative) central place function (Gerrard 1994: 90). Although there are no clear indications of residential continuity through into the early medieval period, it does appear that, in common with certain other former Roman centres such as Winchester, Gloucester and Canterbury, Cirencester had emerged by the mid-seventh century as a royal and/or ecclesiastical centre. A substantial church was excavated in the 1960s on the site of the Augustinian abbey of St. Mary. Possibly attributed to Archbishop Wulfred (AD 805-832), the excavators interpret it as a royal Middle Saxon Mercian minster foundation (Wilkinson & McWhirr 1998: 39), a claim supported by a number of daughter church dependencies in the surrounding area (Gerrard 1994: 92). In a situation analogous to Gloucester, the minster was peripherally located in the north-eastern quadrant of the Roman town (Wilkinson & McWhirr 1998: 7).

In the case of **St. Albans (*Verulamium*)**, the town did eventually revive after AD 900, although with indications of the perpetuation of a Christian function to the end of the fifth century or beyond (Wacher 1996: 238). This seemingly rare British occurrence of a shift in the urban centre away from its Roman focus to an extramural site represents an exceptional instance of topographical development and a phenomenon more commonly associated with Gallic towns such as Tours and Metz (Halsall 1996: 248). The excavation in the late 1990s of the Roman religious complex at Folly Lane offers the tantalising possibility of an explanation regarding the origins of the martyrial cult of St. Alban. The excavators speculate that the late Roman promotion of a Christian place of pilgrimage on the outskirts of the town was a deliberate attempt on the part of the emergent Church to divert attention away from a pagan dynastic or tribal cult focussed on the extramural burial of an early- or pre-Roman local leader. Although apparently in decline for some time prior to its abandonment in the early fourth-century, the latter site appears, therefore, to have been superseded by the shrine of St. Alban located on a neighbouring hill. As a

result, seasonal pilgrimages to Verulamium would have been progressively relocated to the Christian cult centre (Niblett 1999: 419), the site subsequently forming the developmental focus of the medieval town. The precise details of these developments remain, however, poorly understood. Consequently, Verulamium does not make ideal case study material.

Extensive programmes of archaeological investigation over a number of years in several of these centres have served to supplement the sparse documentary record. York is especially well served in this respect, but also featuring in a number of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian written sources. Consequently it has been selected as the principal case study for this class of urban settlement (Section 2.3.2).

### **2.2.3: Class C (Towns): 'New' Towns**

Saxon **Southampton** (*Hamwic*) was founded in the late seventh century, possibly by Ine of Wessex, on a new site c.1.4km to the south-west of the Flavian Roman town (*Claesentum*) (Morton 1992b: 24), and north-east of the medieval walled town. The c.46ha trading settlement was planned from the outset, with house/workshop buildings fronting onto a gridded system of streets, making it the earliest settlement in Wessex to acquire urban characteristics (Cunliffe 1993: 321). The regular street plan suggests the exertion of control by a central authority over the town's foundation and development (Pay 1987: 5). Whether that (presumably royal) authority was located here or, as appears more likely, in nearby Winchester, the likely intention behind the establishment of *Hamwic* was to forge and control trade links between Wessex and the Continent. As well as serving in the capacity of *entrepôt* for the import and export of goods, extensive excavations have revealed evidence for metalworking, bone and antler working and textile manufacture at the individual household level, with no indications of wider zoning of these activities (Morton 1992b: 57). The homogeneity of plan of the sixty or more excavated buildings in terms of size and dual domestic/workshop function would argue for a settlement with little or no social variation. Furthermore, the excavation of a cemetery with a 2:1 ratio of males to females may indicate a primarily trading and industrial function (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 35) and, perhaps, with a seasonally

mobile element. Numismatic evidence indicates that *Hamwic*'s productive capabilities and trading activity was operating as a closely regulated monetary economy (Brisbane 1988: 106), again underlining the controlling hand of authority.

Oxford and Wareham offer examples of tenth-century defensive burghal foundations. The earliest Anglo-Saxon activity at **Oxford** is, in fact, likely to be represented by the foundation of the monastery of St. Frideswide around AD 727 on or near the site of the present cathedral (Hassall 1986: 118). In common with other Mercian towns, Oxford appears to have possessed several minsters, including St. Frideswide, St. Peter and St. Michael (Blair 1988: 225). Archaeological evidence lends support to the theory of a pre-Conquest ecclesiastical presence at Christ Church; excavations conducted in 1985 within the cathedral cloister produced ninth-century charcoal burials, almost certainly belonging to the Anglo-Saxon minster cemetery. They also suggest the existence of some form of associated ninth- or tenth-century community (Scull 1988: 62), as yet unidentified, although excavation has revealed evidence of construction work associated with the development of a river crossing to the south (Hassall 1986: 118).

Physical details of the late Saxon town's defences remain hazy, the gravel rampart and traces of its timber front only being seen for the first time in excavations at St. Michael Street in the late 1980s (Durham 1990: 29). Oxford is, however, known from documentary evidence to have been fortified by AD 911, at which time it passed from Mercian to Wessex control and came within the system of defended towns or *burhs*. Although the precise size of the defended area is uncertain – the early tenth-century Burghal Hidage listing Oxford as having some 1500 hides of wall, whilst excavations and topographical analysis suggest a slightly shorter length of 1840m – it appears to have been a major Late Saxon borough (Hill 1996: 212). In terms of internal layout, the identification of several gravel-metalled streets indicates the existence of a gridded street system established in a single action. Streets include both major thoroughfares such as High Street, and minor side streets (Hassall 1986: 120); the same unity of plan is recognisable in the St. Ebbe's area in the extreme south-western corner of the town, brought within the street grid c.AD 911 (Hassall *et al.* 1989: 272). A sizeable number of late Saxon buildings have been excavated in Oxford, of cellar-pit form – probably intended for food storage –

or larger, cellared houses as were found at Cornmarket and Queen Street in 1959 to 1962 (Sturdy & Munby 1985: 93). Although property division arrangements remain unclear, street frontages appear to have developed rapidly (Hassall 1986: 120).

The Saxon defences of **Wareham** survive considerably more substantially than those of Oxford, with the circuit still standing on three sides and enclosing an area of between 32 and 36ha. The Burghal Hidage cites the town as having 1600 hides, estimated as c.2012m and sharing with Oxford the status of a major borough (Hill 1996: 221). Unlike Oxford, the Alfredian *burh*, with its timber-fronted ramparts and ditches appears to have been established on a virgin site (Cunliffe 1993: 324), although epigraphic evidence attests the presence of an important monastic-type mother church from the sixth century to c.AD 800. Furthermore, Wareham is listed in the early tenth-century Burghal Hidage as the site of a monastery (Radford 1970: 84); as such it is in the same class of Wessex *burh* as Wallingford and Cricklade (Biddle & Hill 1971: 81). Vikings seized Wareham in AD 876, possibly with the intention of using its sizeable royal territory as a base for the conquest of Wessex (Hinton 1996: 157). Although construction of this and other *burhs* was a direct military response on the part of the Wessex royal house, their regularity and planned nature indicates that the intention was not simply to construct a series of fortresses, but fortified towns with permanent populations (Biddle & Hill 1971: 83). A substantial part of this grid is preserved in the present urban topography.

## 2.3: CASE STUDIES

### 2.3.1: Wroxeter (*Viroconium Cornoviorum*, *Civitas Cornoviorum*) (Figures 2-7)

Thanks to its present ruralised state and to systematic archaeological study, Wroxeter offers the best evidence from this country for the (albeit brief) continuation of urban life beyond the withdrawal of the legions. Evidence for the redevelopment of at least three of the central *insulae* during the mid-fifth to mid-sixth centuries in order to accommodate timber-built shops and residences suggests the continuance of a reasonably substantial population at the core of the Roman

walled area (White 1990: 6). Furthermore, the fifth-century construction of a substantial villa-like structure in a previously public space could denote the presence of a powerful individual(s). The identification of a possible church at the town centre suggests that this occupant may have been a bishop. If so, this points to significant changes in terms of the roles and functions of such places.



Figure 2: Plan of Wroxeter c.AD 150-500  
(Source: White & Barker 1998: 77)

The positioning of the present-day village church at the south-western corner of the Roman defences on exact alignment with the Roman street grid suggests that this formed the focus of continuing occupation and central-place functions into the Anglo-Saxon period following abandonment of the Roman urban core (Bassett 1990: 12).

## **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

### *Epigraphic and Literary Sources:*

Excavations by Atkinson in the 1920s on the site of the forum produced remains of a substantial masonry inscription, presumably erected to record completion of the Hadrianic forum in AD 129/130 (Wacher 1995: 366). A limited number of military tombstones recovered from the fort provide information on soldiers and their civilian relatives (White & Barker 1998: 49). A tombstone recovered from the eastern defences in 1968 and dated to the third quarter of the fifth century, commemorates the possibly Irish Cunorix, perhaps one of the town's later commanders (*ibid*: 106). Characteristic of many British Roman towns, Wroxeter only receives passing mention in a limited number of source documents such as the itineraries. The earliest documented reference to the town is by William Camden in his book *Britannia* of 1586, whose brief description is indicative of the ruinous nature by this date of the length of substantial upstanding wall in the baths known as the Old Work. Camden's revised edition of 1695 included an account of the town defences (*ibid*: 13).

### *Archaeological Data:*

The relative absence of post-Roman development at Wroxeter has allowed for both antiquarian and archaeological interest. Fieldwork has, however, almost entirely focussed on investigation of the town's public buildings: to date, 80% of the monumental centre has been excavated in comparison to 1% of the remaining intramural area (*ibid*: 70). Wright initiated the archaeological investigation of Wroxeter in 1872, continuing into the twentieth century with the work of Bushe-Fox (in 1913-14, 1916), Atkinson (in 1942) and Kenyon (in 1980). With the exception of limited sample excavation carried out by Bushe-Fox and Kenyon in the residential zones, most work focussed upon the public and commercial areas (<http://www.bufau.ac.uk/newsite/home.html>). A comprehensive aerial archaeological survey of Wroxeter and its environs by Arnold Baker from the late 1950s resulted in a new, extremely detailed plan of the town (White & Barker 1998: 31). Excavations on the site of the baths basilica in the northern part of *insula* 5 commenced in 1966 under Philip Barker (Barker *et al.* 1997: 2). Conducted on a seasonal basis through to 1990, these excavations pioneered a range of detailed site recording techniques.

This site has served to focus academic interest and debate on the late and post-Roman urban developmental sequence in Britain. In addition, Esmonde-Cleary, Johnson and the Department of the Environment (White & Barker 1998: 29) undertook significant work on the defences during this period.

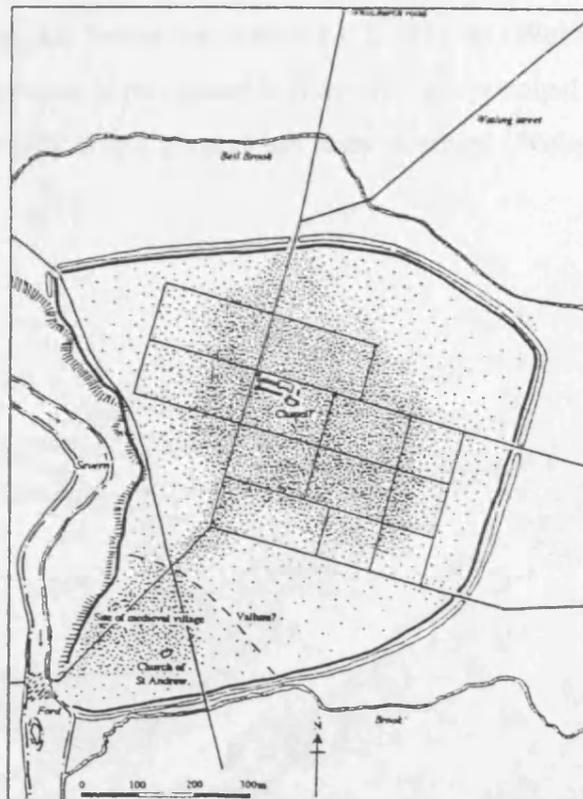


Figure 3: Plan of Wroxeter c. AD 500-650  
(Source: White & Barker 1998: 131)

Since 1994, using a combination of excavation, field survey and GIS analysis, the University of Birmingham's Wroxeter Hinterland Project has attempted (i) to further elucidate Wroxeter's developmental sequence, (ii) to place the city within its hinterland, and (iii) to assess the impact of Romanisation upon that landscape (<http://www.bufau.ac.uk/newsite/home.htm>). Investigation of (iii) has been further assisted by fieldwork necessitated by construction of the Shrewsbury bypass, producing evidence for substantial, complex levels of settlement (White 1998: 9).

### **Wroxeter: Developmental Sequence**

#### **(i) The Legionary Fortress**

The site of the fortress was chosen for purely military reasons, being positioned

strategically at the western end of Watling Street and midway along the major north-south road connecting the legionary bases of Chester and Gloucester. South of Wroxeter the latter route ran parallel to the navigable River Severn (Barker *et al.* 1997: 1). Constructed in AD 56, the c.15ha fortress was the base for *Legio XIV* and, subsequently, *Legio XX* before its demolition in AD 90 (Webster 1993: 50). The basic plan of the fortress is recognisable from the two principal roads and the *porta praetoria*, but internally only a granary has been identified (Webster 1990: 1).



Figure 4: Wroxeter: Suggested Reconstruction of the Baths Basilica Site and Possible Market, Early Sixth Century (Source: Barker *et al.* 1997: 230)

Webster (*ibid.*: 2) maintains that towards the end of its life the fortress underwent conversion to a legionary depot, necessitating demolition of barrack blocks, construction of a substantial store and levelling of the western defences. According to Frere, however, the *Legio XX*'s return in c.AD 87 was for the purpose of refurbishing its old base, characterised by the unfinished extramural bath-house

(Frere 1987: 104). Nothing is known of any settlement of local civilians and retired veterans.

(ii) *Civitas Viroconium* (Figure 2)

The hillfort situated on the Wrekin, four miles to the east of Wroxeter, appears to have been fired by the Roman army in the mid-first century AD, probably by the advance force under Ostorius Scapula. This campaigning was probably the reason for construction of the substantial Roman fort located between the Wrekin and Wroxeter and identified by aerial archaeology (Webster 1990: 1).

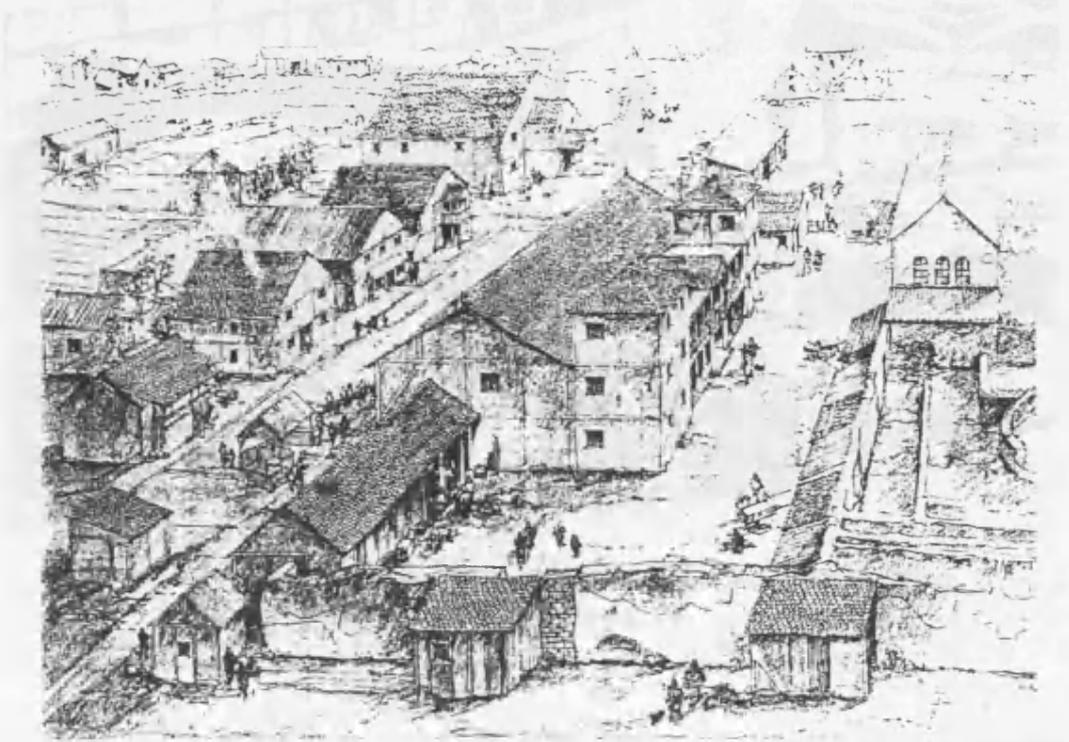


Figure 5: Wroxeter: Suggested Reconstruction of the Baths Basilica Site in the Timber Rebuilding Phase, Later Sixth Century  
(Source: Barker *et al.* 1997: 233)

The *Viroconium* element of Wroxeter's name seemingly derives from the Celtic name for the seat of the hillfort, suggesting that the Roman town was functioning from the outset as the *civitas* capital of the local tribe of the Cornovii (Barker *et al.* 1997: 1). Little is known of the earliest phase of the town (AD 90-120) prior to the second-century expansion. Systematic demolition of the fortress is known to have

provided a flat plateau upon which the town was subsequently laid out, its core initially occupying precisely the same outline as the fortress and retaining the *viae principalis* and *praetoria*. Supplementary roads extended the standard gridiron pattern beyond the area of the fortress (White & Barker 1998: 72). Whilst several of these tallied with minor fortress roads (Barker *et al.* 1997: 1), the *insulae* did not mirror those of the fortress (Webster 1990: 2). The legionary headquarters building may have functioned as the earliest forum (White & Barker 1998: 73).

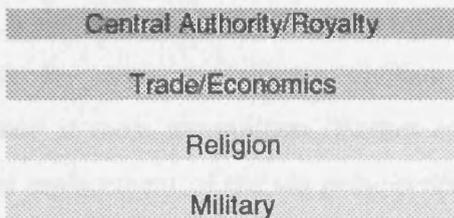


Figure 6: Wroxeter: the Baths Basilica Site in the Timber Rebuilding Phase, Later Sixth Century: an Alternative Reconstruction  
(Source: de la Bédoyère 1992: 127)

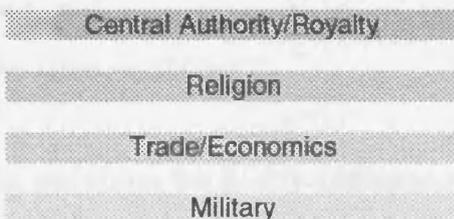
During the first half of the second century Wroxeter underwent costly and sizeable development, possibly prompted by Hadrian's visit to Britain in AD 122. Construction of an earthen defensive circuit extending north- and southwards beyond the limits of the former fortress produced an expanded urban area of around 78ha. (*ibid*). Basset views the inclusion of the Bell Brook Valley on the northern side to have been a third-century development necessitating demolition of the northern section of the defences (1990: 11). The reasoning behind the decision to include the entire valley within the defensive circuit is unclear, as archaeological surveys suggest that the area only ever contained market gardens, sparse housing

and, possibly, some industrial activity. White and Barker propose that it stemmed either from an over-optimistic belief in the potential for population growth, or else from a desire to include all suburban development within the walled area. The latter scenario potentially owes more to native (hillfort) design than to Roman urban planning (1998: 80). However, excavation so far lacks evidence for replacement of the earthen ramparts with a stone circuit (Bassett 1990: 11).

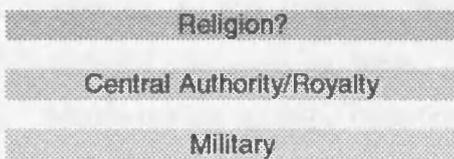
**AD 300**



**AD 500**



**AD 700**



**AD 900**

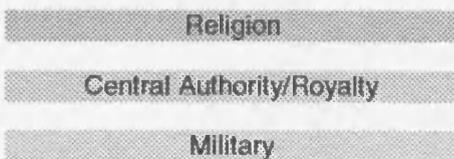


Figure 7: Wroxeter c.AD 300-900: Ranking of Urban Functions

A substantial forum and public baths were constructed, occupying two *insulae* blocks. A sizeable and high-quality inscription, presumably erected to record completion of the former in AD 129 or 130 records the *civitas Cornoviorum* as the

body responsible for its dedication (Wacher 1995: 366). The design of the forum incorporated the courtyard of the unfinished first-century baths in order to create the piazza and shops (White & Barker 1998: 84). Due possibly to the unsuitability of the (Mediterranean) plan or else stemming from problems with water supply, at some stage during construction of the second-century baths was halted and the decision taken to switch the positions of the forum and baths. As a result the former now occupied the western and the latter the eastern *insulae* (Webster 1990: 2). The excavators of the baths basilica estimate that, whereas the forum was constructed within a decade, the baths took between 20 and 30 years; responsibility for these projects lay with the town's civilian authorities, with military and Imperial assistance at most intermittent (Barker *et al.* 1997: 222). This monumentalisation entailed replacement of the *via principalis* by a road one *insula* to the west, flanked on either side by the forum and baths. Previously traffic passing along Watling Street would have been able to bypass the fortress and cross the Severn at its original bridging point, but the new principal route obliged direct passage through the town (Bassett 1990: 11).

Housing and shops are poorly understood, with the exception of those excavated in 1912-14 by Bushe-Fox on the western side of the principal north-south street. These consisted of typical strip-buildings aligned at right angles to the street and with a continuous portico frontage (Wacher 1995: 371). Industrial activities at Wroxeter included glassworking, fresco painting and, later, pottery production and tanning. Metalworking activity, including casting and enamelling appears to have been of particular significance. Wacher suggests that Wroxeter's economy was based upon this industry, the town possibly controlling and exploiting local copper and silver resources (*ibid.*: 373).

### (iii) The Late Roman Town

Wear patterns on floors and in doorways indicated heavy use of the public baths throughout the later Roman period. Coupled with subsidence, this obliged the setting out of terracotta-tiled herringbone floors and other repairs throughout the third century (White 1990: 4). Yet the general impression is one of decay, the main

rooms being abandoned c.AD 300 in favour of the modified side suites (White & Barker 1998: 114). The baths basilica eventually underwent extensive repairs during the last quarter of the fourth century, its floor being replaced on at least three occasions. It is likely to have remained roofed and in use until late in the fifth century (Barker *et al.* 1997: 226). The excavators deem upkeep of the baths to have been the responsibility of a full-time clerk-of-works, based in the annexe to the east of the basilica (*ibid.*: 228): within what was by now an open-plan shell, restoration work was carried out in a series of lean-to shacks (White 1990: 5). There are suggestions that the roof was still in place during this period, albeit in a ruinous state (Barker *et al.* 1997: 228). The shop stalls on the baths' portico appear to have continued to operate into the late fifth century, although an absence of coin finds from this phase is suggestive of a system of bartering having replaced monetary transactions by this date (White & Barker 1998: 116).

Wroxeter's defences in the fourth century saw ditch widening and the raising of the rampart (*ibid.*). Later in the century the town may have contracted to within the first-century circuit (Barker *et al.* 1997: 2). The discovery of crossbow brooches and lead-weighted darts imply a late Roman military presence and, by implication, a concern for the town's security. The discovery in 1968 of the tombstone dedicated to (the Irish?) Cunorix and dating to the third quarter of the fifth century may commemorate one of the garrison's leaders (White & Barker 1998: 106).

A late Roman cemetery has yet to be positively identified at Wroxeter, but a Christian presence is suggested by the rectangular building at the centre of the town, identified by geophysical survey, and situated within its own open area, with apsidal end and east-west alignment; its positioning at a prominent street corner close to the baths is suggestive of official sanctioning (*ibid.*). The building's identity awaits confirmation.

#### (iv) The Sub-Roman Town (Figures 3-6)

Philip Barker's excavations within Wroxeter's baths basilica demonstrated continuing use of the town centre into the sub-Roman period, highlighting the

presence of emergent power structures, either secular or religious, as characterised by bold, substantial and adaptive reworkings of the urban fabric. A note of caution is, however, sounded by Ward-Perkins regarding the extent to which this evidence may be deemed indicative of the existence of a complex, densely occupied town (1996: 10). This period of major construction may have coincided with abandonment of the northern part of the town, possibly prompted by the plague epidemic attested for the mid-sixth century (White & Barker 1998: 126). The *Annales Cambriae* record this as reaching Gwynned by AD 547 (Barker *et al.* 1997: 241).

Around the mid-fifth century much of the basilica was demolished and its roof dismantled. Within the building, levelling up of the uneven floor with earth and construction from roof slates of a new floor surface signalled a switch in function from building yard to *ad hoc* market, perhaps with stalls (Figure 4). Indications of heavy wear to the interior surfaces, coinciding with the cessation of use of an earlier bread oven in the adjacent portico suggests a transferral of trading activity from the porticoes to the now unroofed building interior (White & Barker 1998: 121). The basilica was, once again, a publicly accessible space (Barker *et al.* 1997: 230). The excavators suggest that the permanent structure located in the south aisle may have been functioning as a tax collection point or municipal office (*ibid.*).

The final occupational phase of this zone, beginning c.AD 530-70, entailed radical reworking of the entire site involving demolition of much of the remaining basilica, including its north wall, and the construction of a series of timber buildings on rubble platforms (White & Barker 1998: 122) (Figures 5 & 6). At least 36 structures, covering three sub-phases, signify careful building design and construction by skilled surveyors using a Roman system of measurement (Barker *et al.* 1997: 237).

The centre of the former basilica was dominated by an exceptionally large platform of around half an *actus* or Roman acre, carefully constructed from salvaged rubble, mortar and the remains of a painted plaster ceiling, indicating that the baths had by now been demolished. The size and heavy construction of the platform suggest the base for a substantial two-storey timber-framed building with projecting wings or

towers flanking the entrance (White & Barker 1998: 123). The exceptional size and central positioning of this, the largest building, facing inwards to the southern baths basilica wall rather than out onto the gravel street, strongly suggests exclusivity (*ibid*); potentially it formed the residence of the individual responsible for redevelopment of the urban core. Seeing Gallic parallels, White and Barker take the view that, if the *frigidarium* is deemed a possible sub-Roman church (see below), the initiator may have been a bishop (1998: 125).

To the west, access along the east-west street was limited to foot traffic, seemingly controlled by an open-fronted building narrowing the street to footpath width. The discovery of a lead steelyard weight from the building floor may support this idea of 'control' (Barker 1979: 180). The cobbled street surface was dug up and replaced with a combination of small sieved rubble, soil and gravel in order to produce a hardwearing pedestrian surface (*ibid*). At least six raised platforms were subsequently established, possibly representing booths or stalls, and encroaching on the southern side of the street. Barker *et al.* suggest parallels with North African and Near Eastern *souks* or British medieval market places (1997: 234). A series of timber shops or residences were ranged along the opposite side of the street, some with porticoed facades (White 1990: 6) and timber boardwalks and verandahs (Barker *et al.* 1997: 235). Although occupying standardised plots, variations in constructional methods and the use of relict timbers imply building was a family responsibility (White & Barker 1998: 126), whilst the size and sophistication of design suggest the residents were an aristocratic or high-status artisan group (Barker *et al.* 1997: 235).

By the mid-sixth century and the great rebuilding phase, the *frigidarium* was one of a number of probable storage buildings occupying the former baths service area. Nineteenth-century discoveries in the hypocaust core indicate the intrusion of burials within the urban space and the building's possible new role as a church or chapel (White & Barker 1998: 125). Support for this is in the building's east-west orientation and the possible reuse of the western plunge pool as a font (Barker *et al.* 1997: 236). Nineteenth-century excavations of burnt grain on the *frigidarium* floor alternatively raise the possibility of a granary role, perhaps as the collection point for the *annona* (*ibid*). Ceramic evidence suggests, however, that the grain dates to

the likely reuse of the site as a barn in the medieval period (White and Barker 1998: 147).

Earlier excavations indicate this rebuilding extended over a minimum of three central *insulae*, with timber structures identified in *insulae* 2, 4, 6 and 9 (*ibid*: 127); the forum precinct may also have offered open space suitable for colonisation by timber housing (Barker *et al.* 1997: 234). This fifth- sixth-century phenomenon of building in timber is also visible in Wroxeter's hinterland. Recent excavations at Whitley Grange villa, nine miles to the west and suggested as a possible hunting lodge, produced evidence for the construction of three small timber structures in the ruins of the bathhouse, possibly in the fifth century (White 1998: 13).

Barker *et al.* unequivocally state that these above constructional events constitute a revival of the entire centre of Wroxeter in a new form prior to its seventh-century abandonment, and that "*this was not simply a flash in the pan, but a major phase of the city's life*" (1997: 235). Furthermore, they stipulate three principal points stemming from their excavation of the baths basilica: (i) the transfer of a previously public site into the hands of an individual of authority for his/her private use (ii), the reorganisation impacted on areas beyond the basilica, including the adaptation of the baths service area to agricultural or industrial use and beyond to other *insulae*; (iii) the figure responsible for these developments was a person of high 'Roman' authority, attested by the sheer scale, range and character of the project (Barker *et al.* 1997: 236). This individual was either a member of the late Roman civil government or a bishop occupying an episcopal villa. The claim of a sub-Roman church, however, would lend weight to the latter scenario (White & Barker 1998: 125), as would the suggestion of a late Roman predecessor offered by the apsidal building identified in *insula* 10.

The salvaging of larger timbers from the century-old buildings probably presaged comprehensive abandonment of the site in c.AD 650-700. The apparent care with which this was undertaken and the seemingly unhurried withdrawal from the site is deemed indicative of either an agreed departure or else a reluctance to remain on an undefended site in the face of Mercian raiding and colonisation (Barker *et al.* 1997: 241). Subsequently the site is likely to have reverted to rough pasture, a lack of

medieval ceramic evidence suggestive of a considerable period of dereliction (*ibid*: 244). The consolidation of Mercian power in the region culminated in the establishment of Shrewsbury, in the late eighth or early ninth century, as their preferred urban base. The positioning of a new power centre in such close proximity to the old Roman town is likely to have made any continued activity at Wroxeter illogical (*ibid*: 244).

#### (v) Anglo-Saxon Occupation

Wroxeter village conforms topographically to the street grid of the Roman town, being situated at the south-western corner of the defences at the conjunction of two significant Roman roads. The parish church of St. Andrew's is also aligned with the street grid, with the result that it lacks a precise east-west orientation. By implication, this suggests that the village has its origins in the immediate post-Roman period (Bassett 1990: 11). Consequently several authors propose this as the focal point for continuing occupation (and central-place functions?) following abandonment of the Roman town centre and subsequent shift of population to the south-west (Barker *et al.* 1997: 244; Bassett 1990: 12; White & Barker 1998: 137). The discovery of handmade post-Roman pottery of a type not seen in the basilican or forum excavations recovered from an excavation immediately outside the church in 1985 is noteworthy (Moffett 1990: 9). The settlement was enclosed by a combination of pre-existing Roman defensive earthworks and a still-visible bank of possibly mid-seventh-century date (White & Barker 1998: 137). The principal crossing point of the Severn, presumably still bridged in the sixth century, would constitute a relatively secure defensive point from which the town's hinterland could be controlled (Bassett 1990: 120).

St. Andrew's may occupy the site of a seventh-century predecessor, that which could have replaced the putative *frigidarium* church (final abandonment of the site may have resulted in the shifting of the ecclesiastical focus to the river crossing-point) (Barker *et al.* 1997: 244). Various factors suggest a monastic origin for the church. Firstly, the mid-ninth century Anglo-Saxon cross shaft reused in the eighteenth-century church fabric; secondly, the church's collegiate status at the time

of Domesday; and thirdly, its early land holdings were considerably more extensive than in the medieval period (Moffett 1990: 9). Domesday Book lists Wroxeter's church as having been served with four priests (White & Barker 1998: 141). Consequently, Wroxeter may represent an instance of a monastic enclosure developing at a river crossing point in the corner of a Roman town, as at Worcester (Moffett 1990: 9). In the case of the latter, the church of St. Helen appears to have formed a similar thread of Christian continuity until the late seventh-century foundation of the see of the Hwicce (Bassett 1989b: 248). This would also mirror the establishment of Anglo-Saxon monastic foundations in defended former Roman sites such as the Saxon Shore forts of Bradwell, Burgh and Reculver. This reflects increasing evidence from the north for the reuse of forts on Stanegate and Hadrian's Wall (e.g. Bewcastle, Stanwix and Burgh-by-Sands), and Roman signal stations (Scarborough, Whitby and, possibly, Filey) as churches (Bell 1998: 17). During the late Anglo-Saxon period the settlement developed into a village with manor house (White & Barker 1998: 141). By this period, however, one can no longer justifiably refer to Wroxeter as an 'urban' settlement, even if still retaining a localised, 'central place' function, given its manorial and monastic elements.

### **Wroxeter: Summary Of Evidence**

As seen, Wroxeter is an example of a Roman town that persists then fades. Of the three principal case studies, Wroxeter generates most discussion regarding the nature of its sub-Roman and later occupation. Wroxeter's importance lies in its demonstration of attempts by certain person(s) unknown to sustain classical life via monumental architectural form beyond the fifth century. The implication is the presence of individual(s) capable of organising a workforce, potentially a bishop, who may have been appointed from a local aristocratic family, on the Gallic model.

The impact upon the urban fabric stemming from the presence of such a figure was doubtless significant. That Wroxeter was still supporting a substantial population by the fifth century, evidenced by rebuilding of domestic housing in timber over a minimum of three *insulae* is tenuous, being supported by imprecise dating evidence from old excavations (Kipling 2000: 331). Furthermore, whilst the presence of

some form of market with stalls for traders implies a local population of sufficient size to make such a speculative development worthwhile, there is no reason to suppose that this was a *resident* population. We can further expect that a system of barter or exchange is only likely to have been in operation.

In terms of the abandonment of the urban core, White and Barker (1998: 135) regard it as the end result of the emergence of sub-Roman political structures. In this scenario the urban core is eventually abandoned, either voluntarily, because it was no longer a valid, functioning central place, or else by force because it was perceived as a threat to the new order. For Wachter, on the other hand, Wroxeter is analogous with Cirencester, representing a desire on the part of the inhabitants of the sub-Roman towns to seek protection from some (ill-defined) perceived threat. Hence his image of “small bands of refugees...seeking safety in the nearest easily fortified place” – in this case, possibly, the Breidin hillfort (1996: 377).

The ultimate failure of Wroxeter to maintain its urban status into the full Anglo-Saxon period is intriguing, particularly in light of the possibility of an episcopal presence into the seventh century. Was it, perhaps, located too peripherally to survive changing sub-Roman political power structures? Webster and Barker argue that the take-over of the Wroxeter area by King Penda would have resulted in the town's demise: the pagan king would neither have wished for nor required a town or bishop at this location, being based instead at Tamworth and, subsequently, Lichfield (1998: 136).

Understanding the nature of sub-Roman activity at Wroxeter is vital to interpret the uses to which (some) former Roman towns might have been put during the Dark Age period; difficulties arise not merely whilst attempting to determine the nature of these developments. There are, further, the issues of ascertaining whether or not they are *exceptional*, whether the evidence is obscured by subsequent development, or else the result of some form of wish-fulfilment on the part of the excavators (*cf.* Ward-Perkins 1996: 9). This is all additional to the issue as to whether these central places are urban, semi-urban or rural, a matter of contention which I feel to be largely irrelevant in comparison to the key matter of whether they continued *in use*, in whatever form, beyond the Roman period (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3).

### **2.3.2: York (*Colonia Eboracensium, Eboracum, Eoforwic, Yorvik*)**

(Figures 8-14)

York's origins lie in the first-century legionary fortress and the subsequent substantial civilian *colonia* on the opposite bank of the Ouse. Archaeology and text suggest the co-existence of high-status foci and scattered non-elite occupation across the area of the former fortress and *colonia* into the Anglian period. This overlapped with the development of an additional focus, the peripheral, extramural trading *wic* settlement to the south-east. The establishment of the planned, populous and multifunctional Anglo-Scandinavian town in the late ninth century marked a topographical shift back to the site of the extramural Roman settlement. Consequently, York offers potentially significant benefits in terms of urban characteristics, for identifying the transitional sequence from military and civilian Roman settlement, via poly-focal Anglian trading settlement, to multi-functional, single-focussed Anglo-Scandinavian town.

#### **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

##### *Epigraphic and Literary Sources:*

Textual records provide a few sketchy details concerning the physical appearance and status of the later Roman town, including the presence of a bishop and imperial palace. Given the dearth of archaeological data from c.AD 400 to 750, the source accounts, including references to the seventh-century church of St. Peter (see below), are essential. Furthermore, prior to the pinpointing of Anglian *Eoforwic* in 1985, eighth-century source accounts such as Alfrid's *Life of Luidgar* (Hall 1988a: 128) and Alcuin's poem *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York* had suggested the existence of an active trading settlement (Kemp 1987). The subsequent political and economic significance of Anglo-Scandinavian York is particularly evident from Chronicle and Domesday entries (Hall 1994: 15), although the entries are fragmentary (James 1995: 11).

##### *Archaeological Data:*

The 1960s-70s witnessed major programmes of archaeological investigation, including Brian Hope-Taylor's excavations at York Minster (1966-73) and a

continuous five-year period of work (1976-80) at 16-22 Coppergate under Richard Hall. Both projects significantly increased knowledge of both the Roman fortress and the Anglo-Scandinavian town. The York Archaeological Trust for Excavation and Research was established in 1972 (Hall 1994: 26) and has played a significant role in the investigation of the city's evolution. However, with the advent of PPG16 and the shift towards conservation, coupled with the sheer inaccessibility of much of the archaeology, the Roman fortress and the subsequent Anglo-Saxon *wic* remain

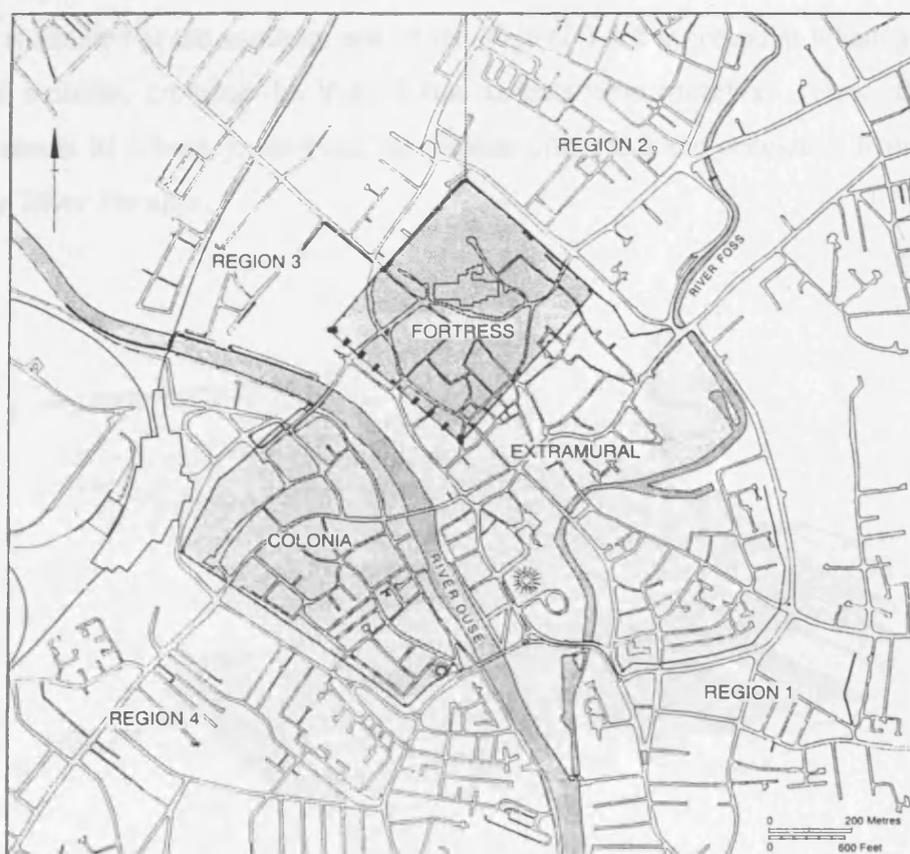


Figure 8: York: Plan of Zones of Activity  
(Source: Monaghan 1997: 834)

poorly understood in comparison to the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement. Likewise, little is known of the internal arrangement of the Roman *colonia* (Wacher 1995: 173). Excavations in 1985 did, however, succeed in fixing the location of an eighth- and ninth-century Anglian manufacturing and trading centre known from documentary records to lie near the confluence of the Rivers Foss and Ouse (Kemp 1987). By 1988, however, only around 0.025% of the mid-eleventh-century settlement had been the subject of archaeological investigation; the predominance of

Coppergate in this sample may mean that the results are unrepresentative (Hall 1988a: 125).

### York: Developmental Sequence

#### (i) The Roman Fortress and *Colonia* (Figures 8-10, 12-14)

York is situated at the southern end of the Vale of York at the point where a band of glacial moraine, crossing the Vale, forms an east-west routeway. Here, the River Ouse meets its tributary, the Foss, the former once tidal and accessible from the sea via the River Humber.

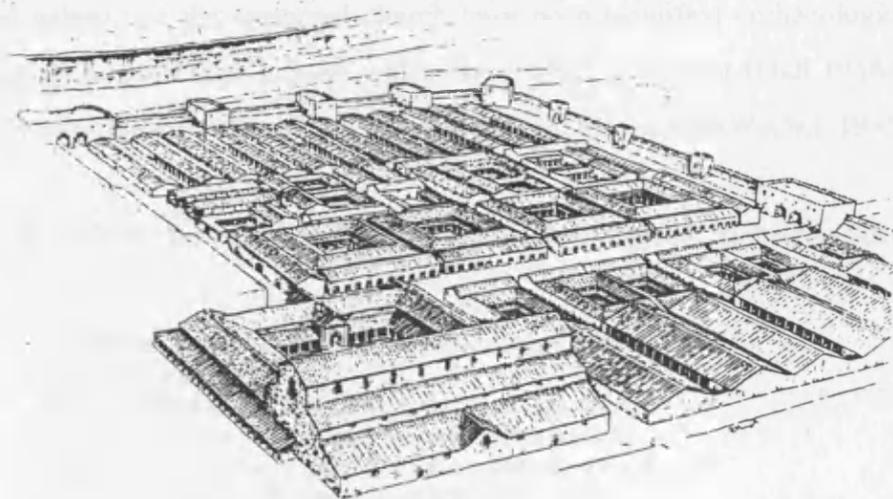


Figure 9: York: Reconstruction of the Legionary Fortress in the Fourth Century (After Philips & Heywood 1995: 204)

A legionary fortress of approximately 20ha was established around AD 71 (Hall 1988a: 125). This played a key strategic role in terms of control of the north, serving as a base for the ninth legion during the Flavian campaigns (Ottaway 1996: 291). Archaeological indications of the demolition of timber buildings and resultant desertion of certain areas of the fortress interior in the early second century are perhaps linked to the departure of the ninth legion. The replacement (sixth) legion raised a number of masonry buildings, such as the barracks excavated in the

Aldwark/Bedern area and at the Minster and Purey Cust sites. Transformation of the defences into stone occurred in the late second/early third century (Ottaway 1996: 294).

From the mid-second century a sizeable civilian presence developed on the opposite bank of the River Ouse, possibly firstly as a *municipium*, but acquiring the title of *colonia* early the following century under Caracalla (AD 211-17) (Heywood 1995: 6). By this period York may be termed a boomtown (Roskams 1996: 276), and it had been elevated to the title of provincial capital of *Britannia Inferior*. The presence of a *domus Palatina* or imperial palace is suggested by the biography of Severus; presumably it was used in the following century by Constantius I and Constantine I, known visitors to York (Wacher 1995: 167). Under Constantine the town became a major Christian centre, Eborius being one of only three British bishops to attend the Council of Arles in AD 314 (Dickens 1961: 2). Neither the imperial palace nor the episcopal church have been identified archaeologically, but are believed to have been located within the civilian settlement (Hall 1988a: 125) – probably enclosed by a circuit wall at its promotion to *colonia* (Wacher 1995: 172).

Roman York is the subject of a praise poem by its eighth-century bishop Alcuin:

York, with its high walls and lofty towers, was first built  
by Roman hands...  
...to be a general seat of commerce by land and sea alike,  
both a powerful dominion, secure for its masters, and an  
ornament to the empire, a dread bastion against enemy attack;  
as a haven for ocean-going ships from the farthest ports,  
where the eager sailor, weary from the sea, could  
at last moor his ship with its long tow-rope.

(Alcuin: *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, line nos. 19-29)

Alcuin's use of the term *emporium* in the phrase *ut foret emporium terrae commune marisque* ('to be a general seat of commerce by land and sea alike') may reflect the late Roman town's commercial significance. Evidence to substantiate this impression of an economically vibrant Roman town remains elusive, however, although excavations at Coney Street and Market Street suggest that, by c.AD 100, granaries, wharves and warehouses were ranged along the Ouse frontage (Monaghan 1997: 837).

Direct trade links between York and the Rhineland are attested through Whitby jet objects (Wacher 1995: 181), whilst kilns operating in the town provisioned both fortress and *colonia* with Ebor Ware, a form of greyware, between the first and third centuries (Monaghan 1997: 869).



Figure 10: York: Functional Zones of the Roman Town  
(Source: Roskams 1996: 270)

Widespread accumulations of dark earth deposits are discernible across the fortress and *colonia* areas, indicative of alterations in the character and density of late- and post-Roman usage of urban space. In terms of the fortress, dark earths in and around the *principia* and Davygate barracks signal pronounced change in the nature of occupation within the fortress from the mid-fourth century onwards. Containing substantial quantities of ceramic and other materials, they suggest a change in attitudes towards refuse disposal (Ottaway 1996: 295). As regards the *colonia*,

excavations at Coppergate, the bridgehead and Queen's Hotel, Skeldergate and Bishophill Junior have all revealed dark earths. Interpretations of the significance of these deposits varies widely (see below), but it is indisputable that they represent a pronounced diminution in population size and density, as well as changes in terms of activities carried out within the settlement.

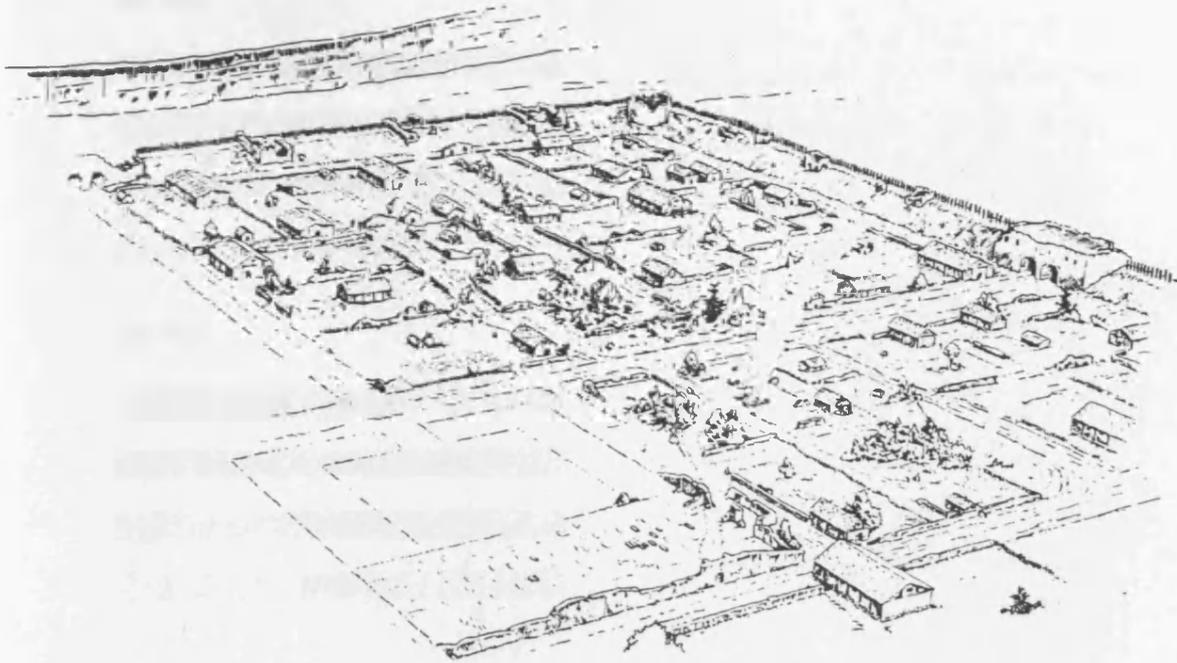
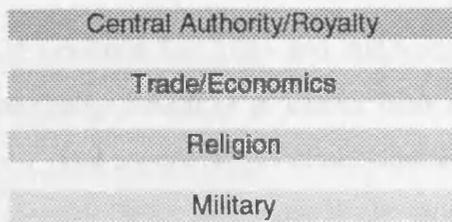


Figure 11: York: Reconstruction of the Legionary Fortress Area in the Ninth Century (Source: Phillips & Heywood 1995: 205)

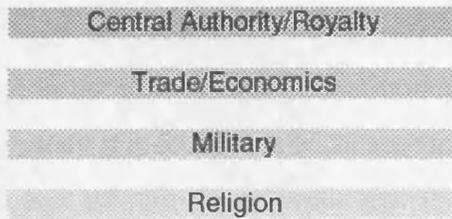
(ii) Anglian York (Figures 12-14)

The Roman fortress may have been eventually abandoned only around the turn of the fifth century (Heywood 1995: 8). In the *colonia*, a gradual fall-off in building standards and progressive disuse of baths and hypocausts are detectable throughout the fifth century (Wacher 1995: 188). Publication of excavations conducted by Heywood & Phillips beneath the Minster allows for speculation concerning strategies adopted by extant fifth-century populations. For example, Carver has interpreted the adoption of the basilican site as a farm or market hall either as an attempt at self-sufficiency within an increasingly run-down urban environment, or else as a bid to claim authority, status and tribute on a site still associated with military authority (1995: 195).

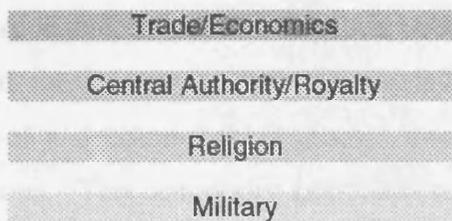
**AD 300**



**AD 500**



**AD 700**



**AD 900**

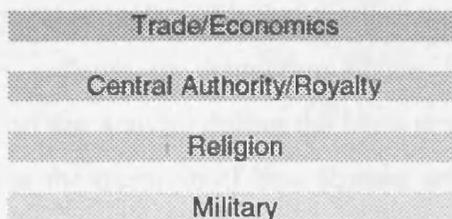


Figure 12: York c.AD 300-900: Ranking of Urban Functions

The excavators, on the other hand, take the view that occupation here was only occasionally continuous, with sporadic use by people and animals (Philips & Heywood 1995). Writing from a Marxist perspective, Roskams rejects Carver's emphasis on the individual and the actions thereof, and instead views Anglian York, and towns in general, as 'a field of action where class conflicts are played out' (1996: 279). Consequently, the sequence of events is explained in terms of attempts on the part of aristocratic and/or royal elites to *actively control or manipulate*

people and resources to their own ends.

Physical evidence for fifth- and sixth-century activity remains both sparse and, as with the timber buildings at Tanner Row and Clementhorpe, difficult to date closely (*ibid*: 9). The accumulation of substantial dark earth deposits, up to half a metre in depth (James 1995: 10), most likely represent a period of immediate post-Roman abandonment and/or horticultural activity. But in either case they should indicate both a substantial fall-off in the urban population and a significant change in terms of the use of urban space. Excavation has produced evidence of widespread flooding in the post-Roman period, notably as seen at Hungate in the 1950s. Here, Roman wharfage deeply buried in seasonal riverine silt deposits suggests the post-Roman loss of harbour and wharfage facilities along with the Ouse bridging point (Ramm 1971: 183).

In those instances where occupation *is* detectable, as in the *principia* and barracks area of the Roman fortress, the possibility arises that this activity forms the end result of a decision-making process involving the use (and adaptation?) of urban structures. The complexity and controversial nature of evidence from the Minster excavations is, indeed, such that the authors are at odds with their editor as to its preferred interpretation. Whereas the former prefer to see fitful, if discontinuous, activity between the fifth and ninth centuries, Carver (1995: 195) argues for sixth-century collapse or demolition of the basilica, followed by the development of zoned artisan activity during the ninth century. The fundamental issue at stake here concerns the question of how Roman urban structures were being exploited in the post-Roman period: were they undergoing *active, adaptive* re-use involving new building work, or simply being utilised as decaying structures (Wood 1995: 7)? Anglian York is, despite recent archaeological discoveries, known mostly from written sources. Historical sources hint at the survival of political structures at York into the sixth century, with the city possibly serving either as Vortigern's capital or as the focus of ecclesiastical organisation, as documented in the writings of St. Patrick (James 1995: 9). References to its status as Northumbrian capital during the AD 620s imply a degree of administrative continuity from the Roman (and sub-Roman) period (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 10). York regained its diocesan status as a result of the Augustinian mission and the re-imposition of a diocesan

organisation during the first half of the seventh century. A number of sources make reference to the baptism of King Edwin of Northumbria by St. Paulinus in AD 627 in a probable direct predecessor to the minster church:

626. The king (Edwin) was baptised at Easter with all his chief men; that Easter was on 12 April. This was done in York, where earlier he had ordered a church built of wood; it was consecrated in the name of St. Peter. There the king gave Paulinus a bishop's seat, and afterwards ordered a larger church to be built there of stone. And here Penda succeeded to the kingdom, and ruled 30 years.

*(The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Peterborough Manuscript E)*

So King Edwin, with all the nobility of his kingdom and a large number of humbler folk, accepted the Faith and were washed in the cleansing waters of Baptism in the eleventh year of his reign, which was the year of our Lord 627, and about one hundred and eighty years after the first arrival of the English in Britain. The king's baptism took place at York on Easter Day, the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, in the church of Saint Peter the Apostle, which the king had hastily built of timber during the time of his instruction and preparation for baptism; and in this city he established the see of his teacher and bishop Paulinus. Soon after his baptism, at Paulinus' suggestion, he gave orders to build on the same site a larger and more noble basilica of stone, which was to enclose the little oratory he had built before. The foundations were laid, and the walls of a square church began to rise around this little oratory; but before they reached their appointed height, the cruel death of the king left the work to be completed by Oswald his successor.

*(Bede: Ecclesiastical History of the English People. Book Two, Chapter 14)*

At the coming of Easter throughout the world,  
the king decided to be baptised together with his people  
under the lofty walls of the city of York; there,  
in the little church which he had swiftly built in honour of God,  
to receive the waters of holy baptism.  
When the festive day of that hallowed season dawned,  
With his children and nobles and a train of the people,  
In the eleventh day of his reign, Edwin was dedicated to Christ  
at the font of salvation, beneath the walls of that city,  
whose heights he then raised to greater eminence,  
by choosing to make it the chief city of his realm.

*(Alcuin: The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York, lines 194-204)*

Although the Anglo-Saxon cathedral church has yet to be traced archaeologically, recent topographical analysis suggests it to have been situated on a block of land to the north-east of the archbishops' palace of the present cathedral (Norton 1998: 1).

### (iii) The Eighth and Ninth Centuries: *Eoforwic* (Figures 12-14)

In a manner similar to London and continental sites such as Arles, Bordeaux and Tours, eighth- and ninth-century *Eoforwic* comprised co-existent, specialist

occupational foci. In the case of York, activity appears to have simultaneously centred on the Roman fortress, the adjacent *colonia* and, to the south, a new trading

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**AD 300**

Fortress	<i>Colonia</i>	Extramural Area
elite activity? craft production	imperial palace? cathedral? bishop's palace?	domestic occupation

---

**AD 500**

Fortress	<i>Colonia</i>	Extramural Area
elite activity? craft production?	administrative centre?	domestic occupation

---

**AD 700**

Fortress	<i>Colonia</i>	Extramural Area	<i>Wic</i>
royal palace cathedral? occupation	domestic occupation monastery?	church(es) monastery(ies)?  domestic occupation?	craft production domestic

---

**AD 900**

Fortress	<i>Jorvik</i>	
cathedral? royal palace? craft production	domestic occupation monastery	craft production mint churches

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Figure 13: York c.AD 300-900: Urban Activities and Functions by Zone

*wic* centred on Fishergate, east of the River Fosse (Roskams 1996: 275). In this scenario the first is likely to have housed the Northumbrian royal palace and/or the successor to Edwin's church, as suggested by the discovery of an eighth-century cemetery beneath the minster (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 33). Hall speculates that the palace incorporated the still-prominent remains of the *principia* (1988a: 126). Yet the construction of new streets such as Goodramgate and Blake Street, cutting

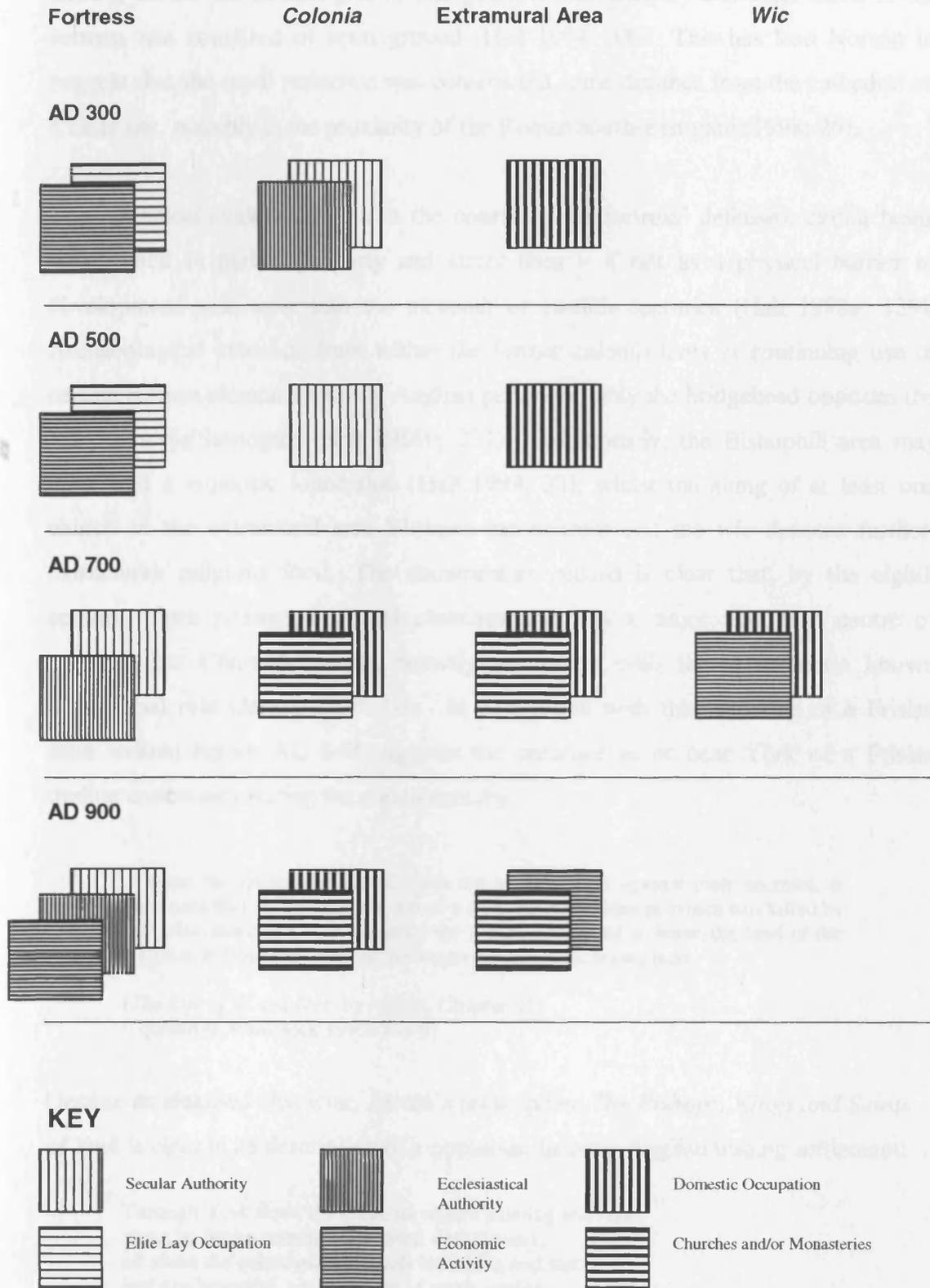


Figure 14: York c.AD 300-900: Zoned Urban Functions and Activities

directly across the Roman grid to link gates, reveals that, by this date, much of the fortress site consisted of open ground (Hall 1994: 33). This has led Norton to suggest that the royal residence was constructed some distance from the cathedral on a clear site, possibly in the proximity of the Roman south-east gate (1998: 26).

Topographical evidence points to the course of the fortress' defensive circuit being perpetuated in parish, property and street lines – if not as a physical barrier to development – at least into the eleventh or twelfth centuries (Hall 1988a: 129). Archaeological evidence from within the former *colonia* hints at continuing use of certain Roman elements into the Anglian period, notably the bridgehead opposite the *via praetoria*/Stonegate (Hall 1988b: 237). Additionally, the Bishophill area may have held a monastic foundation (Hall 1994: 33), whilst the siting of at least one church in the extramural area between the fortress and the *wic* denotes further, extramural, religious foci. The documentary record is clear that, by the eighth century, York possessed several churches and was a major European centre of learning, the Church's wealth possibly associated with the settlement's known commercial role (James 1995: 10). In connection with this, the *Life of a Frisian saint* written before AD 849 suggests the presence at or near York of a Frisian trading community during the eighth century:

...when the citizens (of York) went out to fight their against their enemies, it happened that in the strife the son of a certain noble of that province was killed by a Frisian merchant, and therefore the Frisians hastened to leave the land of the English, fearing the wrath of the kindred of the slain young man.

(*The Life of St. Luidger*, by Alfrid, Chapter 11  
– quoted in Whitelock 1996: 788-9)

Despite its idealised character, Alcuin's praise poem *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York* is clear in its description of a populous, thriving Anglian trading settlement:

Through York flows the Ouse, its waters teeming with fish,  
along its banks stretch fields laden with flowers,  
all about the countryside is lovely with hills and woods,  
and this beautiful, healthy place of noble setting  
was destined to attract many settlers by its richness.  
To York from divers peoples and kingdoms all over the world,  
they come in hope of gain, seeking wealth from the rich land,  
a home, a fortune, and a hearth-stone for themselves.

(line nos. 30-37)

Excavations undertaken in 1985-6 at Fishergate close to the confluence of the Foss and Ouse located the eighth- and ninth-century Anglian manufacturing and trading centre alluded to above (Kemp 1987: 259). Excavation revealed a planned settlement of timber buildings situated within evolving properties, fronting onto gravel streets and associated with numerous rubbish-pits. Although precise boundaries remain unclear, these and previous excavations indicate a settlement covering c.25ha, placing it in the same size ranking as *Quentovic*, Ipswich (*Gipeswic*), London (*Lundenwic*) and, possibly Southampton (*Hamwic*) (*ibid*: 263). Faunal evidence indicates the *wic* to have been located on a green-field site, fairly clear of vegetation, within a non-intensively farmed landscape setting (O'Connor 1994: 142).

The initial phase of activity, dated by coins and ceramic evidence, was characterised by the construction of a non-defensive boundary ditch and the subsequent erection of rectilinear post-built buildings and fences (*ibid*: 137). Imported goods, including sceattas, Frisian combs, Niedermendig lava and Frankish and Rhenish pottery indicate the settlement's foreign trade base, whilst its manufacturing aspect is characterised by crucibles, slags, bone combs, spindle whorls and loomweights. The *wic*'s economy was, to a certain extent, operating on a monetary basis, as highlighted by the discovery of coins, weights and balances (Kemp 1987: 262). Faunal analysis points to a somewhat narrow subsistence base dominated by mature cattle (80% of the red meat total by weight). O'Connor suggests that food supplies to the settlement were subject to deliberate limits, whether financial or legal, on account of its *wic* status, by a controlling royal authority (1994: 141). The occupational sequence appears interrupted by a short, mid-eighth-century hiatus prior to a short-lived and weaker early ninth-century re-commencement (*ibid*: 137). Final abandonment of the trading settlement in the later ninth century ties in with a pick-up of activity at Coppergate and a reversion to the site of the Roman town (Kemp 1987: 263). Consequently *Eoforwic* does not appear to have had an influence upon the topographical development of Domesday York (Hall 1988b: 238).

With the exception of limited religious and secular use of scattered areas of the former Roman civilian town, therefore, Anglian York must have taken on the

appearance of two (physically and functionally) distinct areas of occupation. Whether for legal, practical or other reasons, the reasoning behind the removal of certain functional criteria to a virgin site remains unclear (*ibid*: 238). Only with the ninth-century development of Anglo-Scandinavian *Jorvik* midway between the two was the topographical gap bridged (Roskams 1996: 275).

(iv) The Ninth to Eleventh Centuries: Anglo-Scandinavian *Yorvik*  
(Figures 11-14)

York was seized by the Danish Great Army under the command of Ivar and Halfdan in AD 866/7. Although the Northumbrian king Osberht had recently suffered rejection by his people in favour of the commoner Ælla, the two combined their forces in an attempt to regain the city (Stenton 1971: 247). Both died in the attempt:

867(866). Here the raiding party went from East Anglia over the mouth of the Humber to York city in Northumbria; and there was great discord of the nation among themselves; and they had thrown down their king Osberht and accepted Ælla, an unnatural king; and it was late in the year when they turned to making war against the raiding army, nevertheless they gathered a great army and sought out the raiding-party at York city and broke into the city, and some of them got inside, and an immense slaughter was made of the Northumbrians inside, some outside, and both the kings were killed, and the survivors made peace with the raiding-army.

(*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Peterborough Manuscript E*)

Osberht and Ælla combined forces and assembled an army, and went to the city of York. On their arrival, the Vikings immediately took to flight, and endeavoured to defend themselves within the fortifications of the city. When the Christians noticed their flight and panic, they too determined to pursue them within the fortifications of the city and to breach the wall; and this they did. For in those days the city did not yet have firm and secure walls.

(Asser: *Life of King Alfred*, Chapter 27)

Under Scandinavian control York assumed the status of capital of the northern Viking kingdom of the Danelaw, a role it retained for around ninety years, ensuring dynastic connections with the kingdoms of Dublin and those in the Scandinavian homelands (James 1995: 11). Henceforth York and its region was ruled by a succession of Danish and Norwegian kings, with the exception of a brief period of

Anglo-Saxon rule between c.AD 920 and 954 (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 93).

The establishment of Anglo-Scandinavian *Jorvik* involved a further topographical adaptation and shift, in this instance away from the Anglian *wic* to reoccupation of the site of the *colonia* and, in particular, the adjacent extramural settlement. Archaeological survey shows almost exclusively domestic occupation in the former area, in contrast to the latter, located east of the fortress (and, perhaps, enclosed by an extension to the fortress defences towards the rivers), which has produced evidence for wide-ranging craft production on a commercial scale (Hall 1988a: 130). This reoccupation of the Roman site seemingly reflects a general recolonisation by, or as a response to, the influx of Danish settlers, coinciding approximately with abandonment of the area of the *wic* (O'Connor 1994: 142).

### *The Defensive System*

The extensive survival of the Roman fortress' defences into the Anglo-Scandinavian period, with much of the circuit surviving to over 3m, ensured that the city was able to withstand attacks and sieges (Radley 1971: 37). Its tenacity is further reflected in the reference in Asser's *Life of King Alfred* to the Anglo-Saxon defenders having to breach the city walls in order to pursue Danish attackers (see passage quoted above).

York underwent rapid economic growth and concomitant topographical changes from the early tenth century. The Roman circuit underwent considerable refurbishment, with reinforcement of the fortress' northern walls close to the Anglian tower and at Aldwark (Clarke & Ambrosiansi 1995: 94). In contrast, poorer survival of the walls on the south-eastern and south-western sides prompted construction of a new wall in order to incorporate land between the two rivers to the east (Hall 1988a: 130). Such an arrangement would have provided defensive protection from northern landward attack (Hall 1988b: 243), and must also have been associated with the need for secure commercial shipping moorage on the Foss, attested by excavated timber- and brushwood revetments (Radley 1971: 38).

### *Urban Planning: The Street System*

The Roman street system underwent extensive modification, with much of the present-day street grid having its origins in this period. Whereas formerly the main western approach road entered the fortress from the west, in the new arrangement the road was shifted south-westwards to enter the *colonia* via Micklegate and on via the new Ouse bridge to Coppergate. As a result the entire commercial focus of the town shifted southwards to the new Ousegate-Coppergate-Pavement axis (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 94). Such radical topographical modification implies a lack of population within the former *colonia* area (Radley 1971: 39).

Within the fortress, excavations undertaken in 1967-73 in the *principia* and barracks beneath the medieval minster revealed some continuity of use of the Roman street grid, evidenced by the survival of the *via decumana* and *via principalis* through into the Anglo-Scandinavian period, the latter becoming the medieval Petergate. These roads may, in addition, have influenced the layout of the Anglian cemetery and proto-tenements revealed by the excavators (Carver 1995: 194). The *via praetoria* (Stonegate) also survives, as do a number of Roman roads immediately outside the walls, such as Gillygate and Lendal/Coney Street, but the grid of the *colonia* remains unknown (Hall 1988b: 235).

### *Urban Planning and Economy: Buildings and Properties*

As *Jorvik*'s economy was closely associated with external trading links and consequently reliant upon river transport, its trading centre was drawn south-eastwards away from the fortress towards the Foss. Furthermore, the development of the fortress site into a focal point of ecclesiastical activity may have prevented substantial commercial development (Radley 1971: 39). Excavations beneath the present-day minster in 1967-73 did, however, reveal what the excavators characterised as 'moderately dense, even dense, (industrial) exploitation of the minster area in the Anglo-Scandinavian period' in the form of metal- and bone-working, apparently directly associated with the minster precinct (Carver 1995: 195). None of the sites so far excavated in *Jorvik* show any indications of

specialised zoning of industrial activity.

Excavations at 16-22 Coppergate revealed that, following intermittent fifth- to ninth-century glassworking activity, elements of the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement were in place by c.AD 900. By c.AD 930-5, the tenements were securely established, generally comparable with events between 25-7 High Ousegate and 5-7 Coppergate (Hall 1988a: 130). 16-22 Coppergate is, however, exceptional in two respects: firstly, coins were minted on the site, as indicated by the discovery of two dies; and secondly, the exceptional quality of the excavated data. Dual-function workshops and living-quarters with rear yards within which a wide range of craft activities was carried out occupied the street frontage (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 95). Production included the working of jet, amber, copper, lead, iron, alloy, silver and gold, as well as leather, glass, bone/antler and wood. The manufacture and dyeing of textiles was also carried out on site (Hall 1988a: 130). Subsequently, partially cellared buildings replaced the earlier structures c.AD 970 (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 95). Environmental and faunal evidence indicates progressive moves away from a narrow resource base towards greater exploitation of resources from an increasing catchment area. Linked to this is an apparent change in attitude towards the living environment, with extensive and, apparently, unregulated disposal of waste materials (O'Connor 1994: 144). For the Coppergate/Pavement area, Kenward *et al.* (1978: 67) suggest:

this picture of a town composed of rotting wooden buildings with earth floors covered by decaying vegetation, surrounded by streets and yards filled by pits and middens of even fouler organic waste is probably not too far from the truth

The Coppergate excavations have served to highlight *Jorvik's* extensive trading links, focussing largely on north-western Europe, Scandinavia and its Irish and Scottish colonies, but also as far as the eastern Mediterranean, the Near East and Samarkand (Hall 1988a: 130). In addition, the fact that coins were being minted for both Anglo-Saxon (Athelstan and Eadwig) and Anglo-Scandinavian kings on the same Coppergate property during the late ninth and early tenth centuries denotes clear continuity (James 1995: 11).

The individuals involved in such extensive urban planning remain undocumented,

but its origins presumably lie in royal, aristocratic or entrepreneurial affiliations (or some combination thereof) (Hall 1988a: 130). Meanwhile, the laying-out of property boundaries within the *colonia* area may have been undertaken on behalf of the archbishops, known landholders in this area during this period (Hall 1988b: 242). So far this process is only discernible in Skeldergate in the late ninth or early tenth century.

Despite being the subject of continuing royal Scandinavian and English rivalry through to the expulsion of Eric Bloodaxe in AD 954, York continued to prosper. The late tenth-century *Life of St. Oswald* relates that the town had been “nobly built, and furnished with strong walls”, and that, although now “somewhat rundown”, it supported a population of around 30000. Using Domesday, James (1995: 11) estimates a somewhat smaller but still substantial town of around 2000 houses in 1086). Nor did the Anglo-Saxon seizure of York by King Eadred in AD 954 signal an end either to its commercial wealth or Scandinavian character, as demonstrated by the personal names featured in Domesday Book and by surviving street names (*ibid*). By the time of the Norman Conquest York was second in size only to London (Hall 1988a: 129).

### *Secular Institutions*

A royal presence in Anglo-Scandinavian York is attested by *The Saga of Eric Skalla-Grimsson*, a celebration of the court society associated with the mid-tenth century reign of Eric Bloodaxe, who ‘always had a royal residence in York’.

However, whereas the Anglian royal house is believed to have resided at the centre of the Roman fortress, the early Anglo-Scandinavian kings may have been linked to the *porta principalis sinistra* of the fortress, which may still, in the ninth century, have provided a defensive stronghold. King’s Square, immediately outside the gateway, is termed *Kuningesgard* in the thirteenth century, most likely a Middle English corruption of the Old Norse *Konungsgarthr* or ‘King’s residence’ (Hall 1994: 54). Subsequently, the English kings’ interest in York is reflected in Domesday references to the two reeves of Earl Harold in addition to the high court (*curia*), houses of the canons and meat market (*in macello*) held by the archbishop.

Some form of internal government is also indicated by the subdivision of the city into shires and the presence of four judges (Hall 1988b: 234). Place-name evidence and an Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry indicate that a palace of the Anglo-Scandinavian earls, appointed on behalf of the English kings to rule York, lay in an area known in the eighteenth century as *Earlsburgh*, just beyond the western flank of the fortress (Hall 1988a: 130). This may have been the location of the residence of the eleventh-century Earl Siward of Northumbria, as suggested by his known connection with the church of St. Olaf (Hall 1988b: 235).

### *Religious Institutions*

A number of York's parish churches are known to have Anglo-Scandinavian origins, revealed either by grave markers (the three St. Mary's and St. Denys's in Walmgate) or structural remains (St-Helen-on-the-Walls, Aldwark and, possibly, St. Andrew's in Fishergate). Their positioning along the Micklegate-Ousegate-Pavement axis emphasises its significance (Hall 1994: 38). Their tenth-century also indicates the rapid Christianisation of the incoming Scandinavian groups (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 96). Little is known of associated burial areas. Pagan burials may have taken place outside the settlement at, for instance, Siward's Howe; there are, however, no indications of extensive pagan cemeteries as seen at Dublin. The only convincing instance of the burial of Christian Scandinavians derives from excavation of the churchyard of St. Mark Bishophill in 1961-6 (Hall 1994: 44).

The Anglo-Scandinavian cathedral is likely to have been located within the fortress in proximity to the focus of central authority and the later Norman cathedral (close to the junction of the *via praetoria* (Stonegate) and the *via principalis* (Petergate) (Carver 1995: 192). Indeed, excavations beneath the present minster in 1967-73 (Philips & Heywood 1995) revealed a tenth- and eleventh-century cemetery containing high-status grave-markers.

A second ecclesiastical complex was situated in the former *colonia* area on the west bank of the Ouse on Micklegate. The church (according to Domesday Book named either Christ Church or Holy Trinity) may be identifiable as *Alma Sophia* or Holy

Wisdom, founded in AD 780 by Archbishop Aethelbert, originating from a pre-Viking monastery. Palliser proposes that this was the location of the Roman and Anglian cathedrals, the latter constructed by order of King Edwin and later superseded by the royal chapel at the centre of the fortress (1984: 108). Either way, by the early eleventh century, a strong ecclesiastical presence is visible across the settlement zones, duly reflecting the high urban population.

### **York: Summary Of Evidence**

York may be viewed as a 'classic' example of presumed or probable authority. Its developmental sequence is highly complex and multi-stranded, involving considerable topographical adjustment and change, and shifting of functional foci; all this demonstrates its centrality to (northern) regional political and economic life throughout the study period. York consisted of more than one focus of activity, a series of contrasts or bipolarities: civilian/military, religious/lay, commercial/residential, walled/unwalled. The sequence involved monumental alterations by various significant individuals to the urban fabric that must have had considerable impact on York's population.

These adaptations and reworkings of urban structures do not appear to have been hindered by monumental structural survivals, with the exception of the defensive circuit, which was, in any case, extended. Modifications within the fortress in the sub-Roman period and in the former Roman civilian settlement under the Anglo-Scandinavians involved considerable street and property construction and re-alignment of the urban fabric, and point to large-scale rejection of the earlier system to exploit better new economic arrangements.

Where constraints *are* hinted at, these seem due to certain powerful individuals preventing change; hence the apparent continued under-use of the former fortress area, with sizeable open spaces remaining well into the post-Roman period. Any signs of domestic or industrial activity within this area are likely associated directly with the suggested Northumbrian palace and early cathedral. Within the fortress and beneath the Minster, there are clear indications of changes in the physical

appearance and use of urban structures and institutions from the late Roman period onwards. Individuals or institutions were, perhaps, calling upon military authority associated with the fortress – whether genuine or merely symbolic – in order to bolster claims of sovereignty over the civilian population.

Space for development appears never to have been at a premium, the trading settlement being established on a green-field site. As with *Hamwic*, *Eoforwic* never gained a defensive apparatus, merely a symbolic defining ditch and bank. This is surprising, given the apparent economic importance of the venture to the local royal house, which initially laid out the settlement; one can only imagine that their control of the region meant an attack was not deemed a realistic threat. By the Anglo-Scandinavian period, however, defence was again a prime consideration, involving major extensions to the former Roman civilian town walls in order to enclose the waterfront area.

The physical centrality of the Church in York from before the close of the Roman period is noticeable, the first cathedral probably co-existing with the imperial palace in the *colonia*. Subsequently the Anglian cathedral appears to have been relocated to the former fortress along with the (presumed) palace complex, emphasising the close links between secular and religious power. York is exceptional in terms of its urban design, being a blend of Norse, Anglo-Saxon, Christian and pagan (?) influences, with dominant Danish input.

### **2.3.3: Ipswich (*Gipeswic*) (Figures 15-16)**

Ipswich (*Gipeswic*) represents an instance of a planned Middle Saxon *wic* trading settlement, established on a virgin site and subsequently undergoing rapid expansion. Its early origins place the settlement in a select group of English towns and make it crucial to the study and discussion of early medieval urbanisation. Both topographical and archaeological evidence points to clear continuity of occupation from the Saxon through into the medieval period and beyond. Uniquely amongst the *wics*, however, Ipswich did not undergo any topographical shifting of its occupational focus (Wade, forthcoming).

From what date Ipswich may be termed 'urban' is disputed. However, the presence from an early date of a mint, major ceramic industry, possible royal presence and populous settlement offer compelling evidence for its having attained urban status already by the Middle Saxon period.

## **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

*Literary Sources:* Ipswich is first documented in the will of Theodred, dated to the AD 940s and including reference to purchase of a house in the settlement. Subsequently, entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (*Peterborough Manuscript (E)*) for AD 991 and 1010 link Ipswich with Danish military activity (Wade, forthcoming):

991. Here Ipswich was raided...and in that year it was first decided tax be paid to the Danish men because of the great terror they wrought along the sea coast. That was at first 10 thousand pounds. Archbishop Sigeric decided on the decision.

1010. Here after Easter (a) raiding party came to East Anglia, and turned up at Ipswich, and went straight to where they had heard that Ulfcytel was with his army.

Domeday refers to Ipswich as being in a state of decay (West 1964: 236).

*Archaeological Data:* Ipswich's Saxon origins were first established in the 1950s via Hurst and West's pioneering work on the settlement's substantial corpus of Ipswich and Thetford Wares (1957; Hurst 1956). A systematic programme of rescue excavation has been ongoing since the formation of Suffolk County Council's Archaeology Unit in 1974. To date, around 3% of the Middle Saxon settlement has been subject to archaeological investigation (Wade, forthcoming) – a small sample in comparison to Ipswich's closest parallels, *Hamwic* and, in particular, Dorestad (Warner 1996: 166).

Ipswich appears to be exceptional amongst the *wics* in terms of its apparently continuous developmental through into the medieval period. Consequently much of the present-day street plan is of Anglo-Saxon origin (Wade, forthcoming). This is reflected archaeologically in lengthy, continuous occupation sequences such as

those encountered at Foundation Street (Wade 1988a: 94) and in 1975 at 15-17 Lower Brook Street, ranging from the Middle Saxon period through to the nineteenth century (Dunmore *et al.* 1976: 140). Details of internal structural arrangements are, however, scarce in comparison to contemporaries such as *Hamwic*.

### **Ipswich: Developmental Sequence (Figures 15-16)**

*Gipeswic* was established during the late sixth or early seventh century on a virgin site on heathland at the head of the Orwell estuary, a sheltered landing-place on a navigable river *c.*12 miles from the open sea, making it possibly the earliest English *wic* foundation (Warner 1996: 165). The earliest place-name form, *Gipeswic* ('Gip's *wic*' or 'the *wic* at the corner of the mouth') seemingly refers to the right angle formed at this point by the Orwell (Wade, forthcoming).

The Anglo-Saxon settlement appears to have been the successor regional central place to the Romano-British *Combretoivium*, located 18km upstream of the River Gipping at Coddendam (Wade 1988a: 93), albeit with a considerable occupational hiatus between the two sites. Excavations undertaken on the peripheries of the undefended 60ha. settlement in 1973 revealed early and substantial occupation in the form of slight building remains, along with associated roadside industrial activity, enclosure ditches and a cremation cemetery. Occupation spanned the first half of the first to the later third centuries AD, the site apparently returning to farmland by the late third or early fourth century (DOE 1974: 59).

In its earliest, mid-seventh century form, the settlement of *Gipeswic* consisted of an area of occupation centred to the north of the early crossing of the River Orwell at Stoke Bridge; by the end of the eighth century this nucleus had grown to cover *c.*10ha (Wade, forthcoming). Imported glass and Badorf-type pottery from excavations at Cox Lane in 1958 (West 1964: 290) and Lower Brook Street in 1975 (Dunmore *et al.* 1976: 140) appear to have early seventh-century Dutch Merovingian parallels (Wade 1988a: 93). Three contemporary inhumation burials have been recovered from the present central urban area, whilst a major cemetery of

c.200 inhumations with accompanying gravegoods was excavated to the north at Hadleigh Road in 1908 (Ozanne 1962: 210). A further 100 inhumations were excavated in the same area, south of the Butter Market, in 1987-8 (Wade, forthcoming).

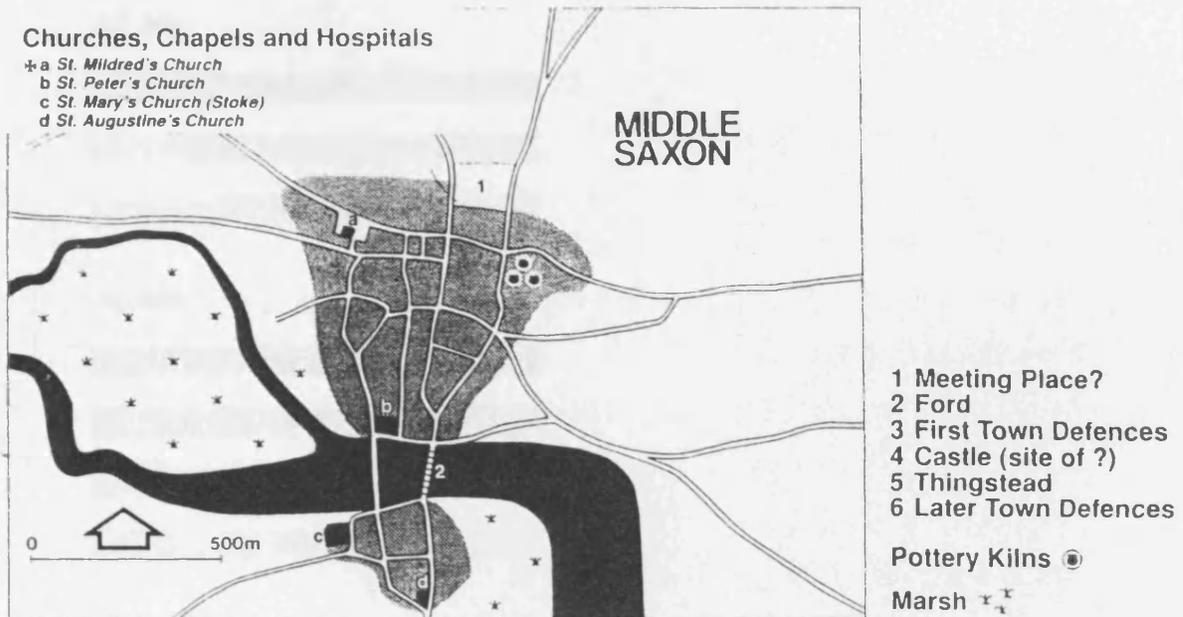
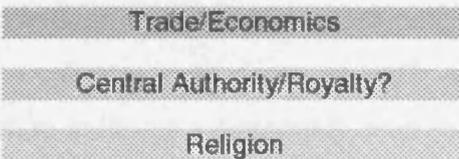


Figure 15: Plan of Anglo-Saxon Ipswich  
 (Sources: Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 20; Wade 1988b: 123)

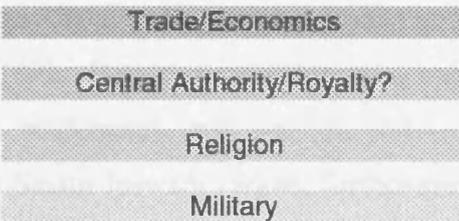
The first major expansion of the settlement, dated by sceattas to the AD 730s/760s, points to a change in activity, if not economic development, coinciding with a Mercian take-over and the doubling of its hinterland (*ibid*). Middle Saxon Ipswich witnessed the overwhelming dominance of the pottery industry over other, largely low-intensity, trade and industrial activities including spinning, weaving, bone-, antler- and hornworking and ironworking. Ipswich's location meant that it was well placed to conduct cross-channel trade with the Rhineland, also aiding its early development of a pottery production system with continental affinities (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 19). Around AD 800, in a seemingly deliberate act of expansion, possibly at the instigation of the East Anglian royal house, the settlement underwent substantial growth, spreading northwards to cover c.60ha (*ibid*). There are no indications of the Middle Saxon occupied area having been defined by any form of ditch and/or bank, defensive or otherwise. Occupying Ipswich between c.AD 879

and 917, the Danes constructed the town's first defensive circuit of ditch and earth rampart in the early tenth century (Wade 1988b: 122). The former has been identified during the course of excavations in Cox Lane (1958) (West 1964) and the Magistrates' Court site (1975); the ditch appears to have gone out of use before c.AD 1150 (Dunmore *et al.* 1976: 135).

**AD 800**



**AD 900**



**AD 1000**

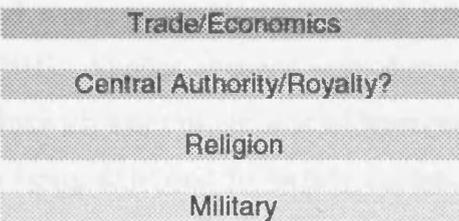


Figure 16: Ipswich c.AD 800-1000: Ranking of Urban Functions

Plan analysis suggests that installation of the circuit had the effect of isolating (still extant) peripheral elements of the street system beyond the defences. Furthermore, the number of openings into the town was reduced; hence the re-routing of certain roads such as St. Clement's and St. Helen's Street towards the closest town gate (Warner 1996: 169). Possible reasons for construction of the defensive works include the known Danish incursions of AD 869-70, Edward the Elder's 'reconquest' of East Anglia in AD 917, and Danish raids of AD 991 and 1010 (*ibid*). Wade suggests that the defences were, in fact, never utilised due to the surrender of the East Anglian Danes to King Edward in AD 918 (Wade 1988b:

122). Extensive excavation has, however, revealed clear variations in the character and density of usage within the Middle Saxon settlement. On the one hand the eastern edge was characterised by well-spaced post-built timber buildings set back from frontages of the gravel streets, with few indications of industrial activity (Wade, forthcoming). By contrast, excavations to the south-east have produced evidence for a ditched arable or pasture field system (Wade 1988a: 94).

Nonetheless, an intensive and varied range of craft production was being undertaken in the settlement core from as early as the late seventh/early eighth century. Excavation indicates a reasonably even spread of cottage industries operating across the occupied area (Wade 1988a: 95). Activities included iron- and copperworking, spinning, weaving and bone- and antlerworking (Wade, forthcoming); goat horn and hides may have been supplied from the Sandling region north of Ipswich (Warner 1996: 169). Pottery production was, uniquely, restricted to the north-eastern zone (of the settlement), and was the sole mass-production industry operating within Middle Saxon Ipswich (Wade, forthcoming). Kilns excavated in Cox Lane in 1961 demonstrated that, following a period of production dating to the seventh to ninth centuries, Ipswich ware workshops were switched over to the manufacture of Thetford ware; production continued into the twelfth century (Smedley & Owles 1963: 304). Similar changes were discernible at nearby Carr Street (Wade 1988b: 122). Ipswich ware usage was widespread throughout the East Anglian kingdom, as well as being exported to largely ecclesiastical or aristocratic sites as far afield as Kent, the West Country and Yorkshire (Wade 1988a: 96; Wade, forthcoming).

Middle Saxon Ipswich was evidently operating as an international port, with trade linkages attested by Rhenish lava quern stones and imported pottery. Rhenish, Flemish and, to a lesser extent, northern French wares comprise up to 15% of the total ceramic assemblage (Wade 1988a: 97). The ceramic record also shows close links between Quentovic and Dorestad, equidistant from Ipswich and suggestive of rival Frankish and Frisian trading practices (*ibid*); Ipswich is situated on the shortest route from the mouth of the Rhine and Dorestad (West 1964: 234). Situated c.90m back from the present quay, the line of the simple post and wattle Middle Saxon waterfront revetment has been traced via boreholes revealed via excavations at Stoke Bridge as a series of gradual encroachments onto the river (Wade 1988a: 94).

Although the corpus of 100 secondary series sceattas from Ipswich indicates the activity of an operational mint between AD 730 and 760, not until the reign of Eadgar (AD 959-975), however, does it appear on the coins as a named royal mint in an abbreviated form of GIPESWIC (Dunmore *et al.* 1975: 65., Wade, forthcoming). Development in the south soon grew beyond the defences, with cellared houses being built on what was previously agricultural land (Wade 1988a: 97).

There is, however, clear evidence for a change from international to more local trade patterns in the course of the tenth century, in particular with the region around St. Neots and Bedford (Wade 1988b: 122). These developments, including the initial establishment of the settlement and subsequent instigation of Ipswich ware production may be indicative of direct involvement on the part of the East Anglian Wuffinga royal dynasty (Warner 1996: 166). If, as has been proposed, St. Mildred's Chapel and a possible associated hall were established expressly for use by the royal house, Ipswich may have functioned as an administrative centre for the East Anglian kingdom (Dunmore *et al.* 1975: 61).

In terms of (urban) provisioning, Ipswich may in certain respects have been largely self-sufficient. Although rural estates must have supplied Ipswich with surplus agricultural produce in exchange from trade goods, Wade has speculated that land enclosed by the known Anglo-Saxon borough boundaries (c.12 000 acres) could, indeed, have provided agricultural produce to a population of up to 2000 (1988a: 97). Faunal studies reveal Ipswich's animal provisioning to have been largely restricted to specific age classes of cattle and pigs (Crabtree 1996: 72) which would support claims of the settlement being capable of providing the majority of its food needs, with imports being restricted to foodstuffs only capable of production offsite. If so, this makes the settlement particularly unusual for its period and type, and presents the possibility of the existence of certain specialist forms and functions of *emporia* (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 36).

Information regarding churches is scanty, but St. Mildred's, St. Augustine's and, possibly, St. Peter's are likely to be of middle Anglo-Saxon origin. The Domesday entry for the latter implies a minster role, its priests serving a substantial region

(Wade 1988b: 122), possibly from the seventh century (West 1964: 301).

### **Ipswich: Summary Of Evidence**

Unlike the previous two examples, Ipswich represents a *new* site, an emergent town. From its earliest phase it displays a highly commercialised nature, with evidence from the first for the importation of foreign goods, and industrial craft production and exchange. Subsequent growth is in defined, regulated stages, clearly at the instigation of a (non-present) central figure. Although the settled area is eventually delimited by the construction of a defensive circuit in the early tenth century, at no point, apparently, does this 'urban' space ever demonstrate evidence for the presence of lay or Christian figures or groupings, either as individual buildings or foci. Nor is there any evidence of zoning of activities, with the sole notable exception of Ipswich Ware production. This was a site established for solely commercial ends, a *wic*, its success in this respect reflected in the unbroken nature of activity on the site.

The possible links with the East Anglian royal house of the Wuffingas may be indicative of an occasional royal presence in the form of documentary references to the existence of a royal chapel and hall within the town. It may have been this house which ordered the initial laying out of the settlement. Yet if Ipswich was functioning as a centre for royal administration of the East Anglian Kingdom (Dunmore *et al.* 1975: 61), why did its urban core not undergo any topographical shifting of focus, a characteristic phenomenon in sites of this group? A significant factor must be the absence of any relict structures from earlier periods hindering development; this was, by all indications, a virgin site.

Ipswich has, therefore, the appearance of a comparatively simple growth sequence. Although settlement expanded to include occupation of the south bank of the river from an early date, the site remained concentrated on the opposite bank, expanding gradually outwards towards its defining defensive circuit and then beyond. The date from which the settlement may be termed 'urban' is problematic, its development being characterised by the gradual acquisition of urban criteria. The

siting here from the eighth century of a mint, probable Middle Saxon royal hall and chapel, and a contemporary large (permanent) population may determine an ‘urban’ nature.

#### **2.3.4: Wroxeter, York & Ipswich: General Points**

The case studies merely offer snapshots of complex ‘urban’ trajectories. Prior to the extension of discussion to the two final chapters we can stress, for Britain, the following factors:

(i) The continuing presence of nobility/leader figures in towns of Roman origin – a key factor governing their continuing existence – was itself dependent upon maintenance of an individual town’s economic, political, strategic importance. As the *raison d’être* underpinning the very existence of these settlements is as nodal points of administrative, political and economic control, any changes to the political infrastructure would directly impact upon them. This could take the form of alterations to the urban form and fabric or else of the sidelining and/or abandonment of certain towns in favour of other, possibly new classes of settlement, at new locations in order to best exploit prevailing trading and political connections and networks. Such is deemed to have been the case with the demise of Wroxeter and the establishment of the Mercian *burh* of Shrewsbury.

(ii) Lay and, subsequently, ecclesiastical authorities were both centred on the urban core, frequently traditionally associated with authority and where defensively they are the most secure.

(iii) Development of towns by disparate individuals and groups, frequently over considerable time periods, had the potential to result in extremely complex urban structures consisting of several individual focal points. As such, there may be considerable problems in attempting to determine at precisely what point in this sequence a particular settlement may be deemed to have acquired the epithet ‘town’ and, in certain instances, when this status was lost. Ipswich is particularly difficult to determine in respect of the former in comparison, for example, to York.

(iv) The fact that England had a lengthier tradition of urban development than, for example, Scandinavia, coupled with the diverse range of individuals and groups impacting on the urban fabric, widens the range of strategies being adopted and the scope of possible resultant scenarios.

(v) The military aspect figures prominently in these processes: the *burhs* are a group of sites with a particularly militarised function that also appear to represent the next developmental stage on from the *wics*. Extensive survivals of late Roman masonry wall circuits into the post-Roman period, reflected in Old English place name elements, must have provided inspiration and/or a model for the plan of *burhs* such as Chester (Strickland 1988). Although the indications are that aristocracy/royalty readily transferred to the former from the latter, twin *wic-burh* linkages appear likely, as with Winchester and Southampton.

#### 2.4: BRITISH 'MODELS': 'TOWN' CONTENTS AND EVOLUTIONS, PRIORITIES AND PROMINENCES

Having examined, in depth, three different models or scenarios of late Roman and early medieval urban developmental trajectories, it is now necessary to consider whether analysis may be taken a stage further and changing urban functions across time be charted in graphic form. This follows on from attempts in Section 2.1.4 to map and tabulate key urban physical elements and activities across twenty sample towns (Figure 1). The intention is that this will aid discussion as to cause and effect in early town development in England and, potentially, other regions.

To this end, a series of charts (Figures 7, 12 & 16) map the evolving roles of the individual case study towns across time, the various functional criteria being ranked in order of their priority and/or prominence. These illustrations are necessarily crude but serve to highlight broad developmental sequences. In the case of Wroxeter (Figure 7), the settlement appears to have retained some form of central place function, although of an increasingly ecclesiastical nature, whilst its economic function dwindled. York, on the other hand (Figure 12), continued as a secular

power base from the Roman period onwards, although its growing economic and trade importance progressively challenged this; the town continued to be significant in terms of its military and Christian functions. Finally, Ipswich (Figure 16) demonstrates a notable stability in terms of urban roles, with, as befits a *wic*, its economic role remaining pre-eminent, along with a probable central administrative function.

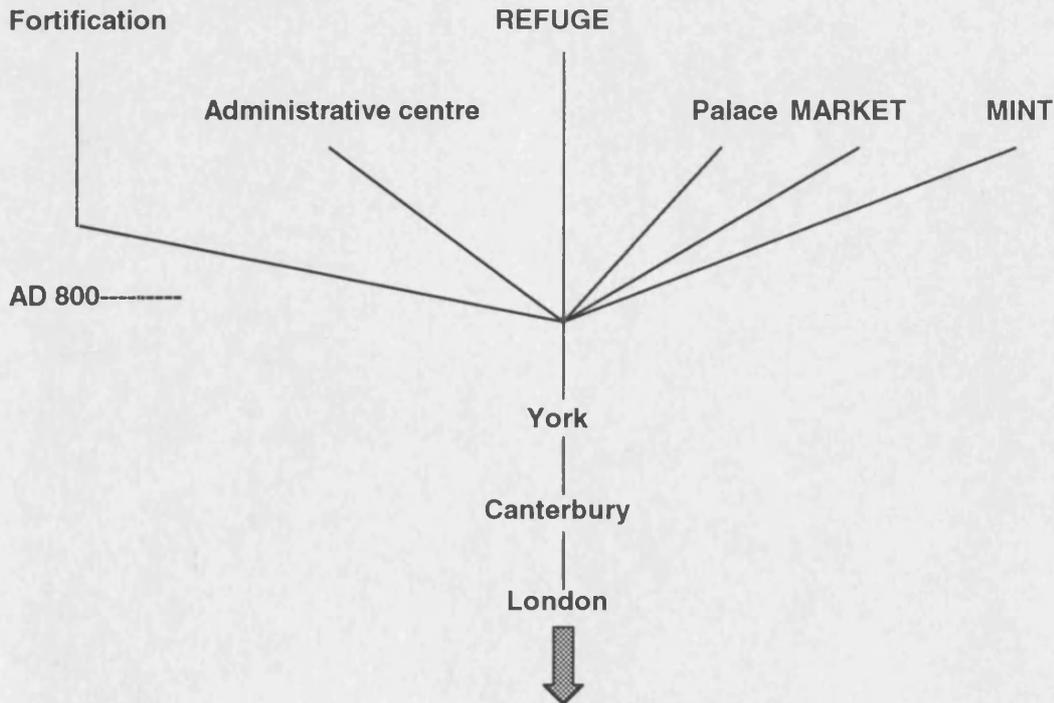


Figure 17: English Towns c.AD 300-900: Ninth-Century Focussing of Functions on the Towns (After Hill 1988b: 202)

Wroxeter and Ipswich appear to have had relatively straightforward stages of development outwards from a central core, albeit in Wroxeter's case resulting in the eventual abandonment of that core in favour of the periphery. For York, however, the scenario is more complex, involving both topographical shifts and polyfocal functional activity (Figures 12-14). Noble and/or royal occupation appears to have remained centred on the former Roman legionary fortress from the later Roman period onwards, subsequently accompanied by the transfer of the Anglian royal palace and, possibly, cathedral from the *colonia*. The presence of churches and monasteries as well as the cathedral across the fortress, *colonia* and extramural areas

centre. The establishment of the Anglian *wic* on a virgin site produced the twin arrangement of fortress with its secular and, most likely, religious presence, and *emporium*. The intervening space was apparently occupied by scattered religious foci. Anglo-Scandinavian *Yorvik* served to bridge the topographical divide and reunite the *colonia* and extramural areas, at the same time resulting in the abandonment of the peripheral *wic* area.

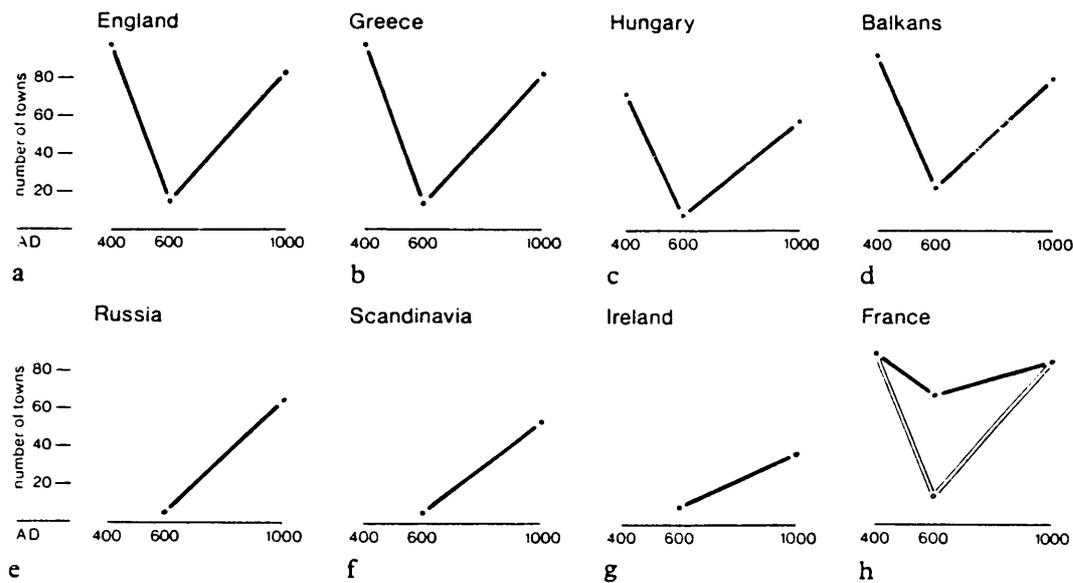


Figure 18: European Towns c.AD 300-1000 (Source: Hill 1988a: 13)

Diagrams such as these may be deemed of (limited) worth in terms of illustrating in graphic form the fluctuating roles of individual towns. However, each one of these aforementioned sequences is unique to a particular town and, as such, cannot realistically be used either as an interpretative or predictive model for other central places. Further possible complicating factors include variations in terms of quality and availability of evidence, and site location. The difficulty of generalised modelling is graphically illustrated by the general lack of such diagrams in the academic literature. Where archaeologists or historians *have* attempted to chart urban functions, the results have proved unsatisfactory. For example, David Hill's representation of the ninth-century concentration of functions on the towns (Figure 17) is both over-simplistic – implying that towns were not already multi-functional central places prior to AD 800 – and incomplete; what, for example, is the role of the Church in this process? And can we truly determine a 'refuge' role? Likewise,

the Church in this process? And can we truly determine a 'refuge' role? Likewise, Hill's 1988 attempt at charting population/town development across Europe in graphic form (Figure 18) provides an unsurprising impression of urban transformation as towns progressively acquired a range of functions following a c.AD 600 nadir. The generality of approach renders such a diagram of limited worth beyond providing a misleadingly simplistic impression of the significance of ninth-century developments. Consequently one can only emphasise the fact that there was a wide range of possible scenarios being played out in the late and sub-Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, and these accordingly defy any genuine all-embracing attempt at modelling. The contrast lies with Gaul, the focus of Chapter Three.

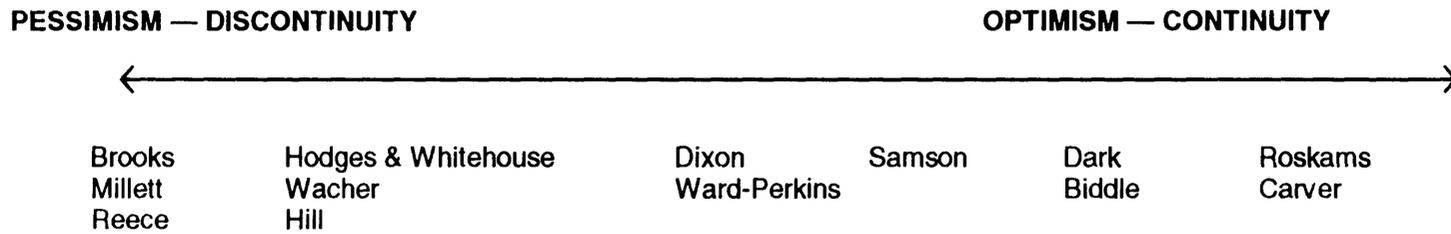


Figure 19: Figure Illustrating Variations in Academic Opinion Regarding the Continuity/Discontinuity of Urban Life in Britain Beyond the Roman Period  
(After Ward-Perkins 1997: 161, 168)

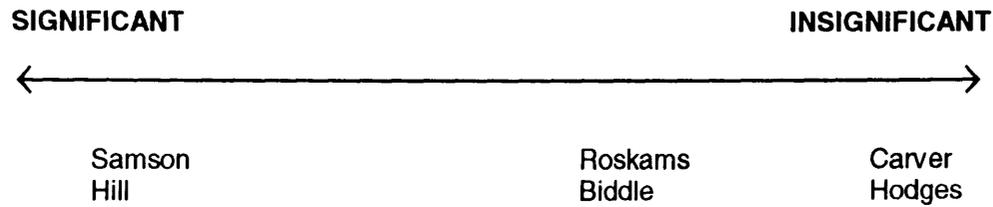


Figure 20: Figure Illustrating Variations in Academic Opinion Regarding the Significance of Wics in the Origins of Early Medieval Towns  
(After Ward-Perkins 1997: 161, 168)

## 2.5: DISCUSSION

This final section summarises the general urban sequence in Britain and associated academic debates, and proceeds to discuss the factors influencing urban change and loss.

### 2.5.1: The Urban Developmental Sequence

Developments may be summarised thus:

- The creation of towns during the first and second centuries AD, subsequently acquiring wall circuits and monumental public buildings.
- The development of zoned activities in and around the late Roman towns.
- Substantial late Roman depopulation and widespread urban failure, but with evidence for the persistence of small-scale activity in certain towns, frequently characterised by an aristocratic/royal and/or presumed ecclesiastical presence, into the fifth century.
- The probable abandonment of the majority of these sites, due either to obsolescence or to a perceived insecurity. The possibility of a continued Christian and/or aristocratic/royal presence as the basis for a seventh-century re-emergence.
- The creation during the seventh and eighth centuries of permanently occupied, specialist market settlements – the *wics* or *emporia* – generally either on virgin sites or in former Roman towns, stemming from a desire on the part of emergent rulers to control and exploit burgeoning (industrial and) trading patterns.
- The continuation apace of urban development throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, substantial Scandinavian redevelopment of the former Roman centres in the Danelaw prompting the construction of the *burh* system of defended central places in the south.

## **2.5.2: Urban Continuity/Discontinuity: The Academic Debate**

Academic consideration of the late Roman and early medieval urban developmental trajectories detailed in this chapter has engendered widely differing interpretations amongst archaeologists and historians. Debate has, in particular, surrounded the issues of (i) the continuity of urban functions beyond the fifth century, and, stemming from this, what might constitute a ‘genuine’ town, and (ii) the role of the *wics* in terms of town development.

As demonstrated previously, the pictorial representation of complex urban developmental sequences is a useful, if problematic, research tool (see Section 2.4). Such an approach may also be usefully adopted – although with the same provisos – in order to convey philosophical concepts in graphic form. To this end, Figures 19 and 20, adapted from an original concept by Bryan Ward-Perkins, chart the range of academic opinion regarding the (dis)continuity of British urbanism and the significance of the *wics*.

In general terms, archaeologists are more amenable than historians to the possibility of the continuance of central place functions in certain former Roman centres beyond the fifth century (Figure 19). At one end of the spectrum, Brooks (1986, 1988), Millett (1990) and Reece (1992) argue for a decisive occupational and functional break in a number of Roman towns, including Canterbury, London, Winchester and Cirencester. Millett cites the loss of Romano-British place-name elements and argues for a transformation of late Roman power structures whereby authority was transferred from the *civitates* to the person of local leaders (wheresoever they might be situated), the towns remaining solely as defended foci prior to their abandonment (1990: 223).

With special reference to archaeological evidence from Canterbury, Brooks is dismissive of the possibility of sub-Roman urban activity, rejecting dark earth merely as evidence for abandonment (1986: 93) – a view that flies in the face of environmental archaeological research findings from a range of sites (e.g. O’Connor 1994 & Ward 1994). Although regarding Canterbury as remaining unoccupied for as little as twenty years (Brooks 1988: 113), Brooks maintains that this and other

former Roman towns were, ultimately, subject to complete desertion (*ibid*: 99). Reece is particularly dismissive of Roman urbanism, viewing the towns as administrative centres imposed over the (never wholly Romanised) native Celtic superstructure. This perceived artificiality ensured that only the 'active will' of the people could guarantee their continued survival; its absence in the later Roman period ensured their demise (Reece 1992: 142). Whilst Reece is diametrically opposed to Carver and Roskams in terms of recognition of the persistence of urban functions beyond the Roman period, they nevertheless share a belief in the actions of individuals as catalysts for change.

To such writers, who place such strong emphasis on the Classical Roman town, the appearance and functional life of such central places in the later Roman period will be an undoubted anticlimax; they simply cannot have continued to be towns. But the inherent risk is to reject out of hand any possibility of continuance of such central place roles, whether as aristocratic and/or royal residential centres or as ecclesiastical foci (possibilities neglected by Brooks).

Moving further across the range of opinion, a number of writers take the view that, whilst the former Roman centres clearly did not retain their urban status beyond the fifth century, many did continue to operate on some level as regional central places (Faulkner, Hill, Hodges & Whitehouse, Wachter). Although critical of archaeologists as too readily accepting the concept of continuity, Hill does not dismiss the possibility out of hand, postulating the continuing necessity of places wherein social and economic functions might be carried out (1988b: 198). Hodges and Whitehouse are similarly doubtful of the possibility of post-Roman urban continuity – despite a belief in the occupation of most towns until the sixth century and acknowledging the existence of certain textual references to *urbes*, *civitates* or *municipia* (1983: 84).

To Ward-Perkins, administrative function is crucial, being the key defining factor of late Roman and medieval towns, despite the towns having undergone changes in fabric and use, to the extent that later certain places would not have physically resembled towns in the late Roman sense (1996: 7). He argues that administration formed a temporal 'historical strand' on a number of sites, linking the Roman and

Saxon periods, as postulated for London and its administrative and/or mercantile functions (1992: 37). Dixon regards the former Roman towns as having retained their defensive character, as intimated by their *-byrig* or *-ceastra* Anglo-Saxon name elements (1992: 154), within which ecclesiastical and/or high-status lay individuals were situated, possibly with associated suburban occupation (*ibid*: 151). He further suggests that these were centres for substantial noble residences in a landscaped setting created from imported topsoils (dark earths) (*ibid*: 156). If so, this would represent *positive* and *substantial* investments on the part of aristocratic groups stemming from a conscious decision to remain in a former – or else what they still perceived as – an urban residential setting. Continued urban survivals were reliant upon such choices on the part of a select few families (*ibid*). This apparent desire on the part of long-Romanised individuals to retain a classical urban existence flies in the face of Reece's notion of artificial urbanism. Biddle is also an advocate of marked late Roman urban *change* rather than decline or decay; likewise he takes authority to have provided a link between Roman and Anglo-Saxon Winchester (1983: 118) in a period during which the settlement was *not* a town. Only in the ninth century, Biddle argues, did Winchester regain its urban status (*ibid*: 115).

The overall impression gained is of towns operating as dynamic, living and symbolic structures, subject to variation and change both in terms of their physical appearance and function. Biddle makes the salient point, as demonstrated by this review of the urbanism debate, that there is seldom sufficient distinction made between continuity of *town life* and *non-urban activity in what had once been towns*. Furthermore, research increasingly demonstrates that continuity may be characterised by the continuing use of a territory and not necessarily of an individual settlement (Biddle 1988: 257).

Roskams and Carver remain the most enthusiastic advocates of urban continuity, though they are ideologically diametrically opposed to one-another. For Carver, the Dark Ages are to be viewed as a period wherein heads of new power structures were making *conscious choices* to invest in an alternative manner to what had gone before (1993: 50). To Roskams, however, the town itself, as a social product, is key, and a stage for social interaction and clashes (1996: 279). Conflict is the

catalyst of change. From a viewpoint concerned with the town as a field of class conflict, Carver's interest in Wroxeter lies in the issue of whether its sub-Roman population was attempting to revive or else reject Roman and/or Christian ideologies (*ibid*: 266). Similarly, Carver views the creation of private estates such as that excavated at Lower Brook Street in Winchester as a deliberately exploitative act on the part of the emergent kings and aristocrats towards the former Roman towns (*ibid*).

Moving to the early Anglo-Saxon period and the emergence of the *wics*, academic opinion is similarly varied regarding their importance in terms of early medieval urban origins (Figure 17). To Samson, the *emporia* are an irrelevance, being simply exchange centres through which elite goods were channelled for consumption in monasteries, palaces and the non-productive consumer towns in a system operating on the exploitation of rural peasantry (1994: 124). This downplaying of the role of trade activity and a belief that the former *civitates* were larger and home to larger permanent population than the *emporia* (*ibid*: 115) is in direct opposition to Biddle, who sees sites such as *Hamwic* as having been populous and wealthy trade and production centres. Consequently their creators would not have allowed their creations to fade but rather to have their functions transferred to new locations in a smooth transitory process (1983: 122).

Hill's doubts as to the significance of the *wics* stem from the comparative scarcity of these units – constituting less than 4% of all European town sites – by comparison with the defended former Roman sites which progressively accumulated urban roles, including bishops' seats (1988a: 10). Roskams acknowledges the *wics* as part and parcel of the mechanism of legitimation and exercising of power by the emergent Anglo-Saxon chiefs and kings, which included re-use of the abandoned towns. He also sees parallels with Scandinavian towns, viewing them as an attempt on the part of the royal houses to promote already extant exchange systems (1996: 267). Hodges takes the line that the *wics* are indicative of a substantial and innovative drive to promote trade activity, the significance of them and their successors, the *burhs*, lying in the eventual emergence of the market economy in the tenth century (1982: 159). Similarly, Carver views the *emporia* as symptomatic of conscious decisions on the part of

newly-emergent controlling groups to promote and exploit trade; these were the creation not of (pre-existing) 'market forces' but of ambitious individuals (1993: 53).

### **2.5.3: Urban Adaptation and Change: The Principal Influences**

Arising from this brief survey of the breadth of academic opinion, a number of salient, catalytic factors of urban adaptation and change are readily apparent. These influences will be fully discussed in their north-west European context (Chapters Five and Six). Consideration is limited here to the definition of those primary forces driving development and change in late Roman and early medieval towns.

- Across many areas of England, the integrated *economic and political supportive infrastructure* necessary to maintain an urban network no longer existed in the fifth and sixth centuries. Nonetheless, elements of the system did survive. In the western periphery, the residual survival of *Romanitas* in the form of inscriptions and Eastern Mediterranean imports to sites such as Tintagel and South Cadbury (Dark 1994: 209) enabled partial survival of the old Roman urban units, as at Wroxeter (White & Barker 1998: 130). This was, however, a delicate framework, structured now on regional kingdoms. Only with the subsequent emergence of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and new power networks during the seventh century did there arise a need to establish, for primarily economic means, a new class of settlements, the *wics*. Even at this stage, however, the great majority of these sites were trading foci and only later gradually acquired or were granted 'urban' attributes. In certain cases, notably in more peripheral regions such as the south-west, changing power structures may have resulted in the redundancy of the earlier centres. This, it is suggested, was the reason for final abandonment of the central area of Wroxeter.
- It is argued that there was no need, means nor, possibly, desire on the part of new Saxon authorities to sustain Roman towns. To the Romans, the town had been the principal mechanism for the spreading and expression of Romanisation and of administering in the provinces. Local leaders during the fifth and sixth centuries seem rarely to have had the resources to either sustain or emulate the

Roman urban past, with the exception of Wroxeter and its classically-inspired timber buildings. Certain noble and/or royal individuals do, however, appear to have wished to be seen to be maintaining a physical presence within the former Roman centres such as Canterbury, York, Lincoln and London, for two main reasons. Firstly, the survivals of what in many cases would have still have been substantial masonry wall circuits and military and civilian structures would have provided usable fortified enclaves. Secondly, association with a powerful urban past and its physically impressive material remains would have enhanced their aura of power and assisted in the legitimisation of their claim to authority.

- The persistence of various former Roman centres into the fifth century and beyond testifies to the fact that, to those still utilising them as central places, they were still deemed workable hubs of economic and social control. It is, consequently, largely academic as to whether they may be deemed *urban* during the sub-Roman period.
- From the later Roman period onwards, secular power structures in Britain were increasingly accompanied in the urban context by ecclesiastical administrations in the form of bishops' seats. The presence of the Church clearly impacted upon the fabric of certain of the former Roman towns, as in the case of the late Roman church of St. Paul-in-the-Bail in Lincoln, erected at the very centre of the forum precinct and so profoundly affecting the townscape. Here, as at York, Canterbury, London and Winchester there exists the *possibility* of Christianity, in the shape of churches and/or bishops, having formed a temporal thread linking the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, as previously proposed for secular administrative and/or aristocratic residential functions. This Christian presence could, however, be deemed fragile on the basis of its monuments and documentary references. In certain instances this link demonstrates marked tenacity. At Wroxeter, possibly functioning as a bishopric as late as the seventh century, a Christian foundation appears to have formed an occupational focus into the medieval period in the face of the removal of secular power elsewhere.
- It is particularly evident that the later Roman Church in Britain lacked the tenacity of its Gallic counterpart, and so failed to impact significantly upon the urban fabric or else to sustain *urban life* beyond the Roman period, despite its

having remained at the topographical heart of the (former) town. Whether or not there was a *genuine break* in terms of Christian presence in the former Roman towns, these places noticeably form the basis of the network of Anglo-Saxon bishoprics established in the seventh century. If there was a discontinuity, might it be the case that there was an attempt on the part of the new order to emulate the sitings of late Roman bishops' seats and/or towns with a Christian heritage in the form of saints, churches and Christian populations?

- The fact that bishops were, from the first, sharing the core urban areas with secular authorities demonstrates the close links between the two power structures. As the emergent Anglo-Saxon Church gained power and influence during the seventh and eighth centuries so its economic role grew, developing the means to alter the urban fabric and economy via the control of markets. Despite the belated nature of ecclesiastical developments in England in comparison to the Continent, the Church appears to have impacted rapidly upon secular institutions via the formal adoption of Christianity by the Anglo-Saxon royal houses. In a mutually beneficial arrangement, secular rulers would have readily identified religion as a vehicle for the consolidation of dynastic and territorial power, and mass conversions as a means by which to unify subjects under the Christian leader of a Christian kingdom. Subsequently, the establishment of a diocesan organisation – assisted by and integrated with Christian foci surviving from the Roman period – formed a framework over which secular structures could be readily overlain. For their part, the bishops would have rapidly gained influence by relocation from rural royal estates to permanent bases, whether in the former Roman towns (Canterbury, Lincoln) or on new sites (Dorchester-on-Thames, Sherborne), on land granted by the royal houses. These landholdings and concomitant rights over local populations guaranteed the Church considerable future influence (Bassett 1989a: 20).
- The ecclesiastical organisational network was supplemented by the establishment of minsters such as Glastonbury and Wimborne, themselves with dependent territories and heavily reliant upon the largesse of nobility and royalty for their continued existence (Cunliffe 1993: 317). Between c.AD 900 and 1100 the system progressively fragmented, ultimately resulting in the

creation of the parish church network. This, the ‘minster hypothesis’ has been the subject of academic debate since the 1990s, with controversy surrounding developmental links between minsters and parish churches. On the one hand Cambridge and Rollason maintain that early churches were not necessarily functioning as minsters and are doubtful of whether pre-Viking churches were responsible for the provision of pastoral care. Moreover, they believe that the hypothesis underestimates the role of the kings in Church organisation (1995: 104). Blair, on the other hand, seeks to emphasise the inherent stability and exploitative influence of minsters upon pre-Conquest land and populations whilst emphasising that the system was subject to close regulation on the part of the royal houses (1995: 212). Whatever the reality, the English Church was indisputably an early and increasingly significant influence upon secular institutions, albeit one entirely dependent upon the continuing patronage and sanction of those powers.

- Pre-existing centres in the forefront of Anglo-Saxon and, subsequently, Anglo-Scandinavian settlement are inherently more likely to have been adopted and reworked than those on the political peripheries. This was clearly not happening simply because they happened to be there, but because, in many cases, they continued to be effective regional foci – hence, in many cases, the suggestion of some form of continuation of central place function throughout the sub-Roman period and beyond. York’s careful positioning at the intersection of major river and land routes guaranteed it important economic and political roles from the first century onwards. Ironically, the physical manifestation of this success in certain circumstances masks the earlier evidence, thereby skewing the developmental phases.
- The appearance of the *wics* marks a new departure in terms of urban design and purpose, being “powerful instruments” on the part of the emergent authorities (Roskams 1996: 266). These were settlements initiated and overseen solely for the control and exploitation of regional and inter-regional trade and production as demand emerged for elite goods. Crucially, whilst these activities were not unique to this class of site, their function as ports for the handling of long-distance trade commodities served to distinguish them from other settlements

(Scull 1997: 289). Guaranteeing their survival and success as commercial ventures demanded riverine or coastal sitings with a controlling royal presence either immediately alongside (*Eoforwic*, *Lundenwic*) or some miles distant (*Hamwic*-Winchester) from 'Roman' towns. In the case of York, the trading *wic* and the royal centre were deemed a single entity settlement with a shared name (Reynolds 1977: 27). Regional variation is detectable; in certain cases the siting of the pre-existing royal or aristocratic enclave was also deemed suitable for the trading centre (so long as there was adequate space available for such a development). Whilst the reasoning behind the choice of site arrangement will have been complex and unique to each scenario, commercial viability is likely to have been deemed a fundamental consideration, and one in which topographical constraints must have figured large. Whilst logic and convenience would, ideally, dictate physical co-existence of administrative and commercial centre, the lack of a suitable site and/or land and riverine linkages may have obliged the *wic*'s installation elsewhere – undoubtedly with the major proviso that the kings be able to maintain total control of the operation. Hence, the ability of the Wessex royal house to establish and successfully operate the trading settlement of *Hamwic*, several miles distant from its base, testifies to the strength and efficacy of its control of the region. With the instigation of these twin elite residential-trading foci arrangements, Britain may be seen to have begun to re-enter the north-west European urban developmental sequence.

- In the early tenth century and the main period of foundation of the burghal system, many urban functions previously shared in a twin arrangement between the earlier *burhs* or royal sites and their dependent *wics* were brought together in a single, fortified location. Instigated in Mercia by Offa and in Wessex by Alfred, a perceived threat of Viking attack provided the impetus for their creation (Haslam 1987: 76). Consequently the primary objective in the foundation of the *burhs* or boroughs was to produce defended refuges for people away from existing 'urban' or royal sites, whose upkeep and garrisoning in times of military threat was the responsibility of the local population (Reynolds 1977: 31). These were not, as the *wics* had been, operating as economic bases. The scale and systematic nature of the resultant network of sites represented an unprecedented manifestation of centralised royal power and, as such, a

significant stage in the development of the medieval burghal town (Loyn 1962: 133; Biddle 1976: 134). Note, however, a marked Roman influence in the *burhs* in terms of physical characteristics, namely quadrilateral plan forms and architectural styles (Roskams 1996: 268).

- A significant minority reoccupied Roman sites with some pre-existing form of defensive arrangement. Of the nineteen towns listed in the early tenth-century Burghal Hidage, four (Winchester, Chichester, Bath and Exeter) consisted of reoccupied Roman town sites (Biddle 1976: 127). These accompanied the body of seventh- and eighth-century non-burghal sites discussed earlier and which includes Lincoln, Canterbury and York, whose relict Roman structural remains were to have a profound and enduring effect – albeit an essentially passive one – upon their topographical development (*ibid*: 106). These central places, with their royal and administrative function, proved logical sites for Anglo-Saxon adoption as military bases. In the case of those seized by Viking forces, they were components of a pre-existing, possibly redundant system that was simply taken over by a new power (Haslam 1987: 79). These sites were (re) adopted precisely because they were still defended and of some real and symbolic importance.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOCIETIES AND TOWNS. CASE STUDY II: GAUL c.AD 300-900

#### 3.1: INTRODUCTION

##### 3.1.1: Chapter Aims

The previous chapter, Chapter Two, sought to examine the developmental sequence of towns within the Roman frontier province of Britain, highlighting the disruptive influences upon urbanism of changing secular and religious power structures in the late- and sub-Roman period prior to a middle- and late-Saxon urban revival. Proceeding from this, the present chapter seeks to chronicle town development in the more prominent/vital Roman province of Gaul. The urban tradition in this region is characterised by a marked tenacity throughout the early medieval period, demonstrating a ready ability to adapt its fabric and functions; in these processes it can be argued that the role of the Church was fundamental. The Gallic scenario is in clear contrast to the British urban experience and demonstrative of a process resulting in the formulation of new classes of town. Furthermore, the range of socio-political groupings impacting upon a sizeable and varied region inevitably results, in certain respects, in a somewhat more complex developmental sequence.

The consensus of academic opinion (including Halsall 1995a; Harries 1992; Loseby 1996; *Villes et Agglomérations* 1990) is to view in Gaul a considerable number of urban survivals at markedly higher levels than in Britain. In this process the crucial factors guaranteeing a town's continued existence were its roles as both secular and episcopal administrative centre. Growing aristocratic involvement in Church affairs from the later Roman period onwards resulted in increasing numbers of bishops being appointed from powerful local families and a progressive identification of the bishop with the role of town leader. The subsequent identification of the Frankish nobility with town and Church served to accentuate urban social roles.

These developments impacted significantly upon the urban fabric, characterised from the third and fourth centuries by the abandonment of suburban areas and their redeployment as cemeteries. Frequently centred upon late Roman martyrial burials, these subsequently attracted further burials and church and monastic foundations. A developing Christianisation of the urban landscape meant that, between the fourth and fifth centuries, building work focussed on churches at the expense of public buildings (Harries 1992: 88). With the exception of a few instances (Bordeaux, Lyon and, possibly, Clermont-Ferrand and Rheims) whereby the Christian administration was transferred from the suburban cemeteries to smaller, centrally located walled enclosures, the earliest cathedrals commonly shared the *castra* with secular power centres. In general these cathedrals were positioned at an internal corner of the *civitas* (Brühl 1988: 45). Alternatively, the continuing presence of a sizeable religious community outside the walls could potentially form a nucleus for future settlement, often attracting economic functions, in many cases with the active involvement of the bishops. Frequently remaining distinct from the earlier Roman core, these foci could result (as at Tours) in a settlement of two or more specialist foci (see Section 3.2.3).

In line with developments elsewhere in north-western Europe, the seventh century saw the establishment by the emergent Frankish states of specialist trading *wics* beside large, navigable rivers. Whilst it is known that St Denis was sited adjacent to the administrative settlement of Paris, nothing is known of a comparable arrangement for the still poorly-understood *Quentovic*. Subsequent Carolingian and Norse (Rouen) rule assured the continuance of centralised urban functions and development throughout Gaul into the medieval period.

The chapter opens with an examination of the range of data available and outlines problems inherent in the study of late Roman and early medieval Gallic towns. Then follows the detailed examination of the three principal case study towns of Arles, Bordeaux and Tours prior to the extension of discussion to include other Gallic towns in order to help define and assess the principal factors influencing early medieval urban adaptation and change.

### **3.1.2: Sources of Evidence**

Whilst Britain is extremely rich in archaeological data yet almost totally lacking in documentary materials and, conversely, Italy possesses substantial documentary, topographical and developing archaeological evidence, Gaul lies between the two extremes, with a number of towns possessing both reasonable documentary evidence and sizeable archaeological data sets. Substantial bodies of epigraphic data, notably funerary inscriptions, and literary materials including hagiographic accounts, praise poems and episcopal correspondence combine to reveal a considerable degree of urban survival, highlighting the role of towns as episcopal centres and foci for elite burial (*Naissance des Arts Chrétiens* 1991; Roux 1971).

Biases and gaps do, however, exist in these data. In the case of the epigraphic evidence, funerary epitaphs dominate the 14000 plus surviving inscriptions for Gaul; they are also regionally imbalanced, with a full 44% of second-century material deriving from the Narbonne region (Goudineau *et al.* 1980: 49).

The documentary material also has shortcomings, with late Classical and early medieval writers' attention centring upon urban ecclesiastical structures, scantily mentioning economic and market functions (Loseby 1998: 264). The licence issued in AD 753 by Pippin the Short to the abbey of Saint-Denis granting permission for its annual fair is unusual in its reference to Frisian mercantile activity (Lebecq 1983: 25). Pertinent texts include itineraries such as the Peutinger Table and the late fourth- or early fifth-century *Notitia Galliarum*, whilst textual passages providing detailed descriptions of individual towns survive from the end of the Roman period onwards (Goudineau *et al.* 1980: 46). Included amongst the latter are praise poems such as those of Ausonius and Paulinus of Pella relating to Bordeaux (Higounet 1973). Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* includes a number of references to Gallic towns, notably a passage detailing Merovingian Metz (*History of the Franks* III.19), as well an account of the bishops of Tours and the churches commissioned there (Dalton 1927). The correspondence of the fifth-century Sidonius Apollinaris refers (not always in a complimentary fashion) to a number of towns, including Clermont, Châlon and Ravenna (Dalton 1915). Hagiographies of such churchmen as Caesarius of Arles (Klingshirn 1994) and Gregory of Tours offer valuable

insights regarding episcopal urban building programmes and the bishops' roles as authority figures. Episcopal power is further emphasised by the elegiac description of Merovingian bishops by the sixth-century poet Venantius Fortunatus (George 1987). In terms of coverage of the latter part of the study period, narratives of political events within the Germanic royal houses and details of Viking raiding on Gallic towns and trading wics are provided by the Frankish Annals, including those of Fulda and St-Bertin (Nelson 1991; Reuter 1992).

France possesses a well-established academic tradition of urban Christian architectural and topographical research, serving to supplement the documentary materials. A number of long-term French archaeological research programmes were instigated in the early 1970s, coverage notably centring on the central and southern regions and towns such as Orleans, Metz, Tours and Marseille. The 1980s witnessed a growing awareness of the significance of urban studies, culminating in the creation of the government-funded *Centre National d'Archéologie Urbaine* (Ministère de la Culture Direction du Patrimoine Sous-direction de l'Archéologie 1997). Yet the numbers of towns that have been the object of detailed close scrutiny are few by comparison with their British counterparts. Despite its comparatively late start, archaeology is, however, increasingly highlighting the physical manifestations of developments in terms of changes to the urban structure, and revealing profound changes in attitude towards the allocation and use of urban space. Indeed, developer-driven archaeological projects, coupled with improvements in excavation techniques assisted by the Ministry of Culture's research guidelines (*ibid*) are allowing for increasing focus on intramural, often secular, developments.

Nonetheless, research remains centred on the frequently spectacular ecclesiastical complexes such as those encountered at Lyon, Rouen, and Viviers, and extramural cemeteries, basilicas and monastic houses. Accordingly, Christian urban topographical studies have produced both multidisciplinary volumes dedicated to individual towns such as the *Topographie Chrétienne des Cités de la Gaule* series (e.g. Biarne 1986; Février 1989; Prevot 1989) and synthetic studies (Duval 1991a; Guyon *et al.* 1992; and the *Naissance des Arts Chrétiens: Atlas des Monuments Paléochrétiens de la France* volume, 1991). The 1990s have, meanwhile,

witnessed publications utilising both archaeological and historical data in an attempt to place towns in their landscape setting. Examples include Provost's work on the Loire Valley (1993) and Rebourg's study of the commune of Autun in the *Carte Archéologique de la France* series (1993). Attention is also turning to the consideration of urban defence, with Garmy and Maurin's volume concerning Aquitanian town circuits a valuable recent contribution (1996). More specifically, a combination of architectural survey and archaeological excavation has been utilised since 1993 in order to elucidate the developmental sequence of the late Roman defences of the Pyrenaean town of Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (Esmonde Cleary, Jones & White 1998). In terms of urban origins and development, academic debate has, in recent years, begun to assess properly Gaul's Frankish legacy; a direct result was the staging of the major exhibition *Les Francs, Précurseurs de l'Europe* (1997).

### **3.1.3: Research Methodology**

As in the previous chapter, this examination of late Roman and early medieval Gallic/Frankish urban development proceeds from the chronological tracing of urban functions and physical components – hence the utilisation of archaeological and documentary data in order to produce a comparable series of tables mapping changes on a town-by-town basis (Figures 21-3, 28 & 33). Whilst various towns have necessarily been the subject of investigation varied in both its character and intensity, we must necessarily be selective, seeking again to assess early medieval (and late Roman) urbanism through key case studies. Consequently the twenty towns and cities that have been selected as a representative sample from across Gaul are those whose bodies of archaeological, epigraphic and documentary data are sufficient to reconstruct the late Roman and early medieval sequences. For consistency, attention will focus solely on regional central places, i.e. those sites accorded *civitas* capital status, as well as the single, notable exception of the seventh-century trading settlement or *emporium* of *Quentovic*.

Status/Physical Criteria	Amiens	Arles	Autun	Bordeaux	Bourges	Clermont-Ferrand	Lyon	Marseille	Metz	Narbonne
Colonia		✓					✓		✓	✓
Civitas Capital	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Castrum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Bourg		✓					✓		✓	
Chef-lieu		✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Bishopric	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cathedral	A-B(?) C-D	A-D	A(?) B-C	B-C	A-B	A/B	A-D	A-D	A-B(?) C-D	A D
Bishop's Palace	A-D(?)	A-B	B/C		B		A-D	B(?)		
Baptistry	D	A-B	B/C	A		B(?)	A-D	A-D	C-D(?)	
Churches	A-B(?) C-D	A-D	A-D	A			A-D	A(?) B-D	A(?) C-D	A D
Women's Monasteries		B(C?) D	B-C	C		C	B-D	A-D	B-D	
Monasteries		B-D	A-D		C-D	B	A-D	A-D	A-D	D
Cemeteries	A-C	A-C	A-D	A		A	A-D		A-D	A-B
Necropoli		A-B	A-D		A	A B(?)	B-D	A-D	A-D	A
Temples				A	A?	A				A
Ducal/Royal Palace	B-D(?)	A-B(?)			A		B(?)		B(?)	
Defences/Fortifications	A-D	A-B D	A C	A-C	A	A	A-D	A-D	A-D	A-C
Gates	A	A-B	A	A	A	A	A-D	A-D	A	
Road/Street System	A	A-C		A-D	A	A	A-D	A-D	A	
Housing	A	A-C		A		A	A-D	A-D	A-B(?) C-D	A
Suburbs/Vici	A	A-B	A(?)	A			A-D	A-D	A	D
Forum	A	A-B		A		A(?)	A	A(?)		A
Baths	A	A-B			A	A(?)	A-B		A	A
Amphitheatre	A	A-B		A	A		A		A	A
Theatre		AB	A			A(?)	A			A?
Circus		A-B								
Aqueduct		A			A	A	A(x4)		A	A
Pottery Production				A-B			A	A-B CD(?)		A(?)
Other Crafts/Industries	A	A		A		A	A	A-D	A C-D	A(?)
Shops		A-D								
River Port/Harbour		A-D		A-D			A-D(?)	A-D		A
Market(s)										
Cultivation				A?						
'Dark Earth'									A-B	
Mint	A-C	A-B					B-D	B-C	C	

Key to periods: A: c. AD 300-450 C: c. AD 600-750  
B: c. AD 450-600 D: c. AD 750-900

Where, for example, A/B is used, indicates that the dating of this feature is uncertain.  
Where, for example, B(?) is used, indicates that the existence of this feature during this period is uncertain.

*Note:* This table is intended as a general guide to the chronological development of urban form and function in a particular town. The inherent limitations of archaeological and/or documentary materials prevent this data table from acting as more than a general indicator of developmental trends and, as such, should be used in conjunction with the accompanying text. Letters accompanied by a question mark indicate that, although the particular criterion or function is likely to have been present at this date, the documentary record is insufficiently precise and/or the archaeological record is lacking in order to state this with any degree of certainty.

Figure 21: French Towns c. AD 300-900: Archaeological and Documentary Indications of Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria (Amiens-Narbonne)

Status/Physical Criteria	Orléans	Paris	Quentovic	Reims	Rouen	Saintes	Toulouse	Tours	Trier	Vienne
Colonia								✓	✓	✓
Civitas Capital	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
Castrum	✓					✓		✓		
Bourg	✓							✓		
Chef-lieu	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bishopric	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cathedral	A-D	A(?) B-D		A	A-D		A	A-C	A-D	A-C D
Bishop's Palace	B-C(?)	B-D(?)		A			A/B D	A-C		
Baptistry	D(?)	B-D(?)		A-D				B-C	A-B(?)	
Churches	A-D	A-D		B-D	B-D	A-D	A-D	A-D	A-D	B-D
Women's Monasteries	C-D(?)	C-D		B-D				B-C	B-D	B-D
Monasteries	B-D	C-D						B-D	B-D	B-D
Cemeteries	B-D	B	C-D	A	B-D	A-D	A-B	A-D	A-D	A-D
Necropolis	A-D	A-D							A-D	
Temples							B	A	A	
Ducal/Royal Palace		B-D(?)						D	A(?) B-D	A/B(?) D
Defences/Fortifications	A-D	A-D		A	A-D	A	A-D	A-D	A	A B(?) D
Gates	A-D	A-D		A	A-D	A	A	A-B	A	
Road/Street System	A	A-D		A	A-D	A	A	A-D	A	A
Housing	A-C	A-D	C-D		A-C	A	A-C	A-D	A	A-D
Suburbs/Vici	A-D	A-D						A-B		
Forum	A	A*		A						
Baths	A	A-B		A	A	A	A	A-C		
Amphitheatre	A			A		A	A	A D		
Theatre	A					A	A			
Circus									A	
Aqueduct	A	A					A			A/B
Pottery Production		A-D	C-D(?)				A-B		A-B	
Other Crafts/Industries		A-D	C-D					A D	A(?)	
Shops								A D	A	A
River Port/Harbour		A-D	C-D		A			B-D		
Market(s)			C-D					D		
Cultivation		A-D			A-D			D		
'Dark Earth'					A-D?			A/B?		
Mint		C-D	C-D						A-C D(?)	

\* Forum fortified and undergoes adaptive reuse as a burial area during this period

Key to periods: A: c.AD 300-450 C: c.AD 600-750  
B: c.AD 450-600 D: c.AD 750-900

Where, for example, A/B is used, indicates that the dating of this feature is uncertain.  
Where, for example, B(?) is used, indicates that the existence of this feature during this period is uncertain.

**Note:** This table is intended as a general guide to the chronological development of urban form and function in a particular town. The inherent limitations of archaeological and/or documentary materials prevent this data table from acting as more than a general indicator of developmental trends and, as such, should be used in conjunction with the accompanying text. Letters accompanied by a question mark indicate that, although the particular criterion or function is likely to have been present at this date, the documentary record is insufficiently precise and/or the archaeological record is lacking in order to state this with any degree of certainty.

Figure 22: French Towns c. AD 300-900: Archaeological and Documentary Indications of Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria (Orléans-Vienne)

The AD 300-900 date range is again broken down into four equal time periods:

Period A (Late Gallo-Roman/Early Frankish): c.AD 300-450.

~ Corresponds to the decay of Roman rule and the beginnings of the Germanic incursions.

Period B (Frankish/Early Merovingian): c.AD 450-600.

~ Clovis' reign as first Frankish king and the close of the period of coverage of Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*.

Period C (Later Merovingian): c.AD 600-750.

~ The end of Fredegar's *Chronicle* and the period of the establishment of the *wics*.

Period D (Early Carolingian): c.AD 750-900.

~ The first Viking raids on Gaul and the rise of Carolingian power.

Whilst Gallic towns lack the strongly individualistic character of their British counterparts, certain of their number can be seen to demonstrate certain variations and, as such, merit particular attention due to their distinctive topographical development and/or functional importance. Whilst three centres (Arles, Bordeaux and Tours) therefore form the principal case studies for this chapter, end discussion will encompass evidence from elsewhere.

### 3.2: CASE STUDIES

The three centres of Arles, Bordeaux and Tours are selected for scrutiny. For each we see continuity of 'urban' roles and of Church from late Roman to medieval times and with varied economic strengths. Each town has been selected as representative of a particular function serving to dominate and impact upon urban development. Consequently Arles is cited for its administrative role, Bordeaux for its economic significance and Tours as representative of a major religious centre.

### **3.2.1: Arles (*Arelate, Civitas Arelatensium, Colonia Arelate Sextanorum*) (Figures 23-27)**

Arles' developmental sequence is unusually lengthy, with evidence for settlement on the Hauture hill from the sixth century BC. The city's strategic positioning on the Rhône and ease of access to the Mediterranean guaranteed it a major role in regional and inter-regional trade and production, resulting in the early appearance of a sizeable planned Greek colony settlement (Congès 1980: 19). Subsequently, Arles' continuing economic importance, combined with state and Church influence, placed the city at the forefront of Gallic political and religious affairs. The end result was a settlement of unusual wealth and monumentality. Changing attitudes towards and requirements for space are manifested in the urban fabric of late Roman Arles, including the adaptation of public structures and open areas to private housing.

Consequently Arles presents a valuable instance of a major urban centre, which maintained its economic and political roles beyond the Roman period, accompanied by a growing and substantial involvement of the Church. An unusually full body of both archaeological and documentary materials assists the examination of these processes.

#### **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

##### *Epigraphic and Literary Sources:*

Documentary material relating to Arles is relatively rich, notably comprising the writings of Ausonius. Several texts indicate the presence here of Italian and Eastern *navicularii marini*, middlemen in commercial arrangements between individuals and the state (Christol 1982: 6). Passing mention is made to Arles in the *History of the Franks* via the conflicts between Sigebert and Guntram, whilst the *Life* of Caesarius offers glimpses of the churches and monasteries commissioned by the bishop. As with the Provençal region in general, however, the late sixth- to ninth-century period is poorly documented.

Status/Physical Criteria	Archaeological Evidence		Documentary Evidence	
	Intramural (Castrum/ Enceinte)	Extramural (Faubourg/ Vicus/Vici)	Intramural (Castrum/ Enceinte)	Extramural (Faubourg/ Vicus/Vici)
Colonia	✓			
Civitas Capital	✓			
Castrum	✓			
Bourg	✓			
Chef-Lieu	✓			
Bishopric	✓			
Cathedral	A/B		A-D	
Bishop's Palace			A-B	
Baptistery			A-B	
Churches		A-B	B-C	A-B (C?) D
Convents/Women's Monasteries			B (C?) D	B
Monasteries			B-D	B
Cemeteries		A-C	B	
Necropolis		A-B		
Temples				
Ducal/Royal Palace	A-B(?)			
Defences/Fortifications	A-B, D		A-B	
Gates	A-B			
Roads/Street System	A-B (C?)	A-C		
Housing	A(B?) C	A-B		
Suburbs/Vici		A-B		
Forum	A		B	
Baths	A-C			
Amphitheatre	A-B			
Theatre			A	
Circus		A-B		B
Aqueduct		A		
Pottery Production				
Other Crafts/Industries			A	
Shops	B(?)			A-D
River Port/Harbour		A-D		
Market(s)				
Cultivation				
'Dark Earth'				
Mint	A-B		A-B	

Key to periods: A: c.AD 300-450 C: c.AD 600-750  
 B: c.AD 450-600 D: c.AD 750-900

Where, for example, A/B is used, indicates that the dating of this feature is uncertain. Where, for example, B(?) is used, indicates that the existence of this feature during this period is uncertain.

Note: This table is intended as a general guide to the chronological development of urban form and function in a particular town. The inherent limitations of archaeological and/or documentary materials prevent this data table from acting as more than a general indicator or developmental trends and, as such, should be used in conjunction with the accompanying text. Letters accompanied by a question mark indicate that, although the particular criterion or function is likely to have been present at this date, the documentary record is insufficiently precise and/or the archaeological record is lacking in order to state this with any degree of certainty.

Figure 23: Arles c. AD 300-900:  
 Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria

### *Archaeological Data:*

Arles has been the object of antiquarian interest since the sixteenth century, with the first academic study (by Constans) of the city's development appearing in 1921. The Roman and early medieval developmental sequence is reasonably well known as a result of several major programmes of excavation undertaken on both sides of the Rhône since the Second World War under the auspices of the state Ministry of Culture in response to urban redevelopment and expansion. Advances in our understanding of the pre-Roman period, however, were limited prior to excavations at the Jardin d'Hiver in 1975, whilst the 1990s have seen the discovery of a possible pre-Augustan wall circuit (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 1367). The density of modern occupation in the core urban area means a continuing bias of knowledge towards the suburbs (Congès, Brun & Roth-Congès 1992: 128). Arles also possesses a major assemblage of late Roman stone sarcophagi (Loseby 1996: 46).

### **Arles: Developmental Sequence**

Early occupation at Arles centred on a low chalk hill (the Hauture) on the left bank of the main channel of the Rhône (Grand-Rhône) and flanked by marshland that remained undeveloped until the modern period. A Greek colony seems evident from the sixth to third centuries BC, archaeological investigation indicating intensive occupation within a planned, defended settlement (Congès 1980: 19). Initially trading in salt, fish and *garum* with merchants in the Rhône Valley, contacts progressively developed between the colony and the Mediterranean (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 137). The rapid, planned nature of settlement exposed south of the Jardin d'Hiver, and indications of trade links with Greece suggest the existence of a Greek *emporium* co-existing alongside a structured native settlement (Sintès 1992: 133). Roman texts name the settlement as, successively, Theliné and Arelatus (Février 1986a: 77). A north-south road linking Arles with Avignon to the north is attested from an early date, whilst to the east a second route provided access to the city's outport of Fos and to Marseille to the south.

Easy river and sea access placed Arles in a nodal position in terms of regional and inter-regional trade and communications (Loseby 1996: 46). Arles acted as a local

**AD 100**

- Secular Authority
- Trade/Economics
- Military

**AD 300**

- Ecclesiastical Authority
- Secular Authority
- Trade/Economics
- Military

**AD 500**

- Secular Authority
- Ecclesiastical Authority
- Trade/Economics
- Military

**AD 700**

- Secular Authority
- Ecclesiastical Authority
- Military
- Trade/Economics

**AD 900**

- Secular Authority
- Ecclesiastical Authority
- Trade/Economics
- Military

Figure 24: Arles c.AD 100-900: Ranking of Urban Functions

market centre in addition to a transferral point for the shipment of supplies, frequently to armies on the Rhine frontier as well as central Gaul and Upper Provence (Klingshirn 1994: 43). Trade links with the wealthy and heavily industrialised Marseille (situated c.80km to the south-east) appear particularly significant (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 136).

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**AD 200**

<i>Castrum</i>	Trinquetaille	Aylscamps
secular administration	domestic occupation elite occupation	domestic occupation cemeteries

---

**AD 400**

<i>Castrum</i>	Trinquetaille	Aylscamps
cathedral secular administration mint domestic occupation	domestic occupation elite occupation? economic activity chapels pilgrimage shrines cemeteries	domestic occupation cemeteries chapels pilgrimage shrines

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**AD 550**

<i>Castrum</i>	Trinquetaille	Aylscamps
cathedral secular administration mint domestic occupation monasteries	domestic occupation elite occupation? economic activity chapels pilgrimage shrines cemeteries	domestic occupation cemeteries chapels pilgrimage shrines

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**AD 900**

<i>Castrum</i>	Trinquetaille	Aylscamps
cathedral secular administration mint domestic occupation monasteries	domestic occupation elite occupation? economic activity chapels pilgrimage shrines cemeteries	domestic occupation cemeteries chapels pilgrimage shrines

---

Figure 25: Arles c.AD 200-900: Urban Activities and Functions by Zone

### (i) The Early Imperial Town

Arles' economic wealth, coupled with its strategically advantageous position, guaranteed it early Roman attention. Hence the establishment here of the Lower Rhône Valley's first *colonia* by Tiberius Claudius Nero, probably in 46 BC (Sintès 1992: 133). Caesar ordered the construction of triremes in the city in 49 BC prior to his defeat of the Marseillaise flotilla (Congès 1980: 10). Little is known of the early (cremation) cemeteries or of the first defensive circuit (Sintès 1992: 134); the indications are of an Augustan date for the initial laying out of the settlement (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 141). The walls were partially demolished in the first century AD to allow construction of the amphitheatre in a phase of expansion which witnessed strong residential and industrial development in the right bank suburb of Trinquetaille (*ibid*: 145). Occupation here was early and rapid, resulting in the infilling of vacant land, with development continuing into the third century AD. Excavation indicates the southern part of the suburb as a zone of substantial noble residences, numerous internal changes and adaptations which suggest lengthy occupation. The discovery of a forum-like open area in Trinquetaille's industrial zone further upstream – created either for religious or administrative reasons – implies a large population, presumably largely dock workers and sailors (Sintès 1992: 137).

Strabo deemed Narbonne comparable to Arles, as “an important town and commercial centre” (*Geographica IV* – quoted in Heijmans & Sintés 1994: 136).

Much later, Ausonius' praise poem also emphasises the city's economic role:

Arles, double town, open your kindly hospitable gates: Arles, Rome of the Gauls, who has as neighbours on one side Narbonne, on the other Vienne, opulent colony of the Alps. The torrential course of the Rhône cuts you in two: but, with a boat bridge linking one shore to the other you form a broad route; by the Rhône you receive merchandise from all the Roman world: nevertheless, you do not keep these goods for yourself, for you enrich other peoples, other towns, you profit Gaul and Aquitaine.

(Ausonius, *Ordo* 20 quoted in Congès 1980: 10; trans. Kipling)

As regards public buildings, the circus was by far the most prominent, laid out south-west of the town; it was the subject of excavation during the early 1990s and designed to house around 20000 spectators (Sintès 1992: 138). The positioning of

both amphitheatre and circus suggest that at some point the southern part of the town underwent a shift in alignment, possibly associated with an extension to the inhabited area (Février 1986a: 78). Cemeteries were located at Trinquetaille, along the road to Nîmes and, to the south, flanking the Marseilles road, the latter forming the basis for the subsequent development of the Aylscamps cemetery (*ibid*).

## (ii) The Late Imperial Town

Excavation indicates an abrupt end to expansion during the second half of the third century, with widespread fire destruction both in the extramural areas of Trinquetaille and Brossolette and, on the opposite bank, on the central sites of the Cr dit Agricole and the Esplanade (Sint s 1992: 141). In the latter, housing was destroyed between AD 250 and 270 and subsequently quarried for building materials (Heijmans & Sint s 1994: 144). Only the circus with its parasitic occupation appears to have escaped unscathed (Sint s 1992: 145), conveying an impression of comprehensive abandonment of the suburban peripheries (Heijmans 1999: 144). This destruction may be linked to two documented invasions of Franks or Alamans in AD 259-260 and AD 275-279 (Gong s 1992: 130). However, indications of fire damage ranged over a fifty-year date range, coupled with variations of destruction within a particular locality and an apparent forewarning of attack enabling inhabitants to empty their properties instead point to a prolonged period of political instability and attack (Sint s 1992: 145). There are signs of the re-occupation by poor-quality housing in the late fourth- or early fifth-century of the abandoned areas. A number of inhabitants may, however, have relocated to properties in the Camargue (Heijmans & Sint s 1994: 154), to probable fortified sites such as Entressen 12km to the south-east of Arles, or else to *oppida* such as St-Blaise, shown by excavation to have been re-occupied during this period (Loseby 1996: 48). Conversely, there is a decline in villa numbers during this period, possibly due to the take-over and merging of estates, as described by Salvian in the mid-fifth century (Klingshirn 1994: 205).

Arles' fortunes changed during the fourth century, the need for a new imperial stronghold between Italy and the Rhine resulting in the city regaining its political and official functions under Constantine (Heijmans 1999: 144) and emerging as a

centre of imperial administration and residence. The imperial mint transferred to Arles from Ostia in AD 313 (Février 1986a: 79). The city took the name of *Const(antina)* or *Constant(ina)* in honour of Constantine II in AD 328 (*ibid*: 78). Around AD 395, the capital of the Praetorian Prefecture of the Gauls was transferred there from Trier. In AD 402/8 it was designated the venue of the Annual Council of the Seven Provinces constituting the civil diocese and, in AD 408, Arles replaced both Bordeaux as capital of the civil diocese of *Septem Provinciae* and Vienne as metropolitan capital of the province of *Viennensis*. Ausonius ranked fourth-century Arles second to Trier amongst the towns of Gaul (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 151). Documented visits to the city by emperors coupled with likely substantial direct imperial sponsorship of the construction of monumental public building schemes – such as Constantine and the ‘northern baths’ – place Arles at the forefront of late Roman political (state) power and influence (Loseby 1996: 50). In recent years, architectural survey of sections of relict upstanding masonry incorporated into present-day buildings has suggested the existence of a late imperial civil basilica south of the baths, possibly associated with visits to the city by the emperor or else meetings of the praetorian prefects (Heijmans 1999: 150).

The economic vibrancy of the late Roman city is evoked by contemporary writings:

After Pannonia, the province of Gaul...it is said that it has a very great city called Trier, where, it is said, the Emperor lives; this is in the midst of the land. It also has another city which comes to the aid of Trier in all things; it is situated by the sea and is called Arles. It receives the merchandise of the whole world and sends it on to the aforesaid city.

(c.AD 360)

(*Expositio Totius Mundi* (Anon), quoted in Loseby 1996: 46)

The town is so happily situated, the commerce there is so active, the merchants go there in such great numbers, that they drain off there all the products of the universe...all the riches of the Orient, Arabian perfumes, Assyrian delicacies...

(Honorius, AD 418, quoted in Congés 1980: 10, trans. Kipling)

A substantial baths complex was built alongside the Rhône, possibly during the fourth century; tradition also places an imperial residence here (Février 1986a: 79). Ausonius describes Arles as a ‘double town’ – *duplex Arelas* – implying that the west bank of the Rhône (Trinquetaille) was also occupied, complementing its

function as a riverine and sea port.

With its first bishop, Marcianus, attested as early as AD 254, Arles is, along with Lyon and Vienne, one of the earliest documented Christian urban communities in Gaul (Février 1994: 49). The first cathedral group was situated in the south-eastern corner of the walled town along with a monastery founded by Caesarius and, possibly, subsequently transferred to the southern side of the circuit on the death of Hilarius in AD 449 (Esquieu 1994a: 135). This is the only known Christian structure inside the walls for this period (Heimans & Sintès 1994: 154). Alternatively, scholars such as Février maintain that by this date the cathedral had been removed to the central site of the present-day St-Trophime (1994: 50). A third theory proposes that the ecclesiastical group remained centred on the pre-eminent Christian focal point of the tomb of St Genesius in the extramural Aylscamps cemetery until around AD 600 and its transferral to its present location (Loseby 1996: 63).

The late Roman period saw the pagan cemeteries of Trinquetaille and Aylscamps evolve into places of Christian pilgrimage centred on the cult of the martyr Saint Genesius. The former is unusual in that it marked the place of the saint's death, not burial (*ibid*: 59). The largest cemetery centred on the St-Honorat chapel, whose cult eclipsed that of Saint Honorius in the twelfth century. The opulence of the assemblage of sarcophagi recovered from the Aylscamps and Saint-Genest-de-Trinquetaille burial areas testify to the wealth of Arles' fourth- and fifth-century elite. The popularity of Aylscamps as a place of pilgrimage obliged the adaptation of the road system (Sivan 1993: 36). The expansion of these late Roman cemeteries indicates a contraction in zones of suburban housing (Loseby 1996: 58).

### (iii) The Early Medieval Town (Figure 27)

Arles passed under Visigothic control from AD 476-480 and is listed as one of the residences of Euric (died AD 483) (Février 1986a: 79). From AD 508 Arles came under Ostrogothic then, from AD 536, Frankish control. A number of public buildings, including the theatre and amphitheatre, appear to have continued in use

(Esquieu 1994a: 136). Parasitic occupation of public monuments and areas is, however, attested in a number of locations from the late fourth or early fifth centuries. These include the Flavian esplanade at the Hôpital Van Gogh and the circus, where spaces between external buttresses were, from the late fourth to early sixth centuries, utilised for private housing (*Gallia* 44, 394), evidently a carefully planned development (Figure 24). Cessation of occupation coincided with abandonment of the circus, possibly as late as the sixth century (*Gallia Informations* 1990 (2), 146). The forum was likewise converted to accommodate fifth-century housing on its paved open area whilst, on the east bank, the Trinquetaille cemetery was sealed during the fifth century to take houses (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 161). Excavations at the Hôtel Van-Gogh revealed rubble-walled and earth-floored buildings with associated earth paths constructed over a Flavian area of paving during the fifth century prior to abandonment of the area from the seventh to ninth centuries (*Gallia Informations* 1987-8 (2), 233).

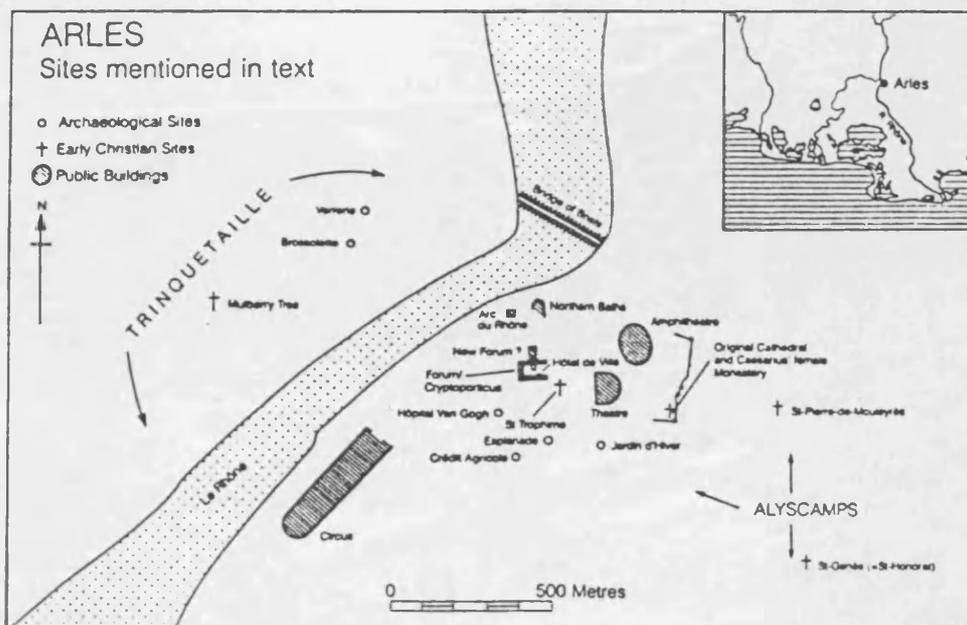


Figure 26: Arles: Location and Principal Features  
(After Loseby 1996: 49)

Significantly, these instances of the incursion of private housing into public spaces appear largely contemporaneous (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 161). Archaeological evidence for this occupation has been recently forthcoming from across the entire intramural area and is indicative of a substantial population rise within the walls around AD 400-425 (Heijmans 1999: 160). Possible causes include northern

refugees looking to the praetorian praefecture of Gaul for protection following its transfer to Arles from Trier, the billeting of troops or else of individuals seeking protection behind ramparts financed by the city's economic prosperity. The latter would explain the desertion of extramural properties. Certainly, the establishment of both the usurper Constantine III and the praefecture at Arles in a period of Germanic incursions indicates the economic and strategic significance of the city during this period. An influx of officials, attendant staff and troops would be expected to have impacted significantly upon both urban fabric and economy (Congès, Brun & Roth-Congès 1992: 132). Alternatively, the excavators of the suburban Esplanade quarter suggest that the causes of its fifth-century abandonment lay in internal politics and the besieging of the town in AD 411 by Flavius Constantius and again in AD 423 by Theodoric I (Gongès 1992: 133).



Figure 27: Arles: Reconstruction of Late Roman Parasitic Occupation against the Circus Façade (*Photo: Author*)

Loseby does not view the adaptation of public land to private use as an indication of a manifestation of crisis or chaos. Rather, he views these events as an acknowledgement by the city authorities of the redundancy of communal, monumental structures as well as a reflection of changes of attitude towards public

and private space (1996: 54).

The fifth century was characterised by a dispute between Arles and Vienne for ecclesiastical supremacy, culminating in the victory of Arles (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 160). In the mid-fifth century the cathedral of Saint-Trophime was transferred from the south-eastern corner of the walled circuit to a site opposite the forum on a road leading from the theatre to the forum. Its central location is presumably also indicative of the power of the Church by this date (Février 1994: 50). Correspondence from Theoderic suggests that state financial assistance was forthcoming for the repair of the city's defences:

Although the prime task may be to revive injured inhabitants, and to display the sign of pity chiefly towards human beings, nonetheless, my humanity has combined two things; I am taking thought for the citizens with generous assistance, and I am hastening to restore to splendour the ancient monuments. For so it will come about that, while the city's fortune is founded on its citizens, it shall also be displayed by the beauty of its buildings. Therefore, I have sent a certain quantity of money to repair the walls and aged towers of Arles. I have also had victuals made ready, which are intended to assist your supplies, and are to be sent to you when the sailing season favours.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* III: 41: King Theoderic to all the Landowners of Arles c.AD 510, winter)

Heijmans has suggested an early- to mid-fifth century construction date for an intermediate defensive enclosure located between the Augustinian and eleventh-century walls, making it contemporary with similar circuits at Nîmes and Narbonne (1999: 159). Bishop Caesarius (AD 502-542) was responsible for construction of the first monastery within the walls, in the early fifth century:

Caesarius (rebuilt) in particular the monastery that he had begun to prepare for his sister, according to its original rule, and with a cloister (for the protection of) virginity (512). Since there is no obstacle to whatever befits the Christian mystery, like a latter-day Noah of our own time he fashioned an ark on account of storms and tempests. He built it for the companions and sisters on the side of the church.

(*The Life of Caesarius of Arles* I: 35)

Significantly we hear here also of the earliest attested example of intramural burial in Gaul (Février 1986a: 81):

And because he never wanted to rest from God's work, he designed and built a triple basilica in a single enclosure (524). He built the nave in honour of the holy Virgin Mary and adorned it more prominently...to relieve the holy virgins he had gathered (in his monastery) of concern for the demands of burial, he had monolithic sarcophagi suitable for burying the dead freshly cut out of huge stones. He then had these arranged in dense rows over the floor of the whole basilica, so that any of the sisters who passed from this life might find a holy burial place ready for use.

*(The Life of Caesarius of Arles I: 57)*

Arles between the seventh and ninth centuries is something of an unknown quantity, with only a few extant textual mentions of church and basilica foundations, for example the seventh-century basilica of Saint-Pierre. Only two excavations (at Van-Gogh and the Major) have demonstrated occupation during this period. The writings of Gregory of Tours and others suggest that Arles lost ground during this period to its old rival, Marseille (Heijmans 1999: 167). Only with the late ninth century do texts emerge that allude to a town undergoing a renewal as implied by references to church construction and defensive modifications (Heijmans & Sintès 1994: 165).

### **3.2.2: Bordeaux (*Burdigala Biturigum Viviscorum*) (Figures 28-32)**

Situated on an alluvial terrace overlooking a natural inland harbour on the Garonne, the site of the future Bordeaux was occupied from the sixth century BC. Its situation on major riverine and land routes offered ready access to north-eastern Gaul, Spain, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and markets for its wine, cereals and ceramic products.

Dating from as early as the third century BC, Bordeaux's artificial harbour was subsequently enclosed within the sizeable late Roman defensive circuit. Late Roman attempts to maximise commercial exploitation of intramural space resulted in the exclusion of public structures, certain of which continued in use as communal structures. These developments were accompanied by substantial expansion of suburban activity. Regional and inter-regional trade continued into the medieval period despite the transferral of the harbour to the Garonne riverbank necessitated by the silting-up of its intramural predecessor and following disruptive raiding

activity by Gascons and Norse.

Bordeaux is, therefore, a significant instance of a city possessing a certain political and intellectual significance, but in reality primarily an economic centre, its manufacturing and trade roles serving to influence its topography until the post-Roman epoch.

## **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

### *Epigraphic and Literary Sources:*

A small body of contemporary documentary materials provides a limited but vivid image of the later Roman port. The praise poems of Paulinus of Pella and Ausonius contain accounts of late Roman Bordeaux describing walls, towers, churches and the harbour; particular emphasis is placed upon the city's commercial affluence. As a native of the city, Ausonius ranks Bordeaux, in his *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, amongst the principal centres of the period.

### *Archaeological Data:*

Local antiquarian interest in Roman Bordeaux has its origins in the sixteenth century. Further, the survival of sections of the late Roman defences into the nineteenth and their depiction in a number of engravings and paintings, further assisted academic investigation by Léo Drouyn (Barraud *et al.* 1996: 16). Major excavations were carried out within the *castrum* at Saint-Christoly between 1973 and 1983, indicating the presence of a substantial late Roman (Bordelais) pottery industry. Systematic archaeological coverage was initiated in 1981 by the Direction des Antiquités Historiques d'Aquitaine, involving the appointment of a city archaeologist and the undertaking of a series of major projects in the face of commercial development. Excavations centred on the Îlot Saint-Christoly, the Place de la Victoire and, most productively, the Rue Porte-Dijeaux (Barraud & Gaidon 1992: 43-4). A plan of archaeological deposits across the city was compiled in 1985 as a consultation document for excavators and developers (Gauthier 1992: 92). Certain parts of the sequence remain poorly understood, in large part due to logistical problems of access to the data, notably the pre-*castrum* phases.

Status/Physical Criteria	Archaeological Evidence		Documentary Evidence	
	Intramural (Castrum/ Enceinte)	Extramural (Faubourg/ Vicus/Vici)	Intramural (Castrum/ Enceinte)	Extramural (Faubourg/ Vicus/Vici)
Colonia				
Civitas Capital				
Castrum	✓			
Bourg				
Chef-Lieu				
Bishopric	✓			
Cathedral	B-C			
Bishop's Palace				
Baptistry		A		
Churches		A		A
Convents/Women's Monasteries				C
Monasteries				
Cemeteries		A		A
Necropoli				
Temples		A		
Ducal/Royal Palace				
Defences/Fortifications	A-C		A	
Gates			A	
Roads/Street System	A-D	A-D		
Housing	A			
Suburbs/Vici		A		
Forum	A			
Baths				
Amphitheatre	A			
Theatre				
Circus				
Aqueduct				
Pottery Production	A-B			
Other Crafts/Industries	A	A(?)		
Shops				
River Port/Harbour	A-D			
Market(s)				
Cultivation		A(?)		
'Dark Earth'				
Mint				

Key to periods: A: c.AD 300-450 C: c.AD 600-750  
 B: c.AD 450-600 D: c.AD 750-900

Where, for example, A/B is used, indicates that the dating of this feature is uncertain. Where, for example, B(?) is used, indicates that the existence of this feature during this period is uncertain.

Note: This table is intended as a general guide to the chronological development of urban form and function in a particular town. The inherent limitations of archaeological and/or documentary materials prevent this data table from acting as more than a general indicator or developmental trends and, as such, should be used in conjunction with the accompanying text. Letters accompanied by a question mark indicate that, although the particular criterion or function is likely to have been present at this date, the documentary record is insufficiently precise and/or the archaeological record is lacking in order to state this with any degree of certainty.

Figure 28: Bordeaux: c. AD 300-900:  
 Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria

## **Bordeaux: Developmental Sequence**

The earliest occupation on the site of the future Bordeaux lay near the confluence of the Dordogne and the Garonne on an elongated, well-drained alluvial terrace flanking the west bank of the latter and forming a natural harbour located c.100km from the coast. The c.5-6 ha. settlement occupied this site between the sixth century BC and the first century AD, dominating the Devèze Valley to the south and the

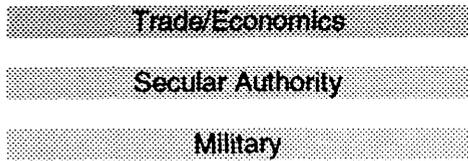
Chartons marshes to the north (Barraud & Gaidon 1992: 44). The establishment of the port in the third century BC stemmed from efforts by local Celtic tribal leaders to monopolise local trading in tin and, subsequently, wine (*Bordeaux: 2000 Ans d'Histoire*: 19). Bordeaux was, first and foremost, a market place, trading in locally produced wine, cereals and ceramics. This primary economic role stemmed jointly from its harbour positioned at the intersection of major roads offering ready connections between the Atlantic and Mediterranean as well as Spain and north-eastern Gaul (Sivan 1993: 32). Under Rome the city acquired a reputation as a political and intellectual centre (*Bordeaux: 2000 Ans d'Histoire*: 20); Ausonius was resident in one its suburbs (Étienne & Barrère 1962: 277).

### **(i) The Early Imperial Town**

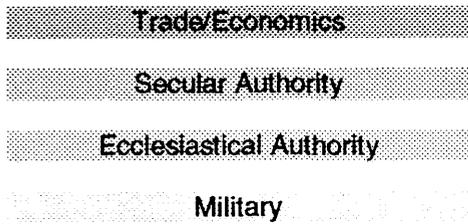
The unwallled early Gallo-Roman town developed rapidly from a first-century AD core of c.6ha to a late second-century maximum of 150-170ha, extending along the banks of the Garonne (Barraud & Gaidon 1992: 45). The major phase of expansion dates from c.AD 150 and included the construction of housing along the Peugue and, to the west a public baths suite on a previously open site (Barraud *et al.* 1994: 29). An effectively regular gridiron street pattern appears to have been aligned on an east-west axis and two north-south axes; elements are preserved in the modern plan. The arrangement north of the Devèze is far less clear, but hints of a diverse grid alignment suggest that this belongs to the phase of later second century AD expansion (*ibid*: 30). Little was known of the city's public buildings until the 1980s, bar the amphitheatre. Excavations have since revealed a *macellum* and fourth-century quays along the Devèze, the latter associated with the inner harbour

(*arrière-port*) and providing access to warehousing and *horrea* (Barraud & Gaidon 1992: 47). Evidence of industrial activity (first- and second-century bronzeworking and forging) comes from the north-western part of the town (*ibid*: 47).

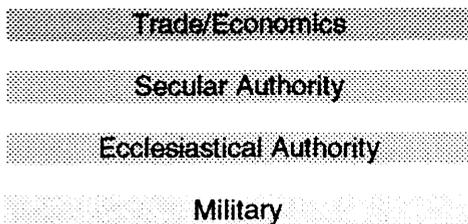
**AD 300**



**AD 500**



**AD 700**



**AD 900**

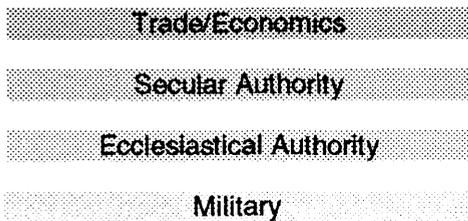


Figure 29: Bordeaux c.AD 300-900: Ranking of Urban Functions

(ii) The Late Imperial Town

Bordeaux’s earliest attested bishop is Orientalis, who attended the Council of Arles in AD 314 (Sivan 1993: 44). Fourth-century Bordeaux was accorded the status of political capital of the province of *Aquitania Secunda* (Étienne 1973: 19). Probably instigated in the face of the first barbarian advances into Gaul in AD 276, the late third- or early fourth-century wall enclosed *c.*32ha., making it one of the largest middle-ranking Aquitanian *castra* (Sivan 1993: 39). Construction of the defences involved considerable use of *spolia* from abandoned cemeteries and public monuments (*Bordeaux: 2000 Ans d’Histoire*: xxiii; Maurin 1992: 381). The enclosure was positioned primarily to enclose and protect the Dèveze estuary river port, use of which, according to Ausonius and Paulinus of Pella, was accessible only at high tide (Sivan 1992: 135).

**AD 300**

<i>Castrum</i>	Extramural Area
trade/economic activity (inner harbour) secular administration (ducal palace)	domestic occupation agricultural production cathedral churches cemeteries/necropoli

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**AD 500**

<i>Castrum</i>	Extramural Area
trade/economic activity (inner harbour) secular administration (ducal palace) cathedral?	domestic occupation agricultural production churches cemeteries/necropoli

---

**AD 600**

<i>Castrum</i>	Extramural Area
trade/economic activity (inner harbour) secular administration (ducal palace) cathedral? trade/economic activity	domestic occupation agricultural production churches cemeteries/necropoli

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Figure 30: Bordeaux *c.*AD 300-900:  
Urban Activities and Functions by Zone

Wall construction meant that the forum, amphitheatre and the Piliers de Tutelle – the latter possibly associated with the imperial cult (Knight 1999: 13) – were left isolated beyond the walls (Barraud *et al.* 1996: 32). The survival of certain public monuments, including the Piliers, implies that practical and/or ideological considerations were being brought to bear (*ibid*: 190). Ideology may have also lain behind the positioning of the *castrum*, serving as it did to enclose (and so unite) the site of the earliest settlement on its low hill with subsequent development south of the river (*ibid*: 33). Inclusion of this higher ground around the Puy Paulin and the Place Gambetta also served to dominate the surrounding area. (*ibid*: 190). The centrality of the river and the unusual intramural port figure prominently in the writings of Paulinus of Pella and Ausonius:

Your walls form a square, and with towers jutting so high that they penetrate the clouds overhead. Inside, one admires the roads that criss-cross the town, the orderly houses, the broad squares that merit their name; then the gates which serve in a straight line the crossroads and, at the centre of the town, the milk of a river supplied by a fountain.

(Ausonius: *Ordo Urbium Nobilium XIV*: 140-5, quoted in Higounet 1973: 49, trans. Kipling)

at the middle of town (which) offers the  
spectacle of an entire sea moving with her fleets

(Ausonius: *Ordo Urbium Nobilium XIV*: 145-8, quoted in Pontefract *et al.* 1973: XXIII)

Up to the walls of this town the beautiful Garonne drives the waters which flow back to the ocean via the gate of her estuary which takes the ships and keeps enclosed within the city an immense port.

(Paulinus of Pella: *Eucharistic*: 44-7, quoted in Barraud, Linères & Maurin 1996: 32, trans. Kipling)

Construction of the defences entailed diversion of the River Peugue outside their line – but with the consequent silting and eventual abandonment of the harbour in the sixth century (Sivan 1993: 40).

Excavation has revealed intensive craft and trading activity within the *castrum*; the use of previously unoccupied land at the Devèze-Peugue confluence appears to have been accompanied by the use of all available marshland so as to maximise usage of



(iii) The Early Medieval Town

Prolonged archaeological investigation supports the image of urban continuity from the fourth to sixth centuries, with no traces of a break in the sequence prior to the late sixth century. Ceramic evidence points to the persistence of trade activity with Africa into the sixth century (*ibid*: 48). A Jewish community is attested in the city by the sixth century, as is a Syrian merchant, Eufronius (*ibid*: 75). However, during the sixth century Bordeaux's inner harbour was finally abandoned due to progressive silting resulting from the late Roman diversion of the course of the Peugue – the move also aggravated problems of flooding through the dyking of the Devèze (Sivan 1993: 40). Efforts to alleviate these problems via reinforcement of

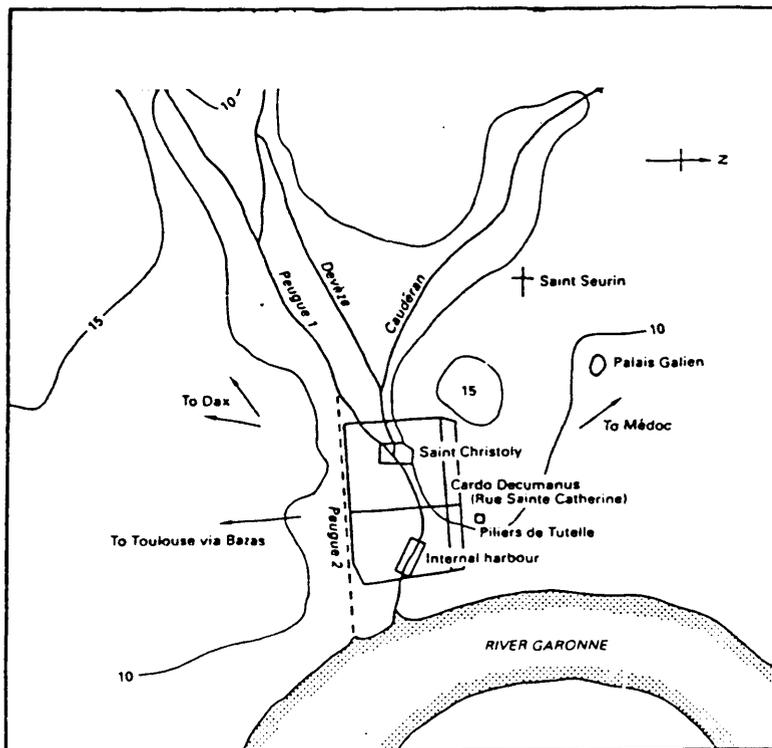


Figure 32: Bordeaux: The Fourth-Century Town (Source: Sivan 1993: 41)

the riverbanks may be indicative of the city's maintained economic vitality during this period (Sivan 1992: 135). In the case of the canalised Peugue, a substantial area had been abandoned and levelled to enable construction of a sizeable earthen flood barrier in the fourth century (Sivan 1993: 42). The silting of the Devèze and the harbour obliged the transfer of the latter to the Garonne riverbank beyond the

walls. Known from the mid-ninth century as the Port de la Lune, the area continued as a minor port area into the twelfth century (Barraud *et al.* 1996: 33). The enduring economic significance of the riverside area into the early medieval period is implied by the discovery of a seventh-century hoard of gold *solidi*, some of Spanish origin (Knight 1999: 149).

Trade with Spain and the Aquitanian hinterland appears to have suffered with the Moslem incursions of the second half of the eighth century, limiting use of the town's major connecting routes to the northern road (Lerat 1980: 77). The location of the post-Roman cathedral complex (es) has elicited much discussion amongst historians (Barraud 1983: 65). It is, however, clear that the episcopal centre shifted inside the walls in the post-Roman period, probably close to the site of the present-day structure. Excavations in 1980 revealed the eastern end of the church of Nôtre-Dame-de-la-Plâce, demolished in the nineteenth century and located 60m from the present-day cathedral of Saint-André in the south-western corner of the walled area. Overlying late Roman housing, source accounts attribute the earliest structure to the sixth-century Bishop Leontius (*Gallia* 43 (fasc.2), 229). The nearby small medieval churches of Saint-Sauveur and Notre-Dame-de-la-Place appear to occupy the sites of earlier twin basilicas and so may form part of the fifth- or sixth-century Merovingian episcopal complex (Lerat 1980: 77). Excavations in Notre-Dame de la Place in 1983 revealed the church of Sainte-Marie, built between AD 560 and 580 by Leontius II, also responsible for construction of the episcopal palace (Barraud 1983: 66; Barraud & Gaidon 1992: 48). Yet no intramural cathedral is documented prior to the ninth century and a charter of Louis the Pious dating from AD 814 reaffirming privileges to the church allocated by his predecessor Charlemagne (*ibid*: 66). Initially dedicated to Saint Denis, its title was changed in the eighth century to Saint-André (*ibid*: 66).

The agricultural and Christian suburban zones of the city developed considerably, with the construction of a number of monasteries including Sainte-Eulalie (c.AD 629-639) and Sainte-Croix (c.AD 643) prior to a curtailment of expansion through invasions and wars (*Bordeaux: 2000 Ans d'Histoire*: 20). Gregory of Tours alludes to the insecurity of the period:

The city of Bordeaux was sorely shaken by an earthquake, and the walls were in danger of falling down; the whole people was so terrified by the fear of death that they thought they must be swallowed up with the city unless they could escape by flight; whereupon many fled to other cities.

*(History of the Franks V: 25 (33))*

Wolves entered the walls of Bordeaux, and without any fear of men devoured dogs. A fiery light was seen to transverse the sky.

*(ibid: VI: 14 (21))*

Although the bishop represented the pre-eminent figure in the political hierarchy of Bordeaux, considerable secular administrative power rested in the hands of the royal-appointed office of *defensor*. Appointed from the ranks of the dukes, incumbents such as the sixth-century Galactorius personified municipal authority. Only in the twelfth century would power transfer to the middle classes (Lerat 1980: 76).

Bordeaux suffered considerable damage in an attack by the Norse in AD 848 (*Bordeaux: 2000 Ans d'Histoire: xxiii*). A Norse raid prompted Charles the Bald, by AD 866, to believe the town lost, prompting its bishop Frontinius to seek refuge at Poitiers (Lerat 1980: 73). Between the final quarter of the ninth and the late tenth centuries, events are extremely obscure due to a dearth of documentary materials (*ibid: 74*).

### **3.2.3: Tours (*Caesarodunum, Civitas Turonum*) (Figures 33-38)**

Originally established in order to maintain Roman control of riverine and road traffic in the Loire Valley, Tours subsequently gained *civitas* and regional capital status. From the fifth century the city gained a prominent ecclesiastical role, its bishopric becoming a constituent of the ecclesiastical province of Lyonnensis III. During the ninth century the *castrum* interior was subdivided, with ducal palace to the north and episcopal group to the south. The development of Gaul's foremost centre of Christian pilgrimage around the extramural abbey of Saint-Martin stimulated expansion and commercial growth of an area under direct royal control and obliging construction of an early ninth-century protective wall circuit.

Ultimately this resulted in the formation of two distinct urban nuclei and, ultimately, a permanent occupational shift away from the old Roman core, the *castrum sancti Martini* forming the core of medieval Tours.

As a result Tours represents a prime example of a bipolar settlement wherein a religious role progressively rivalled its secular counterparts and served to impact profoundly and permanently upon the urban fabric and developmental focus.

## **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

### *Epigraphic and Literary Sources:*

The works of Gregory of Tours form a primary documentary resource for the third to sixth centuries, whereas the seventh and eighth are virtually silent. A number of Carolingian sovereigns' diplomatic documentary survivals and annalistic mentions of Scandinavian raiding activity survive from the period AD 840 to 919 (Galinié 1994: 357). The most comprehensive set of early medieval source materials dates to the tenth century, notably in the form of a group of charters and other documents associated with the Saint-Julien abbey (Galinié 1978: 34).

### *Archaeological Data:*

Tours has been the subject of numerous excavations stemming from urban regeneration and developmental projects since 1945 (Galinié 1982: 79). The densely-occupied nature of the urban core has presented problems regarding access to archaeological stratigraphy – the earliest levels lying between 7m and 10m below modern ground level – whilst modern redevelopment has resulted in systematic destruction, notably in the west and at the economic heart of the medieval town. Academic attention has traditionally focused on monumental archaeological remains such as the amphitheatre and the basilica of Saint Martin (Galinié 1978: 34); possibly as a result of this bias, the Christian topography remains the best-understood aspect of pre-seventh-century Tours (*ibid*: 40). In addition, attention has been given to the late Roman defensive circuit (Wood 1983).

Status/Physical Criteria	Archaeological Evidence		Documentary Evidence	
	Intramural (Castrum/ Enceinte)	Extramural (Faubourg/ Vicus/Vici)	Intramural (Castrum/ Enceinte)	Extramural (Faubourg/ Vicus/Vici)
Colonia	✓			
Civitas Capital	✓			
Castrum	✓			
Bourg	✓			
Chef-Lieu	✓			
Bishopric	✓			
Cathedral			A-C	
Bishop's Palace			A-C	
Baptistary			B-C	
Churches	A-B D(?)	A-B		A-D
Convents/Women's Monasteries				B-C
Monasteries		B		B-D
Cemeteries		A-D		A-D
Necropoli				
Temples	A			
Ducal/Royal Palace	D		D	
Defences/Fortifications	A-D		D	
Gates	A		A-B	
Roads/Street System	A-D	A-D	A	
Housing	A-D	A-B D		D
Suburbs/Vici	A-B	A-B		
Forum				
Baths	A-C			
Amphitheatre	A		D	
Theatre				
Circus				
Aqueduct				
Pottery Production				
Other Crafts/Industries	A	A D		
Shops	A	D		
River Port/Harbour		B-D		
Market(s)		D		
Cultivation				D
'Dark Earth'		A/B(?)		
Mint				

Key to periods: A: c.AD 300-450 C: c.AD 600-750  
 B: c.AD 450-600 D: c.AD 750-900

Where, for example, A/B is used, indicates that the dating of this feature is uncertain. Where, for example, B(?) is used, indicates that the existence of this feature during this period is uncertain.

Note: This table is intended as a general guide to the chronological development of urban form and function in a particular town. The inherent limitations of archaeological and/or documentary materials prevent this data table from acting as more than a general indicator or developmental trends and, as such, should be used in conjunction with the accompanying text. Letters accompanied by a question mark indicate that, although the particular criterion or function is likely to have been present at this date, the documentary record is insufficiently precise and/or the archaeological record is lacking in order to state this with any degree of certainty.

Figure 33: Tours c.AD 300-900:  
 Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria

## **Tours: Developmental Sequence**

### **(i) The Early Imperial Town**

Tours was founded in the late first century BC on the left bank of the Loire, 20km from its confluence with the Cher between Orléans to the east and Nantes to the west. *Caesarodunum*, *civitas* capital of the Turones, was positioned so as to control the navigable Loire running east-west and, north-south, the road linking the town with Bourges, Poitiers and Mans (Galinié 1988: 57).

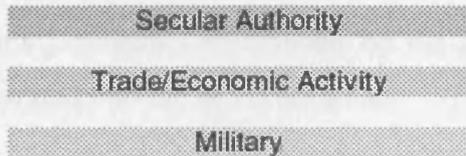
The orthogonal plan was based around two pre-existing roads running parallel to the Loire; in certain parts of the town subsequent development appears to have been insufficient to infill the grid (*ibid*: 125). Tradition places the monumental centre on a hill (*butte*) in the north-eastern part of the town, although this is not yet supplemented by archaeology. Little is known of the first-century town: only the amphitheatre and a temple have been securely identified, the latter on the southern side of the hill (Pietri 1987b: 25). The estimated capacity of the former (max. 12 000) suggests a populous settlement (Galinié 1978: 36) whilst the positioning of surrounding cemeteries to the south and east indicates an occupied area of c.80ha.

Excavation has revealed housing in the central area to have been of poor quality, with the largest and best-equipped residences, often equipped with private bath suites, located on the peripheries (*ibid*: 25). The discovery of two such houses alongside the Loire on the site of the château, with seemingly unbroken occupation from the first to seventh centuries, suggests a stable Roman secular aristocratic presence (Provost 1993: 135). Nonetheless, Tours appears to have entered a period of decline from the mid-second century, with indications of simultaneous abandonment of several peripheral areas of housing, the land subsequently being given over to cemeteries (*ibid*). It appears that only the north-eastern part of the town remained occupied; by the fourth century written sources deemed it a *castrum* (Galinié 1988: 57).

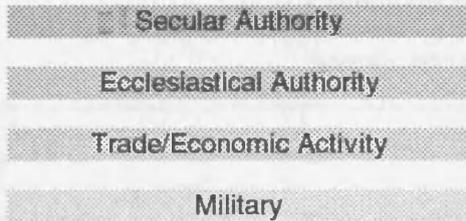
(ii) The Late Imperial Town

In AD 374 the settlement acquired the status of capital of the newly created province of Lugdunensis III and the name *civitas Turonorum*. Presumably due in

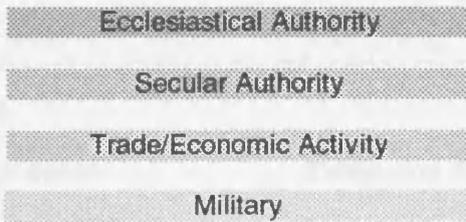
**AD 300**



**AD 500**



**AD 700**



**AD 900**

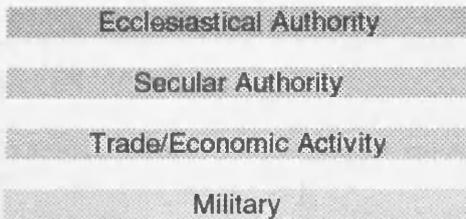


Figure 34: Tours: c.AD 300-900: Ranking of Urban Functions

large part to its strategic communications' control function, the fifth century signalled an upturn in the town's fortunes, with a number of archaeological

indications of renewed housing construction and craft production. Indeed, Tours represents the only example in the Loire Valley of late Roman urban growth (Provost 1993: 136). The late Roman *castrum*, superseding the earlier, open city of c.80ha, was constructed on the north-eastern edge of the town during the fourth century and incorporated sizeable reused blocks of monumental masonry to form a 4m-high rampart (Pietri 1987b: 26). At only 9ha capacity it was one of the smallest *castra* in Gaul (Galinié 1978: 57). The wall circuit ran parallel with the Loire, its positioning probably determined by the presence of the amphitheatre, which was incorporated into the defended area.

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**AD 300**

	Extramural Area	Roman <i>Castrum</i>
	domestic occupation?	secular administration

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**AD 400**

<i>Castrum Martini</i>	Extramural Area	Roman <i>Castrum</i>
cemetery/necropolis	cemeteries/necropoli domestic occupation agricultural activity monasteries	secular administration elite lay occupation cathedral military garrison?

---

**AD 500**

<i>Castrum Martini</i>	Extramural Area	Roman <i>Castrum</i>
cemetery/necropolis churches	cemeteries/necropoli domestic occupation agricultural activity monasteries	secular administration elite lay occupation cathedral military garrison? churches

---

**AD 900**

<i>Castrum Martini</i>	Extramural Area	Roman <i>Castrum</i>
cemetery/necropolis churches domestic occupation trade/economic activity	domestic occupation agricultural activity monasteries	secular administration elite lay occupation cathedral military garrison? churches

Figure 35: Tours c.AD 300-900: Urban Activities and Functions by Zone

This may have functioned as an occasional refuge in periods of threat (Wood 1983: 12). Excavations at the château, located in the north-western angle of the defences, produced a large assemblage of coins indicating a construction date around AD 370-380 (*ibid*: 45). The *castrum* interior appears to have been a sparsely occupied area containing buildings relevant to the town's new-found administrative role including a *praetorium* and prison (Pietri 1987b: 26). Contemporary documents provide no indication as to whether the amphitheatre continued to function as a place of entertainment, although a role as refuge would suggest that its interior remained free of development. There is also evidence for the existence within the *castrum* of modest but high-status housing and for the stationing of armed troops, as suggested by the presence of artefacts usually associated with Roman army federal auxiliary troops (Galinié 1978: 40).

Certain areas of the unwalled early town, notably to the west of the *castrum*, show evidence of re-occupation whilst a number of workshops were established on the future site of the medieval church of Saint-Pierre-le-Peuillier. Furthermore, the relative distance of the cemeteries – 800m to 1400m – from the walled area is suggestive of the intervening area having been reoccupied (Pietri 1987b: 26). Excavations at Saint-Martin demonstrated the reuse of an earlier cemetery around AD 470, firstly as the site of a mosaic workshop and subsequently by a stonemason, both working with reused materials. This resurgence may be linked to the cult of Saint Martin and a resulting demand for the construction of associated ecclesiastical structures (Provost 1993: 136). Certain suburban peripheries were, however, subject to retraction, perhaps indicative of a shift of settlement towards the safety of the walled area. Galinié suggests that the suburbs were undergoing a process of impoverishment, with the abandonment of more peripheral housing and the replacement of more sophisticated, centrally placed structures with poorer quality housing. This may imply the removal of certain socially-prominent individuals to within the walled area (see above) (1978: 38).

Gregory of Tours attributes the foundation of the first cathedral, located in the south-western internal corner of the *castrum*, to the town's first bishop, Litorius (AD 337/338-370) (Galinié 1994: 357):

In the first year of the emperor Constans, Litorius was consecrated second bishop; he was a citizen of Tours and of great piety. He it was who built the first church erected in the city of Tours, for the Christians were now numerous; for the first basilica, he converted the house of a certain man of senatorial family. In his time the holy Martin began to preach in Gaul. He held the see for thirty-three years and died in peace; he was buried in the aforesaid basilica, which today bears his name.

(Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* X: 31)

Litorius also undertook construction of a second ecclesiastical structure, the Saint-Lidoire basilica, located on the western suburban periphery, situated 800m from the *castrum*, surrounded by a pre-existing necropolis and around which a Christian cemetery subsequently developed. Excavation located the third- to fifth-century cemetery mentioned by Gregory of Tours associated with the pre-AD 444 funerary basilica of Saint Martin (Pietri 1987b: 26). In the earliest documented reference to the city's episcopal see, Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St. Martin* comments upon the

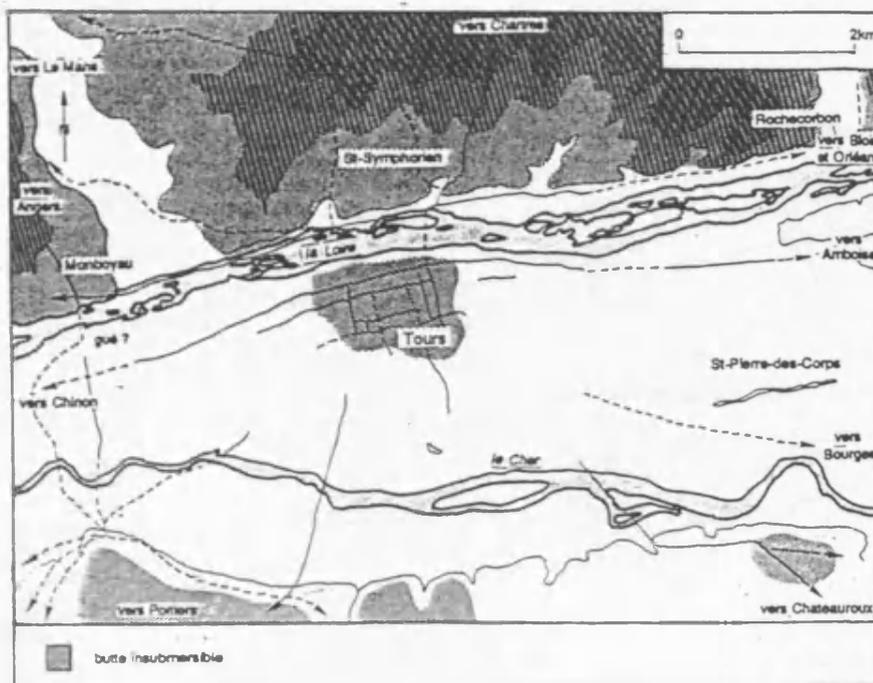


Figure 36: Tours: Location Map (Source: Provost 1993: 120)

bishop's education and election as bishop in AD 371 (Pietri 1987b: 27). Later venerated as both saint and apostle to the Gauls, Martin's shrine became Gaul's principal place of pilgrimage (Farmer 1991: 14) at the expense of the earlier basilica. So began a progressive shift of focus west from the intramural funerary

church to the (subsequently walled) suburban monastery. Bishop Perpetuus (AD 461-91) replaced Saint Martin's basilica with a more substantial structure:

Perpetuus was consecrated as fifth in succession from the blessed Martin. Now when he saw the continual wonders wrought at the tomb of the saint, and observed how small was the chapel erected over him, he judged it unworthy of such miracles. He caused it to be removed, and built on the spot the great basilica which has endured to our day, standing five hundred and fifty paces from the city. It is one hundred and sixty feet long by sixty broad; its height to the ceiling is forty-five feet. It has thirty-two windows in the sanctuary and twenty in the nave, with forty-one columns. In the whole structure there are fifty-two windows, a hundred and twenty columns, and eight doors, three in the sanctuary, five in the nave.

(Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* XI: 14)

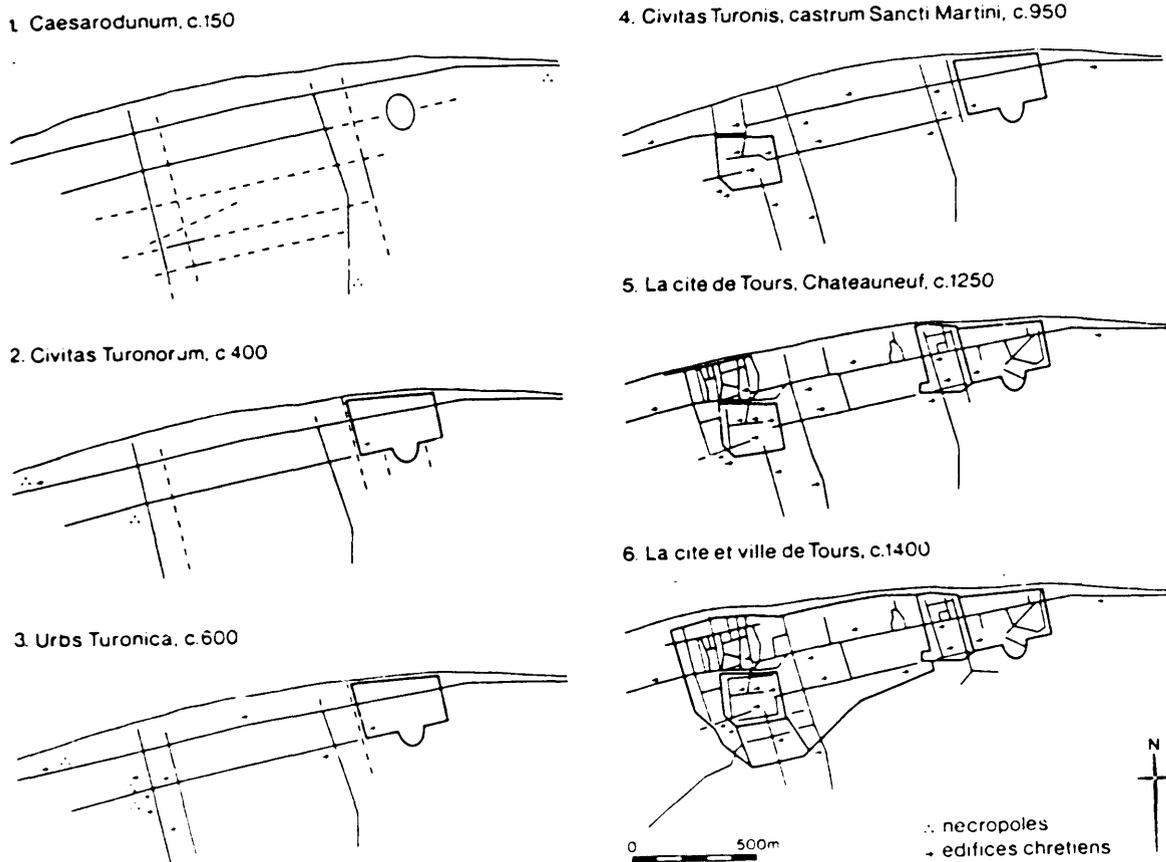


Figure 37: Tours: Developmental Sequence  
(Source: Galinié 1988: 59)

By the mid-fifth century the Tours bishopric was part of the ecclesiastical province of Lugdunensis III, mirroring its lay counterpart. As part of this organisation, the town hosted a Church Council in AD 461, whilst its bishops Eustochius and

Perpetuus held the role of metropolitan (Piétri 1987a: 14).

### (iii) The Early Medieval Town

Tours came under Visigothic control around AD 470, passing into the hands of the Franks after AD 507. Frequently the subject of Frankish dispute, the late fifth-century town was described by the contemporary Paulinus of Périgeux as both prosperous and populous (Pietri 1987b: 27). The town underwent a gradual process of topographical bipolarisation from the late fifth century, centring around (i) the *castrum*, associated with the bishop's seat and the count's residence and distinguished by Gregory as *urbs Turonica*, and (ii) the sanctuaries and monasteries clustering around Saint Martin's basilica. Referred to by Gregory as the *vicus*

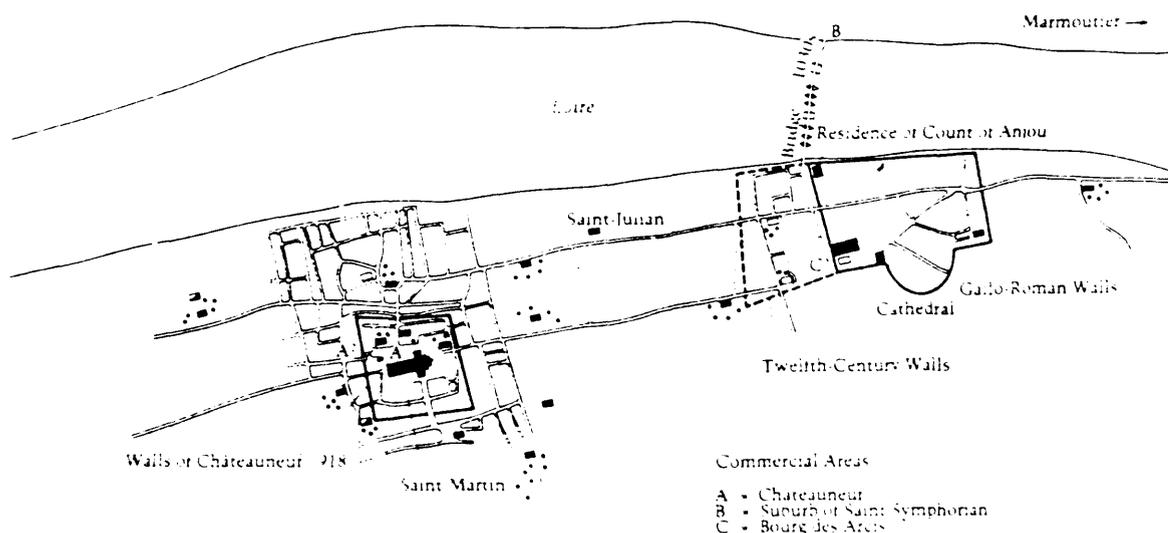


Figure 38: Tours: The Twelfth-Century Town (Source: Farmer 1991: 18)

*Christianorum*, this area was known by AD 918 as *castrum sancti Martini* or Châteauneuf. The land between these two distinct urban districts remained largely rural in character until as late as the eleventh century (Pietri 1987b: 27), occupied by the monasteries of Saint-Julien and Saint-Vincent and associated vineyards (Galinié 1988: 60). Situated midway between the *castrum* and Châteauneuf at the junction

of two major routes into the town, the former was rebuilt and reformed by Archbishop Theotolus c.AD 940 (Farmer 1991: 30) following the destruction of its predecessor in a Norse raid of AD 853 (Pietri 1987b: 37). Theotolus sought to promote links between the cathedral and its dependent house (Farmer 1991: 31).

The suburban area of Tours was subject to increasing abandonment, the fifth-century raising of the basilica over the tomb of Martin accelerating the retraction of the urbanised zone. By the close of the sixth century between six and eight churches or religious houses were grouped around Saint-Martin, with two others along extramural roads and a further three in the city (Galinié 1978: 42). These distinct elements remained separate until being united by the 1356 wall circuit. Artefactual evidence points to a continuing Gallo-Roman aristocratic presence in the city from the sixth to seventh centuries, the Touraine seemingly not being strongly affected by Germanic migrations. During the seventh or eighth century, however, radical changes were taking place regarding use of the *castrum*'s internal space. Private bath suites saw conversion to residential use and timber buildings constructed, possibly for the accommodation of livestock – indicative either of the area's impoverishment or of a change in the residents' living standards (*ibid*: 43).

The late ninth century probably witnessed significant developments regarding the internal arrangement and use of the *castrum* – changes directly attributable to an order by Charles the Bald of AD 869 to strengthen defences of the walled area in the face of Norse attacks. The result was a division of land either side of a defining east-west road serving to separate the ducal (later royal) palace to the north from the cathedral and bishops' residence to the south. The discovery in 1975 of the residence of the counts of Anjou confirmed records of the construction by Hugues l'Abbé of a palace in the north-western corner of the *castrum* before AD 886, replacing an extramural predecessor (*ibid*: 51). These structural changes coincided with the translation of St. Martin's relics to the cathedral. Yet the scarcity of churches within the *castrum* in comparison to the *Saint-Martin* suburb (described below) suggests a low population density, implying that the area was serving as an aristocratic residence and/or place of refuge during this period. A further built-up area developed on the opposite riverbank, subsequently accorded the status of city or town by contemporary documents (Galinié 1994: 357).

From the ninth century Tours was subjected to a series of Scandinavian raids, for example:

The Northmen came up the Loire to plunder the city of Tours in Gaul and set fire to the church of St. Martin the Confessor among other buildings, meeting no resistance.

*(The Annals of Fulda, AD 853)*

On 8<sup>th</sup> November, Danish pirates from Nantes heading further inland brazenly attacked the town of Tours and burned it, along with the church of St-Martin, and other neighbouring places. But because the attack had been known about beforehand with complete certainty, the body of St. Martin had already been taken away to the monastery of Cormery and the treasures of the church to the *civitas* of Orléans.

*(The Annals of St-Bertin, AD 853)*

Such incursions failed to prevent the procession of Saint Martin's relics between the regions' abbeys or oblige evacuation of the *bourg*. Commercial life also appears to have continued effectively unhindered, with Charles the Bald granting the monks of Saint-Martin and the *bourg*'s merchants tax exemption in AD 878 on sales of wine and other goods (Galinié 1978: 46). Measures were, however, taken in AD 903 to protect the monastery via construction of a defensive wall circuit. The *castrum Sancti Martini* was completed in AD 918 (Galinié 1978: 46), by which date a *c.*10ha area was under direct royal jurisdiction (Galinié 1988: 60). Resultant intense occupation and economic activity throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries took the form of housing and shops fronting the basilica arranged around a square in which fairs were held (Galinié 1978: 48). The Saint-Martin district thrived as a commercial centre at the expense of the cathedral area to the east, Church control over the former encouraging the development of a double town (Farmer 1991: 17). By the tenth century the suburb possessed nine churches whilst the town had only two (Galinié 1988: 58).

Descriptions of open space between the city and Saint-Martin and its subsequent attendant *bourg* of Châteauneuf to the south point to the existence of a *suburbium* (Galinié 1994: 357). Tenth- and eleventh-century charters depict these suburbs as effectively rural areas of religious houses scattered amongst associated vineyards and other areas of cultivation (Galinié 1978: 44). From the ninth century measures

to promote more active use of these derelict urban landscapes included the systematic clearance of buildings abandoned in the fifth century at Saint-Pierre-le-Puellier and their replacement with domestic structures. The production of pilgrim badges for sale to visitors to the shrine of Saint-Martin was carried out on the site throughout the ninth and tenth centuries (*ibid*: 48).

Tenth- and eleventh-century Carolingian Tours had doubled in size from its early medieval nadir of c.12ha and emerged as the foremost town of a *pagus* (Galinié 1988: 57). By the medieval period Tours comprised two distinct settlement foci: firstly, the city, with a resident count or king, bishop and cathedral chapter, lay clerks and Jewish quarter; and, secondly, the concentration of civilian and monastic occupation around Châteauneuf (Galinié 1994: 357).

### **3.3: SUMMARY**

#### **The Three Case Studies**

Having detailed the developmental sequences of three late Gallo-Roman and early medieval urban centres, the implications of this evidence will now be reviewed in order to place these towns properly in the context of Gallic urban evolution. This will form the starting point for discussion in a more general, north-west European context in the final chapters.

Whereas the principal British urban case studies demonstrated major variations in terms of their origins, functions and developmental sequences, their Gallic counterparts (Arles, Bordeaux and Tours) reveal considerably less disparity of type, illustrating the narrower range of potential urban developmental trajectories at play in later Roman and early medieval Gaul. Although the three towns reveal themselves to be in some way typologically different from one another, variations between them are generally slight in comparison to other regions. The primary factors of change – secular and ecclesiastical authority, economic activity and military power – generally remained constants; distinctions may be viewed rather in terms of fluctuations or shifts in influence in operation at any one period. These are

the constants that guaranteed the continued existence of these centres throughout the period of study – albeit with shifts of emphasis and prominence over time. Adaptations and changes *are*, however, visible, in the form of continuities, shrinkages, expansions and the development of new foci, resulting in a range of town types. The principal case studies represent three such scenarios, briefly summarised here:

### **3.3.1: Arles – Administrative Priorities**

By virtue of its enduring economic and political importance and, by consequence, populous character, Arles may be classed as a town of mutually distinct but complementary twin occupational foci, Ausonius' 'double town'. Arles is an unusually early urban foundation, stemming from its strategic riverine position that afforded easy access to the Mediterranean. This advantageous location placed the city from the first at the forefront of regional and inter-regional trade and production and, subsequently, of political and religious life, guaranteeing rapid growth and substantial wealth.

Stemming in part from its economically strategic location, Arles was particularly important politically from the imperial period through into the Visigothic era, as demonstrated by its imperial residence. Despite indications of a third-century decline, Arles was, by the early fifth century, effectively the Roman capital of Gaul due to its dual status as administrative capital and imperial residence (*Gallula Roma Arelas*). This early importance was manifested in the urban fabric in terms of carefully planned and sustained development and expansion; powerful monumental public building schemes such as the 'northern baths' and circus appear to have been funded directly by the emperor.

On entering the early medieval period, political and, possibly, social changes served to further impact upon Arles' urban topography via the acquisition of public space for private residences. These developments may have stemmed from enduring economic and strategic roles and the resultant influxes of officials, attendant staff and civilians. Fifth-century Arles appears an enduring centre of authority and

leadership that continued to offer protection to its residents. Ausonius' description of a 'double town' of port and populous west bank further reinforces the perception of a prosperous and stable settlement.

Unquestionably, the fifth- to seventh-century adoption of the circus, the forum precinct and Trinquetaille cemetery for private housing constitutes fundamental changes in attitude to the use of (formerly public) urban space. However, the continued use of the circus despite the construction of parasitic housing against its exterior demonstrates a lack of functional disruption. Indeed, this occupation is known to have ceased with abandonment of the circus.

That Arles possessed one of Gaul's earliest Christian urban communities testifies to the rapid and early influence of the Church in the town's affairs, as does the mid-fifth century transferral of the cathedral from a corner of the defended area to a location close to the forum. This was evidently a city in which the ecclesiastical authorities had early and substantial involvement. Although far less dramatic than those changes visible in late Roman Tours, the development of an extramural cult centre around the tomb of Saint Genesius had a certain impact upon the city's topography, obliging the remodelling of the local road pattern.

### **3.3.2: Bordeaux – Economic Priorities**

Although characterised by contractions, expansions and shifts of emphasis, Bordeaux's developmental sequence remained firmly anchored to its Roman core. By virtue of its natural harbour at the confluence of two major rivers and position at the intersection of land routes, Bordeaux was primarily a market place for the trading of a wide variety of commodities and maintenance of the harbour must have been a constant (and expensive) priority. Indeed, construction of the late Roman *castrum* essentially stemmed from a requirement to safeguard and maximise exploitation of the artificial internal harbour and associated economic activity. That these occupations were being carried out in an area usually associated solely with nobility emphasises the pre-eminence of the town's role as a port. The over-riding perception of the late Roman *castrum* functioning as an enclosed craft production

and trade zone is further supported by clear attempts to make use of all intramural land, including marshland, for economic ends. Installation of the wall circuit also obliged the diversion of the Peugue; subsequently, ultimately futile attempts to save the harbour entailed reinforcement work along the riverbank (the flooding, ironically, caused by re-routing of the river). Although Bordeaux's post-Roman economy suffered as a consequence, being further weakened by Arabian raiding and a shifting of trade and commerce to other regions, the successful relocation of the port area to the Garonne riverbank testifies to the city's enduring economic significance.

The isolation of both the amphitheatre and, in particular, the forum, beyond the walls strongly suggests the functional redundancy by the later Roman period of communal facilities and perhaps, in the case of the latter, its lack of association with any form of central authority. Although Bordeaux had the status of provincial capital its role as secular administration centre is not readily apparent in terms of impact upon the urban fabric.

In terms of Bordeaux's role as a Christian power centre, the situation of the cathedral in an extramural necropolis until its fifth/sixth-century transferral suggests either a lack of perceived threat – supported by extensive extramural suburbs – or that the Church was not firmly established until a relatively late period. Certainly, there is no clear instance in Bordeaux of the Church having caused topographical shift as demonstrated for Arles except for possible alterations to the extramural street grid.

### **3.3.3: Tours – Religious Priorities**

Tours is a classic example of a bipolar settlement, a town wherein distinct twin foci gradually developed and, with time, the more recent eclipsing its older counterpart. This process resulted in a wholesale shift of the urban centre to the extramural focus of the abbey and martyrial basilica of Saint-Martin. Tours' location on the Loire and the popularity of the cult of St. Martin were crucial to these developments, as were, possibly, its religious and ducal (subsequently royal) functions.

The twin developmental strands of *castrum* (consisting of bishop and royal or ducal residence) and ecclesiastical suburb progressed in tandem but separately. Although the Châteauneuf suburb remained answerable to the royal house and its representatives in the *castrum*, the economic function of the former proved to be the epicentre of medieval development.

Political authority cannot have been totally superseded by episcopal control and power. Whilst the cult centre and associated ecclesiastical suburb functioned as a generator of considerable ecclesiastical wealth, the settlement was ultimately answerable to the king. This instance of direct royal control of trade and production would appear to be the closest Gallic analogy to the *wics* and emporia seen elsewhere in Europe during this period, albeit without the existence of a similarly purpose-built, specialist settlement. The economic vitality of this area and the resultant necessity of regulating access to and from its interior is underlined by its tenth-century wall circuit.

These events should, perhaps, be viewed less in terms of shifting balances of power, and more as constant realignments and shifting of lines of *definition* between secular and ecclesiastical groupings. Hence the ninth-century subdivision of space within the walled area between the duke and the bishop is suggestive of a mutually beneficial, co-operative reallocation of space – and even of the recognition on the part of the two ‘camps’ of their interdependence.

### **3.3.4: General Points**

The three case studies offer an impression of the range of urban developmental sequences operating in later Roman and early medieval Gaul, and of their impact upon urban topographical form and function. This brief survey highlights a number of key points:

The majority of towns were established primarily as regional nodal points in order to control and regulate regional political, economic and military activity; this is particularly significant in the case of the *civitas* capitals. An individual town’s

continued existence appears to have been governed by its leaders' ability to administer a region and to regulate and exploit trade and manufacturing activity within, and riverine and road links between the locality and other regions. Hence the location of centres such as Arles, Lyon and Marseille on major land routes, rivers and/or in close proximity to coasts.

Strategic military considerations perhaps figured less large in the development of the majority of towns, with a few exceptions such as Arles and Amiens, their histories characterised by enduring disputes by various groups vying for control.

The fact that secular and ecclesiastical individuals and institutions identified themselves with, and invested money and resources in towns throughout this period testifies to their belief in these as workable instruments of social control. Both Gallo-Roman, Frankish, Carolingian and Norse aristocracies and royalty and the Church were constant physical presences in the *castra*, furthering economic and political drive towards urban development.

Although the vast majority of towns underwent fluctuations in terms of the relative importance of individual roles or functions, the downgrading or cessation of one appears largely to have been compensated for by the acquisition or resurgence of another. Hence Lyon's downgrading as political centre in favour of an early medieval ecclesiastical role, and Marseille's ninth-century economic success despite its loss of function as a principal royal centre.

Fluctuating emphases saw varied physical impacts on the urban form and fabric. Often this involved the appearance of cathedrals and ducal/royal places within small defensive enclosures, the adaptation of redundant public structures and spaces to private use, or the colonisation of former residential extramural areas by monastic houses or by agricultural or artisanal/trading activity. The result was frequently a long-term sequence of fluctuations of activity leading either to a town of two or more functional foci, or even of a permanent occupational shift to a new location, as was the case at Tours.

Despite the resultant range of physical urban forms being manifested in late Roman

and early medieval Gaul, however, the range of possible developmental scenarios is far less diverse than is the case in Britain. Furthermore, extremely few towns experienced loss of urban status, testament to the tenacity of Gaul's urban tradition.

### **3.4: DISCUSSION**

#### **3.4.1: The Urban Developmental Sequence**

The first centuries BC and AD witnessed the foundation of planned Roman towns, in certain instances overlying considerably earlier proto-urban settlements, frequently stemming from a Roman desire to control and regulate trade along strategic land and riverine routes. Subsequently acquiring centralised administrative and political functions, the towns gained monumental public buildings and underwent substantial suburban expansion.

During the third century, heightened insecurity stemming from Germanic incursions prompted the removal of high-status individuals to reduced walled enclosures, generally resulting in the progressive abandonment of suburban areas and, in certain cases, the isolation of and loss of public monuments. The later Roman period witnessed the growth in decayed suburban areas of funerary basilicas and monasteries around martyrial tombs.

In those instances where the earliest cathedrals were located in the suburban areas, the fifth and sixth centuries witnessed the bishops relocating to the *castra*, which they frequently shared with ducal and/or royal figures; the continuing presence of a sizeable extramural religious community often produced a new urban focus with attendant economic functions.

Increasing involvement of local aristocratic families in the Gallic Church and identification of the bishops as local leadership figures guaranteed the growing role of the episcopacy in urban affairs. Consequently a town's episcopal status was crucial to its survival into the post-Roman period. Subsequent Carolingian and Norse rule reinforced these centralised religious and economic urban functions.

### **3.4.2: Urban Adaptation and Change: The Principal Influences**

Following discussion of the developmental trajectories of three representative examples of late Roman and early medieval Gallic towns, a number of key factors governing their form, function and continued existence are identifiable. As these developmental factors will be explored in greater depth in the closing chapter(s), attention here will be restricted to the definition of those forces driving urban development and change in Gaul alone.

- A network of 115 *civitas* capitals with attendant political, economic and military infrastructures was in place in Gaul from the early Gallo-Roman period and, in the case of the Mediterranean south, considerably earlier still. These central places were carefully positioned in order to exert political, military and economic domination over individual hinterlands. Subsequently the Christian Church would overlay its own authority over and, ultimately, challenge secular power structures via the urban episcopal seats. The direct involvement of the Frankish nobility in the Church and towns served to further strengthen aristocratic/urban ties.
- Regional variation *is* visible in terms of these developments. Those areas on the geographical and/or political peripheries such as the Alpes Maritimes witnessed a slower rate of town and, subsequently, bishopric formation than those at the forefront of events, namely the Mediterranean and Rhône valley regions. Therefore, whilst by the close of the fourth century the Lyonnaise provinces had a total of fifty bishops, the Rheims and Trier region had fewer than twelve (Pietri 1991: 34). Heavy reliance upon the initiatives of individual aristocratic bishops in this process further mitigated against the formation of a regular diocesan network (Harries 1992: 82). Similarly, the continuing reliance of towns upon their associated territories guaranteed that they would continue to be more numerous in the prosperous lower Rhône valley than in Burgundy (Loseby 1998: 244). Subsequently fluctuations in urban patterning are visible at both individual town and regional levels. Hence the late Roman decline of Metz in the face of the political marginality of northern Gaul (Halsall 1996: 242) and the shift north of economic activity at the expense of the southern towns of Bordeaux and Marseille (Knight 1999: 169).

- Nevertheless, despite such upheavals, Gallic towns are characterised by their enduring importance, testified by the regularity of disputes for their control. Events favoured maintenance of the status quo. Urban failures were extremely rare, the Frankish kings perpetuating the workable *civitas*-based network (Loseby 2000: 11). Consequently the presence of lay and/or ecclesiastical administrative functions was crucial to the continuing existence of a town. In those rare instances where a town effectively lost its urban character, as in the case of fifth- to sixth-century Metz, the continuing presence of centralised authority provided a functional thread of continuity through into its Merovingian revival (Halsall 1996: 252). Although other factors – suburban occupation, economic activity and military considerations – served to impact upon urban developmental trajectories, these were not constant factors and, as such, do not appear to have been vital to a town's continued existence.
- Urban status was, therefore, inextricably linked to the presence of secular and/or ecclesiastical authority, and was the key defining factor as to whether a settlement might be termed a *civitas* capital (Ward-Perkins 1996: 6). Hence the tiny Senes was, due to its episcopal presence, deemed a *civitas*, whereas the affluent and populous Dijon, lacking a bishop, was simply classed as a *castrum*:

It is a fortified place with very strong walls, built in the middle of a pleasant plain. ...On the south is the river Ouche, exceeding rich in fish; on the north another and smaller stream which enters at one gate, surrounding all the fortifications with its tranquil flow: before the gate it turns mill-wheels with a wondrous speed. Four gates face the four quarters of the world, and thirty-three towers guard the circuit of the walls, which are of squared stones to a height of twenty feet, and above of smaller stones, the total height being thirty feet with a thickness of fifteen. Why the place is not styled a city I cannot say.

(Gregory of Tours: *The History of the Franks* III: 19)

- Consequently an episcopal presence was fundamental to urban status; on the rare occasion that a bishop did move elsewhere, the title of *civitas* capital usually accompanied him (Loseby 1998: 244). Causes of such shifts included a need for greater episcopal security, as in the case of the decision of the late Roman bishop of Carpentras to relocate to the better-defended site of Venasque (Loseby 1992: 147). Internal politics, as with the transferral of bishopric from (Aps) Alba to Viviers or, simply, personal preference also appear to have played

a role. James takes this further, stating that a bishop's withdrawal would result in a town's actual *disappearance*, as in the case of Jublains and Aps (Alba), the latter failing on the transferral of its bishop to Viviers (1982: 49). In a few rare instances this process did indeed result in the disappearance of the original town, as with the shifts of *civitas* from St-Paulien to Le Puy, Aps (Alba) to Viviers and Javols to Mende. These instances of total urban failure were, however, *exceptionally rare*, and largely explicable by inherent weakness on the part of individual towns, as indicated by their peripheral locations and sluggish developmental sequences (Loseby 2000: 11). These were presumably also severely depopulated places: a sizeable congregation might otherwise have encouraged a continuing episcopal presence – although, as yet the archaeological record from seats such as Aps and Javols is insufficient to identify the rate of depopulation.

- Within this already exceptional body of *civitas* changes one must still differentiate between simple transferrals of *civitas* status to new locations within the same city territory (Aps (Alba) to Viviers) and even more rare instances of the removal of title to a separate *civitas* territory (Jublains to Castellane). To conclude, transferrals of *civitas* status were exceptionally unusual, an inherently conservative political system favouring extension of the network of bishoprics via subdivision of existing *civitates* in order to create new city territories. In those exceptional cases where the title of *civitas* was transferred to another centre, the original title-holder continued to exist with the lesser status of *castrum* or, as in the case of late Roman Jublains, of *vicus* or *oppidum*.
- Late classical and early medieval towns and urban populations in Gaul were thus overall characterised by an inherent stability and an ability to adapt their form and function to changing circumstances. Furthermore, notably in the south and Rhône Valley regions, the network of sizeable, populous towns was established from an early date, even prior to the Roman conquest. Nearly 1000 years of urbanism in these regions could not be readily disrupted. The continuing presence of both nobility and sizeable populations is indicative of the enduring concept of urban life – even if this increasingly involved turning towards the bishops to provide leadership.

- Despite the late appearance of Christianity in Gaul, notably in the north, and the absence of a comprehensive Church organisation prior to the Merovingian period, secular administrations were frequently accompanied in the urban context from the later Roman period by ecclesiastical power structures in the form of episcopal seats. The appearance of cathedrals and episcopal palaces within the *castra* is indicative of the burgeoning leadership role of the Church at local and regional levels. The increasing involvement by local aristocratic, senatorial families in the Church hierarchy from the mid-fifth century is indicative of the growing power of bishops as figures of both political and spiritual leadership to their urban communities. Hence the turning of citizens to bishops such as Eucherius and Patiens of Lyon, Perpetuus of Tours and Mamertus at Vienne for assistance in times of crisis or for financial aid in order to construct wall circuits or repair pre-existing defences. As ex-military men, certain bishops including Sidonius Apollinaris of Clermont and Vivianus of Saintes actively participated in the defence of their cities (Mathisen 1993: 100).
- The switch in funding from monumental public building schemes to ecclesiastical construction projects saw the progressive Christianisation of townscapes. As the natural successors to the public baths and amphitheatres as communal meeting places for worship and religious processions, the late fourth and fifth centuries witnessed an explosion in church- and cathedral-construction. Changing perceptions of and the necessity for public and private urban space would have further driven developments in building form and function.
- The bishops frequently exploited the Christianisation process in order to boost the image of individual towns at the expense of others in a process serving to exploit its Christian heritage for financial gain and urban pride. This could involve the canonisation of a past bishop or, where such a figure was lacking, the acquisition of saints' relics. In certain cases this approach was adopted in an attempt to compensate for a loss of secular status and income, as in the case of Symphorien and Autun (Harries 1992: 78). Saints' roles also included the function of urban *protector*, serving to further the urban role and making the town an even more logical place of residence. The acquisition of a distinct Christian urban image was further assisted by the attraction to it of new

monastic foundations.

- The resultant accretion of market activity to burgeoning extramural pilgrimage centres such as Tours brought the Church greater social and economic influence. Ecclesiastical impact upon topography was compounded by the urban character of Gallic Christianity, rural parishes and monastic houses developing subsequent to the imposition of the urban diocesan structure. Furthermore, whilst wall circuits afforded monastic houses both physical defence and seclusion, they also facilitated the controlled flow of goods and people to and from the ecclesiastical enclosure. Combined with the growth of attendant support services for visiting pilgrims, the ultimate result was development of walled Christianised suburbs, as evidenced at Arras, Narbonne and Tours.
- Whilst a significant feature of seventh- and eighth-century British and Scandinavian urban development, specialist proto-urban trade emporia are, with the exception of the northern *Quentovic* and St-Denis, noticeable by their absence in Gaul. Likely reasons include the retention of local and regional market functions by the majority of towns into the medieval period, notably in the south and along major riverine routes such as the Loire and Rhône. The maintenance and further enhancement of urban economies by Frankish, Merovingian and Scandinavian authorities rendered unnecessary significant reworking or replacement of a viable town-based economic, political and defensive framework.

### **3.4.3: Urban Adaptation and Change: Functional and Physical Effects**

After setting out and investigating the primary catalytic forces serving to power town development and change in late classical and early medieval Gaul, it is now necessary to examine the impact of these factors upon urban form and function. In terms of form we must now widen our investigation to include other towns in Gaul. To what extent can these comply with sequences noted above? In terms of form, we observe a range of scenarios, both chance and deliberate, impacting upon the urban fabric. These variously take the form of single or bipolar developmental foci in addition to a range of adaptations and changes regarding urban space and structures.

## Form

### Bipolarities

A number of Gallic towns witnessed the deliberate creation or else 'natural' evolution of physically and functionally distinct developmental foci. The result was any number of combinations of polarities, including ecclesiastical/secular, commercial/administrative and *castrum*/suburban ecclesiastical foci.

This image is contemporaneously described by Ausonius for **Arles** as *duplex Arelas* – implying a populous settlement consisting on the one hand of the central port and city area and, on the other, the west bank suburb of Trinquetaille across the Rhône. Subsequently, the writings of Gregory identify twin foci at **Tours**. In the case of **Autun**, the duality is ecclesiastical and lay; by the late medieval period the cathedral quarter of Saint-Nazaire comprised two densely-occupied zones inside the late Roman enclosure, defined to the north by a terrace wall adapted for defence in the mid-ninth century. Excavations since 1985 have identified a cloister associated with the documented reorganisation of the eighth-century canonical buildings undertaken by Bishop Jonas in AD 858. The development of the rest of the town is less well known, with a second zone of dense occupation (more commercial and artisan in character) recognised in the centre of the Gallo-Roman town (Deflou *et al.* 1994: 162). By now Autun comprised two distinct parts: the high town of the bishop, and the lower town of Marchaux, the two separated by the Roman defences which also enclosed certain monasteries (Rebourg 1993: 27).

At **Paris**, the Île de la Cité was defended from the early fourth-century by walls enclosing c.9ha and accommodating the episcopacy and lay administration (Duval *et al.* 1992: 106). Considerable quantities of Argonne pottery are indicative of strong fourth-century occupation. The *praetorium* or *palatium*, later the Merovingian royal palace, was located in the western part of this enclosure, its plan unknown. Located on the south-western side of the island, the fourth-century cathedral was superseded in the sixth-century by Saint-Étienne, sited further east (Velay 1992: 90). The hilltop forum in the open town on the east bank of the Seine was modified during the fourth century in order to function as a defensive refuge, confirmed by excavations undertaken in 1971 (Duval *et al.* 1992: 106).

Guyon suggests that early Christian texts point to a bipolarisation of the early medieval topography of **Marseille**, with a split between a higher forum, dominated by a temple, and a lower counterpart, the latter the location of the execution of an early Christian martyr (Guyon 1986a: 127). In a number of other towns the points of martyrdom and the burial places of Christian saints served as a magnet for both ecclesiastical and lay development. At **Narbonne**, development was particularly marked south of the River Aude in the walled *suburbium Sancti Pauli* area, attracted largely by the shrine constructed over the burial of Saint Paul and around which a cemetery developed from the fourth century (Esquieu 1994b: 318). Similarly, an extramural cemetery at **Angers** attracted numerous funerary basilicas, their alignment respecting the early Roman town plan alignment (Piétri 1987c: 73). **Aix-en-Provence** presents a more complex scenario wherein three distinct early medieval defended foci are inferred by later documentary evidence. These appear to have comprised (i) housing centred on the cathedral, the possible precursor to the *bourg Saint-Sauveur*, (ii) a fortress located to the south, positioned on a Roman gate and forming the core of the ducal town mentioned in thirteenth-century texts and, to the west, (iii) a 'ville', again referred to in later medieval documents (Guyon 1986c: 23).

Early medieval **Tours** presents an instance of topographical development whereby the growth of a particular area was such that it served to draw activity away from its counterpart(s) and so produce a new urban focus. Originating in the fifth century, this gradual process of topographical bipolarisation centred on (i) the *castrum*, containing the bishop's palace and count's residence and referred to by Gregory of Tours as *urbs Turonica*; and (ii) the abbey of Saint-Martin and associated residential and market activity. The latter formed the economic generator for the future early medieval town (Galinié 1978: 33). Land between these distinct urban districts remained effectively rural until as late as the eleventh century and their unification within the 1356 wall circuit (Piétri 1987b: 27).

This process of development of a dual urban focus and subsequent focal shift is directly paralleled at the major textile production centre of **Arras**, with a new, monastic focus serving to draw development away from the former Roman core and its resident ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The removal of the remains of

Saint Vaast across the Crinchon and development of a substantial royal-founded hilltop abbey – at its height covering over 4ha – and substantial attendant suburban development took place during the second half of the seventh century. Defended at the close of the ninth century in the face of Scandinavian raiding, the monastery became the focal point for the surrounding rural population and the focus of the medieval town (Jacques 1994: 58).

### Single Foci

Conversely, certain towns remained focussed on the original Roman urban core, seemingly due in part to functional continuity and to an absence of movement to a new focus on the part of the authority for commercial and/or ecclesiastical purposes. This need not imply, however, that these centres were any less dynamic than their multi-focal counterparts; rather, prevailing political and economic circumstances favoured the maintenance of the topographical status quo. Frequently, however, we witness here a general shrinkage of populated urban space.

Augustan **Clermont-Ferrand** was established on a volcanic hill, the town expanding rapidly during the Claudian and Trajanic-Hadrianic periods (Provost 1994: 124), reaching a maximum 90-100ha extent in the late first century AD. A third- or fourth-century wall circuit referred to by Sidonius Apollinarius and, in the sixth century, by Gregory of Tours, occupied c.2.5-3ha of the hill. Tradition places the earliest cathedral in the extramural *vicus*, but already in the mid-fifth it was transferred to an intramural site at the instigation of Bishop Namatius (Prevot 1989b: 32).

At **Bordeaux**, the unwalled early Gallo-Roman town developed rapidly from a first-century AD core of c.6ha to its late second-century maximum of between 150 and 170ha, extending along the left and, subsequently, right bank of the Garonne (Barraud & Gaidon 1992: 45). The c.32ha late third- or early fourth-century *castrum* was positioned primarily to enclose the Dèveze estuary river port, with the consequence that the forum, amphitheatre and the ‘Piliers de Tutelle’ (function unknown) were left outside the wall circuit (Barraud *et al.* 1996: 32). Attempts to

maximise use of intramural space for commercial activity resulted in the use of reclaimed land.

## Adaptation and Change of Urban Space and Structures

Whether resulting from perceived insecurity, increased/changing urban populations or needs thereof, profound changes are visible in terms of the use of urban space and the fabric of buildings therein from the later Roman period onwards. These include:

- *Wholesale, deliberate shifts of the occupational focus from one locality to another, as opposed to the previously discussed phenomenon of progressive drifts of occupation and/or activity.*

A clear late second- or early third-century demographic shift is discernible at **Lyon** from the Fourvière hill to newly reclaimed land on the right bank of the Saône, resulting in a reduction of the inhabited area of the former. Excavation points to an almost total desertion of the hill during the third century (Colardelle & Reynaud 1981: 86) due to a combination of economic and political crises, and local disputes (Desbat 1984: 37). The cathedral group was also established on the right bank of the Saône in the Fourvière district during the fourth century (Arlaud *et al.* 1994: 271).

This occupation of a new, virtually undeveloped site mirrors the location of Saint-Seurin in **Bordeaux**, as well as at **Metz** and **Strasbourg** (Arlaud & Burnouf 1992: 209). By the sixth century the majority of Lyon's population was concentrated on the right bank of the Saône; not until the fourteenth century were the lower town and Fourvière hill defences (re) built. The Carolingian *burgus* is documented from the ninth century, situated at the centre at the town's core around the Saint-Nizier church (Arlaud *et al.* 1994: 271). Following the Frankish conquest of AD 532-534, the town lost its political function in favour of a religious role, with coinage being minted on behalf of the Church before the end of the sixth century (Février *et al.* 1986: 22).

Occupation at **Riez** appears to have undergone a progressive shift away from the open Roman town situated on the plain at the confluence of the Auvestre and Colostre to the Saint-Maxime hill. Spanning the late sixth to eleventh centuries, this (re) occupation of a more secure location may represent a response to the invasions to which the region was subject during this period (Guyon 1986b: 39). Peripherally situated in the south-west in the Pyrenees, the relocation of **Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges** from its early Roman valley floor location to an adjoining hilltop in the late fourth- or early fifth century is unlikely to have stemmed primarily from defensive insecurity. Rather, the construction of walls with visually impressive projecting towers suggests that urban pride was as much a consideration as defence in their provision – and, perhaps, in the decision to relocate (Esmonde Cleary *et al.* 1998: 353).

- *The cannibalisation and/or conversion of Roman public buildings in order to create defensive enclosures or refuges.*

In **Paris**, certain former public areas and buildings underwent late Roman adaptive reuse, with public monuments on the undefended east bank showing signs of repair and modification, at a time when the city was assuming military, political and, especially, economic roles. Excavations in 1971 confirmed the fortification of the forum during this period (Duval *et al.* 1992: 106). At **Tours**, the positioning of the 9ha *castrum* on the north-eastern edge of the open city around AD 370-380 was probably determined by the presence of the amphitheatre, which was incorporated into the defended area (Wood 1983: 12). The same is true for **Périgeux**, where extensive use of salvaged masonry in order to produce a small hilltop enclosure is suggestive of a local initiative on the part of a reduced late Roman population for refuge and/or defensive purposes (Christie 1997: 493).

- *The utilisation and/or adaptation of former public structures or spaces in order to accommodate churches or episcopal groups.*

At **Metz**, the earliest cathedral complex may have been sited in the subterranean passages of the amphitheatre, abandoned during the third century and reused the following century. Paul the Deacon makes reference to the siting here of a church dedicated to Saint Peter (*sanctus Petrus in Amphitheatro*) (Wagner 1994: 287). Excavations conducted between 1976 and 1986 in **Autun** on the site of Saint-Pierre

L'Estrier placed the origins of the suburban church and monastery in the fourth-century adaptation of a first-century suburban villa (Rebourg 1993: 86) or pagan temple (Young 1988: 228).

- *Episcopal groupings display a tendency to be located, from the first, in intramural castral areas (Arles, Lyon, Metz, Strasbourg, Tours).*

Although subsequently removed to more central locations within the *castra*, the earliest cathedrals were, almost without exception, positioned along the inner faces or at the corners of wall circuits, as, for example at **Arles, Narbonne, Saintes, Toulouse, Vienne**. Although such peripheral sitings may indicate early Church power having been secondary to secular authority, the fact that construction of the *castra* coincided with that of the earliest cathedrals in such towns as Tours (Galinié 1988: 57) mitigates against this. Alternatively, a wish to cloister cathedrals and monasteries behind walls (whether *castra* or specifically ecclesiastical communities) may have arisen in part from a need to control and regulate trade with (in), and access to what were increasingly economically vital locales. By the early medieval period, however, certain cathedrals occupied central locations, occasionally on the site of redundant Roman buildings or communal areas.

At **Metz**, by AD 616 the cathedral was located at Saint-Étienne (Saint Peter) in the north-western part of the town flanking the rampart. Sited near the forum on the site of an abandoned baths building, this appears an instance of profound change in terms of attitudes towards the use of urban space (Halsall 1996: 250). Similarly, at **Rheims**, the early fifth-century structure attributed to Bishop Nicius was located south-east of the forum on the site of the Gallo-Roman baths (Berthelot 1994: 57), whilst at **Aix-en-Provence** the monumental fifth-century cathedral buildings were constructed on the forum and associated road (Guyon 1986c: 22). **Rouen's** first cathedral was constructed within the *castrum* on the right bank of the Seine in the first half of the fourth century. Extensive excavations from 1985 at the cathedral indicate that the first basilica was constructed on the site of a fourth-century house, the new building partially incorporating the earlier structure's baths suite. The excavators speculated that this denotes either the presence of baths for use by the bishop or clerks, or a series of ritual baths related to baptism (Le Maho 1992: 22).

- *The utilisation and/or adaptation of former public structures or spaces in order to accommodate housing.*

Parasitic occupation of public monuments and areas is attested at **Arles** at a number of locations from the late fourth century (see above, Section 3.2.1). These changes may be indicative of northern refugees looking to the *praetorian praefecture* of Gaul for protection or else of individuals seeking protection behind walls financed by Arles' economic prosperity; the latter would explain the desertion of extramural properties. Alternatively, the excavators of the suburban Esplanade quarter suggest that the causes of its fifth-century abandonment lay in internal politics and the besieging of the town in AD 411 by Flavius Constantius and again in AD 423 by Theodoric I (Gongès 1992: 133).

At **Angers**, a public baths suite was occupied in the third century by poor-quality housing (Piétri 1987c: 72), whilst excavations at **Vienne** in 1987 in the Rue de Burgogne revealed a fifth- and sixth-century adaptation of the forum to private residential use. The portico was subdivided into smaller walled units and a cesspit installed, implying also a breakdown in water services. A succession of occupational levels suggests continuing use of this area into the tenth century (*Archéologie Médiévale* 19, 279-280).

## **Function**

Alongside changes in physical fabric, shifting political, defensive and economic factors inevitably impacted upon the role(s) of individual towns at local, regional and national levels.

## **Changing Roles**

**Lyon**, following the Frankish conquest of AD 532-534, lost its political function in favour of a religious role. The city played host to a number of Church councils during the sixth century, and coinage was being minted in Lyon on behalf of the Church before the close of the century (Février *et al.* 1986: 22). Between the mid-

fourth and late sixth centuries the Roman trade and army supply centre of **Metz** suffered a severe decline, probably due to the political marginality of northern Gaul following the withdrawal of the imperial authorities from the region (Halsall 1996: 242). Halsall suggests that, between around AD 400 and AD 560, the term 'ecclesiastical and administrative village' would be a more appropriate epithet than 'town' (1992: 270). The city's seventh-century revival followed its acquisition of the status of Merovingian royal centre and the attendant growing power of the local aristocracy, changes characterised by increases in church and cemetery numbers (Halsall 1996: 255).

## Functional Persistence

### ▪ *Economic Roles:*

**Marseille** was established by Phoenician colonists around 600 BC. Positioned at the end of the Rhône corridor, its sheltered deep-water Mediterranean harbour guaranteed the city an early and significant trade role (Loseby 1992a: 165). Marseille passed into Visigothic (AD 476) and, subsequently, Frankish (AD 536) control, coinciding with renewed maritime trading activity. Ceramic evidence indicates strong trade links with Africa and the East, contemporary texts making particular mention of Provençal textile exports via Marseille (Baratier 1973: 53). In addition to this *entrepot* role, archaeological evidence suggests pottery and glass production (Loseby 1992a: 171). Although eighth- and ninth-century power shifts resulted in the city's loss of function as principal royal port, the city appears to have maintained its economic role into the early ninth century and the end of Frankish domination. Ultimately, Arab expansion in the Mediterranean from the later seventh century curtailed Marseille's prominence as an active port, culminating in its sack in AD 838 (Baratier 1973: 59).

Documentary sources list the involvement of **Narbonne** from an early date in a wide range of industrial and trading activities stemming from its strategic position on the River Aude and the crossing-point of roads to Toulouse and Spain. Sidonius Apollinaris makes reference to the region's involvement in fishing, wheat, vine, olive, salt and mineral production, whilst archaeological and epigraphic materials

point to the presence in the city of, amongst others, metalworkers, tanners and clothiers (Gayraud 1979: 109). The development of suburbs on the eastern and western fringes of the town from the ninth and tenth centuries (Esquieu 1994b: 318), coupled with the continued existence of the *suburbium Sancti Pauli* south of the Aude are indicative of Narbonne's continuing economic viability.

Major riverine and land route situations guaranteed **Arles** and **Bordeaux** significant and enduring market and production roles (see Sections 3.2.1. & 3.2.2), despite the increasing administrative significance of the former, major later Roman modifications to the harbour facilities of the latter and the progressive shift northwards of market and trade activity.

The trading *wic* of *Quentovic* is unique in this corpus of late Roman and early medieval towns in that (i) it was never a *civitas* capital (being too late in date), (ii) it is the sole settlement to have suffered total abandonment; and, furthermore, (iii) it appears to have been the only Gallic site operating purely as an *emporium*. Located archaeologically in the 1980s in the Canche Valley c.10km from the Atlantic coast, industrial activities carried out on the 35ha site between the seventh and eleventh centuries included bone-, antler-, glass-, textile- and metalworking. Numismatic and source evidence indicates it to have been the base of a *praefectus* and Frankish mint (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 16). It is possible that the *emporium* shifted location up the Canche Valley rather than simply dying out ((Hill *et al.* 1990: 55).

Centres of Christian pilgrimage also had the potential to serve as generators of urban development, with the growth of monasteries and attendant supporting infrastructures around martyrial shrines. In the case of **Tours** the cult that developed in association with Bishop Martin was of sufficient magnitude both to influence the town's physical development and sustain its economic life. Descriptions of open space between the city and the Saint-Martin funerary basilica indicate the existence of a *suburbium*, a feature typically associated with episcopal cities. The first documentary mention of a *bourg* associated with, and directly originating from, construction of the basilica of Saint Martin dates from the late ninth century. Referred to by Gregory as the *vicus christianorum*, by AD 918 this area is known as *castrum sancti Martini* or Chateauneuf.

▪ *Centres of Secular Authority:*

**Metz** was annexed by Clovis and, from the reign of Theodebert (AD 534-548), assumed the title of Austrasian capital, maintaining its importance into the Carolingian period. Although the royal or mayoral palace residence has yet to be located (Gauthier 1986b: 41), Metz is known to have been the principal urban centre of the Austrasian kings. The city's status as Merovingian capital and the attendant presence of the royal house as well as mayors of the palace ensured that the bishop's authority was, unusually, not pre-eminent (Vigneron 1986: 75).

Later Gallo-Roman **Paris** assumed military, political and, especially, economic roles. Julian and Valentinian stayed here periodically during the AD 350s and 360s; the late Roman *praetorium* or *palatium* is assumed to have become the well-documented Merovingian royal palace, located within the walled enclosure on the Île de la Cité. Paris assumed the status of royal capital under Clovis in the early sixth century, a function that it retained until the early seventh century. The (extramural) basilica of Sainte-Geneviève (d. AD 502) constructed by Clovis superseded Saint-Germain as the principal royal Merovingian burial place. This role in turn was taken by Saint-Vincent in the second half of the sixth century, serving instead as the venue for various Church councils (Duval *et al.* 1992: 116). Although by the eighth century Paris had lost its function as a royal seat, the fact that the *civitas* remained the seat of a count ensured that it maintained its influence and administrative function throughout the Frankish period (Velay 1992: 108).

Constantinian **Arles** emerged as a centre of imperial administration and residence, the imperial mint transferring there from Ostia in AD 313 (Février 1986a: 79) and the capital of the Praetorian Prefecture of the Gauls from Trier c.AD 395. In AD 402/8 Arles was the venue of the annual council of the seven provinces constituting the civil diocese and, in AD 408, it replaced Bordeaux as capital of the civil diocese of *Septem Provinciae* and Vienne as metropolitan capital of Viennensis. Consequently, by the early fifth century Arles was effectively the Roman capital of Gaul due to its dual status as administrative capital and imperial residence (*Gallula Roma Arelas*).

**Trier** acquired a major administrative function from an early date, the *legatus*

*Augusti pro praetore* transferring there from Rheims in the second century (Gauthier 1986a: 19). From AD 286/7 the city became the customary residence of the western emperors, whilst coinage was minted in the city throughout the fourth century under the aegis of the Gallic emperors. The *Notitia Dignitatum* also refers to the presence in the city of numerous arms and clothing workshops (*ibid*). The removal by Stilicho of the prefecture from Trier to Arles c.AD 395 coupled with several Germanic attacks on the city throughout the fifth century served to weaken the city (Geary 1988: 30). Following its secession to the Franks in AD 464, however, Trier acquired a royal palace, whilst the counts were installed in the *Kaiserthermen* (Gauthier 1986a: 21). A 'Roman' official, Count Argobast, was based in the city during the AD 470s (James 1982: 44), whilst a Frankish moneyer was operating in the city from the sixth century (Gauthier 1986a: 21). **Vienne** assumed the title of capital of the province of Viennensis in AD 314 and took an important role in imperial affairs. Constantine stayed there in AD 316, and Julian celebrated his eighth accession to the Consulate in the city in January AD 356 in addition to wintering there in AD 360 (Descombes *et al.* 1986: 23). Burgundians occupied the city during the fifth century and, in a tradition mentioned by Gregory of Tours, the town became the residence of the Burgundian kings (*ibid*: 25).

- *Military Roles:*

The Roman conquest of Brittany was the stimulus for the emergence of early Roman **Amiens** as an *entrepot* for the supply of troops stationed there and for the newly established colonies. Subsequently, under the Tetrachy and Constantinian dynasty the city seemingly played a key role in the defence of the north-western province, controlling both an important northern route and the Somme estuary. Grave goods indicate a heavily militarised and increasingly Germanic population; epigraphic evidence as well as references in the *Notitia Galliarum* and the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus and Sulpicius Severus reflects the garrison character of the later town (Bayard & Massy: 1982: 24). Its strategic military position ensured early Roman interest in **Arles**, the town acting as a transferral point for the shipment of military supplies to troops stationed on the Rhine frontier, central Gaul and Upper Provence (Klingshirn 1994: 43). Subsequent Visigothic, Ostrogothic, Frankish and Carolingian interest in the city testifies to its enduring strategic importance.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOCIETIES AND TOWNS BEYOND THE EMPIRE. CASE STUDY III: SCANDINAVIA AND IRELAND c.AD 700-1100

#### 4.1: CHAPTER AIMS

In previous chapters I have examined the decay or transition of towns in the two major Roman provinces of Britain and Gaul. In the case of the latter region, valuable urban survivals can be recognised, yet with remodelled townscapes involving considerable demonumentalisation, a process wherein the role of the Church figures large. The data show, therefore, a new type of town evolving in Gaul. For Britain, however, the break from Rome and the delayed urban revival saw a slightly different pattern of urbanism arising in the ninth century, namely the semi-defended mustering and taxation points of the *burhs*.

In the present chapter I extend discussion to Scandinavia and, later, to Ireland, in order to examine urban evolution *outside* the Roman Empire. The sequence is noticeably different in a number of respects to the two other case study areas, notably in terms of the belated nature of these developments, with documented towns only emerging in the late tenth century (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 88). Paradoxically, the Scandinavian peoples were clearly playing an active role, via trade and, subsequently, through colonisation, in the revival of economies from the eighth century. Ultimately this assisted in the re-stimulation of urban life in Gaul and, subsequently, in the re-establishment of towns in Britain and in the formation of Irish towns during the ninth and tenth centuries (Wallace 1992: 36).

Early medieval urban formation in both study regions was clearly being driven by four inter-linking factors: kingship, state formation processes, trade and the actions of the Christian Church. In the case of Scandinavia, emergent chieftains and royal houses sought to control and develop regional and inter-regional economic activity via the creation or re-location of specialist manufacturing, exchange and market centres. Although permanent, populous towns eventually emerged, the long-term

absence of the royal houses from the urban context, coupled with the slow and tardy rate of Christianisation of the region prevented the acquisition by the Church of significant power or influence within the Scandinavian region during this period (Sawyer 1987: 83).

A considerably different picture emerges in Ireland, namely of a region wherein state formation was in constant flux, with royal houses and dynasties vying for power and succession throughout the period (Ó Cróinín 1995: 240). Importation and distribution of goods via coastal trade or gateway sites by secular leaders is presumed from an early date, as is the early involvement of the Church in the control of markets. Consequently, a number of monasteries developed into the region's first semi-urban sites and, in turn, towns. A number of planned towns were subsequently established at the instigation of Hiberno-Norse kings, an amalgam of Scandinavian, English and native Irish influences (Ó Corraín 1972: 105). Bishops remained centred upon rural monasteries until the eleventh century (Sharpe 1984: 265). As previously, this chapter will utilise a series of key centres to examine the nature and evolution of urbanism in the regions under examination.

## **4.2: SOURCES OF EVIDENCE**

### **4.2.1: Scandinavia**

Aside from a few references in the works of Jordanes, Procopius, Gregory of Tours and Bede, Scandinavia lacks relevant written source materials between the fifth and seventh centuries. Even in the closing stages of the Iron Age and on entering the Viking period these materials are distinctly lacking (Näsman 1989: 162), with a few exceptions such as Rimbert's late ninth-century *Life of Ansgar*. The situation is somewhat better on reaching the medieval period. Texts include missionary saints' *Lives* as well as histories, notably Adam of Bremen's *History of the Bishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, dating from the AD 1070s, in addition to accounts by visiting merchants such as Ohthere, Wulfstan and the Arab merchant al-Tartushi, the latter writing of Hedeby c.AD 950 (Roesdahl 1982: 70). All offer valuable descriptions of trading settlements and towns, albeit with the proviso that these are accounts and

impressions offered by *outsiders*. In terms of archaeological evidence, Denmark and Sweden both have lengthy traditions of urban research, with sites such as Birka in Sweden and Hedeby in Denmark having been identified during the late nineteenth century and subsequently forming the foci of extensive programmes of excavation. The rapid development of urban excavation in Sweden has parallels with the British experience: late 1960s' town centre redevelopment schemes prompted legislative protection for archaeological deposits, culminating in a rapid drop in the number of excavations and a resultant shift of focus to suburban areas (Broberg & Hasselmo 1992a: 13). Excavations at Ribe, the Danevirke and Hedeby during the 1980s have served to demonstrate the complexity of Danish social and political organisation during the eighth to tenth centuries (Näsman 1989: 163).

#### **4.2.2: Ireland**

Ireland possesses one of Europe's largest bodies of early medieval source materials in the form of annals, genealogies, king-lists, law tracts, poems and others documents, due in large part to the introduction of Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century. The Annals of Ulster chronicle events down to the arrival of the Norse and beyond, whilst additional Irish annals provide sketchy indications of developments from the mid-ninth century.

Certain texts comment on the physical appearance of early Irish monasteries or monastic settlements. The *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*The Book of the Taking of Ireland*) describes twelfth-century Tara and Uisnech (Doherty 1985: 47), whilst Cogitosus' seventh-century *Life of Brigit* contains a description of the semi-urban monastery of Kildare (De Paor 1976: 29). Passages by Gerald of Wales, writing in the late twelfth century, and Bernard of Clairvaux offer further (albeit highly biased and unfavourable) first-hand accounts of Ireland's towns, monasteries and peoples.

Excavation has produced physical corroboration for Viking origins of several towns (Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, Cork and Dublin) (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 106). The prolonged programme of archaeological and historical investigation makes Dublin by far the best understood of these towns – ongoing since the early

1960s by the National Museum of Ireland– and aided by numerous publications.

Consequently, urban studies have dominated medieval Irish historical and archaeological research since the mid-1960s. The twin stimuli of the Wood Quay excavations and publication of medieval borough charters in 1964 provoked a re-examination of urban medieval Ireland (Bradley 1990: 39), although, as a consequence, rural settlement patterns remain poorly understood (Wallace 1992b: 35). According to Clarke, the closest parallels to the early development of Dublin from a pre-urban nucleus to town lie in the region of eastern Germany and Poland and, in particular, tenth-century Magdeburg. Consequently it belongs to the same sequence as those centres identified in Gaul, England and Germany (1990: 54).

This did, however, result in a situation whereby by the early 1990s historians were for the first time able to consider the Hiberno-Norse town as a concept, with many physical similarities in terms of situation, layout, building forms and defence (Thomas 1992, Wallace 1992b). A spin-off has been a re-evaluation of the small group of large early medieval monasteries via a combination of documentary and plan analysis, making this the most controversial of the various branches of Irish urban studies (Bradley 1990: 40). This has, to a certain extent, served to counter long-held notions of urbanism as a colonialist imposition upon Ireland, proposing that quasi-urban places were already in existence prior to the arrival of the Norse (Simms 1990: 39).

#### **4.2.3: Case Studies**

Various points must be made at the outset regarding the choice of case studies for discussion in this chapter. Firstly, the body of towns involved is clearly substantially smaller than is available for Britain and Gaul, due to a series of interconnected geographical, political and social factors serving to limit viable urban centres in the Scandinavian region. In recompense, however, this has the advantage of allowing for fuller examination of the individual case studies. Secondly, in terms of site categorisation, the distinction between what constitutes on the one hand a *wic* market site and, on the other, a town is considerably more

blurred, with many of the trading sites possessing and/or gathering urban criteria from an early date. As a result they have generated considerably more debate than their north-west European counterparts. Consequently it may be problematic to attempt to distinguish too rigidly between the two classes of settlement.

### **4.3: SCANDINAVIAN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

#### **4.3.1: State Formation and Kingship (Figure 49)**

The early Scandinavian kingdoms were constantly changing their boundaries, resulting in few national monarchies being established prior to the early tenth century at the earliest. Scandinavia's tendency towards separatism meant that, until as late as the eleventh century, political power in Norway and Sweden seemingly rested in the hands of regional rulers exerting kin-based authority over often-small areas. Retention of royal power could only be guaranteed through the use of force (Jones 1984: 66).

The first indications of Danish political centralisation and state formation appear to stem from the Roman Iron Age (the first to fourth centuries AD), with final unification under a single ruler from as early as the early ninth century under Godfred (Fell 1989: 196). Danish royal power was, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, sufficient to significantly increase the number of town foundations (Ulriksen 1994: 806).

The origins of Scandinavian kingship are extremely obscure, with references to royalty commencing with Tacitus' mention of a king of Sweden *c.*AD 100; Adam of Bremen, writing *c.*AD 1070, states that the Swedes had an ancient lineage (Jones 1984: 198). Frankish textual evidence strongly suggests the existence of numerous Danish and Svea (Swedish) kingships. Whilst a single Swedish king may well have been in place by the ninth century, references to events such as the Swedish attack on Birka suggest a rule open to dispute (Skovgaard-Petersen 1981a: 13). Decision-making required public consent in assemblies, and the ability of the Svear to depose

their kings suggests that continued occupancy of power was reliant upon public consent (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993: 89). Olaf Skötkonung (d. c.AD 1022), one of the earliest undisputed Swedish kings, was the first to gain dominance over both the Svear and Götar, as well as being seemingly the acknowledged possessor of the overlordship of eastern Norway (Fell 1989: 198).

Norwegian unification came considerably later than in Denmark, where royal power was heavily dependent upon provincial leaders, the farmer republics, jarls and free subjects (Jones 1984: 151). Attempts by petty chieftains and kings to extend their power over wider regions from the late ninth century caused social power to shift from a kinship- to land and class basis. Consequently royal power and income focussed on the acquisition of estates and land rights via warfare (Saunders 1995: 35). A significant royal dynasty of Swedish origin is known from the Oseberg and Gokstad ship burials to have been based around the Oslofjord, whilst certain other areas of Norway appear to have been under the rule of chieftains (Fell 1989: 197). Norway only gained a stable kingdom in the late tenth century (Skovgaard-Petersen 1987a: 14). By the eleventh century royal authority across the Scandinavian region had been consolidated at the expense of aristocratic power, the process being particularly marked in Sweden (Jones 1984: 152).

#### **4.3.2: Trade and Economy (Figures 47, 48 & 50)**

The Viking period witnessed a transition from an economy previously based upon reciprocal gift-exchange between kin, warriors and allies to a monetary system, the ultimate result being the establishment of controlled market and craft production centres. Whereas the gift economy was, in the pre-Viking period, provisioned solely by raiding activity, the emergence of an international market during the ninth century resulted in royal houses seeking to control and exploit regional and inter-regional trade in both essential and luxury commodities (Hedeager 1994). This development of local and foreign markets – the former indicating a new social stratification in farming communities – appear to have combined to produce a growing and coherent demand for Scandinavian furs, iron and agricultural products (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 49). The consequence was the creation of a new class

of specialist trade and production sites such as Hedeby, Birka and Helgö and, ultimately, towns (*ibid*: 50). In this process the role of local kings or chieftains was crucial, documentary evidence indicating their close involvement in site foundation and control, as evidenced by their carefully unified plans of streets, building plots and harbours. Royal officials were operating from these sites; the kings owned land there from as early as the ninth century; and they were the subject of frequent royal visits (Roesdahl 1998: 118). Guaranteed success of these market places and associated trade routes crucially required exclusive control, or a monopoly of violence in a region (Skovgaard-Petersen 1981a: 12). Consequently the local king or chieftain would, in exchange for dues and, perhaps, first refusal on trade goods, guarantee the personal safety of the merchant (Roesdahl 1998: 118).

Such markets were in place by/from the eighth century for the inter-regional exchange of various goods, whilst some, such as Paviken in Gotland, were probably highly specialised in terms of production, seasonally occupied and linked to local markets. Generally situated on inland rivers or lagoons, they were accessible by sea but offered a degree of protection from raiding; defensive measures were generally added in a subsequent phase of consolidation. The establishment of trading sites along major sea routes demonstrates an increasingly organised market for specialist imports. Dankirke received western European goods and, in the case of Lundeberg, from central Europe and the southern Baltic (Näsman 1991: 35). By the seventh century, a distinct hierarchy of coastal settlements is discernible in Denmark, ranging from the trading sites (Ribe and Hedeby), via regional markets (Sebbersund), down to the landing-places (Sønderø, near Roskilde and Lynæs) (Ulriksen 1994: 806). The majority of trading activity within the market sites appears to have been undertaken on a seasonal basis as part of a *félag*, or fellowship, by individuals otherwise involved in agriculture, fishing or hunting for the remainder of the year (Roesdahl 1998: 118).

Numismatic evidence indicates contact between Europe and Denmark from the eighth century; by the early ninth, several Scandinavian and Baltic long-distance trading centres were in place (Sawyer 1982: 73). The first royal Scandinavian coinages were struck in late ninth-century England; only from the late tenth was trade activity and royal authority sufficiently sophisticated to produce the first

*native*, national Scandinavian coinages, the first (*sceattas*) being minted at Hedeby intermittently during the eighth and ninth centuries. Discoveries of silver coinage in association with scales and weights indicate its use as bullion rather than currency before the eleventh century, supplies of which would be supplemented by Danegeld via raiding activity.

### **4.3.3: Religion**

The Old Norse pagan religion was a powerful unifying force for the many disparate Scandinavian groupings. The fact that most Germanic peoples converted at an early date must have heightened the Scandinavian sense of isolation from the Christian world whilst, at the same time, forming a linking common denominator (Jones 1984: 74). Increasing contacts with English and Germanic Christian teachers, missionaries plus traders and Christian slaves, must also have stimulated Church influence. The earliest attested mission to Scandinavia was Willibrod's visit to the Danish king Ongendus in AD 700, but concerted attempts at conversion did not get underway until the Frankish efforts of the AD 820s, resulting in the establishment of bishoprics at Birka and Hamburg.

By the mid-ninth century Christianity was officially tolerated in both Denmark and Sweden, with priests now permitted to baptise and preach. Missionary work was, however, initially limited to the market centres, the first churches established in Birka, Hedeby and Ribe around AD 850 in order to serve the needs of their Christian slaves and visiting merchants. Native conversion was, therefore, a very gradual process: Denmark underwent official Christianisation by the last third of the tenth century, with conversion of King Harald probably taking place in the AD 950s or 960s, and bishoprics established in Odense, Roskilde, Lund and Jutland (Sawyer 1982: 139).

Norway was converted in the first third of the eleventh century, whilst paganism survived in Sweden beyond the Viking period. According to Adam of Bremen, Archbishop Adalag established bishoprics at Schleswig, Ribe and Århus in AD 948 (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993: 107).

Our most blessed father...was the first to consecrate bishops for Denmark: Hored for Schleswig, Liafdag for Ribe, Reginbrund for Aarhus. To them he also commended churches across the sea in Fyn, Zealand, and Scania and in Sweden. This was done in the archbishop's twelfth year.

*(A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Two, iv (4))*

Conversion of the royal houses did not occur until the tenth and eleventh centuries, royal figures having realised the potential personal benefits of being included in the Christian European community, having seen the wealth, dignity and ceremonial of the Christian foreign courts. The Norwegian Olaf Tryggvason recognised that conversion would assist the upholding of his authority in the more troublesome areas of his kingdom (Jones 1984: 134). For its part, the Church actively encouraged the state formation process in Norway, since the transferral of large amounts of royal land to the Church encouraged the breakdown of kinship and served to provide the emergent feudal state with a material power base.

The canonisation of the king Olaf Haraldsson epitomised the unity of Church and State (Saunders 1995: 36). The ultimate result was the creation of Christian kingdoms, lay and ecclesiastical authority combining to create multifunctional urban centres (Hedeager 1994: 144). Indeed, in Sweden, a religious function appears a major factor governing whether or not a central place continued as a town into the medieval period. A number of places in the Mälaren Valley and Östergötland, some perhaps representing bishops' seats or rural deaneries, existed in parallel with towns such as Sigtuna. Marked by groupings of two or three churches, they subsequently developed into towns, mostly in the thirteenth century (Hasselmo 1992: 35).

## 4.4: THE TRADING SITES AND TOWNS

### 4.4.1: Ribe, Denmark (Figures 39 & 40)

Ribe is a prime example of a seasonally occupied Scandinavian Viking-period trading centre which developed into a wealthy medieval town, in the process shifting its central focus from one river bank to another.

#### Range and Quality of Data Sources

One of the best-understood early Danish trading sites, Ribe has been subject to considerable archaeological investigation since the early 1970s, largely due to its occupation of a greenfield site. Despite this, the Viking-period settlement was only archaeologically traced in the 1970s. Ribe is the first Danish town mentioned in the documentary record (and in which the Church figures large) (Skovgaard-Petersen 1981b: 26), firstly by Rimbert in his *Life of Ansgar* and subsequently by Adam of Bremen, writing in the AD 1070s (Roesdahl 1982: 76). Such documentation highlights Ribe's importance as a meeting place (Bencard 1972: 85).

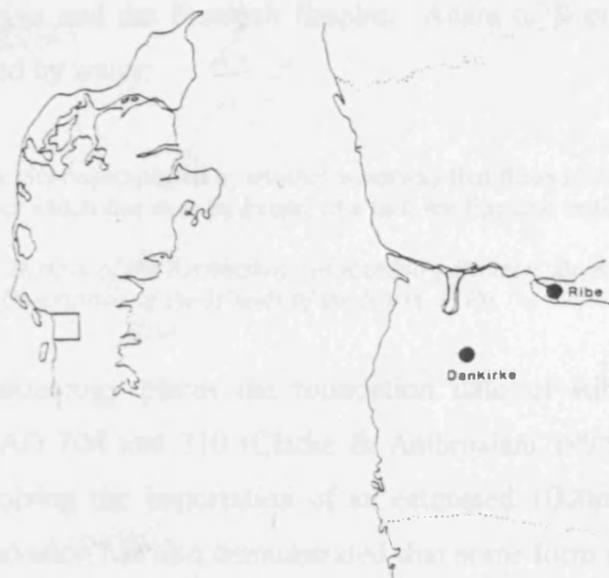


Figure 39: Location of Dankirke and Ribe  
(Source: Jensen 1991d: 74)

## **Dankirke (Figure 39)**

Excavation has revealed the probable predecessor to Ribe, Dankirke, lying 7km south-west of Ribe. Established in the pre-Roman Iron Age, the site developed during the Roman Iron Age (c.AD 1-400) from a typical rural settlement into an aristocratic centre, its wealth derived from trade in cattle and, perhaps, salt (Hansen 1991: 23). Artefactual evidence indicates unusually close trade contacts with Western Europe in the form of glass drinking vessels and sceattas, for which Dankirke formed a distribution point/trading post. As such the site is at odds with surrounding agricultural settlement and so may represent the seat of an important local family or chieftain of sufficient wealth to attract tradespeople and, consequently, luxury items (Bencard *et al.* 1990: 147). There is some dispute as to whether there is some occupational overlap with Ribe, which was created around AD 700, but sceatta finds at Dankirke suggest some continuing importance into the eighth century (Jensen 1991d: 88).

## **Ribe (Figures 40 & 41)**

The trading centre of Ribe lay on Jutland's west coast on the north bank of the River Ribe, close to a crossing point; the river enabled access to the coastal area and thence Frisia and the Frankish Empire. Adam of Bremen described Ribe as being surrounded by water:

...a city encompassed by another waterway that flows in from the ocean and over which one sails for Frisia, of a fact, for England or for our Saxony...

*(A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Four:  
A Description of the Islands of the North, i (1))*

Dendrochronology places the foundation date of Ribe and its market place to between AD 704 and 710 (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 53), the laying out of the latter involving the importation of an estimated 1000m<sup>3</sup> of subsoil (Jensen 1991c: 94). Excavation has also demonstrated that some form of occupation carried on into the medieval period, even following the twelfth-century occupational shift to the new medieval town on the opposite river bank.

The market site consisted of plots of land ranged along either side of a single street, the properties occupied by small, temporary, seasonal workshops set in 8m-wide plots of land defined by ditches aligned at right angles to the river. The entire site appears to have been laid out in a single action. Excavation has shown a wide range of high- production craft activities, including the manufacture of glass beads, combs and bronze jewellery as well as amber polishing (Jensen & Watt 1993: 203). Brooch manufacture appears to have been undertaken in the open by travelling or resident craftspeople and/or founders operating within particular localities (Madsen 1984: 97). Production is likely to have been aimed at a purely Scandinavian market, although many goods were imported into the site from the Rhineland, including lava quernstones from the Eiffel region, glass for bead making and Rhenish pottery. There are also signs of trade links with Lower Saxony, Norway and, possibly, England (Bencard *et al.* 1990: 145). Ribe may, in addition, have been the principal point for the importation and redistribution of Norwegian hones into Denmark from the ninth into the eleventh centuries (Myrvol 1991: 134).

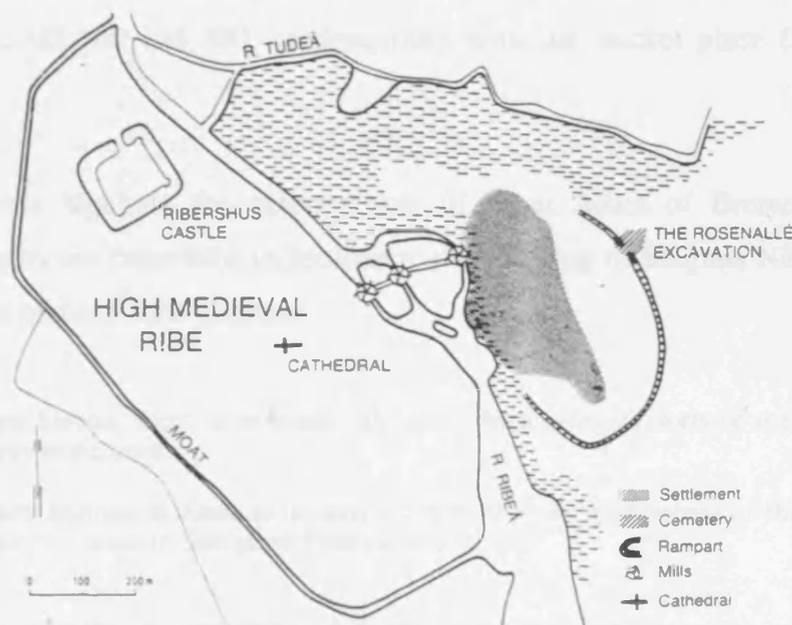


Figure 40: Plan of Ribe Showing Pre-Viking and Viking Areas of Occupation and Fortifications Excavated in 1989  
(Source: Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 54)

Commercial cloth production is postulated from the recovery of textile fragments and the high proportion (c.90%) of sheep jaws from mature individuals (Bencard *et*

al. 1990: 144) in addition to the comparatively large numbers of textile working implement finds in comparison to contemporary settlements (Bender Jørgensen 1991: 75). Thick manure deposits suggest a cattle-trading basis for the economy (Jensen 1986: 10). The site boundary was defined by the cutting of a ditch in the early ninth century, supplemented by a defensive moat and, presumably, rampart in the following century (Jensen & Watt 1993: 204). The subsequent growth of the settlement required the construction of a second defensive bank further to the east, running from the River Ribe to the River Tved (Jensen 1991d: 88), thereby increasing the enclosed area from around 10ha to 16ha.

Coins were minted on the site from the eleventh century. However, the evidence for a coin economy operating from the eighth century, as demonstrated by widespread coin finds from workshop floors is, to Bencard (1981: 79), an indication that this place was a 'genuine' town from its outset. Whilst much activity on the site must have been of a seasonal nature, possibly associated with fairs, excavation has shown an area of permanent settlement to the south-east. A graveyard was situated 250m to the north-east; partially excavated in 1989, it contained 25 burials and was in use between c.AD 700 and 800, contemporary with the market place (Jensen 1991d: 88).

Source texts highlight the gateway role of Ribe: Adam of Bremen describes a pilgrimage by sea from Ribe to Jerusalem; the wedding of Magnus Nielsen is said to have taken place in Ribe because

...the harbour there is crowded with ships which bring all sorts of marvellous wares to the town.

(Later addition to Adam of Bremen's *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, quoted in Skovgaard-Petersen 1981b: 25)

Ribe was clearly a carefully planned and organised trading settlement, its development requiring an individual of some considerable power and authority. Although it could conceivably have been the work of a local chieftain, the existence by this period of royal-instigated projects such as the Danevirke, the southern Danish defensive work, suggests the hand of a centralised royal power, able to regulate the region's trade and manufacturing activity. The instigation of

formalised market sites such as Ribe implies a new and significant interest in the region by centralised power (Jensen 1991d: 88). The possibility of the continued co-existence of Dankirke and Ribe suggests that this royal figure was operating in co-operation with a local chiefly figure based at Dankirke.

## **The Medieval Town**

Adam of Bremen records that Ansgar constructed a church here in AD 860 – the second church to be established in Denmark – and that there was a bishop at Ribe in AD 948. Only with excavations in 1989 (at Rosenalle) was the Viking-period occupational gap filled. This excavation demonstrated occupation of the sand spit between the earlier area to the north and the medieval town to the south from at least the eighth century, a later boundary ditch and rampart defining a 10ha-area (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 54). Ribe was the site of an operational mint during the eleventh century and the reign of Canute, the period when the See of Ribe controlled most of Jutland (Bencard 1972: 85). During the course of the twelfth century the focus of occupation shifted to the opposite (southern) riverbank at the point where the river ceased to be tidal. Following the move, the earlier centre developed into a suburb of the medieval town.

In terms of Ribe's ecclesiastical history, the biography of Horik II of Denmark describes how the king granted a piece of land in the town's market place for the construction of a church (*ibid*). The town is known to have been the seat of a bishop by AD 948, along with Hedeby forming one of Denmark's first bishoprics. Therefore it is clear that (i) the king owned land here and (ii) that he had an interest in church building. During this period prior to the Christian conversions construction would necessarily only go ahead if Christians were present to form their congregations and if there was ability to protect markets and trade routes from attack. Congregations would presumably consist of merchants and, perhaps, artisans or Scandinavians who had converted whilst trading abroad (Skovgaard-Petersen 1981b: 22).

In 1145 Bishop Helias established a community of canons and a school in the new

town. Tax records indicate that the king and Church were sharing trade profits during this period and that the king (Svend Grathe) was not prepared to give up his income from and influence over trade in the town (*ibid*: 25). During the high Middle Ages the town gained a powerful role in the Danish kingdom and formed a point of contact with Western Europe.

#### **4.4.2: Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig, Germany (Figures 41 & 42)**

Haithabu (German spelling) or Hedeby (Danish spelling) is an instance of a small settlement being re-organised or founded as a trading-station by an emergent royal house. Subsequently it expanded into Scandinavia's most significant site, operating (albeit briefly) in tandem with Schleswig before the latter took its place as a multi-functional medieval town.

#### **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

Wherever there is an arm of the sea (Germany) has very large cities. This region the Caesar Otto at one time subjected to tribute and divided into three bishoprics. One he established at Schleswig, which is also called Haddeby and is situated on the arm of the Barbarian Sea named by its inhabitants the Schlei, whence also the city derives its name. From this port ships usually proceed to Skavia or Sweden or to Samland, even to Greece. The second bishopric he founded at Ribe, a city encompassed by another waterway that flows in from the ocean and over which one sails for Frisia, of a fact, for England, or for Saxony.

(Adam of Bremen: *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Four: A Description of the Islands of the North*, i (1))

Hedeby features in a number of accounts by visiting merchants such as Othhere, Wulfstan and the Arab merchant al-Tartushi, writing of Hedeby c.AD 950, as well as churchmen, notably in the Life of Ansgar (Roesdahl 1982: 70):

Slesvig (i.e. Hedeby) is a large town at the other end of the world sea. Freshwater wells are to be found within the town. The people there, apart from a few Christians who have a church, worship Sirius...the town is not rich in goods and wealth.

(The Arab merchant al-Tartushi – quoted in Logan 1991: 21)

In archaeological terms, Hedeby is the best-understood town in the Scandinavian

region, with excavation campaigns undertaken in the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s following its identification in the 1890s. Despite this, by the early 1980s approximately only 5% of the total area within the rampart had been investigated (Clarke 1994a: 80). Associated cemeteries as well as the hillfort and harbour areas have also been excavated (Roesdahl 1982: 70).

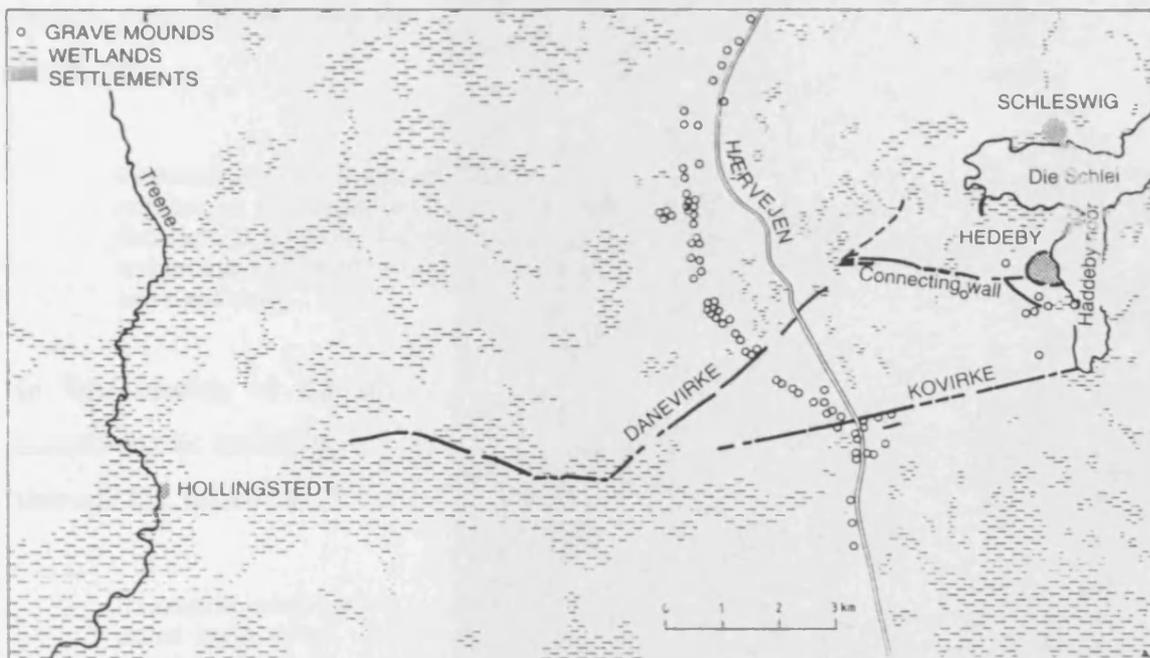


Figure 41: Hedeby and its Relationship with the Danevirke and Schleswig, Southern Jutland (Source: Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 57)

### **Haithabu/Hedeby (Figures 41 & 42)**

Hedeby was Scandinavia's most southerly town, located on the former border between the Danish and Germanic kingdoms, on the Jutland peninsula at the eastern end of the Danevirke defensive system; Hedeby lies on the south bank of the River Shlei at the end of the Slien fjord at Haddeby Nor. Continuously occupied from the mid-eighth century until the end of the Viking period, its situation guaranteed it a major role in long-distance trade. Substantial archaeological coverage has highlighted the sheer size and occupational density of Hedeby, with a population estimate in the region of 1500 individuals. Consequently it is larger than contemporary northern European trading sites (Clarke 1994a: 81). Excavation has

demonstrated that, in its earliest form, the settlement consisted of two or three minor eighth-century semi-rural nuclei prior to the formal laying out of the trading centre slightly to the north.

Dendrochronology has further indicated that initial construction of the Danevirke was underway as early as AD 737, negating the stipulation in the Royal Frankish Annals entry for AD 808 that it was the work of Godfred (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 56).

Godofrid...decided to fortify the border of his kingdom against Saxony with a rampart, so that a protective bulwark would stretch from the eastern bay, called Ostarsalt, as far as the western sea, along the entire north bank of the River Eider and broken by a single gate through which wagons and horsemen would be able to leave and enter.

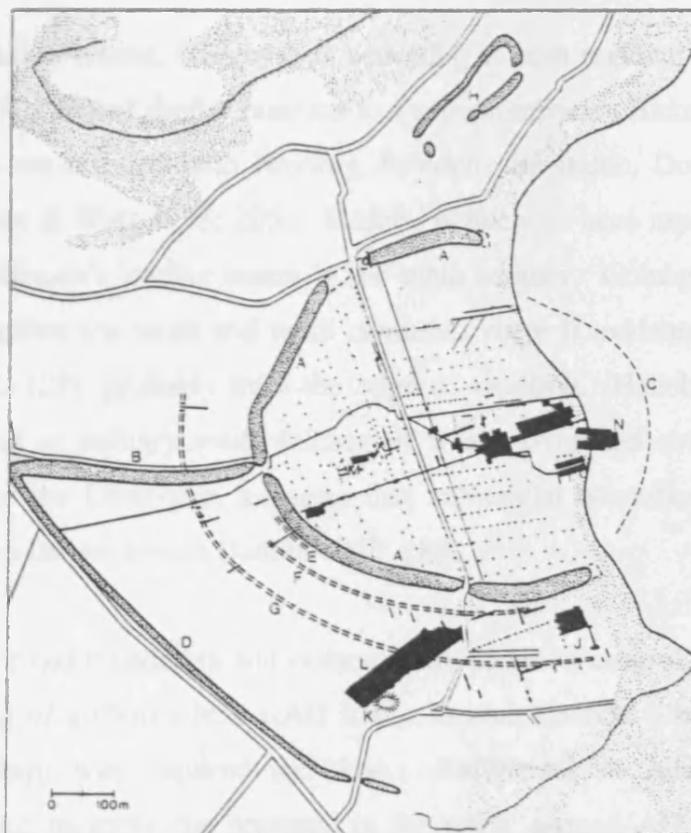
In the creation of the trading site Godfred destroyed the town of Reric and transferred its merchants to the new centre in an apparent attempt to channel trade through his, rather than Charlemagne's, kingdom:

...Godofrid before his return destroyed a trading place on the seashore, in Danish called Reric, which, because of the taxes it paid, was of great advantage to his kingdom. Transferring the merchants from Reric he weighed anchor and came with his whole army to the harbour of Schleswig.

Godfred's initially open settlement featured streets and small rectangular buildings sitting on fenced-off plots, these land divisions apparently having been maintained throughout the life of the settlement (Bencard *et al.* 1990: 14). An associated cemetery lay to the west. Excavations have centred on the harbour, where well-preserved quays lead out into the water in continuance of the land divisions (Jensen & Watt 1993: 205). The general impression is of an ordered settlement, the main axes of which were determined by its road system and canalised brook (Schietzel 1985: 151).

In the mid-tenth century a substantial earth rampart and external ditch enclosed a semi-circular area of c.24ha. Although the defended area was probably never entirely infilled (Roesdahl 1982: 74), the fact that certain plots appear to have remained unoccupied may indicate the existence of a free-trade area or storage space to accommodate temporary merchants' camps. Although an absence of

references in the written sources to craftspeople operating at Hedeby has elicited much discussion, excavation has produced limited evidence for zoned comb making and metalworking activity (Jansen 1985: 201).



- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| A: semicircular wall                        | H: Hochburg                    |
| B: connecting wall to Danevirke's main wall | J: excavated early settlement  |
| C: harbour fortification                    | K: boat-chamber burial mound   |
| D: fore wall                                | L, M: cemeteries               |
| E, F, G: ditches                            | N: harbour excavations 1979-80 |

Figure 42: Plan of Hedeby (Source: Roesdahl 1998: 121)

A pre-Viking hillfort (*Hochburg*) situated on a clay outcrop immediately north of the settlement functioned as a cemetery and, probably, a place of refuge (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 60). Excavation has revealed several associated grave fields, notably south-west of the settlement but also enclosed within the rampart and hillfort areas (*ibid*: 61). Various burials reveal both a certain Christian influence and distinct class differences in Hedeby's population. In terms of male/female

ratios, a random sample of 100 skeletons showed an inherent male bias in the population: 62% male/38% female (Randsborg 1980: 81). The discovery of burial mounds associated with rune stones to the south and west of the settlement may represent burials of figures belonging to the tenth-century regional royal house (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 61).

Primarily a trading station, Hedeby was operating at both regional and international levels, larger than but of similar function to the contemporary Birka. Long-distance trade linkages are attested with Norway, Sweden, the Baltic, Dorestad, Asia and England (Jensen & Watt 1993: 205). Hedeby is likely to have rapidly taken Ribe's place as Scandinavia's leading centre in the ninth century. Coinage was minted on the site throughout the ninth and tenth centuries; there is evidence for a tollhouse (Sawyer 1992: 128), probably from the reign of Godfred. Hedeby's siting on the Hærvej/Oksevej or military road, defence of which prompted construction of the initial phase of the Danevirke, suggests that substantial quantities of goods were passing through the settlement (Jansen 1985: 188).

Hedeby was a royal foundation and consequently under its control, as demonstrated by the building of a church here c.AD 850 – Denmark's first – by Bishop Ansgar (royal permission was required for this). References in Adam of Bremen's chronicle appear to imply the presence in the town, around AD 900, of a minor branch of the Swedish royal family, and two memorial stones from the Hedeby region refer to three 'Swedish' kings, Olaf, Gnupa and Sigtrygg (Jones 1984: 112). Hedeby had many centralised functions as well as close links with the local *thing* and foreign trading connections.

Schleswig replaced Hedeby in the eleventh century, with its royal residence and cathedral. Although dendrochronological dates appear not to allow an occupational overlap between the two sites (the latest attested date from Hedeby is AD 1020 and Schleswig's earliest is AD 1071) (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 63), documentary evidence suggests otherwise (see below). Furthermore, Hedeby is known to have been an exporter of Rhenish ware pottery to Schleswig throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, indicating some form of occupational overlap between the two centres. The decision to move was probably precipitated by a drop in land level: the

resultant increased risk of flooding, coupled with a need for a deeper-water anchorage for new, larger ships meant that Schleswig was a more practical option (Roesdahl 1982: 74). Hedeby was fired shortly before AD 1050 by Harald Hardrada, followed by a Slav attack in AD 1066.

## **Schleswig, Denmark**

Hedeby – Schleswig is an example of a pairing arrangement of towns, associated with the development of long-distance trade. This linking of towns together in a twin arrangement has been a trend in German urban archaeology – Lübeck/Old Lübeck being another such example. Excavation has served to confirm the connection between Hedeby and Schleswig first proposed by Walter Schlesinger in the early 1970s (Janssen 1988: 48).

By the mid-eleventh century sources deem Hedeby/Schleswig to be a single place of some importance (a Church synod was planned for AD 1063, though never held). Schietzel has suggested the existence of functionally distinct twin centres operating in tandem on either side of the Schlei, governed by the demands of Church, State and long-distance trade (1985: 180). Written sources describe it as a military base, port and trading post, with its first mention in the Imperial Annals in AD 804. Schleswig was certainly a significant commercial centre in the first half of the twelfth century as well as an episcopal centre and royal palace site (Fehring 1991: 192). Its close proximity to the frontier with Saxony also guaranteed the town a strategic importance (Sawyer 1992: 128).

Dendrochronological dates from excavations undertaken during the 1970s in the present town centre provided an earliest occupation date of AD 1071. Excavation indicates that a planned reorganisation of the plot boundaries and house alignments was undertaken during the twelfth century, an arrangement surviving to the present day (Janssen 1985: 224). Several quays and associated jetties were constructed and extended during the eleventh and twelfth centuries (*ibid*: 207). Schleswig was in decline by the mid-twelfth century, due to changes to trade routes and the rise of Lübeck, the latter assuming control of goods' transfer through the region (Clarke &

Ambrosiani 1995: 63). As a result the Danish royal palace, churches and harbour sites were abandoned, in addition to Schleswig's roads and land divisions undergoing considerable remodelling (Fehring 1991: 192).

#### **4.4.3: Helgö, Sweden (Figures 43, 44 & 46)**

Variously described as a port of trade, market and/or trade centre, Helgö is viewed as a small, non-urban island settlement. In an arrangement typical of the region's rural settlement pattern, a series of successive farm unit groupings occupied artificial terracing. Originating as a localised market centre, the settlement gradually acquired centralised regional and international trade and manufacture functions as well as a possible religious role. Despite this, and although seemingly supplying the royal estate within which it was probably situated, this undefended settlement appears never to have acquired urban characteristics.

Helgö's population remained low, and it never gained a mint, an aristocratic or royal presence or an administrative function. As such it represents one of a group of early, undefended sites of trading and manufacturing activity that also included Kaupang, Paviken (Lamm 1982: 3) and, in Denmark, Gudme and Dankirke (Section 4.4.1). It is, however, included here as it forms the precursor to Birka.

#### **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

*Literary Sources:* Helgö lacks the written source references of its successor, Birka. Adam of Bremen provides a brief description in AD 1070 of the island of the same name, but it is not definitely referred to again until a document of AD 1370 under its present name of Lillön (Holmqvist 1961: 23).

*Archaeological Data:* The site was the subject of excavation between 1954 and 1978 under the direction of Wilhelm Holmqvist, resulting in an ongoing series of publications by the Swedish *Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien* and making it one of the longest-running excavation projects in Swedish archaeology (Lamm 1988: 89-90). Work initially centred on Building Group Two, the so-called international trading centre and promptly yielded large quantities of

high-quality artefacts. A major interdisciplinary project was subsequently established by Holmqvist, investigation in the final years concentrating on finds and structural remains from the four other building groups and two of the associated cemeteries (*ibid*: 90).

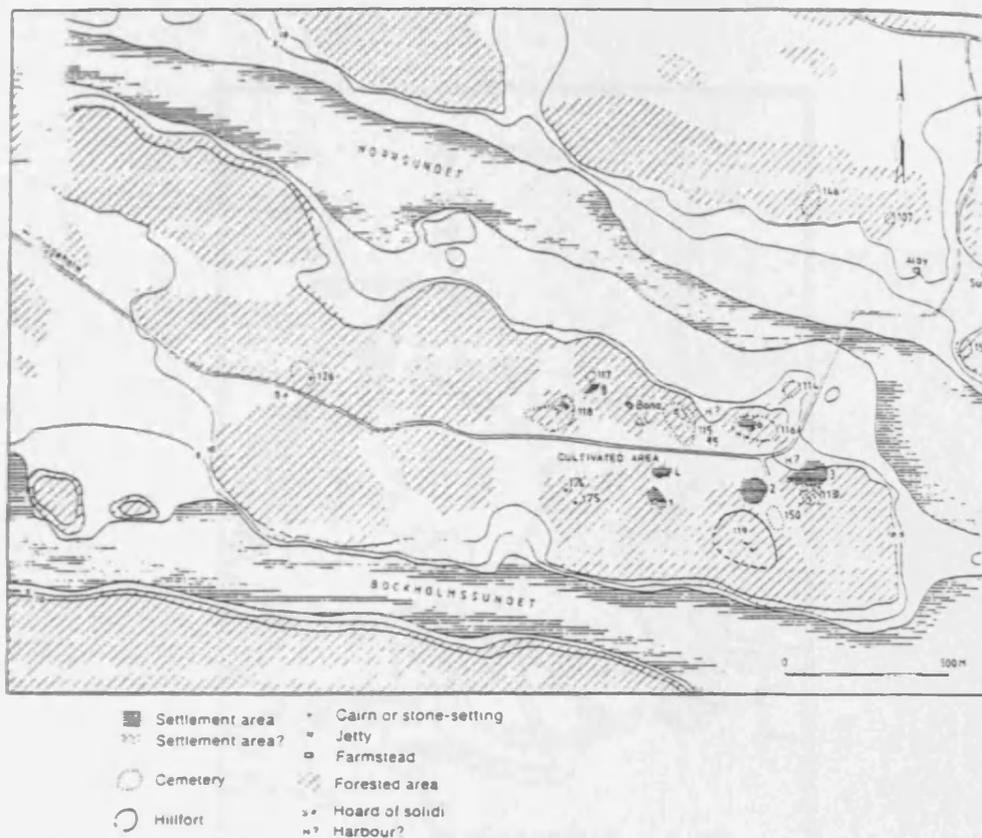


Figure 43: Plan of Helgö and the Island of Lillön  
(Source: Lamm 1982: 2)

## Helgö

Helgö is situated on the small island of Lillön in Lake Mälaren, around 30km from Stockholm in the county of Uppland. A silted-up channel, the Norrsund, separates the island from the mainland of Ekerö (Holmqvist 1961: 22).

The island Helgoland...lies hidden in a deep recess of the ocean in the mouth of the Elbe River...It is barely eight miles long by four miles wide, and its people use straw and the wreckage of ships for fuel...This island produces crops in the greatest abundance and is an exceedingly rich foster mother for birds and cattle. On it there is but one hill and not a single tree. It is hemmed in on all sides by very precipitous crags that prohibit access except in one place, where also the water is sweet. All sailors hold the place in awe, especially, however, pirates.

(Adam of Bremen: *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Four: A Description of the Islands of the North*, iii (3))

Helgö was strategically sited in order to maximise trading potential in central Svealand, possessing good connections to all parts of Lake Mälaren and being well-placed to control trade through river channels. Its location also facilitated control and domination of the trade route entering the Mälaren Valley from the east, presumably by the lords based on Lillön (Holmqvist 1961: 27).

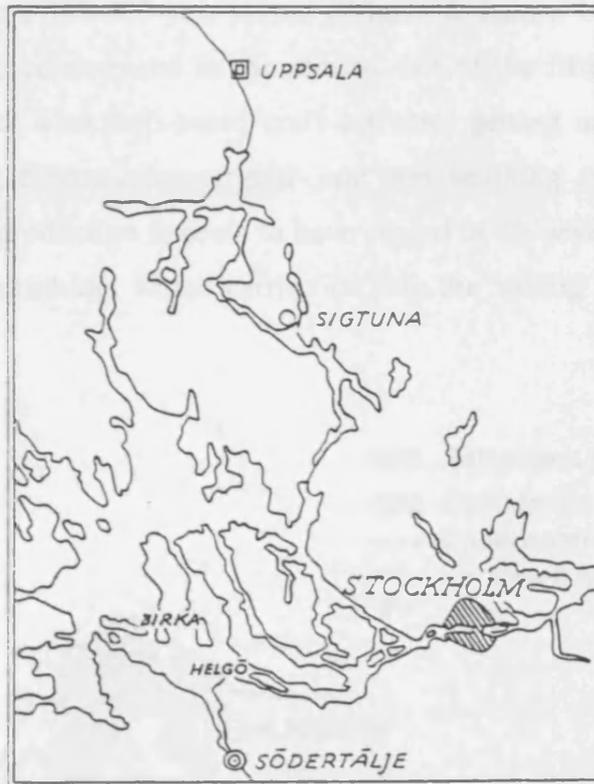


Figure 44: Location of Helgö in Relation to Birka  
(Source: Holmqvist 1961: 41)

Helgö's developmental sequence is extremely complex, consisting of small, shifting groups of elongated rectangular buildings, occupying a series of artificial terraces and associated with cemeteries. Each of the six groupings was in use for between 150 and 350 years, radiocarbon dating indicating a principal occupational phase between the sixth and ninth centuries (Kyhlgberg 1982: 19).

Helgö shows no indications of planning or defence in either of its two main occupational phases. The first, dating to the migration and early Vendel period, suggests a relatively large settlement, with, possibly, a market place at its centre. In

the subsequent, later Vendel and Viking phase, the economic and functional basis of the site assumed more of an agricultural aspect (Lamm 1982: 3).

Of the six identified building groups, Group Two is deemed to have been the centre for 'international' trade activity, and Group Three the focus for more localised manufacture and trade. Both are represented by a series of workshops (Lamm 1988: 89) operating over a 300-400-year period (Wigren & Lamm 1984: 84). Production in the latter group commenced in the second half of the fifth century, but with a range of intensive, workshop-based craft activities getting underway in the sixth century, including bronze-casting, gold- and iron smithing and bead manufacture (*ibid*). Industrial production appears to have ceased in the seventh century, with the exception of ironsmithing, which carried on into the Viking period (Lamm 1988: 93).

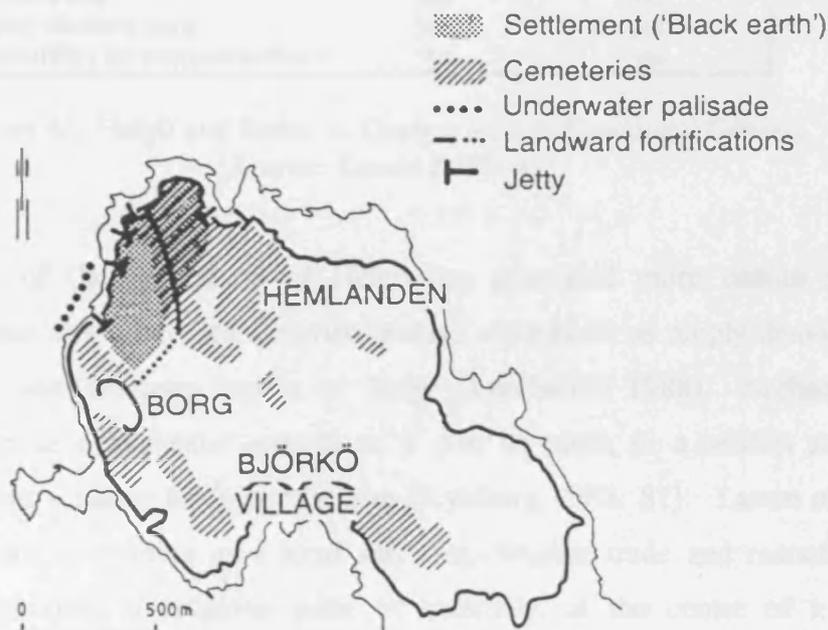


Figure 45: Plan of Birka and the Island of Björkö  
(Source: Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 73)

Helgö was markedly different to Birka in terms of the size of both its permanent population and attendant hinterland. Ambrosiani maintains that Helgö was supplying around 500 isolated farm households compared to Birka's 2000-3000 (Ambrosiani 1983: 103). Ola Kyhlberg's study of the various cemeteries and

excavated structural remains at Helgö suggested either a permanent population of between 17 and 25 individuals, perhaps representing only two farm/family units or, alternatively, temporary, seasonal occupation (Kyhlerberg 1982: 27). This ties in reasonably well with Ambrosiani's figure of 14 to 16 individuals over the settlement's 700-year lifespan (Ambrosiani 1983: 107) and would be in accord with a predominantly farm-based society (Kyhlerberg 1982: 27). Helgö's size of population during this period is, therefore, comparable with the earliest occupational phase of Hedeby (Lamm 1988: 96).

Function	Helgö	Birka
administrative centre	unknown	<i>praefectus</i> present
thing site	unknown	yes
religious centre	probably	probably
relatively large population	periodically	yes
Defences	no	yes
mint	no	no
various industries	yes	yes
local trade	yes	yes
long-distance trade	yes	yes
suitability for communications	yes	yes

Figure 46: Helgö and Birka: A Comparison of Functional Criteria  
(Source: Lamm 1982: 4)

Interpretation of the function(s) of Helgö has generated more debate amongst researchers than any other Scandinavian trading settlement, as amply demonstrated by the publication *Thirteen Papers on Helgö* (Lundström 1988). Archaeologists variously propose a nucleated settlement, a port of trade, or a market and trade centre linked to a major landowner's farm (Kyhlerberg 1988: 81). Lamm maintains that Helgö was functioning as a local and long-distance trade and manufacturing centre and, possibly, a religious point of assembly, at the centre of a heavily populated hinterland (Figure 46). As such it may be deemed to be a central place (Lamm 1982: 5). The discovery of gold-foil figurines suggests that, like Gudme in Denmark, Helgö was a pagan cult centre (Clarke 1994a: 32). A number of finds, including an Irish crozier head, Coptic ladle, bell shrine, Anglo-Irish mounts and probable blue glass chalice, all suggest an early Christian presence (Lamm 1988: 94); the name Helgö itself means Holy Island (Clarke 1994a: 32). The sixth- or seventh-century Indian bronze Buddha statuette associated with the latest

occupational phase exemplifies the long-distance character of the settlement's trade connections by this date (Clarke 1994a: 33).

Kyhlberg (1982: 27) suggests that the settlement was heavily reliant upon fishing – as indicated by the discovery of jetties and the lack of cultivable land – as well as seasonal products and, to a lesser extent, on goods exchange. There is, as yet, no evidence of Helgö having functioned as either administrative or secular and/or religious power centre (Lamm 1988: 4). On the basis of the (slightly later) case of Birka, Holmqvist believes Helgö to have been under direct royal control – namely the king of the Svear – from as early as the later Iron Age (i.e. c.AD 400-800). It is also his contention that its primary *raison d'être* was to serve the king and his followers (1961: 30). Although the two sites appear to have shared the same functions, based on trade and manufacture, Helgö reflects existing (i.e. rural) settlement form rather better than do Birka and the *portus/vicus/wic* trading settlements.

Indications of social stratification in its cemeteries, the character of goods being manufactured in its workshops and the existence of a farm associated with the Folkunga dynasty a few kilometres along the Mälaren Valley all suggest that Helgö was included within a royal estate (Ambrosiani 1983: 108). The royal/aristocratic manor/farm of Hundhamra lies 5km to the east, the territory of which appears to have included much of the northern and southern shores of Helgö (Ambrosiani 1987: 247). Hundhamra was in the hands of the Folkinga dynasty by the thirteenth century (Ambrosiani 1983: 107).

Kyhlberg's examination of spatial patterning in Building Group Three demonstrated that no more than two centrally placed farms or units were occupied at any one time. This draws her to conclude that the society of Helgö was based not on town formation, central place or royal power but rather on the individual owner, possibly in association with the use of slaves (Kyhlberg 1988: 29). The suggestion was also made that the entire Helgö complex represented the demesne of a centrally governed farm lying to the west (*ibid*: 87).

Perhaps most importantly, the indications are that, unlike Birka, Helgö was not

originally intended as a long distance trading site – although it was in receipt of long-distance prestige commodities from the seventh century – but, rather, as a local market (Lamm 1982: 5). Subsequently, however, it attracted a number of central-place roles, which brought it into line with the purpose-built trade centres such as Birka and Hedeby. Before c.AD 800 Birka had replaced Helgö and taken on its specialised functions (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 71).

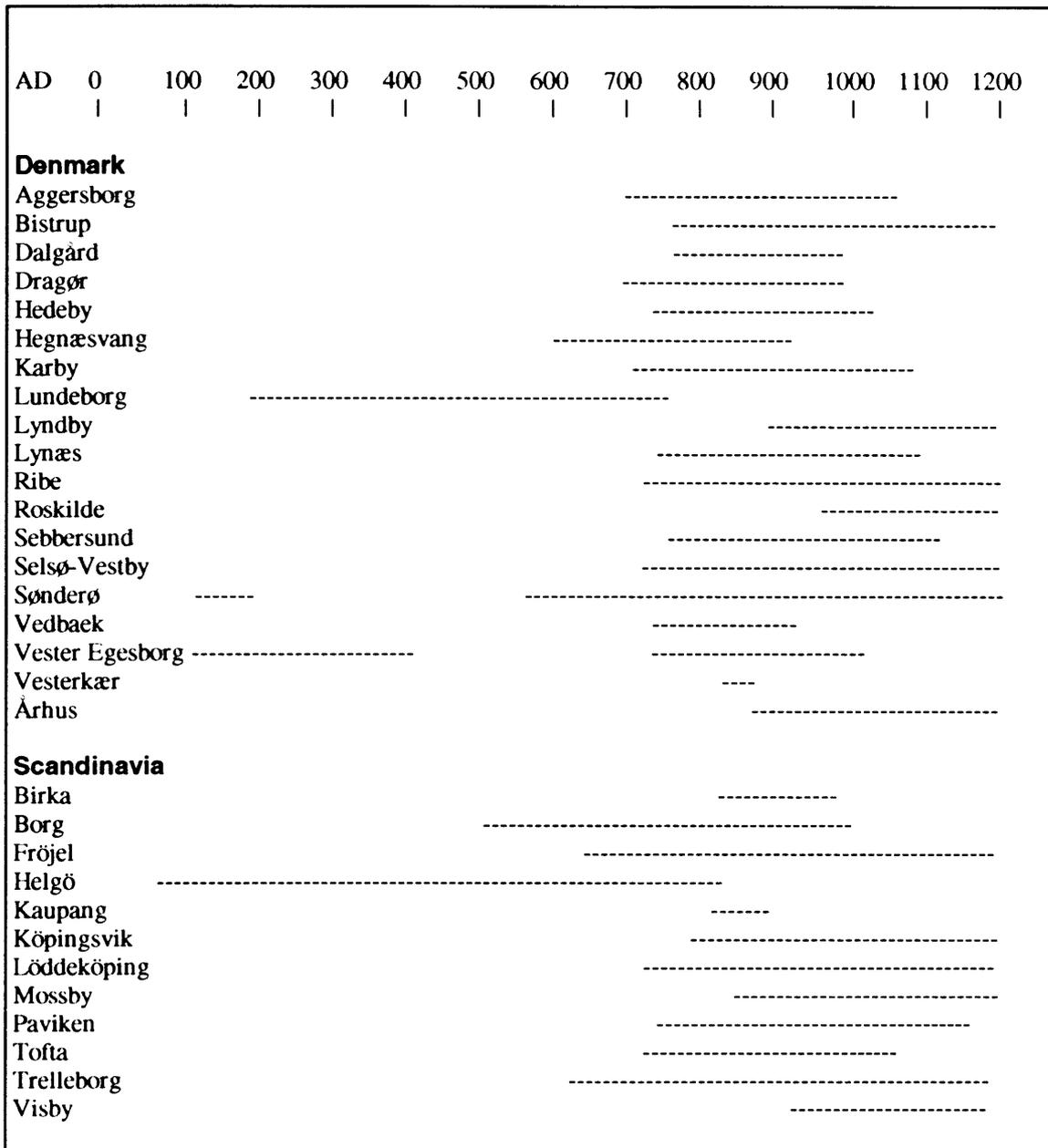


Figure 47: Scandinavian Trading- and Landing-Places: Main Phases of Activity (Source: Ulriksen 1994: 800)

Helgö's end seemingly lies in its inability to cope with a rapidly increasing demand for trade at the onset of the Viking period. The port was small, and the channel to the north – subsequently becoming silted up – offered little scope for accommodating deeper-draught vessels. Hence the establishment of its successor, Birka, at the point at which Lake Mälaren widens, probably at the instigation of the lords of Helgö (Holmqvist 1961: 38).

#### **4.4.4: Birka, Sweden (Figures 44 & 45)**

Situated on the defended island of Björkö, Birka was founded and controlled by Swedish royalty as a port and central place and with a reasonably large, permanent and socially stratified population. It was also a local exchange and manufacturing site. Although eventually replaced by Sigtuna, occupation continued on the site beyond the tenth century.

#### **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

*Literary Sources:* Reasonably extensive missionaries' descriptions of the town exist, including the Life of St. Ansgar (the *Vita Anskarii*), dating from the AD 870s, and Adam of Bremen's *History of the Bishops of Hamburg-Bremen* dating from the AD 1070s. Rimbert refers to Birka as *portum regni ipsorum qui Birca dicitur* (quoted in Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 71).

*Archaeological Data:* Although first excavated in 1680 by the Swedish antiquarian Johan Hadorph (Ambrosiani 1992: 14), the most significant investigations were undertaken between 1871 and 1890 by Hjalmar Stolpe (*ibid:* 71), eventually resulting in a series of publications from the 1930s, concentrating on the cemeteries' gravegoods. Excavations in the late 1960s saw a re-evaluation of the island's topography; subsequent work has been of a minor nature, concentrating on the cemeteries and rampart (*ibid:* 15), although in the early 1990s new details of structural remains emerged due to exceptional conditions of preservation (Clarke 1994b: 86). A new research programme directed at investigation of the 'dark earth' commenced in 1990 (D. O'Sullivan, pers. comm.).

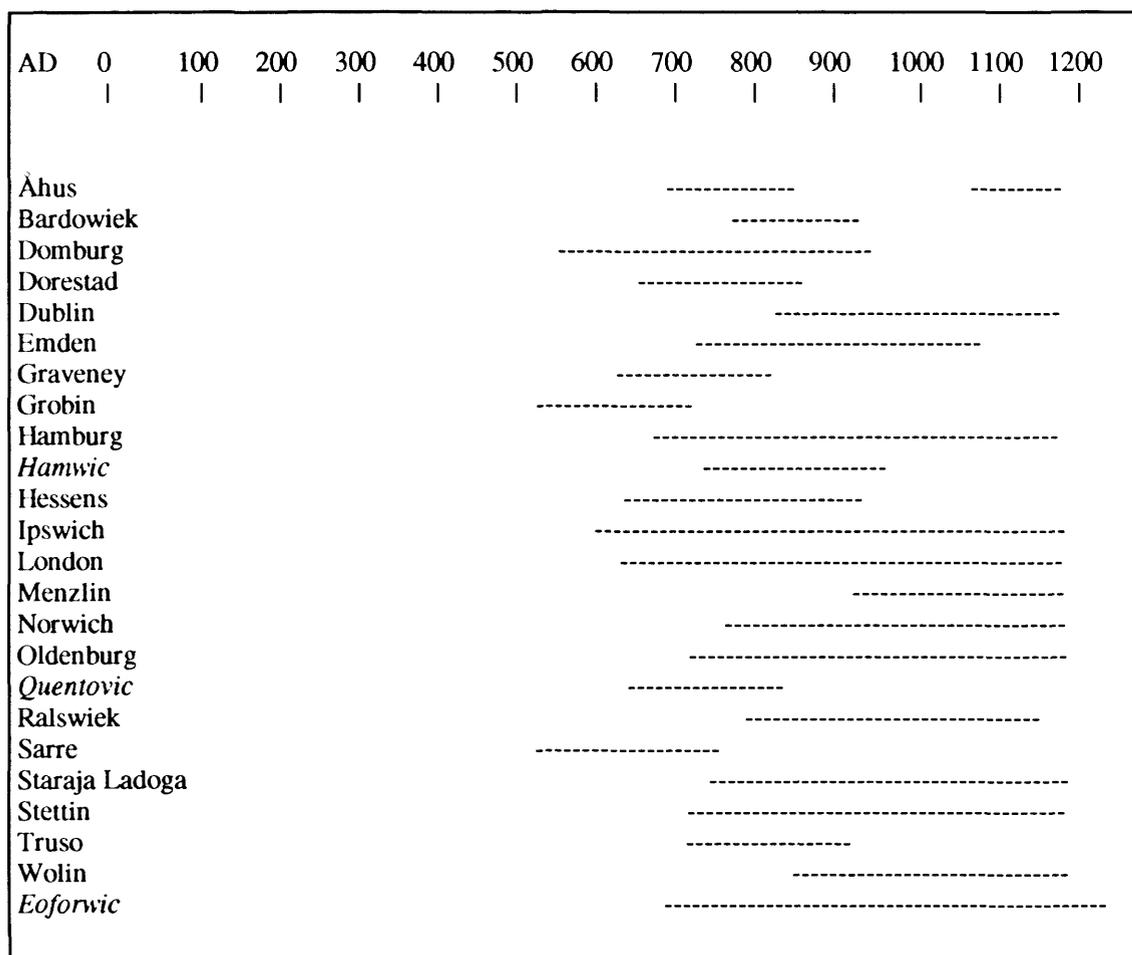


Figure 48: Northern European Trading- and Landing-Places:  
Main Phases of Activity (Source: *Ulriksen 1994: 800*)

Research has highlighted Birka's close manufacturing and supply linkages with the surrounding region, the Mälaren Valley, which possesses one of Europe's best-preserved (c.25000) bodies of archaeological sites in the form of Viking-age cemeteries and associated twelfth- to fourteenth-century farms/villages (Ambrosiani 1981: 20).

### **Birka**

Sweden's largest putative town was situated on the island of Björkö in Lake Mälaren, 30km west of modern Stockholm on the then major communication route between the kingdom of Uppland at Uppsala and the sea, close to Helgö:

Björkö is a town of the Goths situated in the middle of Sweden not far from the temple called Uppsala...At that place a bight of the sea which is called the Baltic or Barbarian Sea by extending northwards forms a desirable, but to the unwary and

those unacquainted with places of this kind a very dangerous, port for the barbarous tribes that lie spread about this sea. For the people of Björkö, very often assailed by the inroads of pirates, who are numerous there, have set about deceiving by cunning artifices the enemies whom they could not resist by force of arms. They have blocked that bight of the restless sea for a hundred or more stadia by masses of hidden rocks, making its passage as perilous for themselves as for the pirates. In this haven, the most secure of the maritime regions of Sweden, all the ships of the Slavs and Sembi and the other Scythian people, are wont to meet at stated times for the diverse necessities of trade.

(Adam of Bremen: *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Four: A Description of the Islands of the North*, lx (62))

Walls enclosed an area of *c.*7ha containing 'Black Earth' – a *c.*2m accumulation of occupation deposits, whose spread beyond the defences suggests a certain shrinkage or movement of the settlement. The site was dominated by a hillfort, possibly garrisoned and/or of refuge function (a *borg*); the *Vita Anskarii* refers to a fortification in which the town's inhabitants could seek shelter, as in the case of the attack by King Anund (Ambrosiani 1992: 17). Birka was subsequently fortified during the tenth century with the construction of a semicircular rampart on the landward side; the harbour appears to have been defended by a series of wooden piles sunk into the lakebed (*ibid*: 18).

A number of large cemeteries ring the settlement, the largest, the *Hemlanden*, comprising around 1600 burial mounds (Ambrosiani 1992: 18). These graves, the earliest dating to around AD 800, have elicited estimates of what Gräslund (1980: 86) takes to have been a socially stratified permanent population in the region of 500/600-1000. Variations in burial customs from cemetery to cemetery suggest that specific groups were buried in particular cemeteries (Ambrosiani 1992: 20), which would accord with source evidence for, according to Rimbert, two distinct groups peopled the site: *negociatores* (merchants) and *populi* (permanent residents) (Foote & Wilson 1970: 208). Grave goods indicate British, Carolingian, Caliphate, Russian, Aapp and Scandinavian contacts. Source references to a number of churches in or near the settlement indicate a Christian element in the population; Gräslund suggested a focus for Christian burial to the north of the town (Gräslund 1980: 83).

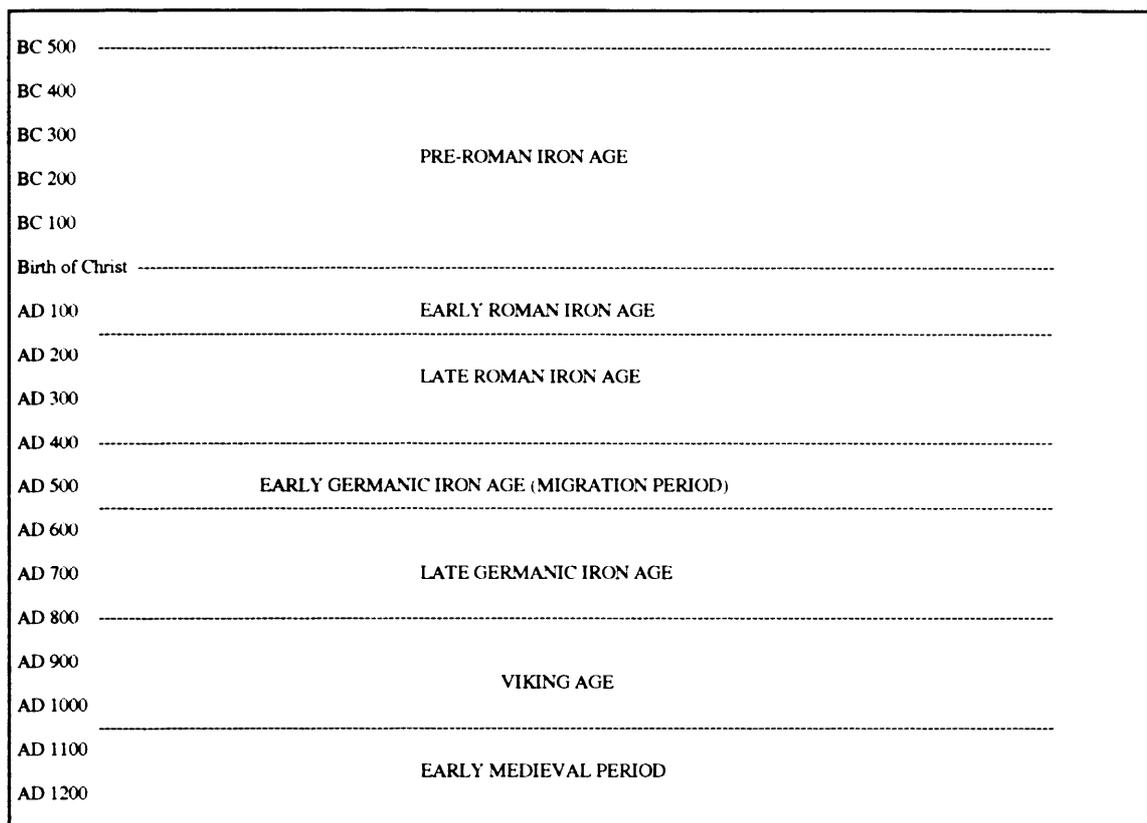


Figure 49: The Chronological Periods of Iron Age, Viking Age and Early Middle Ages in Denmark (*Adapted from Ulriksen 1994: 798*)

Ringstedt has suggested that the construction of chamber-graves during the ninth and tenth centuries in or close to the ramparts was intended to boost the status of the leading class in a period of state formation and urbanisation (Ringstedt 1997: 127). Gräslund argues that this comprised the merchants (1980: 86); Ambrosiani, however, prefers to explain variations in funerary ritual at Birka in terms of religious and ethnic, not social differences (1988b: 64).

Estimates of Birka's foundation date vary between the later seventh century and AD 800, but finds from the 'Black Earth' as well as from excavated graves point to earlier occupation (Hyenstrand 1992: 48). It appears to have ceased as a trading centre around AD 950 before its final abandonment c.AD 975, the settlement being replaced by the nearby royal site of Sigtuna. According to Adam of Bremen, by c.AD 1070 all visible traces of the settlement had gone, although finds from the 'Black Earth' suggest some continued usage (*ibid*: 48). Birka was primarily a port, being situated on an artificial Viking-age harbour (Ambrosiani 1992: 17).

Scandinavian Trading Centres/Towns c.AD 300-1050:  
Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria

Status/Physical Criteria (Archaeological and Documentary Evidence)	Birka		Dankirke		Hedeby		Helgö		Ribe		Schleswig	
	Arch.	Docu.	Arch.	Docu.	Arch.	Docu.	Arch.	Docu.	Arch.	Docu.	Arch.	Docu.
Administrative centre		✓		?		✓		?		✓		✓
-thing site		✓				✓		?		?		
Bishopric										✓		✓
Christian centre		✓						✓		✓		✓
Pagan centre								✓				
Church(es)		D, E								D, E		
Cathedral										?	F	F
Cemeteries	D, E					D, E	A - D			C - E		F
Secular elite presence		?		A - C ?		✓	C-D ?					F
Permanent royal presence						D/E						F
Large, permanent population		✓				✓		OCC.		OCC.		F
Housing					D, E		A - D			C - E		
Pottery production												
Other trade/craft activities	✓	✓			D, E		B - D			C - F		F
Market place	D, E				D, E ?			B-D ?		C - E		
Local trade	D, E		✓	✓	D, E		B - D			C - E		F
Long-distance trade	D, E		A - C		D, E		B - D			C - E		F
Suitability for communications	✓				✓					✓		F
Mint					D, E	D, E				E	✓	F
Defences/settlement boundary marker	E	F			E					D, E		F
Fort/refuge	✓				D, E		✓	✓				F
Road/street grid					D, E					C - E		F
River port/harbour	D, E				D, E	D, E				✓	✓	F

Key to periods: A: c.AD 300-450 B: c.AD 450-600 C: c.AD 600-750  
D: c.AD 750-900 E: c.AD 900-1050 F: c.AD 1051-1100

Note: This table is intended as a general guide to the chronological development of urban form and function in a particular trading centre or town. The inherent limitations of archaeological and/or documentary materials prevent this table from acting as more than a general indicator of developmental trends and, as such, should be used in conjunction with the accompanying text. Letters accompanied by a question mark indicate that, although the particular criterion or function is likely to have been present at this date, the documentary record is insufficiently precise and/or the archaeological record is lacking in order to state this with any degree of certainty.

Figure 50: Scandinavian Trading Centres/Towns c.AD 300-1050:  
Key Functions/Status and Physical Criteria

As a likely royal foundation and central place, Birka, along with Helgö, may represent an early attempt to increase royal and crown state incomes, with a possible connection between Birka and the royal manor of Adselsö Hovgård (3-4km distant) (Ambrosiani 1987: 247). In terms of Church history, Birka was, along with Hedeby and Ribe, the subject of a visit in the AD 830s and 850s by the emissary and missionary Ansgar (*ibid*: 11) and, subsequently, by Archbishop Unni, where he died in AD 936 (Sawyer 1985: 169). Rimberts' *Vita Anskarii* details Ansgar's first appearance in Birka, at the invitation of the Swedish king Bern:

When he (Bern) learned of their mission he took counsel with his faithful people about it, and with their unanimous approval and agreement gave them permission to stay there and preach the gospel of Christ. Freedom was granted to anyone who wanted it to seek out their teaching...Many there were who looked with favour on their mission and freely heard the Lord's doctrine...Numbers of them earnestly sought the grace of baptism. Among these was the prefect of the town, a man called Herigar,

member of the royal council and much loved by the king. He received the gift of holy baptism and continued very firm in the Catholic faith. Soon afterwards he built a church on his family estate and devoted himself to the service of God.

(Rimbert: *Vita Anskarii*, 11-12)

There are few indications of economic function for the first century of the settlement's existence, but it was clearly functioning as both local manufacturing site and exchange point – the island was of insufficient size to support a large population via agriculture – and *entrepôt* for international trade and exchange. Craft activities carried out at the site included metal- and hornworking, textile production and the manufacture of combs, swords and whetstones. Ambrosiani (1983: 103) groups Birka's service functions into three circles of immediate and regional hinterlands plus an 'international' east-west trade. There is, however, no evidence for the presence in the settlement of an operational mint.

Possible 'urban' status is indicated by the presence here of a mayor or governor, presumably a royal official due to the close links with the royal seat at Uppsala. Birka had a *thing* or assembly, presided over by the governor, and a law court, signifying that a relatively sophisticated administrative system was present. The reasons for Birka's end as a trading centre are unclear, but may be linked to changes in the regional economy resulting in the diminishing of supplies of Arabian silver as well a possible sea and/or land level rise, preventing access to the sea (Roesdahl 1998: 125).

## 4.5: DUBLIN, THE VIKINGS AND IRISH URBANISM

Having examined the evidence for Scandinavian town growth, I now turn to Ireland and, in particular, Dublin as an instance of Viking-driven urban development *away* from the homelands.

### 4.5.1: State Formation and Kingship

The survival of a substantial body of contemporary Irish writings enables the origins and development of the early kingdoms and attendant dynasties to be traced in considerable and unusual detail, possibly as far back as the fifth century (Duffy 1997: 11). No attempt will, however, be made to outline such events in detail, as these matters lie beyond the scope of this study.

According to seventh- and eighth-century law tracts, Irish kingship comprised three distinct tiers: firstly, the ruler of the petty tribal kingdom or *túath*; secondly, the great king or *ruiri*, with both a *túath* and overlordship of other tribal kings; and thirdly, the *rí ruirech* or 'king of overkings'. It would appear that from as early as the eighth century this hierarchy was in a state of flux whereby certain dynasties achieved political domination at the expense of less powerful groups (Ó Corráin 1972: 30). Consequently the early medieval period witnessed a growth in regional dynasties such as the southern Éoganacht and the western Ulster- and Midlands-based Uí Néill (Edwards 1990: 8). By the early eighth century the latter group was acknowledged as the supreme dynastic power in Ireland, its aggressively expansionist tendencies illustrated by an anonymous early ninth-century Éoganacht text: *they seize land by the sword; by violence they seize sovereignty* (quoted in Ó Corráin 1972: 23).

Seventh- and early eighth-century law tracts indicate a highly hierarchical society with heavy emphasis on status and honour, as well as clear distinctions between free and unfree, 'sacred' (kings, poets, clerics) and secular. At the same time there appears to have been a certain awareness of the existence of a broader community (Edwards 1990: 8). This relatively logical system did not, however, extend to rules

of royal dynastic succession: the numerous potential heirs and rival factions involved frequently resulted in power politics holding sway and further encouraging intra-dynastic conflict. The continuing absence of a uniform system guaranteed that kingdoms and attendant dynasties remained in a constant state of flux (Ó Corráin 1972: 42). Furthermore, the arrival of the Norse had nothing of the impact of that of their counterparts in England or Gaul. The limited nature of their settlement added to the fact that they were only one of many factors at play in early medieval Irish politics resulted in their never achieving political dominance (Ó Cróinín 1995: 240).

Despite attempts on the part of the newly emergent Christian Church to Christianise kingship via the introduction of royal ordination, the inauguration ceremony remained essentially secular, albeit with strongly pagan elements. These deemed that, as the representative of his territory, any faults of the king would have direct consequences for his kingdom. Christianity complemented secular authority in its acceptance of the God-given royal right to rule, and the stress placed upon the individual guaranteed personal ambition as ideologically acceptable (Mytum 1992: 47). The first royal ordination appears to have been conducted around AD 573 by Colum Cille with his installation of Aedán mac Gabráin as king of the Dál Riata. The first documented (analistic) reference dates to AD 793 and the ordination of the king of Munster, Artrí mac Cathail (Ó Corráin 1972: 34).

#### **4.5.2: Trade, Exchange and Economy**

Although Ireland was never a Roman province, the Empire did, nevertheless, exert an influence on the region via a number of both direct and indirect points of contact. Most significant of these were the Roman Church, trade/exchange and, one might suppose, that of urbanism itself, the impacts of which will be discussed in the proceeding section (Section 4.5.3). Classical texts and the (largely somewhat later) lives of the early saints suggest substantial involvement by chieftains in the importation from the continent of wine, hides, wool and other luxury commodities in order to maintain kinship and clientage linkages. The life of St. Ciarán describes the provisioning of the monastery of Clonmacnoise of Gallic wines by merchants, and Ptolemy's map of Ireland was seemingly compiled by and for the use of traders

(Ó Corráin 1972: 71). Place-name evidence suggests a possible Irish connection with the Bordeaux wine trade via the word *Bordgal* (*Burdigala*) (Doherty 1980: 77).

Place-name evidence points to a dramatic expansion of increasingly sophisticated agricultural and horticultural techniques, stemming directly from a demand for monastic land by the newly-emergent Church, coupled with a dramatic population rise between c.AD 600 and 800, as evidenced from a dramatic increase in archaeological sites. By the tenth and eleventh centuries society had lost its communal ownership basis and evolved into a system of fixed-base, privately-owned farms (Ó Corráin 1972: 49).

For the early medieval period, archaeological and source material evidence points to the undertaking of a wide range of craft activities from an early date, including textile, enamel and glass production, the majority of goods being exchanged via gift-giving, reciprocity and goods' redistribution. The predominance of ironworking in the archaeological record across a wide range of both lay and ecclesiastical sites suggests that production of certain items, such as swords, remained the preserve of the specialist craftsman (Edwards 1990: 86). In terms of pottery production, Ireland remained largely aceramic until well into the medieval period, with the notable and widespread exception of souterrain ware (*ibid*: 68).

The existence of specialist ports of trade or 'gateway communities' has been postulated, although only Dalkey Island, south of Dublin Bay, has produced any tangible evidence, excavation suggesting the existence of a small, defended trading community situated on a small promontory. Its location in a neutral, frontier position, isolated from the mainland, implies a desire on the part of kings to (i) offer traders a degree of protection and (ii) to control access to the site from the inland region (Mytum 1992: 262). At this early stage, goods' transactions mostly took the form of gift-exchange, reciprocity or redistribution; only subsequently would trade become a significant factor, reflecting the restructuring or growth of royal authority (Doherty 1980: 70).

There is no evidence that the secular authorities were attempting to exert control over economic activity in inland regions prior to c.AD 800. It is, however, possible

that the Church was already assuming some role in terms of the promotion and control of local markets at the larger monastic sites prior to this date (Ó Corráin 1972: 72). Charles Doherty views the adoption of gift-exchange by the Church from the sixth century as marking its assimilation into society, characterised by a number of reciprocal arrangements operating between monastery and monastery, Church and nobility and Church and laity (Doherty 1980: 75).

Discussion of the monastic sites will be limited here to the examination of their economic role; the issues of their form, function and possible semi-urban status are explored below in Sections 4.5.3 and 4.6.2. It is clear that, by the tenth century, markets had developed around a number of monasteries, a reflection of the placing of religious houses so as best to attract wealth and prestige (*ibid*: 104) and thereby maximise their chances of survival. Positioning of monasteries on productive agricultural land and/or in/between kingdoms was likewise a prime consideration (Wallace 1992b: 39) and monasteries had the potential to be established close to existing markets. The earliest documented reference to a monastic fair or *óenach* is at Lusk, Co. Dublin, in the Annals of Ulster entry for AD 799 (Doherty 1980: 81).

Certainly, as Church power and influence increased, a number of these markets took on regional, national and international importance (*ibid*). Coupled with references to the trading of cattle and landed property (Simms 1995: 108), charters indicate that the monastic market at Kells was operating on a more permanent basis by the tenth or eleventh century. Doherty emphasises the role of monastic sites as sources of slaves, citing their function of place of refuge and, more contentiously, their high resident populations (1980: 81). As well as their economic role, these sites were clearly also acting as centres of administration, learning and art, in the case of Kells, Kildare, Cashel and Kilkenny becoming towns in their own right during the medieval period.

Ó Corráin emphasises the growing aristocratic involvement in the Church and its increasing control and exploitation of the monastic market centres. Hence the existence of a cash market at Armagh during the eleventh century and the involvement of twelfth-century Lismore in foreign seaborne trade, despite its proximity to Waterford and Wexford (1972: 73). Swan maintains that the presence

of a market place at the enclosure gateway was the key factor guaranteeing the evolution of a particular site into a genuine town (1985: 105). In reality this is an overly simplistic approach, with the entire structure of Anglo-Norman feudal relations demanding consideration (D. O'Sullivan, pers. comm.).

In terms of external developmental factors, the mid-tenth century onwards witnessed Norse influence impacting significantly upon the Irish economy with the establishment of the first permanent, urban settlements of Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, Cork and Dublin (Ó Corráin: 1972: 105). The case study of Dublin is outlined below in Section 4.5.4. Although an initial, ninth-century phase had witnessed the formation of a number of permanent coastal settlements and encampments, the significance of the secondary developmental stage lies in the fact that these new sites were, first and foremost, trading sites, constructed to a common plan. These were to develop into ports, tied into an extensive international trading network (Simms 1992: 104). Stemming from this, the key contribution of the Norse to Irish urban development may be deemed to have been the positioning of towns at estuarine river mouths close to tributaries, optimising usage of natural defences and giving easy access to hinterlands. In certain cases this may have placed restrictions upon subsequent development of the urban fabric (Wallace 1992b: 39).

#### **4.5.3: Religion: Christianity and the Coming of the Monasteries**

(Figure 51)

British and Gallic missions introduced Christianity into Ireland during the fifth century, but conversion was a slow process, paganism persisting into the sixth century (Edwards 1990: 99). Furthermore, the policy of the Church from an early date to remain independent of secular authority ensured that it had little impact upon the Irish social fabric prior to the seventh and eighth centuries (Mytum 1992: 105).

The Church did, however, impact swiftly upon the landscape, the growth of the early Irish Church and resultant rapid expansion of monasticism from the second half of the sixth century culminating in the development of monasteries such as Durrow, Bangor and Clonmacnois. Adomán's *Life of Columba* suggests that, by the

mid-sixth century, there was a degree of Church organisation in place, although this appears to have come about in a somewhat *ad hoc* way, largely due to the absence of former Roman towns upon which to place a system of bishoprics. The exact picture remains unclear. Ó Cróinín disputes the existence of a genuine diocesan organisation, maintaining that the system largely centred on the monasteries and their hereditary abbots, the resident bishops rarely venturing out into the diocese (1995: 167). Others, such as Edwards, maintain that the bishops were not subordinate to the abbots, but that the territorial episcopal dioceses and monastic confederations peacefully co-existed (1990: 100).

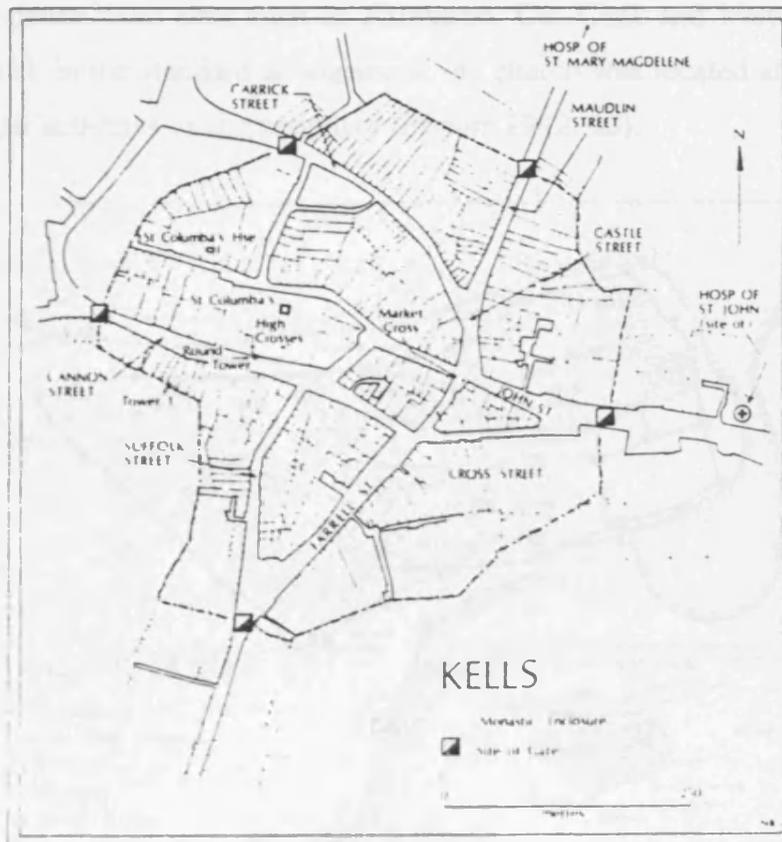


Figure 51: Plan of Kells Showing Location of the Monastic Enclosure (Source: Bradley 1990: 44)

Richard Sharpe argues that a process of gradual change, without any guiding policy or model, produced a Church both independent of a Romanised, urban-based organisation, and with considerable scope for internal adaptation and change. The resultant flexibility allowed the peaceful co-existence of monastic and non-monastic

churches. In the face of the development of the monastic town and the increasing secularisation of the Irish Church, bishops retained their powers of pastoral jurisdiction (1984: 265).

Aerial photographic survey has identified several hundred monastic enclosures scattered across Ireland, ranging in date from the fifth to twelfth centuries (Swan 1985: 78). Location was a prime consideration if these houses were to gain the requisite wealth and prestige in order to guarantee survival. A growing economic role, linked to the growing cult of relics, resulted in moves from the seventh-century to enclose the sacred areas and to regulate their internal layout (Edwards 1990: 106). Evidence from sites such as Kilmacoo, Co. Cork and Moyne, Co. Mayo, suggests that, in the standard arrangement, the church was located at the centre and more secular activities on the periphery (Mytum 1992: 83).

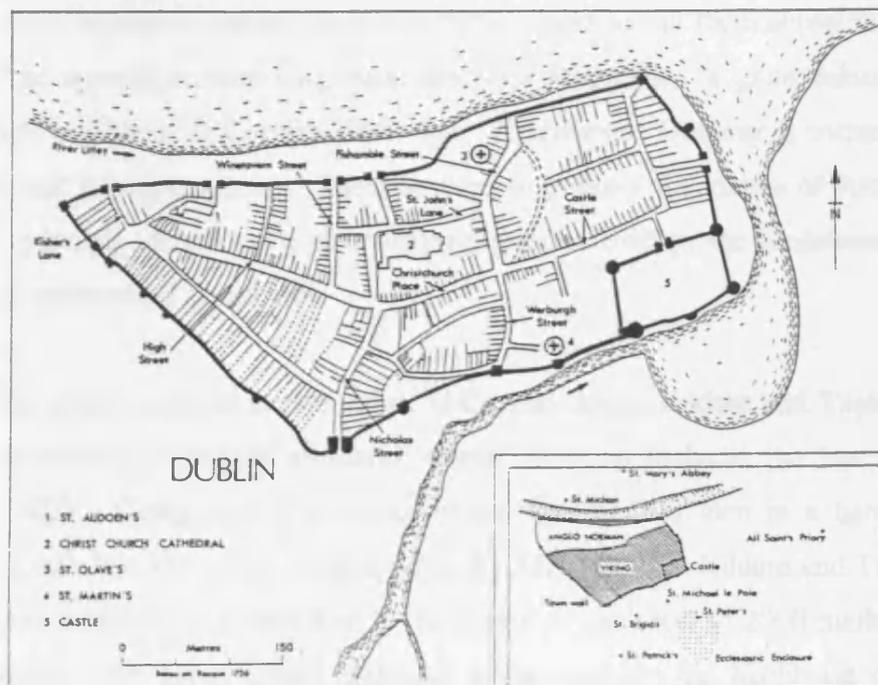


Figure 52: Plan of Hiberno-Norse Dublin, Based on Rocque's 1756 Map (Source: Bradley 1990: 48)

By as early as the seventh century a number of sites such as Kells, Armagh and Downpatrick had developed into sizeable complexes. Founded in the early ninth century, Kells grew in importance following the relocation of St. Columba's relics from Iona. Between the ninth and twelfth centuries it had a market outside its gate

and functioned as an administrative, educational and craft production centre as well as place of refuge (Bradley 1990: 43). In the case of Armagh, the present-day street plan follows the line of the boundary enclosing the seventh-century monastic settlement (Swan 1985: 84). The ecclesiastical capital of Ireland since its foundation by St. Patrick, written source evidence attests to the existence of a central area enclosing the principal church and the abbot's house, surrounded by three precincts or *trians*, containing streets with houses to accommodate craftspeople, functionaries and students (Bradley 1990: 43). There are also references to housing being maintained by the local royal family (de Paor 1976: 30).

This group of later, developed, monastic sites continues to court more controversy than any other in Irish urban studies (Bradley 1990: 40). Such is the contentious nature of these places that there is a lack of consensus amongst historians as to whether they should be accorded the title of 'monastery', 'town' or 'monastic town'. Their impressive nature prompted early writers to call them actual towns: as early as the seventh century Cogitosus describes Kildare as "a great metropolitan city", albeit unwalled (Ó Corráin 1995: 48). If, however, Doherty is correct in his assertion that it was Cogitosus' intention here to counter the claims of Armagh as Ireland's principle church via a piece of propagandist writing, the usefulness of the passage is undermined (1985: 56).

Taking the source material at face value, Ó Corráin deems Kildare and Taghmon to have been heavily populated monastic 'towns' from as early as the late seventh century (*ibid*). Citing source accounts of the loss of 200 men in a battle with Durrow in AD 764, Ó Corráin suggests that, by AD 800, both Kildare and Taghmon had resident populations somewhere in the region of the 1500 to 2000 mark (1972: 72). On the other hand, Logan, although acknowledging the likelihood of small settlements existing in association with Celtic monasteries, cannot accept them as being fully urban sites (1991: 46). Evidently, however, on the eve of the Viking invasions, the monasteries possessed both economic and administrative functions (as well as being seats of learning and art) and, as such, formed Ireland's sole cultural and economic power centres (Simms 1995: 104).

By the late tenth century the majority of the Norse had converted to Christianity as a

result of which (presumably Irish) priests were sent to Canterbury for consecration as bishops, whilst continuing to be answerable to Rome. This action, which bypassed the pre-existing, predominately monastic, ecclesiastical organisation, saw them have a significant influence upon the Irish Church from the eleventh century (de Paor 1976: 32). The earliest attested bishop of Waterford, Maél Isu Uah Ainmire, was Irish, whereas Limerick had mostly Norse bishops (Ó Cróinín 1995: 267). The majority of Dublin's bishops were Irish, the earliest – Dúnán – being appointed by King Sitric, who also founded the church or priory of Holy Trinity c.AD 1030 (Curtis 1990: 102). There is annalistic evidence for several pilgrimages to Rome having Dublin as their starting-point, and that safe passage of the pilgrims through Germany was gained from Emperor Conrad via King Knut, a close ally of the Dublin king Sitric (Wallace 1985: 220).

Despite the significant role played by Irish churchmen in the spread of Christian teachings throughout Europe, there is a distinct impression of core and periphery at play in the attitudes of certain Christian writers towards Ireland. These central European writings, coming out of those regions in possession of a common Roman socio-cultural heritage, were directed towards those beyond the limits of the former empire. The subjects of these views were, indeed, Christians, but the ways in which they expressed their faith were deemed inferior and consequently in need of crusading and colonisation. Hence the justification for the arrival in Ireland of the Anglo-Normans in AD 1169 (Simms 1995: 100) and the attitudes expressed by such as Gerald of Wales, writing shortly after his visit to Ireland in AD 1185:

The faith having been planted in the island from the time of St. Patrick, so many years ago, and propagated almost ever since, it is wonderful that this nation should remain to this day so very ignorant of the rudiments of Christianity. It is indeed a most filthy race, a race sunk in vice, a race more ignorant than all other nations of the first principles of the faith.

(Gerald of Wales: *The Topography of Ireland, III: Of the Inhabitants of Ireland XIX: How the Irish are Very Ignorant of the Rudiments of the Faith*)

Such negative views also extended to commentary upon the character of Irish settlement and an apparent reluctance or inability of its population to take on board the concept of urban life:

In the common course of things, mankind progresses from the forest to the field,

from the field to the town, and to the social condition of citizens; but this nation, holding agricultural labour in contempt, and little coveting the wealth of towns, as well as being exceedingly averse to civil institutions – lead the same life their fathers did in the woods and open pastures, neither willing to abandon their old habits or learn anything new.

(Gerald of Wales: *The Topography of Ireland, III: Of the Inhabitants of Ireland, X: Of the Character, Customs and Habits of the People of Ireland*)

#### **4.5.4: Dublin (Figures 52-54)**

Thanks principally to extensive archaeological coverage since the early 1960s, Dublin is by far the best understood of the half dozen or so known Irish Viking urban foundations. Although little is known of the earlier, *longphort* phase, the partially urban settlement appears to have consisted of a defended harbour, a large cemetery and, by implication, an associated area of permanent occupation. As such it appears to mirror trading settlements in the Scandinavian homelands such as Birka or Haithabu. A fifteen-year occupational hiatus followed in the early tenth century as a result of the driving out of the Danes to England by a coalition of Irish kings. The settlement was re-established later in the century as a populous, carefully planned and defended town, that persisted into the twelfth century and whose organisational elements betray considerable non-Scandinavian influences. By as early as the mid-tenth century it has been conjectured that this densely occupied major trade and manufacturing centre had replaced York as the principal western Viking town (Wallace 1985: 112). It was also during this period, c.AD 1030, that Dublin gained the status of city (*civitas*) upon the foundation of Christ Church Cathedral (Clarke 1998: 331).

#### **Range and Quality of Data Sources**

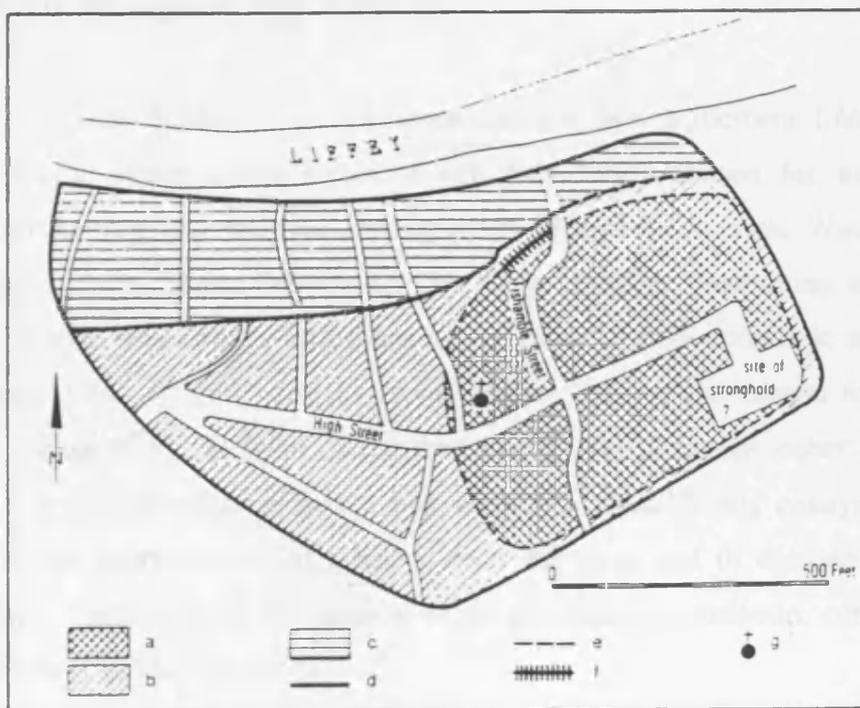
*Literary Sources:* source accounts such as the Annals of Ulster provide sketchy indications of events from the mid-ninth century, onwards. Later descriptive passages by Gerald of Wales and Bernard of Clairvaux provide (albeit unfavourably biased) outsiders' accounts of Ireland and its people.

*Archaeological Data:* Dublin is alone amongst those Irish towns with recognisably

Viking origins in having been the subject of sustained investigation. A substantial programme of excavation by the National Museum of Ireland has been ongoing since the early 1960s, most notably the Wood Quay group of sites excavated between 1974 and 1981. This has been accompanied by an ongoing series of excavation reports and specialist publications (e.g. Fanning 1994; Lang 1988; Wallace 1992a & 1992b; Walsh 1997).

### Dublin: Developmental Sequence (Figure 53)

The town, Ireland's earliest, appears to have had two main stages of occupation. In its earlier, non-urban, ninth-century phase, source evidence indicates the existence of a defended harbour or *longphort* from c.AD 841 (Simms 1995: 104), seemingly a base for raiding activity, overwintering and, possibly, seasonal market activity.



2 Map of the growth stages of the walled town. This is a conjectural reconstruction based on town-plan analysis and on archaeological discoveries.

KEY: a. Viking encampment; b. extension of the Viking settlement into a trading station, with a town wall of c. 1100; c. Anglo-Norman reclaimed area in the Liffey estuary, with extensions to the town wall of c. 1300; d. town wall; e. probable course of the earthen defences; f. point at which three parallel earthen banks were uncovered archaeologically; g. Christ Church Cathedral, first built as a wooden church c. 1030 and rebuilt in stone in the early Anglo-Norman period.

Figure 53: Plan of Developmental Stages in Growth of Hiberno-Norse Dublin (Source: Simms 1990: 45)

There was a naval camp at Duiblinn from which the Laigin and the Uí Néill were plundered, both states and churches, as far as Sliab Bladma.

(*Annals of Ulster*, AD 841)

The excavation of a large inhumation cemetery 3km away at Kilmainham points to the presence of a permanent associated settlement. Patrick Wallace (1988: 108) suggests a comparable arrangement to that seen at Birka or Haithabu of an unwalled *portus* and defended citadel which, if correct, would represent a considerably stronger Scandinavian influence on layout than was the case with the subsequent, Viking settlement.

An ecclesiastical presence is attested on the site of the subsequent town during the pre-Viking period in the form of seventh- and eighth-century annalistic references to abbots of Dublin and, more controversially, bishops' lists (Simpson 1997: 17). Although exact locations are uncertain, a number of monasteries are attested during this period in this region (Logan 1991: 48).

In c.AD 917 the Scandinavians had established a new settlement (*dún*) on high ground to the south of the Liffey, a site presumably chosen for its defensive potential, contemporary with the foundation of Wexford, Limerick, Waterford and, presumably, Cork (Simms 1990: 44). Dublin's apparent positioning at the focal point of several major roads underlines its centrality to Irish economic and political life (Clarke 1990: 57). Under the Norse Dublin became the central focus of the sizeable region of Fingal (land of the foreigners), ranged across either side of the Liffey. The Scandinavian enclosure was seemingly subsequently enlarged in order to defend the southern side of a bridge over the river and to enclose a growing population. Tenth-century fortification works produced an enclosure comparable in size to Birka (11.7ha.) (*ibid*: 67).

These events followed the defeat of the Irish O'Neill king of Tara and the re-establishment of the Viking kingdom of Dublin after a hiatus caused by the Danish rout of the Norwegians from the town in AD 851 (Logan 1991: 49).

Fame on her swift wings having quickly taken her flight over the whole island, and spread abroad, according to custom, the success of the enterprise, the Norwegians were massacred in all quarters, and in a short time all of them were put to the sword by force or fraud, or compelled to take ship and return again to Norway or to the islands from whence they had come.

(Gerald of Wales: *The Topography of Ireland, III: Of the Inhabitants of Ireland, XLI: How the Norwegians were Driven Out of Ireland, after Reigning there about Thirty Years*)

During the course of the tenth century Dublin would forge close dynastic and trade links to York and become the centre of a Norwegian kingdom (*ibid*: 51). Certain aspects of the structural arrangement of the town and of the buildings within are strongly suggestive of English and Irish influences as well as new innovations; wider issues of native and Scandinavian input into urban development are addressed below (Section 4.6.2).

The defended area spread progressively eastwards from a central core to enclose an area of around 12ha, placing it in the same size range as Birka (11.7ha) and Haithabu (25ha) (Simms 1979: 35). By the turn of the tenth century the occupied area was defined by an earthen rampart and timber palisade, and defences upgraded around AD 1100 with the construction of a stone wall circuit. Excavations at Wood Quay and at Winetavern Street produced evidence for the Hiberno-Norse and Anglo-Norman defences (Walsh 1997: 90). Wallace (1985: 109) maintains that the design of the circuit betrays a native Irish influence, possibly from monastic centres such as Kells and Armagh. The positioning of the central plan element, the principal street, in order to follow the natural site contours, gave a curved character to the street pattern, an arrangement at odds with English and Scandinavian town grids (Ó Cróinín 1995: 257). Extramural occupation to the south-east is attested by documentary references to Dublin's last Viking king having land holdings in this area (Simpson 1997: 17).

In terms of Dublin's urban topographical development, Simms has identified a sequence wherein settlement expanded westwards from an early (possibly stronghold) core at the confluence of the Liffey and Poddle, followed by the addition of a wall circuit c.AD 1000 and Anglo-Norman land reclamation work (Simms 1979, 1990). This analysis is lent credence by the archaeological evidence, with indications that the houses and land divisions at Fishamble Street originate in

the early tenth century, whereas those in High Street and Winetavern Street date to c.AD 1010 and 1030 (Bradley 1990: 49). The seizure of Dublin by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, high-king of Ireland in AD 989 and imposition of a tax upon each messuage (*garrdha*) also implies that a system of regular building plots was already in place by this date (Clarke 1990: 67). The regularity and stability of these property divisions as revealed by excavation is particularly marked (Bradley 1990: 50), pointing to a respect for, and possible regulation of, property in a structured urban society (Wallace 1992b: 36). Variations in terms of form and siting of buildings within individual land plots do, however, suggest that owners were allowed leeway to build as they wished (Wallace 1985: 114).

Excavation has also demonstrated that the town's oldest plan element contains the highest status occupation, whereas the subsequently developed High Street, with its workshops, sizeable yards and small houses, appears to have supported an artisan population (Bradley 1990: 49). The High Street plots show a marked irregularity in length, possibly indicative of piecemeal development (Simms 1979: 34). The overall impression of Hiberno-Norse Dublin is of a densely-occupied town, development of which was restricted by its confining defensive circuit (Wallace 1985: 112). Excavations at Fishamble Street between 1974 and 1981 revealed occupation spanning the period c.AD 920 and 1100, consisting of regular properties defined by wattle fences and occupied by wattle buildings fronting onto the river. These were most likely housing and/or combined workshops and dwellings, with access to the river apparently via paths leading through the buildings to the waterfront (Simms 1995: 104). To date, over 200 buildings have been archeologically traced in Dublin since 1961; the 120 or so tenth- and eleventh-century structures uncovered at Fishamble Street between 1974 and 1981 represent the largest single group this side of the Elbe (Wallace 1992a: 3). Wallace concludes that the Dublin houses are an amalgam of Irish and Scandinavian building design and constructional methods, the end result of a process of adaptation whereby native traditions were being 'taken over' by the Norse. The Dublin house types are also notable in terms of their uniformity, with parallels in Whithorn (Dumfries & Galloway) (D. O'Sullivan, pers. comm.).

Dublin's position at the intersection of the northern trade routes leading down from

the Faroes, Scandinavia and the Northern Isles and on to England and the Continent guaranteed it a crucial role in Viking trade and commerce (Ó Cróinín 1995: 258). Numismatic evidence provides the clearest indications of this economic vitality, with Dublin the location of Ireland's only operational mint from around AD 997 (Wallace 1987: 200).

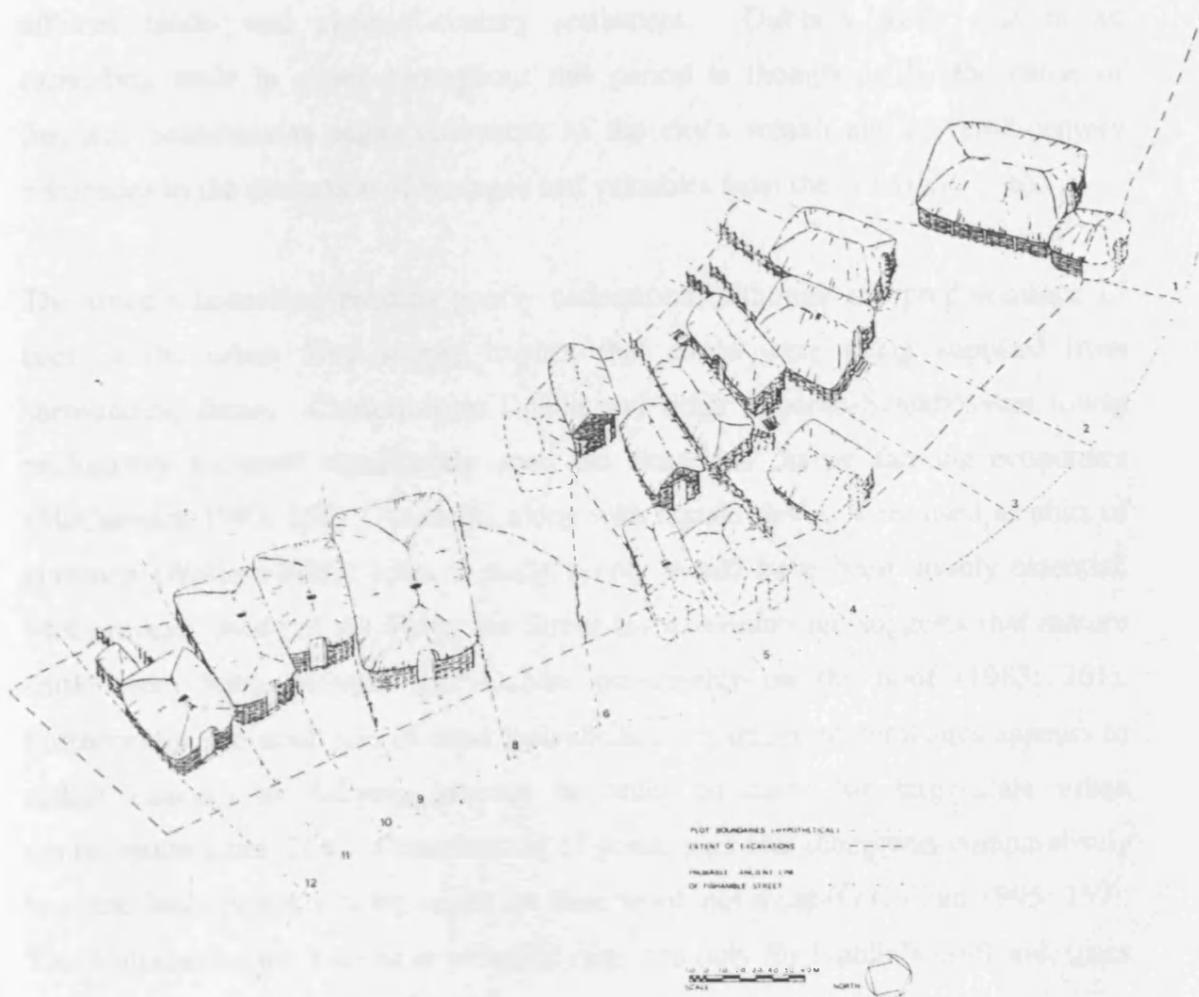


Figure 54: Fishamble Street, Dublin: Reconstructed Street, Building Level 8 (Source: Wallace 1992b: 42)

Artefactual evidence points to Dublin's role as a major commercial and industrial centre, with large-scale specialist comb, textile, tool and shoe production and leather- and bronzeworking (Logan 1991: 46), in addition to widespread trading and commercial links to the Baltic region and beyond. The twelfth-century *Life of St. Patrick* records a tribute of the inhabitants of Dublin in combs, shoes, gloves and iron knives to the archbishop of Armagh (Ó Cróinín 1995: 259). Analysis of the

city's substantial and varied corpus of wooden objects demonstrates how native English and Irish stylistic elements survived, intermingling with Scandinavian influences in order to create new artistic forms well into the eleventh century (Lang 1988: 48). Artefactual evidence, in the form of imported elite items such as Baltic amber, high-quality textiles – including gold braids, silks and worsted fabrics (Wallace 1987: 219) – coupled with written sources offer a clear impression of an affluent tenth- and eleventh-century settlement. Dublin's likely role in an expanding trade in slaves throughout this period is thought to be the cause of frequent Scandinavian sagas references to the city's wealth and eleventh-century references to the extraction of hostages and valuables from the city (*ibid*: 236).

The town's hinterland remains poorly understood, although the predominance of beef in the urban food supply implies that cattle were being supplied from surrounding farms. Consequently Dublin and other Hiberno-Scandinavian towns presumably impacted significantly upon the hinterland's native farming economies (McCormick 1983: 259). As cattle, along with female slaves, were used as units of currency (Wallace 1987: 130), a ready supply would have been doubly essential. McCormick's study of the Fishamble Street faunal assemblage suggests that mature cattle were being brought into Dublin, presumably on the hoof (1983: 261). Furthermore, the small size of these individuals comparative to rural sites appears to reflect changes in dairying practice in order to cater for large-scale urban consumption (*ibid*: 264). Consumption of goats, pigs and sheep was comparatively low, the latter possibly being raised for their wool, not meat (Ó Cróinín 1995: 259). The hinterland must also have provided raw materials for Dublin's craft industries and its buildings (Wallace 1987: 133).

Dublin's earliest churches are known only from documentary and literary sources and dedications to early saints such as St. Colum Cille and St. Duilech (Clarke 1990: 58). Subsequently the earliest attested *Scandinavian* Christian presence in Dublin is the timber church erected in the centre of the town (subsequently the location of Christ Church Cathedral) c.AD 1030 as a direct result of the introduction of Christianity to the Norse inhabitants by King Sitric Silkbeard. Operating under the Roman diocesan system, Dublin's early bishops were consecrated at Canterbury (Simms 1990: 47).

The great significance of eleventh-century Dublin is reflected in the increasing desire on the part of Irish kings to control the town (by now the most heavily populated centre in the country and unofficial capital). Control of Dublin was the key to domination of Ireland and, as such, was the principal objective of eleventh- and twelfth-century politics (Doherty 1980: 84). Hence the decision to establish an archbishopric in Dublin rather than in the former Church centre of Kildare (Wallace 1985: 139). Despite the city's seizure on three separate occasions between AD 980 and 983 by Maél Sechnaill (Ó Cróinín 1995: 260), the Irish kings found it profitable to allow Dublin's inhabitants to remain, a steady source of wealth and tribute. Furthermore, Dublin's fleet was available for direct mercenary hire via the Irish kings, as in the case of its leasing out by Diarmait Mac Murchada to the English King Henry II in AD 1165 for campaigning in Wales (*ibid*: 270). Dublin's economic importance is illustrated by the granting of a *tuarastal* (homage) of 1500 cows by Mac Lochlainn, king of Cenél Eógain, following his seizure of the city in AD 1154 (Ó Corráin 1972: 162), in addition to its inclusion in the Book of Rights as an Irish *mór-thuath*. The town was consequently obliged to pay tribute and naval service to the High King and the king of Leinster (Curtis 1990: 101). By the Anglo-Norman period control of Dublin had become sufficiently vital to be subjected to seizure by the Anglo-Normans in AD 1170 and subsequently besieged by the High King Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair (Wallace 1987: 238).

## **4.6: SCANDINAVIAN AND IRISH URBANISM: DISCUSSION**

To conclude, various factors can be highlighted concerning the origins and development of urbanism in the Scandinavian and Irish regions.

### **4.6.1: Scandinavian Urbanism**

Between c.AD 700 and 1000 Scandinavia witnessed the establishment of a range of specialist trade and manufacturing sites and, subsequently, of permanently occupied, urban settlements. These developments are intimately linked to state formation processes and the growth of local, regional and inter-regional markets during this period, developments that stimulated a demand for a wide range of manufactured goods and resources amongst the emergent aristocratic and royal elites.

The urban formation process may be broken down into three main stages:

- The establishment of sites for specialised goods production and exchange purposes, frequently with low, transitory populations (such as Dankirke, Helgö and Paviken),
- The development of early nucleated market-place settlements with permanent populations (Ribe and Århus),
- More sizeable towns such as Birka and Hedeby develop during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

Many of these trading settlements possessed so-called 'urban' functional criteria either at, or shortly after, their foundation (including evidence of planning – permanent populations – central place functions – mints, etc.). Consequently there is considerably greater blurring between the labels market/trading site and town *per se* than is the case with their north-west European counterparts. The resultant difficulties in terms of urban definition and interpretation are readily apparent, as demonstrated by archaeological and historical writings on the subject and the seemingly variable usage by authors of the terms 'urban', proto-urban' and 'trading

site'. The role of emergent chieftains and royal houses in the above developments was crucial, stemming from a desire to control, develop and exploit regional and inter-regional economic activity, as evidenced by close linkages between manufacturing and market sites, trade routes and royal manors such as Jelling. This process, the ultimate result of which would be the formation of the Scandinavian nation states during the tenth and eleventh centuries, frequently resulted in the uprooting and resiting of market and manufacturing sites, such as Helgö/Birka/Sigtuna or Hedeby/Schleswig, in order to best exploit changing trade patterns. Nevertheless, the peripatetic nature of kingship, with its constant shifting from estate to estate, meant that royal figures did not take up permanent residence within the urban context prior to the tenth and eleventh centuries and the eventual emergence of the national monarchies. Even then, royal capitals *per se* such as Copenhagen were only established at the close of the medieval period.

The Christian Church was, therefore, secondary to royalty in terms of its influence on Scandinavian urban development, playing a lesser role than was the case in England and, in particular, Gaul, where a network of bishoprics formed an organisational focus serving to bridge the Roman and medieval periods. Moreover, the Christianisation of the Scandinavian region was a comparatively late and gradual process; early missions had little success, and only in the mid-ninth century did the royal houses permit Ansgar to construct churches and evangelise freely (Lund 1995: 210). As a result, churches appeared in, or nearby, towns from the ninth century, but generally on peripheral noble or royal lands that did not serve to affect or influence the urban fabric. At Birka, for example, the church built by the town prefect was erected on his estate *outside* the settlement, and did not result in the establishment of a permanent Christian community (*ibid*). By the tenth and eleventh centuries, however, the now officially Christian Scandinavian nation states were promoting the creation of churches and cathedrals within emergent, sizeable medieval towns such as Ribe and Schleswig.

Ultimately, therefore, Scandinavian urbanism was only one of a series of institutional imports acquired through Euro-Scandinavian contact, which also included the concept of the Christian nation state. In the case of town development, however, this was a reciprocal process of influence. On the one hand, a

combination of overseas trade contacts and political exile served to reveal new possibilities to those Scandinavians venturing overseas for state formation, kingship and settlement form. In the case of the latter, the results included towns such as Dublin and York, the product of a blend of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Irish and Christian elements. Conversely, these same notions would be brought back to the homelands at a later date, resulting, by the eleventh century, in the Christianised Scandinavian nation-states, with power centred on sizeable towns and cities and their resident bishops and kings.

#### **4.6.2: Irish Urbanism**

In the case of Ireland, there is evidence from as early as the Roman period of attempts on the part of ruling groups and, later, the Church, to control economic activity through the promotion and control of markets and ports of trade. A number of centres subsequently developed into medieval towns, to be accompanied at a later date by a number of Norse foundations. The active pursuit of economic and political power by the Christian Church and emergent Irish and Scandinavian royal houses produced a number of unique urban and semi-urban settlements, without any one group attaining overall control.

As with the Scandinavian region, Irish urban development was characterised by three, albeit different, main phases of development:

- In the first phase, involvement by local royal houses in the importation and distribution of elite commodities via specialised ports (Dalkey Island and, possibly, Nendrum) in order to maintain kinship and clientage connections is postulated from an early date.
- The second phase witnessed increasing attempts on the part of an emergent Church to control markets and regional and inter-regional trade via advantageously located monasteries. Consequently a number of these houses developed into the region's first formative urban sites and, therefore, medieval towns (such as Kells, Kildare, Cashel and Kilkenny).
- Finally, a number of planned towns were established at the instigation of Hiberno-Norse kings, a unique amalgam of Scandinavian, Christian, English

and native Irish influences (Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, Cork, Dublin). Bishops remained centred upon rural monasteries until the eleventh century and the foundation of the town-based bishoprics by the newly-Christianised Hiberno-Norse royal house.

The slow, protracted aspect of the Irish urban formation process is highlighted by Clarke, advocating that, as in Norway, the region witnessed a gradual 'drift' towards urbanisation (1998: 364). Hence the difficulty of pinpointing precisely when a settlement acquired the status of town. Indeed, in the case of Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford, these developments were so belated as to deem Irish urbanisation an achievement not of the Scandinavian incomers but of the Hiberno-Norse (*ibid*: 368). Alternatively, whilst acknowledging that sites with urban characteristics were already in existence prior to the arrival of the Norse in the form of larger monastic settlements such as Armagh, Clonmacnois and Kildare, Ó Cróinín emphasises the importance of the Scandinavian importation of the concept of the town into Ireland. This is deemed all the more remarkable considering that these were essentially an agricultural people, and that the establishment of towns such as Dublin and Waterford was as much a result of their political and economic expansion as were the trading sites of Haithabu and Birka in the homelands (1995: 270). True enough, but the direct influences playing upon the Norse during their period of exile in England should be emphasised. Here, they saw towns at first hand; their skill lay in the adaptation of this model or prototype to best suit the Irish setting.

The Scandinavian factor was only one (albeit incredibly important) in a series of links in the chain of urban development. This flow of influence ran directly from the Classical Roman towns of Britain and Gaul, via the various specialised post-Roman trade, ecclesiastical and lay elite semi-urban sites, through to the early medieval town. The significance of the Norse lies in their role as catalysts through which the concept of urbanisation was taken to England, and where it gained a unique character through combination with other influences (Wallace 1992b: 36).

Clarke & Ambrosiani are somewhat disingenuous in stating that, as Irish towns were being founded by peoples from a region without towns, it is unlikely that there

was a *stated intention* to establish towns, rather that they grew organically, possibly even by chance (1995: 102). This argument fails, however, to take into account known, direct, Northern European influences upon Scandinavian economic, political and social institutions, including urban development. Ireland was never within the Empire but was, nevertheless, a region the subject of seemingly subtle, but ultimately, vital Roman influence – namely the Roman Church and its attendant monastic foundations, forming one of the key influences upon the Irish urban formation process (in contrast to the Scandinavian homelands). Hence the growth of sites such as Kildare and Kells into sizeable, walled places with a range of central-place functions; namely, administration, commerce, learning and art; this blended with the other significant factor, the dynamism of Viking economic expansionism.

The Norse had also founded a number of semi-urban sites, the *longphorts*, in the initial stages of their occupation in Ireland. Subsequently exiled from Ireland to England, they had seen the planned, defensive Anglo-Saxon *burh* town at first hand – itself with Roman roots. This was the basic concept that was brought back to Ireland on their return in the tenth century, but in form it was not a slavish copy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DEFINING THE TOWN. URBAN STRATEGIES: FORM, FUNCTION AND AGENTS OF DEVELOPMENT c.AD 300-1050

#### 5.1: INTRODUCTION

The three case study chapters have served to identify the diversity and range of urban developmental trajectories both within and beyond the boundaries of the former Roman empire in the late, post-Roman and early medieval periods. Key British, Gallic and Scandinavian towns were selected in order to reveal and question the suitability of archaeological and historical/documentary data for comprehending these sequences and to raise the fundamental problems of urban character and role. Initial attempts were made to determine the general factors serving to drive urban development at the level of the individual study area. Drawing upon findings from these various regions, analysis can now be taken a stage further in order to identify the broad agents and agencies serving to dictate urban development.

Precisely what were these post-Roman towns? To what extent did their classical pasts survive and for what reasons, and who organised and controlled these survivals or directed new functions and objectives? Are specific urban types and features recognisable from these or is it problematic to seek 'models' in the urban forms that emerge from AD 400? Indeed, is it possible to place towns in typological groups or should they always be viewed as individual and distinctive units, comparable to others purely in terms of basic administrative and religious function? As noted previously, it is hoped that the Scandinavian and Irish chapter offers an alternative perspective, enabling us to identify what 'new' towns sought in their form and content, in contexts divorced and detached from the remnants of classical towns which, in the old empire, still continued to influence if not dictate urbanism.

Is it the case, therefore, that relict urban structures were simply benign and chance survivals, or were they *active* influences upon the towns to be manipulated as their

populations saw fit? Were post-Roman urban populations developing anything *different* in terms of urban form and function or simply struggling to maintain remnants of past forms? Taking this a stage further, is it possible to identify, via the written and archaeological record, those individuals and/or social groups responsible for driving such developments? What were their agendas and what conditioned or restrained them?

This chapter seeks to draw together strands identified in Chapters Two to Four, firstly examining emergent forms and new directions, and then proceeding to determine the roles and agents of this modified urbanism.

## **5.2: INHERITANCES, REWORKINGS AND EMERGENT FORMS**

### **5.2.1: Control of Space**

Secular and ecclesiastical authorities have always sought, by a variety of means, to regulate urban space and attendant activities therein. Shifting requirements on the part of disparate town groups have long served to impact upon the usage and, to some extent, the very existence of private and public land.

The Roman authorities placed heavy emphasis upon the provision of communal urban space for social and economic purposes within rigidly regulated and standardised town plans. Although economic activity was frequently the subject of specialist zoning, the sizeable gridded areas frequently incorporated substantial areas of unoccupied land. The later classical period witnessed a diversification of urban form as Christian and secular authorities increasingly sought to capitalise on burgeoning religious and commercial activity from their exclusive walled enclaves and resulting in the formation of tightly regulated specialist foci. Churches and cathedrals replaced the forum and theatre as principal places of social interaction, the former Roman towns subsequently accompanied by purpose-built settlements (*wics*) created by emergent states purely for the rigid control and exploitation of emergent commercial markets. Political consolidation during the ninth and tenth centuries lead to the clustering of a range of functions in these and other central

places (the *burhs*), with further specialist demarcation of space.

In terms of the former Roman towns, relict communal space and structures were subject to both adaptive re-use and selective preservation. As purely trade and productive centres, the *wics* are characterised by the rigid allocation and control of space to artisans and traders by their royal instigators, with centres such as Ipswich and Ribe providing clear indications of urban planning solely for commercial purposes. The peripheral locations of urban churches prior to the tenth and eleventh centuries further reinforces the overriding industrial character of these settlements. The means by which certain *wics* such as *Hamwic* were given up is significant, being deemed either too vulnerably situated or unsuited to the modified requirements of royal-controlled settlements, in this case Winchester. Subsequently, during the ninth and tenth centuries, defence and the need to accommodate royal and episcopal palaces, cathedrals and religious houses, accompanied economic considerations. The result was, in the case of the *burhs*, the establishment of regular, gridded plans in order to provide ready access to defences as well as space for markets and walled enclaves for aristocratic figures and groups. This frequently resulted, as with Arles, Marseille, Dublin and York, in highly complex settlements consisting of several closely regulated functional zones. In many instances, however, *burhs* were initiated in order to fulfil a requirement for defence or territorial control against the Danes. In this scenario the functions of defence, territorial and resource control and the provision of secure refuge initially figured large, only subsequently being superseded by the emergent requirements for economic, religious and secular expansion.

This regulation of new urban space governed the positioning of, amongst other structures, cathedrals, episcopal and royal palaces, military garrisons, mints and private housing. Any such construction and/or relocation of facilities would have been carried out solely with the ultimate approval of the state authorities, as regulators and/or owners of urban land. Building works would have included the provision of accommodation for churches, cathedrals and monastic houses. The gradual shift of ecclesiastical structures from the suburban peripheries towards the urban cores testifies to the growing significance of the Christian Church in, chronologically, Gaul, Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia. Although ultimately

answerable to the lay authorities, the growing prominence of the Church in social, political and economic urban affairs did, however, ensure that it was increasingly dictating its relocation to the urban core, notably in the case of Gaul with its close ecclesiastical/lay aristocratic elite linkages. The process occurred somewhat later in Britain, as opposed to Ireland and Scandinavia where the Church remained largely reliant upon lay official sanction.

Whilst the transformation of amphitheatres and theatres into fortresses denotes state-directed or aristocratic adaptive reuse, the impact of the lower social echelons on the fabric of the old Roman centres is also detectable. The cannibalisation of fora, amphitheatres and other relict public spaces for housing apparent in post-Roman towns in Gaul, Britain and Italy would appear to have been a response on the part of urban populations arising from a combination of convenience and logic. Although abandoned, these structures constituted sturdy stone- and/or brick-built structures available for rapid reuse either in new forms (housing or workshops) or as quarries for the construction of new accommodation. The reasoning behind such actions was, therefore, essentially that of economic necessity, stemming from a weakened economy and an attendant lack of economic, material and technological resources. However, it also signals a blurring of divisions between private and communal land, presumably with the permission of the town authorities. It is likely that much of such work was undertaken independently and without official sanction, raising the possibility either that the authorities were aware of but chose to ignore such unsanctioned adaptations, or that this work was permissible if it did not interfere with or compromise urban functional foci (see Section 5.2.3. for further discussion of this aspect). If, therefore, Mussolini's idealised city of large public open spaces and official buildings required the removal of the majority of the population and so offered no residential space (Quartermaine 1995: 213), the (presumably) official sanctioning of large-scale, non-elite private housing within the walls of late fourth-century Arles represents its antithesis.

As town populations shrunk so new urban space, in the suburbs in particular, became available to those who remained. The growing absence of public and administrative architecture resulted in increasingly private and scattered townscapes, grouped around monasteries, churches and markets.

This is all indicative of altered images of what urban space *could* contain, including burials – a fundamental change. However, to what extent was this regulated and how far an organic transition?

### **5.2.2: Active Space/Inactive Space**

Patterns of usage and regulation of urban space on the part of secular and ecclesiastical authorities were, therefore, frequently diverse, complex and ever-changing, as were the means employed to undertake these policies. It is also readily apparent that, whilst certain urban structural elements and zones were undergoing functional adaptation and change, usage of others was being consciously perpetuated. Put another way, the archaeological record offers hints of *functionally inert* as well as *actively utilised* urban space. Clearly, not all of these actions can have stemmed from official sanction.

It is consequently necessary to attempt to distinguish between those instances of *officially sanctioned or authorised* (re) use of town space and structures, and the actions of individuals operating *without* the express approval of the urban authorities (although not necessarily illegally). An example of the former might be the construction of private, non-elite housing against the exterior façade of the circus at Arles during the fourth to sixth centuries. The fact that these structures were directly associated with a still-functioning public structure and, therefore, likely to have still been accessible to the community is strongly suggestive of a lack of official sanction.

As to the identity of the inhabitants of this housing and the reasoning behind its appearance, this must be addressed separately, but the frequently piecemeal nature of these works is suggestive of initiatives on the part of individuals or family groups. Habitation of an area subject to presumably frequent and heavy use by foot traffic would have been difficult and unpleasant and, consequently, suggestive of necessity rather than choice. Although such construction work is unlikely to have been undertaken with the express permission of the authorities, it is feasible that they were in any case unaware of or not overly concerned with developments

beyond their walled enclaves. As providers of shelter and sustenance to the urban poor, the bishops are likely to have been particularly sympathetic to their plight. Conversely, the adoption of redundant public structures and spaces such as fora, amphitheatres and road surfaces as residential areas might be deemed officially acceptable. This was in part due to the fact that the community as a whole presumably no longer had need of them, but also due to the fact that their conversion would have required the wholesale reorganisation of frequently substantial areas, utilising considerable resources and workforces. Hence, there is the implication that these schemes might be official responses to influxes of groups (whether civilian or military garrisons) into central urban areas, whether from the suburbs or further afield.

### **5.2.3: Living in the Ruins (Figure 55)**

Whilst post-Roman urban authorities and populations sought variously to adapt, remodel or replace inherited classical structures and space (see Section 5.2.5), in certain cases town inhabitants evidently chose to live in and amidst increasingly ruinous remnants of former Roman structures rather than engage in the *active reworking* of their surroundings via site clearance and redevelopment. We must question such 'squatter' existence: are these developments simply the inevitable, logical and convenient outcome of the paucity of financial and material resources on the part of post-Roman populations 'making do'? Or are they more proactive, conscious choices on the part of individuals, selectively drawing upon the urban past as need dictated? Does the occupation amidst piles of rubble and walls of ruinous Roman structures archaeologically identifiable at Chester and Leicester constitute a *breakdown* in terms of the regulation of urban space, or simply the *reuse* of conveniently redundant communal space? Too often such living is termed 'squatter' occupation, carrying with it connotations of poverty and vagrancy. Is this really the case? Or are we in fact misreading the archaeology?

In the case of Chester, buildings associated with the Roman fortress survived into the tenth century. During the tenth and eleventh centuries archaeology attests to widespread occupation in *convenient* (but possibly not entirely comfortable) spaces

amongst and on top of rubble deposits and walls. The overriding impression is of individuals living amongst and not impacting upon a ruinous settlement, a scenario for which Strickland offers the possible analogy of present-day occupation of the Roman *praetorium* at Umm el-Jemal in Jordan (1988: 117) (Figure 55). However, elsewhere in Chester the active reuse and adaptation of earlier remains is visible in the form of the possible use of the *principia* as a church already from the fourth century and the late Saxon use of a building associated with the *principia* as a market (*ibid*: 110). Consequently there is the suggestion of separate threads of development taking place in the post-Roman 'townscape'. At an official level the controlling powers were actively engaged in the reworking of the urban fabric for communal (religious and economic) purposes, whilst lower-status individuals were engaged in house construction and, presumably, associated agricultural and craft activity.

Recent work close to the centre of Roman Leicester offers a similar picture of a settlement that its inhabitants and/or occasional visitors were actively attempting to shape. This work evidently involved the adaptation as well as replacement of remnant Roman structures, but seemingly at a low-status, non-official level – although it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between officially sanctioned and non-official actions. Distributions of fifth- and sixth-century ceramic material at Causeway Lane and other sites point to levels of activity analogous with the contemporary dispersed rural site of Eye Kettleby, east of Leicester (Connor & Buckley 1999: 83). This pseudo-urban occupation appears to have existed in the context of substantially surviving late Roman public buildings, with the forum and other structures probably enduring as upstanding structures well into the medieval period (R. Buckley, pers. comm.). Structural elements of remnant Roman buildings at Causeway Lane survived sufficiently into the medieval period to be incorporated into eleventh- and twelfth-century timber constructions. More indirectly, there is clear evidence for the perpetuation of Roman wall alignments in the area of the forum in medieval property boundaries, implying lengthy survivals of the Roman public buildings (Connor & Buckley 1999: 71).

Consequently it would appear that here, as in various former Romano-British towns, relict masonry structures survived as upstanding structures and were, therefore,

readily available for robbing until well into the medieval period. In addition, it is apparent that from as early as the fourth century urban space was the subject of adaptation in the form of the demolition of earlier structures and their replacement with timber structures. However, beyond the possible existence of a late Roman cathedral on or near the forum, none of the post-Roman activity visible in Leicester has the air of 'official' function or sanction. As is suggested for Chester, building work appears to have been undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis.

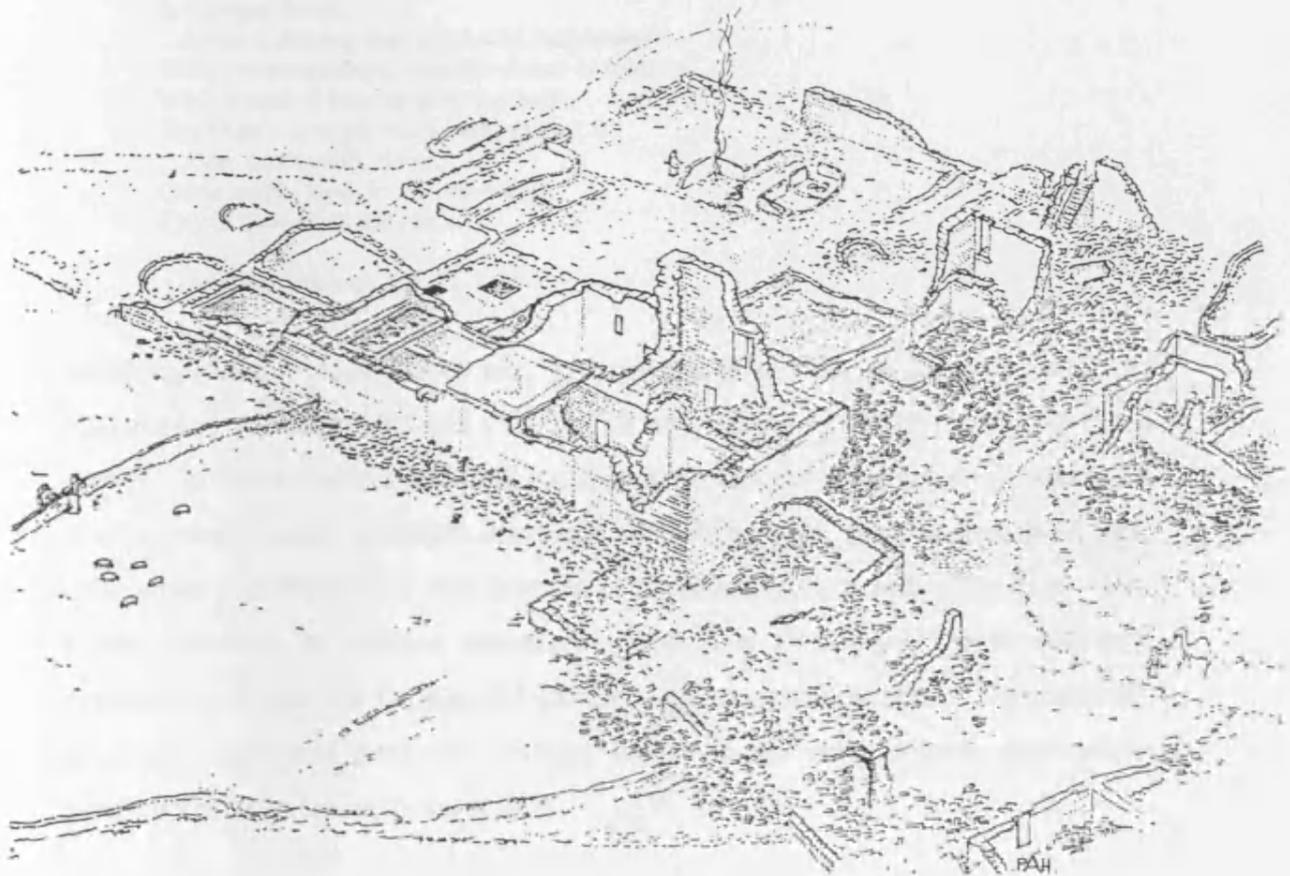


Figure 55: Umm el-Jemal, Jordan: Modern-Day Occupation of the Fourth-Century *Praetorium* (Source: Strickland 1988: 117)

Although such construction evidently did not constitute urban planning in the accepted sense, it was, however, undertaken in a way that both selectively drew from and respected pre-existing structures and property boundaries. Did such occupation amidst rubble and ruinous structural remains constitute something more than mere convenience? The choice to live and work on top of and around such

remains rather than repair or replace them might, perhaps, imply a degree of respect, fear or admiration for the structural legacy of their predecessors. Anglo-Saxon writings do suggest a certain regard for the monumentality of Roman buildings and, by association, their creators:

Fate has smashed these wonderful walls,  
This broken city, has crumbled the work  
Of giants. The roofs are gutted, the towers  
Fallen, the gates ripped off, frost  
In the mortar, everything moulded, gaping,  
Collapsed. The earth has clutched at rulers  
And builders, a hundred generations rotting  
In its rigid hands...  
...It was a shining city, filled with bathhouses,  
With towering gables, with the shouts of soldiers,  
With dozens of rousing drinking halls,  
Until fate's strength was swung against it...  
...Here was wealth, silver,  
Gems, cattle, land, in the crowning  
City of a far-flung kingdom.

*(The Ruin, line nos. 1-8, 21-4, 35-7)*

Admiring though such works are, it would appear that, in certain cases, the resources, organisation and will were sufficiently lacking to engineer coherent urban change. In this scenario individuals and family groups chose rather to live and work in convenient, readily available open spaces such as relict road surfaces and fora. Only when a particular site was deemed of especial practical and/or symbolic merit would clearance be deemed necessary – and only then when the means were available to do so. In the case of Chester, the extensive survival of monumental structures associated with the fortress indicates that such moves were rarely necessary prior to the medieval period.

Why, then, did people choose to live in the midst of such dereliction and decay? Reasons of duty, obligation or direct protection may be discounted in light of the probable indifference or physical absence of authority figures. There must, however, have been a degree of both symbolic and actual shelter to be gained from living and/or working within upstanding building shells and wall circuits. The lowly character of occupation as seen at Chester would indicate that these were not individuals who in any way viewed themselves as the rightful social heirs to these former Roman places. Rather, they were likely there, whether as permanent

residents or occasional visitors, to make utilitarian use of these places as, variously, quarries, animal shelters, market gardens, workshops and, perhaps, places of residence. It is clear that the decision by these people to base themselves within relict fortresses and towns was one of *personal choice*, and not one forced for reasons of practical necessity or social obligation.

The general impression gained from the British evidence is of small-scale post-Roman urban populations picking their way between masonry foundations and footings and, in the case of the relict Roman public buildings, ruinous but upstanding walls. In the case of Chester the structures associated with the former fortress were seemingly purely quarries, building resources to be drawn upon as required. As an essentially utilitarian resource, symbolic associations with a monumental past appear to have been lacking or, at best, secondary to practical considerations, with no draw being exerted upon people by the remains. Furthermore, there is an implied absence (or unwillingness) of individuals or social groups choosing to draw upon the Roman urban legacy in order to bolster their position amongst those choosing to visit and/or reside within the former fortress. Although Britain continues to lack indications of socially superior, populous residential zones seen on the continent, hints of post-Roman market and episcopal presences do testify to (if only occasional) influxes of people into the former towns for economic and religious purposes. The fact that salvaging of materials and structures was so piecemeal in character is further suggestive of a lack of regulation and, by implication, an absence of controlling authorities on the site. It also implies that the number of individuals making use of the site, either as residents or sporadic visitors was low; greater numbers of people would have necessitated more systematic clearances of wider areas. The evidence is, again, suggestive of initiatives by individuals or family groups.

The possible continuation of central-place functions beyond the Roman period is suggested by the emergence of certain of the former Roman towns in the middle Saxon period as centres of Christian and secular power. Whilst such presences during the intervening period may have taken the form of the sizeable urban estates as postulated for Winchester and Lincoln, aristocrats and emergent royal houses were, until the later Saxon period, based upon rural estates.

Consequently the ruinous towns cannot generally be deemed the typical settings for the higher social echelons.

Clearly one must differentiate between the actions of the authorities and those of individuals and groups from the lower social echelons. In the case of the former, in Britain secular leaders and the Church were evidently aware of the existence of the former Roman towns, forts and other structural remains and capable of putting them to use when practical and ideological considerations dictated. Such moves are manifest in decisions to utilise former forts as monastic sites and to site early cathedrals in town fora (Leicester, Exeter, Lincoln). In the case of Chester, the presence in the former fortress of 'squatter' occupation is surely indicative of its functional redundancy during the post-Roman period. In this scenario those low-status individuals making use of the site were seemingly allowed to make use of the site as they saw fit. Therefore, whilst occupation overlying fallen masonry and on disused road surfaces clearly *does* constitute a profound change in terms of the use of urban space, it does *not* mark a breakdown in terms of its regulation; rather, the controlling powers chose not to exercise constraint upon its use. Further, the scattered occupation attests a 'clinging onto' settlement in these decayed urban seats.

#### **5.2.4: Failures and Losses**

In certain instances changes in terms of political and economic power structures resulted in urban functional attrition and, potentially, failure through obsolescence or marginalisation. These developments could take the form of deliberate shifts of activity to a new location, as with the movement of merchants by the Scandinavian kings, or the progressive loss of urban attributes from the former Romano-British towns. The overriding tendency amongst later Roman and early medieval towns was, however, for their survival, albeit often with considerable alteration of form and function. Hence, with a few notable exceptions, the failures *did*, subsequently, regain their urban functions. It is possible that such revivals stemmed from 'tradition' and a conscious desire to invoke the Roman urban past at a time of heightened insecurity. In Britain the Danish threat and the instigation of the burghal

system combined to permit such 'renewal', initially at a proto-urban level, in the form of name survivals or the acknowledgement of their Roman origins by the epithet *-caester* (as in Caistor-by-Norwich).

The failure and loss of urban structures and roles presumably arose in the main from functional obsolescence. Such changes will have ranged from progressive attrition and eventual disappearance of particular functions to total loss of urban status. Chapter Two served to outline the British case studies, but it is pertinent to re-emphasise at this point the decay of the key site of Wroxeter. The town's belated seventh-century abandonment is likely to have stemmed from functional redundancy in the face of the emergence of Mercian power and the resultant establishment of nearby Shrewsbury (Barker *et al.* 1997: 244). It is, however, open to question whether the decision to leave the site was voluntary or imposed upon its inhabitants by the authorities. The latter scenario was clearly being played out in the *deliberate and final* abandonment of the Scandinavian trading sites of Dankirke and Reric and the transferral by the Scandinavian royal houses of their resident merchants to Ribe and Hedeby. Here, however, the decision to transfer craft production and trade activity wholesale from one location to another appears to have been based on market factors. Similar deliberate decisions of abandonment appear to lie behind the final desertion of *Hamwic* in favour of the royal burghal centre of Winchester, albeit following a period of co-existence.

In the case of Gaul, an episcopal presence proved fundamental to the retention of urban status, *but not to a settlement's very existence*. Consequently on the rare occasion that an individual bishop chose to transfer his seat to another location, whether for reasons of personal security, internal politics or personal preference, the result would normally be serious functional repercussions for the earlier site, the title of *civitas* generally moving with him. Clearly, therefore, an episcopal withdrawal would have dealt a serious blow to a town's standing, but not, however, threatened its very existence. Moreover, the overriding tendency was for continuity, with such moves representing *transferrals of function* from one location to another. The extremely rare instances of actual failure and desertion (Aps, Javols) are largely explicable by poor location, long-term decline and depopulation; a town lacking a sizeable congregation would in any case have encouraged episcopal abandonment.

### **5.2.5: Emergent Urban Forms**

Stemming from the economic revival of the seventh and eighth centuries, a range of disparate but inter-linked specialist foci came into existence prior to their progressive clustering together to produce the medieval town. In the case of Britain, emergent rulers based within the former Roman centres guided the emergence of the *wics*. Scandinavian developments prompted a reciprocal flow of influences upon urban form between the homelands and Britain, Gaul and Ireland, resulting in a range of both specialist and multifunctional proto-urban centres and towns. The perpetuation and extension of Gaul's urban infrastructure beyond the Roman period produced frequently sizeable and complex multipurpose towns, with few indications of the creation of physically separate specialist settlements seen in Britain.

Largely arising from perceptions of heightened insecurity, the post-Roman urban populations appear to have undergone a certain change of social scale. The sense of community previously fostered via places of group interaction such as forum and baths was progressively replaced with a certain introspective quality whereby aristocratic and/or aristocratic elites were retreating behind wall circuits, stemming from reasons of security and, presumably, a desire for seclusion from the lower social orders. The progressive abandonment of the majority of Roman public monuments meant that the churches and cathedrals were, in most cases, the sole places of communal assembly. Conversely, at the same time, the range of new strategies that served to impact upon urban form and function demonstrate a marked *dynamism* on the part of (shrunken) late- and post-Roman populations. Freed from the constraints of the effectively redundant classical model, they were able to shape the towns to their own emergent needs of defence, Christian worship and commerce, whilst, in the main, retaining their role as secular administrative centres. In addition, the fact that there was now such a range of socio-political groupings operating across Europe increased the breadth of potential town types and forms, including, in case of the *wics*, settlements constructed for a specialist (economic) function, albeit with controlling linkages to nearby aristocratic/royal central places. These were individuals neither constrained nor over-awed by the Roman heritage who seemingly had no compunction in taking apart and reshaping relict structures

and townscapes. At the same time they demonstrate the ability to adopt certain elements of that urban inheritance in order to produce something *new*, as in the case of Dublin and York.

As the range of urban functions diversified and individual towns took on specialist roles so two or more foci of activity must frequently have taken on the aspect of physically separate entities. Increased diversity equalled greater complexity of form and, hence, morphologically distinct (but inter-dependent) foci. Did the positioning of the Middle Saxon *wic* settlements on virgin sites away from the former Roman towns signal a conscious rejection of the past, as Bradley claims (1993: 122)? The likelihood is that they stemmed from a combination of practicality, choosing to instigate these productive and market sites from scratch on a clean slate, and a desire to avoid interference with the Roman urban cores and their centralised authority associations.

The post-Roman period is characterised by a wide range of possible scenarios in terms of urban form and function – what Benevolo has termed a ‘vast, open-minded and ingenious experiment’ (1993: 15). Within the former empire, the erosion of centralised control and its gradual replacement with more localised systems offered the potential for a much broader interpretation of the notion of ‘town’. The Roman prototype (or, rather, its loss) ultimately gave rise to a range of urban forms. Each had its own debt to its classical forerunner, but this was only one element of the formula that was subsequently added to by Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Carolingian and Scandinavian groupings. As new, divergent states emerged, so the potential range of urban form and function widened in order to suit the requirements of these groups. Even if, ultimately, their goals remained the same (i.e. economic and political supremacy), *their chosen means of so doing did diverge*.

The twin factors driving such developments may be summarised as (i) the changing needs of the urban populace, be they political, religious, social, defensive, economic; and (ii) the abandonment and adaptation of town plan and structures resulting from these demands.

### 5.3: AGENTS OF CONTROL AND DEVELOPMENT

Having defined and detailed a range of manifestations of late antique and early medieval urban development and change, we may now move to considering the agents of these processes. Who controlled and regulated urban remodelling and to what ends? Is a distinct hierarchy of control discernible? How did this authority react to and make use of the urban past, and to what extent did individual structures contribute to urban change? Can, for example, an eleventh-century Anglo-Scandinavian king have had an accurate perception of a Roman town that he was, in part, seeking to reproduce in *Jorvik*? Is there an implied admiration of the Roman state, or was this the simple emulation of certain physical elements viewed as most appropriate for the task in hand, namely a well-ordered, readily-defended and economically-viable town? Moreover, is it viable for a present-day academic to hope to gauge accurately the perceptions and expectations of such individuals? Here we assess the possible/probable roles of royalty, aristocratic and ecclesiastical elites, artisans and ordinary urban inhabitants in perceiving and shaping the towns of post-Roman and early medieval Europe.

#### 5.3.1: Royalty and Secular Elites

Whether as permanent residents or occasional visitors, the emergent royal houses and dynasties were key to urban development across all three study regions. As successors to the Roman state administration, kings in Britain and Gaul employed town creation and exploitation of internal urban space, structures and the activities of its inhabitants as a means by which to perpetuate and expand economic and political hold over their kingdoms. Beyond the study regions, relevant is early Lombardic recognition of the significance of towns as occupational, administrative and defensive foci guaranteed the establishment of duchies in Italian towns from an early date (Christie 1995: 148). The perpetuation of close Gallic aristocratic-town links ensured early ducal and royal urban presences, the former figuring large in the episcopacy. In Britain, the serious erosion or else formal removal of the Roman state apparatus in AD 410 resulted in the transferral or usurpation of power to estate-based local groupings (possibly chieftains) prior to the emergence of the

Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the later Saxon removal of the royal houses to the urban context. In the case of Scandinavia, the prolonged and convoluted process of state formation mitigated against the early appearance of towns, urban-based royal houses making a belated appearance in the eleventh century with the emergence of the nation states.

#### (i) Urban Elites and Administrations

In the Roman provinces aristocracy and administrative systems were, from an early date, essentially urban-based. The later empire was, however, characterised by the removal of certain aristocratic individuals to rural estates and the delayed transferral of emergent royal houses to the towns on a permanent basis. Despite a similarly prolonged absence from Scandinavian and Irish towns kings maintained representative presences from an early date.

Not simply the form but, ultimately, the continuing existence of towns and urban life/life within towns was reliant upon the will of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities and their desire to continue to invest time and money in the towns. It was they who could sustain, adapt or abandon the towns as they saw fit in order to suit their defensive, economic and political priorities. This need not, however, necessarily imply the *physical presence* of these bodies and individuals within the towns.

These elites cannot, however, have been immune from the influence of the past and, as well as consciously manipulating notions of the town past and present to their own ends, must themselves have been prey to misperceptions of the institution and of life therein.

Although the process was, in certain instances, protracted and complex, all three study regions were characterised by the eventual decision by kings, along with the Church, to transfer their administrations to the urban context in recognition of the fact that these were now the *accepted foci of power*. This duality of secular and ecclesiastical power is typified by similar transferrals of kings and bishops to

**Hungarian** towns along the Danube during the medieval period. The donation in 1198 by Imre of an unfinished royal residence to the bishop of Esztergom and construction of a new palace close by resulted in Church and state power jointly emanating from within the walls of a single castle. Similarly, the division of Óduda (Old Buda) between the Church and the royal house in 1355 resulted in the development of an ecclesiastical settlement focussed on the former Roman *castrum* and an extramural royal castle, the two linked by a former Roman road (Gerevich 1990: 40).

In common with other Roman provinces, the *civitates* in **Britain** provided the bases for the imperial administrative systems and, to a large extent, socially prominent individuals for much of the Roman period, urban life being synonymous with classical civilisation. Although decisions regarding individual Romano-British towns had, to a large extent, been the responsibility of prominent local figures, AD 410 signalled the formal acknowledgement by Rome that jurisdiction over the towns had now devolved to the local level. Ironically, the majority of those individuals then left in the position to make such decisions chose to remain outside the urban context that, in certain cases, appears to have become the sole preserve of the bishops. Abandonment appears to have stemmed either from obsolescence or a perceived insecurity.

Nevertheless, although the towns and forts do not appear to have been fully utilised, they nevertheless retain the appearance of being in the ownership of the royal houses. Forts of the Saxon Shore such as Brancaster, Portchester and Richborough were donated to the Church as monastic land after AD 600, whilst Winchester retained its aristocratic and/or royal focus, despite the fact that the resident population was too low for it to be deemed genuinely urban. Certain of the former Roman towns such as Lincoln, Winchester, London and York, therefore, offer the possibility of choices on the part of aristocratic individuals and groups to remain in places with, presumably, dynastic and family associations or memories of privilege and social obligation. The laying out of substantial aristocratic private estates such as that excavated at Lower Brook Street in Winchester would appear to represent *positive and substantial investments* in what were still deemed preferred places of aristocratic residence (Dixon 1992: 156). The reasoning behind such moves is

likely to have been twofold. Firstly, substantial survivals of relict masonry public and military buildings and wall circuits would have provided readily adaptive structures and sources of building materials. Secondly, the linking of a physically impressive urban past with the emergent regime of a culture with a building tradition of timber construction would have assisted legitimization of its claim to authority (see below).

Certain aristocratic/chieftly/royal figures appear to have sought to perpetuate (or else revive) former Roman towns such as Canterbury and Lincoln as residential and/or power centres into the fifth and sixth centuries. Leader figure associations are also forthcoming from the border towns of Caerwent, Catterick and the forts of Birdoswald, Pen Llystyn and *Segontium* (Bradley 1993: 123). There are, however, few indications of an active desire and/or ability on the part of these individuals to *actively imitate* the classical urban heritage. The clearest attempt either to renew via emulation or, as is more likely, *perpetuate* classical urban life via monumental architecture is, however, represented by the fifth-century remodelling of the baths insula at Wroxeter. Whether at the behest of a local chieftain or bishop, the construction in timber of monumental, Roman-styled buildings is surely indicative of the desire of a powerful resident individual to consolidate his/her social standing through identification with the past. As to whether this same individual was attempting to sustain classical urban life *per se* via the establishment of shops, market and associated housing is entirely open to question due to uncertainties regarding the existence of a resident population and the interpretation of the archaeology. What is clear is that, in the seventh century, the strategy failed, and the urban core was abandoned due to changes in the light of Wroxeter's political and strategic redundancy.

On entering the seventh and eighth centuries and the period of the *emporia*, kings were evidently choosing to remain outside evidently specialist market settlements and, therefore, what might have been deemed *unsuitable* royal residences, although the likelihood is that the kings maintained a regulatory presence via resident officials. The inclusion of a royal enclave in the midst of a purely economic settlement would, in any case, have taken up valuable productive space. The ninth and tenth centuries were characterised by the establishment of permanent seats by

the emergent Anglo-Saxon royal houses in the form of *burhs*, either in the Roman towns or purpose-built on virgin sites. The focussing of previously widely dispersed functional foci in a single central location was unprecedented and thus may be indicative of the uncontested nature of royal power by this date. The scale and character of the defensive burghal network represented a significant stage in the development of the medieval town (Loyn 1962: 133). The contribution of the Scandinavian states was twofold. Firstly, it was the threat of (mainly Danish) invasion that provided the catalyst for the instigation of an integrated defensive system. Secondly, as individuals responsible for the establishment of Dublin and York, the Anglo-Scandinavian kings were the creators of a new urban form, the result of a blend of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Irish and Christian elements. Conversely, the multi-functional royal and ecclesiastical town was one of a number of concepts brought back to the Scandinavian homelands.

**Gaul** possessed a long-standing tradition of local aristocratic involvement in urban patronage, governance and economic life, notably in those regions bordering the Mediterranean. Increasing involvement of Gallic aristocratic individuals and families in the Church's episcopal and monastic hierarchies provided a vehicle for the perpetuation of town-based administrative systems beyond the Roman period. The fact that, almost without exception, Gallic towns endured into the medieval period, despite physical and functional fluctuations or shifts was, in large part, due to the continuing involvement and investment by aristocratic individuals, Germanic royal houses and attendant administrations of money and resources in urban life. Examples include Burgundian Vienne, Frankish Trier and Merovingian Paris. Above all, this reflects the continuing belief of nobility and royalty in the towns as an effective means of *social control*.

Consequently Gaul's key towns were characterised by early and enduring presences of the kings of the emergent Germanic states, serving to perpetuate the *civitas* organisational network (Loseby 2000: 83). Arles represents one of the clearest such examples, wherein resident imperial, Visigothic, Ostrogothic and Frankish administrations and attendant officials provided continuity of authority and leadership, illustrative of the city's enduring economic, political and strategic importance. Assuming the title of Austrasian capital, Metz endured as a political

centre into the Carolingian period. The loss or the withdrawal of royalty from a town was rare; Paris's loss of function as a royal seat was mitigated somewhat by its continuing role as a Frankish count's seat (Velay 1992: 108). It is evident that, in certain instances, the conflicting interests of royal and ecclesiastical power manifested themselves in the dominance of one over the other – in the case of Merovingian Metz the dual presence of the royal house and the palace mayors serving to prevent episcopal pre-eminence (Vigneron 1986: 75). Conversely, certain Germanic rulers such as Chilperic apparently chose to remain on their rural estates rather than attempt urban residency as a result of the dominance of the bishops and Christianity in towns such as Tours (Van Dam 1985: 185). An increasing tendency amongst rulers such as Childerbert and Chilperic to conduct assemblies, councils and meetings on rural estates was compounded by the subsequent decision of the Merovingian kings to switch their affairs to rural palaces, notably Cluny, by the mid-seventh century (Loseby 1998: 263). Consequently, the fact that such kings felt themselves to be thus excluded demonstrates that such figures *were*, to a great extent, dependent upon the towns as bases for their rule and administration, and that their absence was deemed detrimental to effective governance.

As regards the aristocracy, prominent local family members viewed episcopal office and the taking of monastic orders as a means by which to perpetuate obligations of Christian duty, personal and family ambitions and allegiance to one's town. As a consequence of its urban nature, service in the Church would have obliged residence in the towns – although certain individuals were the subject of episcopal reprimands for spending too much time on their rural estates (Harries 1992: 90). There are, moreover, indications that Italian as well as Gallic rulers also actively promoted the towns as the proper place of residence in the face of seeming aristocratic reluctance:

Constantly dwelling, as you are, within the sacred walls (of Rome), you request that leave of absence be granted you, for your personal benefit...my love bestows on your illustrious greatness four months' leave of withdrawal to your province, on condition that you hasten to return to your own house, when they have expired. Thus, the residence of Rome, the most glorious place on earth, which I mean to be crowded with vast throngs, may not grow thinly populated...Where can you look on buildings of such beauty? It is a kind of sin for those who can have their fixed dwellings in Rome to make it long a stranger to them.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* III: 21 King Theoderic to the Illustrious Faustus c.AD 512)

Men declare their great delight even in the countryside of this province; do they then have no desire to inhabit its cities? What is the use of men lying hidden, when they have been so refined by education?...Let the cities, then, return to their original glory; let no-one prefer the delights of the countryside to the public buildings of the ancients. How can you shun in time of peace a place for which wars should be fought to prevent its destruction?

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* VIII: 31: King Athalaric to the Distinguished Severus c.AD 526-7)

The correspondence of Sidonius Apollinaris and its frequent exhortations to his aristocratic friends to leave their country estates and return to Lyon and Narbonne also imply that, by the fifth century, urban life and public office were less attractive propositions (Loseby 1998: 25).

Despite the fact that their homelands lacked the urban tradition of the former Roman provinces, the **Scandinavian** peoples were, paradoxically, assisting in both town revivals and the creation of new urban forms in England, Gaul and Ireland. And yet the emergent Scandinavian and Irish royal houses, along with the Christian Church, appear to have viewed the urban setting as unsuitable until well into the medieval period, long preferring to remain *outside* the urban context and constantly moving between rural estates such as Jelling and Hundhamra. Chieftains and kings were, nevertheless, entirely capable of effectively instigating and guiding town development and serving to control activities therein.

Were towns in these regions, therefore, solely instruments of social and economic control? The absence of ecclesiastical, aristocratic and royal figures may, on the one hand, be explained by the unsuitability of these purely utilitarian places of production and trade for aristocratic and royal residence, despite royal ownership of land at sites such as Birka, Helgö and Hedeby from the ninth century (Clarke & Ambrosiani 1995: 50). Royal officials were, moreover, operating from these settlements from an early date, and these places were the object of frequent royal visits. Royal control of urban space presumably also largely explains the prolonged absence of the Church until such date as the kings permitted a Christian presence, initially in the form of churches and, subsequently, cathedrals; such moves could only have been instigated with the granting of land to the Church. Even at this stage, the continuing existence of rural cathedrals and monasteries until well into the medieval period may suggest an inability on the part of the ecclesiastical

authorities to shift the Church infrastructure to the towns. Alternatively, it may reflect a belief that, as the system was functioning adequately, there was no need for its transferral.

The fluid, volatile nature of Irish and Scandinavian state formation processes was such that, for a considerable period, the royal houses simply lacked sufficient hold over their emergent territories to centralise the various economic, political and religious functions in a single focus, the town. Subsequently, with the development of nation states and resultant changes to kingship, the town was deemed the proper place for both royalty and Church – and the royal houses had the requisite control of people and resources to carry out this transferral. Hence the significant increase in Danish town foundations during the tenth and eleventh centuries (Ulriksen 1994: 806.)

Zealand is an island, very large in extent, situated in an inner bight of the Baltic Sea...Its largest city is Roskilde, the seat of Danish royalty...To the west of it lies Jutland, with the cities of Aarhus and Aalborg, and Wendila.

(Adam of Bremen, *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Four: A Description of the Islands of the North V: 5*)

Nevertheless, royal capitals such as Copenhagen were only in place at the close of the medieval period. Despite the extremely late arrival of Scandinavian urbanism and town-based royalty, however, the fact that Denmark had been unified under a single ruler from the early ninth century and the reign of Godfred demonstrates that here, at least, effective royal power was *not* reliant upon a single, fixed operational base. Expansion of the urban network was, however, rendered possible and speeded by the firm control of the royal houses over regional manufacturing and market patterns and, once the decision had been taken by the kings to expand their power, the complex, multifunctional towns were the inevitable outcome. The fact that towns appeared in Sweden some two centuries later than in Denmark and Norway indicates the tardy development of royal power. Similarly, despite the proximity of Scotland to the Danelaw, Viking involvement in Scotland remained minimal. Conversely, royal Scottish dynastic involvement in developments in Dublin and York by Constantín mac Áeda accompanied the consolidation of Scottish royal power throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries (Foster 1996: 117). The eventual

creation of towns in the twelfth century by David I and successors represented a formal acknowledgement of the existence of stable pre-existing settlements such as Berwick, Perth and Stirling (Yeoman 1995: 54).

## (ii) Urban Symbolism

In attempting to determine the means by which changing administrations sought to utilise inherited towns and space and structures therein, it is firstly essential to clarify the types of symbolism involved in this process. Consequently it is necessary to differentiate between (i) the selective adaptation and/or reuse of relict spaces and buildings for practical considerations of accommodation and defence, and (ii) the conscious, calculated manipulation of the concept of 'the town' by high-status individuals for *actively symbolic or propagandist* ends.

Certain elements of the urban past were carefully adopted by emergent administrations. This was, in part, in order to legitimate claims to power, as in the adoption by the Anglo-Saxon royal houses of former Roman towns and forts, and even in the use of Roman plan elements by the Scandinavians in England, Ireland and their homelands. In Gaul, however, the inherited structural remains continued to evolve under new rulers with continuing attendant Roman-influenced populations. In addition, the relict, redundant urban past could be subject to *alteration or adaptation* and so effectively *subverted*, via the calling on the grandeur of the past, in order to suit the requirements of new administrations. When, for example, the church of Saint-Paul-in-the-Bail was constructed at the centre of Lincoln's Roman forum, presumably at the behest of the civil administration, the bishop must have been aware of the symbolic power to the Church of adopting a presumably still-monumental setting previously synonymous with secular authority. Similarly, the inferred siting of Exeter's first cathedral within the *principia* of the Roman fortress suggested by a tenth-century church dedication to St. Peter implies the accompaniment of Christian with military authority (Strickland 1988: 115). These actions evidently represented more than the simple conversion of a conveniently relict space. As with the adoption of forts as early monastic sites, such moves seemingly represent attempts on the part of the

Church to justify its presence through equation with Roman authority (Bradley 1993: 122) or, simply, the Roman 'past' – albeit moves only possible with the express permission of the lay authorities.

Problems arise, however, when attempting to determine between such deliberately adaptive reworkings of the urban fabric on the part of emergent administrations for *consciously ideological* ends and the *purely adaptive and convenient reuse* of redundant structures and spaces, such as the conversion of Vienne's forum to private housing in the fifth and sixth centuries (*Archéologie Médiévale* 19, 279-280). Such construction could, presumably, only be carried out with the official sanction of those in control of intramural land. (However, see Section 5.2.2 regarding Active/Inactive Space).

In **Britain**, there are few indications of sub-Roman and Anglo-Saxon chiefs or kings making use of the Roman urban heritage for symbolic or propagandist purposes of legitimation, as was clearly happening in Gaul and Italy. Fifth- and sixth-century local leaders appear to have had little requirement and/or requisite resources to perpetuate the decayed classical towns. Furthermore, as Britain lacked any semblance of comprehensive organisational frameworks (whether secular or ecclesiastical), there can have been no obligation on the part of prominent local chiefs and, subsequently, Anglo-Saxon kings and nobility to integrate with a pre-existing organisational framework. Nor can there have been any direct challenge to their authority as was the case with the emergent Germanic states in Italy.

Nevertheless, clear evidence that certain aristocratic and/or royal figures *were* maintaining a physical presence in former Roman centres such as Lincoln, York, London and Canterbury into the fifth century and beyond would strongly suggest that, as centres away from the political peripheries, these were still deemed *workable foci* of economic and social control. Consequently it made good political sense to maintain their use. This view is supported by the fact that the secular authorities were frequently accompanied in the centres of the former Roman towns by bishops, whom in certain instances (Canterbury, Lincoln, London) may have provided organisational continuity into the Anglo-Saxon period. In this process leaders were, firstly, assisted by the survival of usable fortified *enceintes* in the form

of substantial civilian and military wall circuit and structural survivals. Secondly, public perceptions of their power and legitimation of claims to authority would have been assisted via direct association with a powerful Roman urban heritage and its legacy of spectacular material remains, monuments that appear to have engendered a degree of awe in post-Roman minds:

Fate has smashed these wonderful walls,  
This broken city, has crumbled the work  
Of giants. The roofs are gutted, the towers  
Fallen, the gates ripped off, frost  
In the mortar, everything moulded, gaping,  
Collapsed...  
...It was a shining city, filled with bathhouses,  
With towering gables, with the shouts of soldiers,  
With dozens of rousing drinking halls,  
Until fate's strength was swung against it...  
...There were buildings  
Of stone, where steaming currents threw up  
Surging heat; a wall encircled  
That brightness, with the baths inside at the glowing  
Heart. Life was easy and lush.

(*The Ruin*, line nos. 1-6, 21-4, 37-41)

Fifth-century activity within the military fortress at York may represent the attempts of individuals to bid for authority, status or tribute through a site associated with Roman (military) authority. However, this seemingly intermittent use of the baths basilica site by animals and humans, possibly as a farm or market hall in the midst of an apparently increasingly squalid and ruinous urban environment militates against it being representative of resident officialdom. Rather, it has the air of attempts at self-sufficiency on the part of individuals in an increasingly run-down urban context (Carver 1995: 195).

On entering the Anglo-Saxon period kings and aristocratic figures adopted the shells of former Roman towns including Winchester and forts such as Portchester – certain of which were seemingly functioning in the intervening period as aristocratic and/or episcopal centres – as a means by which to justify their authority via reference to continental European states (*ibid*: 122). Direct association of their authority with still-monumental Roman structural remains would have had undoubted propagandist value for the emergent administrations. Concurrently, royal authority was further consolidated and extended via the instigation of new

classes of settlements on a combination of former Roman and previously unoccupied sites. Overt Roman urban influence is evident in a number of respects regarding physical components and organisational system of *wics* such as *Gipeswic* and *Hamwic* and the Alfredian *burhs* including Winchester, Chichester and Exeter. This utilisation of the urban past cannot, however, be dismissed as purely propagandist; these were not slavish copies of Roman towns or forts, in that the Roman elements are only one of a number of influences drawn from Ireland and the Scandinavian homelands in addition to Rome. Rather, it would appear that rulers were logically and swiftly capable of drawing from a range of sources in order to create a new urban form, and one most suited to its allotted function(s).

It is apparent that the trading settlements generally occupied virgin sites, so avoiding the former Roman centres. The implication may be, therefore, that their instigators were choosing to *deliberately avoid* the pre-existing sites, not simply because the new sites gave free rein for purpose-built specialist design, but that the Roman sites were being retained solely for elite residence. Their sharing of precious urban space with economic functions would detract from and weaken their exclusive character and favourable associations with a monumental urban past. If this was indeed the case, the Anglo-Scandinavian kings were fully aware of the value of associating their regimes with this urban heritage.

In part due to contemporary documentary survivals, clear indications of the active adoption by royal houses of the urban heritage for *actively symbolic, propagandist ends* are considerably more apparent and widespread in Gaul and Italy. Certain of the Germanic kings consciously and actively sought to directly identify themselves and their administrations with the classical towns in order to consolidate their claims as natural successors to and inheritors of the Roman state. In **Italy**, Lombardic rule was characterised by a marked imperial influence in the ready acceptance of pre-existing towns such as Pavia, Verona and Lucca as suitable bases for royal and ducal authority and the construction therein of palaces. The circus at Milan was also utilised by Agilulf for the coronation of his son and successor Adaloald in AD 604 (Christie 1995: 147). Similarly, in **Gaul**, King Chilperic sought to emulate the Byzantine emperors via the construction of circuses in Paris and Soissons. However, whilst a progressive transferral of royal activities away

from the towns to rural estates, notably Cluny, did not detract from rulers' belief in the town as the proper place for the conducting of kingship (Loseby 1998: 263), it must have downplayed the necessity to emulate Roman imperial rule. Post-Roman adaptations of relict public structures and spaces to private housing, as with the forum at Vienne or a baths suite at Angers are illustrative of a disinclination on the part of the secular authorities to maintain the classical urban model.

The clearest and most exceptional instance of Roman emulation was that pursued by the Ostrogothic king Theoderic, whereby, stemming from his belief in himself as a rightful successor to Roman rule, the king looked to Rome for inspiration and legitimation (Johnson 1988: 96). The result was the aggrandisement of the (previously late Roman) Ostrogothic capital of Ravenna, the projects including construction in consciously imperial style of the Arian episcopal complex and royal palace. His (re) construction work also involved Gallic as well as Italian towns, including Arles:

I am hastening to restore to splendour the ancient monuments. For so it will come about that, while the city's fortune is founded on its citizens, it shall also be displayed by the beauty of its buildings. Therefore, I have sent a certain quantity of money to repair the walls and aged towers of Arles.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* III: 41: King Theoderic to all the Landowners of Arles c.AD 510, winter)

Royal patronage extended to the promotion of public display via the revival of traditional Roman spectacles, including circuses and racing, Theoderic citing public pressure:

Antiquity...held (racing) to be sacred, but a quarrelsome posterity has made it a scandal...Compelled by pressure from the people, I cherish the institution: such gatherings are what they pray for, while they delight in rejecting serious thoughts...Therefore, let us grant the expenses, and not be forever giving from considerations. Sometimes it is useful to play the fool, and so control the joys people look for.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* III: 51: King Theoderic to the Praetorian Prefect Faustus AD 507-12)

Theoderic's particular interest in the renovation of the heavily symbolic city of Rome was characterised by the funding of extensive reconstruction of the city's imperial residences, aqueducts, sewers and wall circuits (Johnson 1988: 77), work

for which he was particularly concerned to be remembered for by posterity:

Past princes should owe me their praise: I have conferred long-lasting youth on their buildings, ensuring that those clouded by old age and decay shall shine out in their original freshness.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* I: 25: King Theoderic to the Distinguished Sabianus c.AD 507-12)

Furthermore, Theoderic emphasised the necessity of careful *design and upkeep* of buildings, reflecting the Roman tradition of building to last:

It is useless to build firmly at the outset if lawlessness has the power to ruin what has been designed: for those things are strong, those things enduring, which wisdom has begun and care preserved. And therefore, greater attention must be exercised in conserving than in planning them, since a plan at its outset deserves commendation, but from preservation we gain the glory of completion.

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* I: 25: King Theoderic to the Distinguished Sabianus c.AD 507-12)

Although their emergent leaders were aware of the political, diplomatic and economic benefits to be gained from adopting an institution synonymous with royalty and secular authority, the late emergence of stable territorial kingship in **Ireland** and **Scandinavia** mitigated against the establishment of urban networks. In addition to their belated appearance, these towns lacked structures and spaces of potential communal interaction, stemming from the functional redundancy of such facilities in settlements geared solely to trade and productive activity. Places such as Birka and Hedeby were, indeed, primarily trade and production centres.

Towns such as Paris and York were known to Scandinavian traders and leaders by way of raiding expeditions, trade contacts and, subsequently, Christian missions. Their worth to rulers did not, however, derive from symbolic associations with the Roman urban heritage but from their direct equation with royal power. Consequently towns must have appeared attractive (i) as potential instruments of social, economic and political control and (ii) as suitable places for royal residence. Hence the appearance of royal residences in sizeable, complex emergent towns such as Ribe and Birka. The carefully delineated streets and house and workshop plots of the trading *wics* betray a Roman influence in their design. By the tenth and eleventh centuries secular leaders wielded sufficient political power and reason to create complex, multifunctional towns such as Dublin, Schleswig and Copenhagen.

### (iii) Royalty, Towns and Trade

In the following section, the evidence for trade and the means by which it was exploited by chiefly and royal individuals and administrations for political, social and economic gain is considered, proceeding from the attrition and loss of wide-ranging Roman trade networks to the ascendancy and subsequent demise of the *wics* and *burhs* in favour of the multi-functional medieval burghal towns. The developmental sequence was characterised by the recognition on the part of emergent rulers of the political capital to be had from domination of trade and manufacturing activity. Proceeding from the establishment of networks of specialist productive and market foci, state formation processes and the development of an inter-regional market economy ultimately resulted in the clustering of economic functions into a single focus, the burghal town.

The later Roman period was characterised by a decreasing investment on the part of socially-prominent families in the towns, a change manifested in the decision by many to reside full-time on their rural estates. As a result, the (notably Romano-British) towns developed into walled enclaves of estates accommodating a few aristocratic families along with possible ecclesiastical and/or lay administrations, the supportive service industries for which appear to have effectively constituted the sole productive urban activity prior to the seventh-century revival. The emergence of territorial kingship in the post-Roman period provided royal houses with a controlling hand in the regulation and exploitation of local, regional and inter-regional patterns of trade and manufacture: this enabled them to consolidate their power bases and negotiate relations with other administrations via gift exchange. By the seventh and eighth centuries rulers wielded sufficient power to regulate and channel manufacturing and market activity via purpose-built trading *emporia*. This they achieved at a distance, the kings preferring to remain resident on rural estates or, in the case of Britain and Gaul, within former Roman fortress and town sites. The gradual abandonment of the majority of the trading settlements then signalled the progressive clustering of economic and other functions into defended, royal central foci and the emergence of these as burghal towns.

Later Roman **Britain** was characterised by a sharp decline in trade and industrial

activity, notably in terms of the sudden collapse of pottery production, although urban public spaces such as the fora at Exeter, Gloucester and Silchester were being occupied by metalworking and other industries. Large-scale manufacture did, however, cease in the south around AD 400. Although fine Mediterranean vessels and amphorae continued to be imported into Wales and the west into the mid-sixth century, probably in exchange for metals and/or metal ores, the overall picture of decline is probably explained either by a fall-off in demand for elite goods (Millett 1990: 226) or the excessive price of such imported commodities. These developments were preceded by a progressive withdrawal of landowning urban elites to villa estates, leaving behind administrative officials, (lesser?) aristocratic individuals and, possibly, monastic houses. The probable presence of farms within late fourth-century Cirencester and Verulamium may be indicative of belated attempts on the part of magistrates to boost tax revenues via agriculture (Higham 1992: 46) or else increasing self-sufficiency on the part of urban populations.

By the close of the Roman period and the withdrawal or collapse of Imperial organisation, therefore, the intramural zones of such towns as Lincoln, York and Winchester appear to have largely consisted of sizeable aristocratic urban estates (Young & Vince 1992: 386). The support structures for these elites probably constituted the sole urban-based trade and manufacturing activity prior to the seventh-century economic revival. Later fourth-century Winchester has evidence for metalworking extending across the city, whilst sub-Roman Cirencester supported bronzeworking and weaving (Gerrard 1994: 90), probable by-products associated with the provisioning of resident aristocratic families. Widespread sub-Roman dark earth deposits are open to a number of (not necessarily exclusive) interpretations including urban landscaping (Dixon 1992: 150), agriculture, domestic and structural debris or waste from a range of industrial activities. The likelihood is that the dark earths also represent the accumulation of debris stemming from the introduction into the towns of building materials, animals and associated manure, fodder and bedding from the urban hinterlands. In certain cases deposits on a single site derived from a number of processes, as at Southwark, London, where a combination of rubbish spreads and market gardening deposits gradually accumulated between the second and late fourth centuries (Evans 1999: 128).

Archaeological indications of the fifth-century use of grain dryers in Dorchester and Exeter and a barn in Verulamium, coupled with evidence for operational markets in Canterbury and Wroxeter are strongly suggestive of attempts by powerful resident figures to regulate the distribution of goods. In the case of Wroxeter, this apparently took the form of pedestrianisation of a street and installation of booths or stalls (Barker 1979: 180), noting discovery of a lead steelyard weight. There is, however, no suggestion that anything other than a barter or exchange system then operated, nor that those individuals involved in such activity were necessarily resident in the towns. The subsequent absence of trade activity from the urban context may imply a switch to the direct provisioning of urban estates by rural producers (Hinton 1990: 7).

The existence in **Gaul** of a long-established and stable urban tradition, notably in the Mediterranean south, with its Greek and Phoenician foundations of Arles, Bordeaux and Marseille was, in large part, due to their strategic positioning on riverine or land trade routes in order to maximise their potential as market, production and redistribution centres. Continuing aristocratic and royal urban involvement/ presences into the medieval period testifies to the towns' continuing economic viability. The later Roman period was characterised by growing aristocratic involvement in ecclesiastical office, resulting in the election of increasing numbers of bishops from prominent local families (see Section 5.3.2). As service in the Church came to be deemed the accepted medium for aristocratic ambition and social service, so elite urban expenditure was increasingly channelled into construction of churches at the expense of 'traditional' public buildings (Harries 1992: 88). Although a significant number of their lay contemporaries appear to have become progressively detached from urban affairs in favour of their rural estates, those who remained, as bishops, wielded increasing economic as well as social and political power. As sponsors of construction and renovation works and promoters of local martyrial cults, the bishops came to impact significantly on the physical and economic fabric of various Gallic towns including Tours, Bordeaux and Paris.

The leadership offered by the bishops served as a bridge linking the Roman and medieval periods as Carolingian and Norse rulers recognised the towns' continuing

viability as economic (as well as political) centres, reflected in their reinforcement of these centralised urban functions. As with the British towns, the likelihood is that most economic activity within the post-Roman Gallic towns centred around provisioning (i) remaining aristocratic families, (ii) burgeoning monastic communities, and (iii) pilgrims to the Christian martyrial shrines.

In **Britain**, the sixth- and seventh-century emergence of dynastic royalty and consolidation of royal territorial control enabled kings to establish operational centres of a range of former Roman towns and fortresses. Canterbury probably constituted a Kentish royal power base prior to the arrival of Augustine in AD 597 (*ibid*: 28), whilst York's Anglian kings may have occupied the fortress basilica (Dixon 1992: 153). The royal houses appear to have been receiving elite goods via coastal sites such as Portchester Castle from as early as the fifth century (*ibid*: 39). By the sixth century, however, the kings wielded sufficient territorial control to channel these resources through the first *wics* in order to regulate supply to themselves and the emergent Church. The earliest attested sites lie in Kent and included the ports of Fordwich, Sandwich and Sarre (Vince 1994: 110).

The appearance of the specialist trading *wics* marked a crucial departure in urban design and function, constituting a specialist class of proto-urban settlement initially formulated by emergent kings in order to maintain monopolistic control of prestige goods production and exchange as a means of maintaining alliances between rulers and dependent chiefs/aristocracy. Subsequently these sites were employed to control and exploit burgeoning regional and inter-regional trade and industrial production. Economic activity did not constitute the *sole influence* serving to drive town creation and development; state formation processes, kingship, and the Church were all significant governing factors. However, the decision by emergent royal houses to attempt to foster and guide craft production and markets formed the primary reason for the establishment of the emporia. Consequently, production and trade regulation were, by the seventh and eighth centuries, *major* considerations governing the continuing prosperity and very existence of the emergent towns and their controlling administrations. If a particular town or city was sufficiently strategically well-placed in order to exploit regional trade and manufacture, this could constitute a major factor in its continued existence, frequently via changes in

political control, as well as stimulating rivalry for its domination, as occurred with York and Dublin. The positioning of the coastal or riverine emporia alongside or linked to pre-existing royal/aristocratic centres (e.g. *Eoforwic*, *Lundenwic*) or some miles distant (e.g. *Hamwic*, Winchester) is indicative of the controlling hand of kings and of their crucial role in guaranteeing the success (and very existence) of their commercial ventures. Hence the association of Ipswich with the East Anglian royal house and York with the Northumbrian kings; London was the subject of dispute between the Essex and West Saxon kings, thus reflecting the wealth being generated here (Hinton 1990: 39). Whilst the ideal situation for a trading settlement would have been alongside its controlling royal base (as at London and York), the fundamental necessity for commercial viability would, on occasion, dictate a more remote location (Winchester and *Hamwic* and, possibly, Lincoln and Winteringham) – testament to the efficacy of royal control over its region. Furthermore, numismatic evidence from these sites indicates the introduction of a newly *commercial* element to accompany the market in luxury goods, possibly including trade in agricultural goods and slaves (Scull 1997: 285). Whilst not possessing a monopoly on industrial production, the functioning of such places as *Gipeswic*, *Hamwic* and *Lundenwic* as long-distance ports of trade (*ibid*: 289) was the characteristic that set them apart from other classes of site and constituted a new development in settlement function. The impermanent character of these sites prevented them from influencing the topographical development of subsequent settlement, as in the case of the abandonment of Anglian *Eoforwic* in favour of a reversion to the site of the former Roman town in the ninth century (Hall 1988b: 238).

For **Gaul**, the role of the Church in the promotion of urban economic life manifested itself in the development of ecclesiastical markets or *burgi* centred on extramural monastic and cult foci, notably at towns such as Narbonne and Poitiers. In the case of smaller centres such as Limoges, Narbonne and Arras, the market foci served to dominate the pre-existing town, in the case of Tours resulting in a progressive shift of urban focus. Even in this instance, however, episcopal power cannot have exceeded royal control of productive and market function. Whilst the cult of Saint Martin generated substantial wealth for the Church, the extramural ecclesiastical suburb remained ultimately answerable to the king. The economic

viability of these commercial zones appears not to have been compromised by Germanic and Viking military incursions to which the towns were subjected during the post-Roman period. Hence the commercial life of Châteauneuf at Tours continued largely unaffected by ninth-century Scandinavian raiding, Charles the Bald granting tax exemptions to the *bourg*'s merchants in AD 878 (Galinié 1978: 46).

Whilst providing the monastic houses with physical security and seclusion, the subsequent construction of protective wall circuits also promoted a conducive environment for markets and fairs into which the controlling royal houses could effectively regulate the flow of goods and people. Ready availability of intramural space for the accommodation of clerical and market populations within larger towns such as Bourges, Poitiers, Narbonne and Toulouse prevented extramural monastic *burgi* from drawing urban developmental focus away from the Roman cores (James 1982: 66).

*Quentovic* and St Denis would appear to be the only recognisable instances in Gaul of specialist proto-urban emporia, of which only the latter was directly associated with a pre-existing town (Paris). Again, both demonstrate close royal and Church involvement regarding their instigation and regulation of trade and production therein. One of the principal ports of access into Gaul for Anglo-Saxon merchants, *Quentovic* also became one of Gaul's most prolific mints (*ibid*: 69). Heavy Church involvement in the *wic* as a marketplace for the sale of surplus monastic estate produce manifested itself in the representative presence of several monastic communities. Monasteries maintained churches here as far afield as Ferrières-en-Gâtinais and Fontenelle/Saint-Wandrille. The fact that the Parisian order of St-Germain-des-Prés did not own property in the emporium, so obligating it to demand transport from its representatives in Brie and Beaune in order to sell its produce, testifies to the economic importance of the site (Lebecq 1997: 77). Founded by the Frankish king Dagobert in AD 634-5, the annual fair at St Denis was attended by Anglo-Saxon, largely Wessex, merchants (*ibid*: 76). Similarly, the Church established control over new or pre-existing fairs and markets at Beauvray near Autun, Pierre-Leveé at Poitiers, the Champ à Saille fair at Metz and elsewhere under the guidance of episcopal officials, as laid out in the Capitulary of Soissons of

AD 744 (Hilton 1992: 27).

The paucity of recognisable *wic* sites in Gaul in comparison to Britain and Scandinavia must reflect in part the unbroken continuity of town-based secular authority and economic activity from the Roman to medieval periods. The survival of a robust and long-established urban network rendered unnecessary the establishment by emergent Germanic rulers of an alternative, physically separate network of trade and productive foci. In the case of the Mediterranean south, however, the progressive dwindling of eastern imports from the later sixth century culminated the following century in the effective cessation of trade links between the two regions. These developments coincided with a shift northwards of trade and commercial activity to northern Gaul, Frisia and England and the emergent *emporia* (Knight 1999: 169). This attrition of post-Roman economic functions is evident in the southern ports of Marseille and Bordeaux. The latter suffered due to a combination of the relocation of its harbour area to the Garonne riverbank in the sixth century, obliged by the silting of its intramural harbour (Sivan 1993: 42), and damage incurred to its Spanish and Aquitanian trade links following eighth-century Moslem incursions (Lerat 1980: 77). Similarly, Marseille's economy was devastated by a combination of the cessation of Mediterranean ceramic imports from the later seventh century arising from Arabian expansion and its sacking by Arabs in AD 838 (Baratier 1973: 59). Despite these setbacks, however, both towns succeeded in retaining their primary economic functions into the medieval period.

Whereas English and Gallic towns frequently boasted several roles from an early date – albeit subject to fluctuations in terms of comparative significance – **Scandinavian** proto-urban settlements were, primarily, places devised for the control and further exploitation of local, regional and inter-regional production, trade and exchange. Only subsequently did they acquire stature and functional complexity via the acquisition of further central-place roles as mints, administration centres, defences and royal residences. Consequently the persistence of individual centres was entirely dependent upon controlling kings or chieftains and their preferred means of exploiting regional trade and exchange patterns – as well as their ability to do so. The tardy nature of Scandinavian state formation processes, due in large part to the fragmentary nature of authority wielded by the controlling

authorities, could only have exacerbated such processes and hindered the establishment of stable bases from which to develop multifunctional medieval towns. A comparable scenario seemingly operated in **Ireland**, whereby the absence of a standardised system of dynastic inheritance mitigated against the establishment of stable kingdoms (Ó Corráin 1972: 42) and the overall dominance of any one political grouping, including the Norse (Ó Cróinín 1995: 240). Consequently the region lacks evidence of chiefs or kings attempting to control economic activity prior to c.AD 800 beyond the regulation of specialist ports of trade such as that located on Dalkey Island, south of Dublin, transactions apparently limited to gift-exchange (Doherty 1980: 70). The monasteries otherwise formed the sole proto-urban foci during this period.

Scandinavian towns were primarily *economic generators* for the royal houses, and remained so until the arrival of the Church and kings in the urban context. Consequently, whilst minster churches in the former Roman towns were key to their ninth-century emergence as a local and regional centre (Reynolds 1999: 162), the late arrival of Christianity and the dominance of kings and chieftains in the Scandinavian urban context militated against their having the same impact.

Hence the existence into the ninth century of temporary, seasonally occupied market sites, the manifestation of an economy still largely based upon reciprocal gift-exchange between allies, kin and warriors and fuelled by raiding activity. A clear hierarchy of Danish coastal settlements was, however, in place by the seventh century in order to facilitate exploitation by rulers of an emergent regional and inter-regional economy and resultant heightened demand for luxury commodities. Sites ranged from simple landing-places (Sønderø) via regional markets (Sebbersund) to seasonal trading sites (Ribe, Hedeby) (Ulriksen 1994: 806). Increasingly sophisticated arrangements involved the creation of specialist production centres such as Paviken, whilst both Dankirke and Lundeborg received European imports (Näsman 1991: 35). Dankirke demonstrates that, from as early as the Roman Iron Age (c.AD 1-400), certain (possibly chiefly) resident individuals possessed sufficient wealth to act as a draw to traders in elite goods (Bencard *et al.* 1990: 147). It is, moreover, possible that these figures remained in place following the royal foundation of Ribe around AD 700. Helgö may represent a different scenario

whereby a localised market centre was situated on the estate of a nearby royal farm or manor that, whilst gradually acquiring regional and international trade functions, never gained an aristocratic or royal presence or other urban characteristics (Ambrosiani 1983: 108).

During the ninth and tenth centuries the development of feudal society, coupled with the attendant consolidation of royal power and expansion of trade networks witnessed the next crucial stage in urban economic development. Spurred by the need to create defensive refuges, the trade- and production-dominated *wics* were superseded as a diverse and diffuse range of pre-existing functions including mints, royal palaces, markets and monastic houses were transferred to a single urban focus. In the case of the former Roman provinces this frequently involved a reversion to a relict Roman town or fort, in many cases with pre-existing aristocratic and/or monastic associations. In the case of **Britain** this proceeded from a period of dual *wic/burh* arrangements prior to the replacement of the former by the latter and ultimately resulting in the multi-functional, defended medieval burghal town with resident bishop and royal house. The scale and systematic character of the *wic* network instigated by the Mercian Offa and Wessex's Alfred constituted a hitherto unmatched manifestation of centralised royal power (Loyn 1962: 133; Biddle 1976: 134).

By the mid-tenth century the majority of the *burhs* had permanent resident populations engaged in a range of craft activities (Vince 1994: 114). For the first time settlements were in place which functioned as central markets for the purchase of both luxury goods and essentials, including foodstuffs, by peasantry from surrounding districts as well as those from the higher social echelons (Saunders 1995: 41). Urban economic roles took on a new significance with the establishment by the late tenth century of mints in all ports and *burhs*, the culmination of an ongoing process (Vince 1994: 112). The monopolistic market role of the towns was strengthened by the royal houses, notably via the legislation of Edward the Elder and Athelstan, resulting in the creation of a ranked system headed by the towns and their attendant resident ecclesiastical, secular and legal administrations and mints (Reynolds 1999: 177). These were *not*, however, primarily economic bases, as the *wics* had been. The principal objective of the royal houses was to provide a network

of defensive refuges to be maintained and garrisoned by the local populace at times of heightened military threat (Reynolds 1977: 31). Yet the standardised, carefully-planned character of *burhs* such as Winchester, Oxford and Wareham indicates that the intention was not to merely to create fortresses but permanently populated, defended towns (Biddle & Hill 1971: 83). Although they constituted secure bases within which markets and craft production could be undertaken, trade and manufacturing activity were only two elements in an expanding repertoire of urban functions.

The late ninth and early tenth centuries in Britain were characterised by a shift of economic activity northwards, reflecting Scandinavian activity in the region (Vince 1994: 115). Shifting patterns of political power did not, however, impact unfavourably upon the region's economic life. The rapid economic growth of Anglo-Scandinavian York indicates a close and sustained involvement of successive resident royal houses in the production and import/export of a wide range of goods via extensive trading links. Furthermore, the minting of coinage on behalf of both Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian kings on the same Coppergate property throughout the ninth and tenth centuries testifies to a smooth transition from one administration to another (James 1995: 11). Constant vying for control of the city on the part of Anglo-Scandinavian, English and Norman rulers indicates the city's centrality to northern economic (as well as political) affairs.

In **Scandinavia**, the onset of the Viking period marked a key transition from an economy based upon reciprocal gift-exchange to a monetary system, the ultimate result of which was the network of regulated craft production and market centres. The ninth-century emergence of an international market economy encouraged kings to seek to regulate and exploit trade in essential commodities as well as prestige goods (Hedeager 1994). As *significant and major investments and innovations*, kings sought to protect emergent towns such as Hedeby and Birka via defensive structures such as the Danewerke. The readiness of Scandinavian rulers to transfer merchants from one trading settlement to another as well as the extension of personal protection to visiting merchants demonstrates the importance placed upon maintenance of exclusive control over these sites and associated trade routes (Skovgaard-Petersen 1981a: 12).

Trade activity and royal authority were, by the late tenth and eleventh centuries sufficient to produce complex, multifunctional towns including Ribe and Schleswig and, ultimately, in capitals such as Trondheim and Copenhagen with resident bishops and kings, inspiration for which largely derived from reciprocal diplomatic and trade contacts between Scandinavia, Ireland and England. Although Scandinavian influence on Irish manufacture and trade was similarly substantial, notably regarding Dublin and Wexford, its impact was tempered by Church involvement in the promotion of markets and production.

### **5.3.2: Bishops and Clergy**

All three study regions are characterised by close links between aristocratic/royal figures and the Christian Church, markedly so in terms of prolonged and extensive aristocratic involvement in and regulation of ecclesiastical organisation and activity. The culmination of this intimate secular/lay relationship was the establishment of urban episcopal seats, in certain instances the instigation of new diocesan networks involving the transferral of bishops from rural sees.

Towards the end of the Roman period in the west inhabitants of towns were increasingly looking towards bishops as local authority figures, notably in Gaul, Italy and Spain, with the Christian Church progressively assuming the reins of urban and rural leadership. These developments stemmed in part from a logical, progressive equation of episcopal power with local aristocratic families as the Church became the accepted medium for the pursuit of aristocratic ambition. Accordingly Christian impacts on urban space are increasingly noticeable. In Gaul, a region with particularly close Church-town connections, secular and ecclesiastical powers possessed a symbiotic relationship beyond the Roman period, resulting in mutually beneficial sharing of control over urban space and institutions from a common base. In Britain, although its Christian Church lacked the tenacity of its Gallic and Italian counterparts, there are, nevertheless, hints that churches and/or bishops based at the former Roman towns provided threads of continuity into the Anglo-Saxon period and the arrival of the missionary bishops. However, despite close linkages between royalty and the Church, these bishops wielded insufficient

power to impact upon the residual urban fabric or to prolong urban life.

For Scandinavia, an initially non-urban Church lacked influence, manifested in the itinerant existence of the bishops and peripheral positioning of early urban churches. In the case of Ireland, however, the Church long formed a settlement determinant, and, as seen, certain of the rural monasteries emerged as the region's first proto-urban/urban settlements. All three study regions were characterised by the eventual appearance in the urban context of the bishops alongside kings and secular administrations, marking the recognition on the part of the two powers of the close ties between and interdependency of the Church and the Christianised nation states.

#### (i) Britain

Christianity offered a relatively weak influence upon Britain – the late and thus post-Roman episcopal framework was severely lacking and patchy, its poverty indicated by the offer to British bishops by Constantius II of free transport to the Council of Rimini in AD 359 (Salway 1981: 723). Further, whilst former Roman towns such as Canterbury, Winchester and Wroxeter demonstrate the possibility of continued episcopal and/or monastic presences into the sub-Roman and/or Anglo-Saxon period, this presence was not vital. Wroxeter appears to demonstrate particular tenacity, with the possible presence of a bishop into the seventh century, a Christian focus remaining on the site into the medieval period in the face of the removal elsewhere of secular power. Consequently, whilst secular power continued to be centred upon rural estates until the ninth century, there are hints that sub-Roman bishops chose to remain in the ruinous Roman towns – although their location, number and period of stay are open to considerable debate. If there *were* a break in the episcopal organisational sequence, it would appear likely that the later Saxon bishops willingly underwent transfer from the company of the itinerant, rural royal retinues to the new, permanent bases of the *burhs*. As the seats of their predecessors and in the light of their Christian legacy, these centres would undoubtedly have had invaluable spiritual and symbolic significance in addition to the more practical benefits of defensive provision and monastic seclusion.

The seventh century witnessed the establishment of a limited number of additional bishoprics in new, rural locations as bases for evangelising bishops. Birinus established a cathedral at Dorchester-on-Thames in AD 634 as an operational base for the conversion of the West Saxons (Myres 1986: 156), whilst North Elmham functioned as the seat of the first bishops of Norfolk (Stenton 1971: 437). Suffering destruction in tenth-century Danish raiding and re-established shortly afterwards, these sees were ultimately rendered redundant due to the transferral of their bishops to urban seats as part of the general eleventh-century Church reforms of William and Lanfranc (Stenton 1971: 667). Consequently, Crediton in Devon lost its episcopal status to Exeter in 1050 (Hinton 1990: 120), whilst the see of Leicester, previously transferred to Dorchester-on-Thames and subsequently combined with the Lindsey diocese, was finally moved to Lincoln (Whitelock 1974: 181). The East Anglian bishopric was switched to Thetford from North Elmham, and Lichfield, Selsey and Sherborne to Chester, Chichester and Salisbury respectively (Stenton 1971: 666). Ultimately, therefore, the rural sees failed to wield influence on urban development.

It is only with the middle Anglo-Saxon period that the British Church assumed a significant role in the promotion of urban development via the regulation of markets associated with minster churches/pilgrimage centres such as Oundle and Luton. By the later Saxon period only those former Roman towns with attendant minster churches emerged as local and regional economic centres (Reynolds 1999: 169). Assisted by the legislation of the West Saxon kings that sought to transfer and regulate ecclesiastical, secular and economic functions to the *burhs*, the Church belatedly garnered the means to influence urban form and function. The arrival of the *burhs* witnessed the positioning of churches where population was densest: at gates, alongside central roads and linear markets (Morris 1989: 204); even if small these must have constituted dominant and numerous features in the townscapes. By the late eleventh century London had over a hundred parish churches and Winchester around fifty, many originating as private, proprietary churches (Biddle 1976: 133).

(ii) Gaul

The Gallic bishops were, to a far greater extent, on a par with secular leaders in terms of guiding and perpetuating town development, forming a bridge between the Roman and medieval periods in a period of weakened state hierarchy. As symbolic and, in many cases, actual inheritors of secular authority, they increasingly took on urban leadership roles, organising the previously secular preserves of defence and building regulation, coupled with the religious functions of spiritual authority, temporal protection and welfare. During the Merovingian and Carolingian periods construction and renovation projects were facilitated by financial loans to the bishops by Germanic rulers and supplemented by the allocation of funds by the kings' representatives, the counts (James 1982: 64).

The Gallic Church constituted the organisational framework around which an emergent post-Roman society formed, in which process aristocratic families figured large. Gallo-Roman and Frankish aristocratic individuals adopted Church office, notably the post of bishop, as a means by which to perpetuate traditional roles and social obligations of leadership and Christian duty. Personal and family ambition combined with allegiance to one's town would, however, have been additional considerations. As secular and religious power centred on the towns, such ambitions inevitably obliged participation in urban affairs. The additional dimension of control over religious and sacred life offered the potential for effectively monarchical rule and even, in the event of canonisation, continued status and influence after death (Mathisen 1993: 93). Episcopal overseeing of the welfare of the poor and the urban congregation would have carried particular resonance, if only in the collective perception of the public. Hence figures such as Perpetuus of Tours and Mamertus of Vienne progressively took on political as well as spiritual significance to their communities. Such individuals were, to their congregations, protector figures:

Attila, king of the Huns, going forth from Metz, subdued many cities of Gaul; and he came to Orléans, and battered it with rams, so striving to take the city. When the beleaguered people cried out to their bishop (Anianus) to know what they should do, he, trusting in God, enjoined them all to prostrate themselves in prayer, and with tears to implore the help of God, ever present in time of need...And now the walls were shaking under the shock of the rams, and on the point of falling,

when behold Aëtius came; and Theodoric, king of the Goths, and Thorismund, his son, with their armies swiftly advanced upon the town, and cast forth and flung back the enemy. The city thus freed by the intercession of the blessed bishop, they put Attila to flight.

(Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* II: 5(6))

It happened one night that the city (of Bordeaux) was struck by a great fire. People quickly ran to the man of God and shouted: 'By your prayers, holy Caesarius, extinguish the roaring flames!' When the man of God heard this, he was moved by sorrow and compassion. He prostrated himself in prayer in the face of the oncoming fire, and at once stopped the flames and drove them back. On seeing this, everyone praised God's manifestation of power in Caesarius. After this miracle everyone in Bordeaux admired him so much that they regarded him not only as a bishop but also as an apostle.

(*The Life of Caesarius* I: 22)

(Vienne) was frequently shaken by earthquakes, and wild creatures, stags and wolves, entered the gates, wandering without fear through the whole city. These things befell through the cycle of the year, till at the approach of the Easter festival the whole people looked devoutly for the mercy of God, that at last this day of great solemnity might set a term to all their terror. But on the very vigil of that glorious night, while the holy rite of the Mass was being celebrated, all of a sudden the royal palace within the walls was set ablaze by fire from heaven. All the congregation, stricken with fear, rushed from the church, believing that the whole city would be consumed in this fire, or that the earth would open and swallow it up. The holy bishop, prostrate before the altar, with groans and tears implore the mercy of God. What need for me to say more? The prayer of the illustrious bishop penetrated to the height of heaven; the river of his flowing tears extinguished the burning palace.

(Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* II: 25(34))

In a number of instances episcopal protection extended to provision of refuges for the rural population (see Section 5.3.3).

From the fifth century, the notion of the bishops as protectors and saviours of the urban populace was further accentuated via the promotion of local bishops as cult figures at the expense of 'foreign' martyrs. Insecurities were exploited in order to promote the notion that, unlike the emperor and civil officials, the bishops and local saints had not deserted their congregations (Van Dam 1985: 166). Developments further arose from concern for one's hometown and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. Frequently, however, these actions stemmed from attempts by aristocratic bishops to gain new identity and purpose in the face of the demise of imperial service and growing Germanic influence. For a time at least the Church offered Gallo-Romans a means to ignore Germanic elements – episcopal office was still, by the fifth century, limited to Roman citizens (Mathisen 1993: 102).

Despite the heavy involvement of aristocratic families in (predominantly urban-based) Church office, certain of their clerical number chose to remain on their rural estates rather than attend urban religious festivals. In a number of instances this resulted in episcopal rebukes, as in the case of the two members of the Vienne clergy reprimanded by Sidonius Apollinaris (Harries 1992: 90). This potential for conflict demonstrates the close ties between lay and Church power as well as the firm identification of the majority of the aristocracy with the countryside.

The progressive colonisation of urban space by Church buildings is also notable, resulting in a pronounced Christianisation of the townscapes via intramural church and cathedral construction, extramural monasteries and the promotion of suburban shrines of local martyrial figures as places of pilgrimage (see above). The emerging centrality of the bishops in urban affairs manifested itself physically in their transferral from the peripheries to the urban cores, accompanied by increasingly complex episcopal residences and palaces in towns such as Autun and Trier. Whilst frequently sharing close physical and political co-existence with secular authority, most bishops maintained a degree of seclusion within separate walled enclaves.

By the Frankish period, certain of the bishops appear to have assumed such power and influence over urban development that they were, in effect, serving to *exclude* the emergent Frankish royal houses from the towns, the kings instead choosing to remain based on rural estates. In the case of Gregorian Tours the all-pervading influence of the cult of Saint Martin was deemed too great for royal residency and so not to be competed with (Van Dam 1985: 185).

There was nothing that he (Chilperic) hated as much as he hated the churches. He was perpetually heard to say: 'My treasury is always empty. All our wealth has fallen into the hands of the Church. There is no-one left with any power left except the bishops. Nobody respects me as king; all respect has passed to the bishops in their cities'.

(Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* VI: 46)

Ecclesiastical suburbs served to impact physically upon the fabric of Arras and Tours via a shift of focus away from the *castrum* to the extramural *bourg*, around which medieval development would centre. Strasbourg progressively lost its political significance in favour of a religious role following the Frankish conquest

(Février *et al.* 1986: 22). Such developments did not, however, constitute a conscious flouting of royal authority on the part of the bishops, to whom they were ultimately answerable, but merely a recognition on the part of the kings that they could not compete with ecclesiastical authority in the same physical setting. It did, however, serve to limit material input, reliant as this was upon an actual royal presence (Van Dam 1985: 185). Such conflicts of authority were of course impossible in Britain or Scandinavia until a much later date due to the absence of towns.

The guarantee of safety to an urban population afforded by a strong episcopal figure would ensure the continuing presence of congregations and, in turn, perpetuation of Church funds and the prosperity of the town. Success would reflect favourably upon the incumbent bishop and guarantee financial, social and spiritual benefits. Urban economic viability was assisted by the efforts of bishops to promote their town over others via the promotion of local saints and relics. An implicit desire to boost the urban economy using commercial methods of fairs, markets and festivals drove such moves to both a Christian and market end, namely the exploitation of local pilgrimage centres.

By implication, therefore, certain Gallic towns were essentially ecclesiastical centres whose principal *raison d'être* was the promotion of local Christian martyrial cults and the upkeep of attendant support structures. Consequently the majority of urban populations may have consisted of artisans and other lower class individuals associated with the construction and upkeep of churches, cathedrals and monastic houses. Numbers would have been swelled by visiting pilgrims and, perhaps, more permanent residents attracted by the notion of living in close proximity to the saints. As traditional protectors of both their spiritual and temporal welfare, the urban poor would have identified more readily with and felt greater allegiance towards their town and its (ironically, generally aristocratic) bishop than did the rural, non-ecclesiastical aristocracy.

(iii) Scandinavia and Ireland

Turning to Scandinavia, Christianity was viewed by emergent national kings as a vehicle for the consolidation of their secular powers and newly-established kingdoms, as well as a means by which to emulate their north-west European counterparts. As seen, both Church and secular leaders remained rural until a late date and their eventual move to urban contexts from the tenth century. In the absence of towns during the intervening period there were, consequently, no central places with which regional non-elites could identify or *be identified with* by their social superiors.

The establishment of a Scandinavian ecclesiastical network and attendant conversion of its royal houses and peoples was a considerably later and more drawn out developmental process than was the case in Britain. Furthermore, the bishops long remained peripheral figures in the process of urbanisation. These were, consequently, markedly less influential individuals than their Gallic, Italian and British counterparts. Religious function only appears to have been a determining factor in the survival of central places into the medieval period in Sweden, bishops' seats or rural deaneries in the Mälaren Valley and Östergötland co-existing with towns such as Sigtuna and developing into towns during the thirteenth century (Hasselmo 1992: 35).

The fact that, until the mid-twelfth century, the majority of Scandinavian bishops were of English or German nationality, must have had some impact upon their attitudes towards their secular dependants, the kings, as well as, perhaps, their lay subjects. Can they have felt the same allegiance to their adoptive towns (where they existed) and nations as their Gallic counterparts, drawn generally from local aristocratic families? A certain element of disinterest in their missions is also indicated by the fact that, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, bishops undertook no conversions, suggestive of a preference for the pursuit of personal prestige over evangelism (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993: 107). Theirs appears to have been an essentially *precarious* existence, caught between conflicting allegiances to royal and papal power.

Moreover, with the exception of the mid-tenth century sees of Ribe, Århus and Schleswig, the majority of bishops were itinerant, missionary figures. Lacking fixed episcopal seats they travelled under royal protection with the king's retinue between estates prior to the establishment of a regular diocesan organisation in the eleventh century (*ibid*). With the subsequent development of nation states and resultant changes to kingship, towns such as Ribe and Trondheim were deemed proper places for royalty and Church in recognition of the fact that these were now the *accepted foci of power*. The result was frequently a physically close, symbiotic relationship of secular and ecclesiastical power, as with eleventh-century Hamburg:

Archbishop Unwan and along with him Duke Bernhard had built a stately fortress from the ruins of the old city (of Hamburg) and erected a church and dwelling places, all of wood. Archbishop Alebrand, however, thought a somewhat stronger defence against the frequent incursions of enemies was necessary for an unprotected place, and first of all rebuilt of squared stone the church that had been erected in honour of the Mother of God. Then he constructed for himself another stone house, strongly fortified with towers and battlements. In emulation of this work the duke was roused to provide lodging for his men within the same fortified area. In a word, when the city had thus been rebuilt, the basilica was flanked on one side by the bishop's residence, on the other by the duke's palace. The noble archbishop also planned to have the metropolis of Hamburg girded with a wall and fortified with towers, had his swift death not interfered with his desires.

(Adam of Bremen, *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Two:* lxx: 68)

In the absence of both power structures and relict sites that could be adopted as the basis for an emergent ecclesiastical system independent of royal largesse, the bishops inevitably remained secondary figures to their royal masters.

In the case of Iceland, however, a region completely lacking in both towns and royal houses and operating instead under a system of territorial lordships, the early bishops assumed a particular relevance as symbolic and, possibly, actual leadership figures:

Instead of towns they have mountains and springs as their delights. Blessed, I say, is the folk whose poverty no one envies; and in this respect most blessed because all have now adopted Christianity...They hold their bishop as king. All the people respect his wishes. They hold as law whatever he ordains as coming from God, or from the Scriptures, or even from the worthy practices of other peoples.

(Adam of Bremen, *A History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. Book Four: A Description of the Islands of the North, XXXVI (35)*)

The absence of towns even obliged Iceland's first bishop, Ísleif (elected in 1056), to use his farm at Skálholt as his diocesan base, his son and successor Gizur subsequently making it the episcopal see (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993: 108).

Although the Scandinavian Church eventually wielded considerable influence upon the newly-emerged urban fabric and power structures, this was a late development and one dependent upon the granting of land and funds within towns by the secular authorities. Where churches made an appearance in towns from the ninth century, their peripheral sitings prevented their impacting significantly upon the urban fabric; that built on the estate of the town prefect outside Birka failed to attract a permanent Christian monastic presence (Lund 1995: 210). The provision of Scandinavian trading settlements with churches seemingly stemmed initially from the need to provide for visiting Christian merchants.

During the tenth and eleventh centuries the Church began to impact upon urban form and development via land grants and its bishops' appearance in emergent towns such as Hedeby. The state development process in Norway saw mutual benefit to the Church and the royal house, large-scale transferrals of royal land to the Church providing the emergent feudal state with a material power base (Saunders 1995: 36). Moreover, the Church and its diocesan organisation provided the framework upon which the emergent national Swedish and Norwegian kingdoms could be overlaid, provincial ecclesiastical councils forming the precursors to the secular national councils (*ibid*: 60). In contrast, the influence of the Christian Church in Ireland was potent: indeed, it perhaps took the process a stage further than was the case in England and Gaul, as monasteries such as those at Armagh, Kells and Kildare formed the cores of proto-urban development at a period prior to the formation of the first 'genuine' towns. Here, Church and secular authority co-existed alongside each other; trade activity, whilst present, was operating at a low-key, localised level. An early monastic and, possibly, episcopal presence is attested at Dublin prior to the Norse re-founding of the settlement in the early tenth century (Simpson 1997: 17). The establishment of a bishopric and construction of a timber church early the following century marked the introduction of Christianity to the Norse inhabitants by King Sitric Silkbeard and reflects Dublin's key role in domination of Ireland (Doherty 1980: 84).

### **5.3.3: Military Presences and Defensive Provision**

Next we must analyse the extent and character of military activity. Principally, is it possible to identify urban military garrisons and, if so, whom and what were they intended to defend? If they are absent, does this signify a lack of perceived threat, or merely that the individuals and institutions deemed necessary of protection were based elsewhere? If so, who was providing defensive provision in the absence of army garrisons? Finally, is any degree of continuity or, alternatively, variation discernible regarding the use of towns as military bases?

Across our study zones, defences played a variable role: in Britain, many towns show indications of continued expenditure on their wall circuits into the fourth century. Subsequently, following the final withdrawal of the legions, defensive measures would have effectively been left in the hands of the dwindling urban populations, hence the apparent influx of *fœderati* into fifth-century Canterbury (Wacher 1995: 205). A few towns such as Cirencester offer hints of sub-Roman adaptive reuse of relict Roman public monuments as civilian refuges or military bases in a scenario analogous with Gaul and Italy. Otherwise defended towns and relict walls appear as symbolic elements in royal foci. Subsequently, the threat of Viking attack during the later Anglo-Saxon period prompted the establishment by the Mercian and Wessex royal houses of the defensive network of civilian-garrisoned *burhs*, frequently involving the adoption and/or adaptation of the relict Roman towns. The subsequent (re) foundation of Dublin and York by the Anglo-Scandinavians saw a continuation of the process. For the majority of towns in Gaul, the provision of protection for urban populations increasingly became a responsibility of those in episcopal office, in large part due to the fact that certain of the bishops were former military commanders. In the absence of military garrisons, defensive measures consisted of the conversion of redundant public structures including amphitheatres and fora into public refuges in combination with the construction of individual enclosures for lay aristocratic and ecclesiastical individuals and administrations.

The few notable exceptions were those towns with direct imperial connections, namely Arles and Trier and, subsequently, Germanic and Viking involvement

(Arles, Paris), resulting in their being permanently garrisoned. Lacking an inherited urban network to adapt and/or adopt for military purposes, the emergent Scandinavian kings were obliged to formulate their own defensive measures, a process hindered by the tardy and prolonged formation process of nation states and territorial kingship. The result was the instigation of substantial schemes including the Danevirke and the forts of Harald Bluetooth along with the eventual provision of the towns with protective moats and ramparts.

In the case of **Britain**, certain sub-Roman towns and fortresses such as York, Chester and Winchester offer evidence of their having functioned as (largely temporary or intermittent) bases for sub-Roman rulers and, presumably, attendant military retinues, and/or as civilian refuges. Hence the construction of around thirty sunken-floored buildings in Canterbury between the fifth and seventh centuries, possibly representing housing for incoming Anglo-Saxon *fæderati* mercenaries (Wacher 1995: 205). Wacher raises the possibility of the amphitheatre at Cirencester having been converted to a fortified refuge for the town's remaining inhabitants (*ibid*: 322). There is a further suggestion of the structure having functioned as a base or place of safety for a local chieftain prior to the Battle of Dyrnham AD 577 (Gerrard 1994: 88). Sixth-century York may have functioned as Vortigern's capital (James 1995: 9), and Chester as the seat of a branch of the Cadelling dynasty during the same period (Thacker 1988: 119). This continued use or re-adoption of still-monumental civilian and military wall circuits and buildings by emergent tribal leaders/kings would have offered the twin advantages of physical protection and favourable association of their administrations with that of Rome.

The middle Saxon *wics* seemingly acquired defensive arrangements very late in their occupational sequences – *Gipeswic*'s first defensive circuit dates to the tenth century and the period of Danish occupation (Wade 1988b: 122) – or else featured only symbolic defining banks and ditches, as in the case of *Hamwic* (Brisbane 1988: 103). This implies that royal territorial authority was sufficient to afford these trading sites adequate protection; subsequent provision of certain *wics* with defensive ramparts suggests their having assumed greater significance.

Component parts of a pre-existing urban network, many former Roman towns

and/or fortresses, including Winchester and Exeter, were subject to adaptive reuse, in combination with newly-established sites such as Oxford and Wareham by the Mercian and Wessex Anglo-Saxon royal houses as part of the network of defensive *burhs*. Although initiated in response to the Danish threat, the perception is that these were not intended from the outset *primarily* as fortifications but as populous administrative, religious, market and manufacturing centres. The progressive accumulation of functions into single centralised foci – ongoing prior to the Danish incursions – would, however, have increasingly made defence a prime consideration. With the notable exceptions of York and Dublin, it would appear that those sites (re) established by the Vikings, namely the Five Boroughs, instead have the appearance of military fortresses rather than towns (Biddle 1976: 122). Again the sites were deemed suitable precisely because of their pre-existing defences and royal and administrative roles; this was an extant (possibly redundant) system that was simply taken over by a new power (Haslam 1987: 79).

As symbolic and, frequently, actual figures of secular authority, Gaul's post-Roman bishops were increasingly involved in matters of urban defence, including maintenance of wall circuits to protect urban flocks. Whatever the true degree of threat to the towns posed by incoming Germanic groupings, the desire to compete for social prestige, possibly between bishops and counts, must have played a significant part in public munificence (Samson 1994: 108). In some cases bishops, as ex-military officers, were actively engaged in the defence of their cities against barbarian attack, including Sidonius Apollinaris of Clermont and Vivianus of Saintes (Mathisen 1993: 100). In the north, where the royal-appointed counts were a lesser urban presence, one of the duties of episcopal office even included commanding troops garrisoned there (James 1982: 58).

Episcopal defensive provision could also include the creation of refuges for the rural population, as with the use of the monastery at the fort of Chinon near Tours as a response to an attack by Aegidius in AD 463 (Mathisen 1993: 100) and defended residential episcopal enclosures. Similarly, certain sixth-century Italian bishops undertook construction of *castra* for civilian use, noting the fort/refuge at Laino on Lake Como in north central Italy of AD 550 (N. Christie, pers. comm.), whilst the Ostrogothic king Theoderic's widespread building projects included the adaptation

of military sites as civilian refuges:

I command that the castle sited near you be strengthened, since matters of war are well ordered when planned in time of peace...

So, by this authority I decree that you are speedily to build yourselves houses in the aforementioned fort...What an advantage it will be to live in your own homes, while the enemy endures the harshest quarters!

(Cassiodorus, *Variae* I: 17, King Theoderic to all Goths and Romans Living at Dertona c.AD 507-8)

The 'incursion' of housing into previously public space such as the fora of Arles and Vienne and against the external face of the circus at Arles (*Gallia* 44, 394) may indicate either civilian refugees seeking intramural protection or the billeting of troops.

Whilst the strategic positioning of certain towns guaranteed continuing military involvement and dispute over their control, their frequently multiple roles as economic, administrative, religious and defensive centres ensured that military considerations rarely figured prominently in developmental sequences. Regarding the exceptions, the strategic military positioning of Arles ensured prolonged army involvement in the city from the Roman period onwards. Indications that aristocratic individuals rejected the late Roman city in favour of their rural estates imply associations with the fifth-century reoccupation of *oppida* such as St-Blaise and the contemporary use of the fortified site of Entressen (Loseby 1996: 48). As an imperial capital Trier had a resident garrison, for which purpose its amphitheatre was converted under Constantine (Greenhalgh 1989: 107). In Italy, Spoleto's amphitheatre was converted into a fort, later a monastery, then a barracks. The late Roman fortification of the forum at Paris may be linked to its growing military as well as political and economic importance (Duval *et al.* 1992: 106). The incorporation of the amphitheatre in Tours' *castrum* and construction of a small hilltop enclosure at Périgueux are suggestive of local initiatives for defensive and/or refuge purposes (Wood 1983: 12; Christie 1997: 493).

During the ninth and tenth centuries the towns regained their military importance in the face of external raids and civil disorder, as a result of which wall circuits underwent repair. Previously a count's residence, the amphitheatre at Nîmes was

used as a citadel against Saracen attacks, whilst Saracen raiding on Aix-en-Provence saw defensive enclosing of the archbishop, count and canons' communities.

As noted, the establishment of stable **Scandinavian** national kingdoms was a lengthy process. Consequently, the creation of permanent and secure urban bases was only achievable in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the construction of forts including the Trelleborg by the tenth-century Danish king Harald Bluetooth representing a (short-lived) preliminary stage in the furtherance of royal power (Sawyer & Sawyer 1993: 54). Problems were exacerbated by the fact that rulers were obliged to put in place a totally new system of defence and control as, unlike the former Roman regions, there was no pre-existing organisation available for adaptive (re) use.

Yet, as in Britain, the trading centres were left unfortified until late on, possibly testament to the efficacy of royal territorial control and/or their initial lack of economic worth. Their subsequent defence, by contrast, marks a heightened sense of economic value. Conflict could result in the destruction of a town (as happened at Hedeby around AD 1050) or the exaction of ransom (*brandskatning*) in order to avert this, as at Birka (Clarke & Ambrosiani: 150). A ninth-century ditch initially defined the Danish trading centre of Ribe; only in the following century were a rampart and moat added (Jensen & Watt 1993: 204). Despite suggestions of a royal dynastic association and location on a royal manor, the island site of Helgö never acquired defences, possibly due to its failure to attract functional significance beyond its local market role (Lamm 1982: 5).

Situated on the Danish-German border at the eastern end of the Danevirke defensive system, Hedeby acquired a rampart and ditch in the mid-tenth century (Roesdahl 1982: 74), reflecting its role as a key economic and political location. An associated pre-Viking hillfort (Hochburg) seemingly functioned as both refuge and cemetery (*ibid*: 60). The Swedish port of Birka was similarly strategically located on a major route of communication between the kingdom of Uppsala and the sea, thus promoting its early protection. Hence its domination by a hillfort functioning as a military garrison and/or civilian refuge (*borg*); the *Vita Anskarii* refers to its use by Birka's inhabitants in an attack by King Agund (Ambrosiani 1992: 18). The

settlement's defences were supplemented in the tenth century by the construction of a rampart and by the sinking of wooden piles across the mouth of its artificial harbour (*ibid*).

With the eventual establishment of the national kingdoms, substantial, functionally complex towns including Ribe and Schleswig were in place along with capital cities such as Copenhagen, the permanent episcopal and national royal presences of the latter meriting integrated defensive systems. By this date walls and town went hand in hand.

#### **5.3.4: Artisans and Traders**

In the context of economic activities in towns, we must endeavour to differentiate between resident artisans and visiting traders and merchants. What controls were these individuals subject to, and were they active influences over urban form and function? Given the (re) emergence in the seventh and eighth centuries of commercial market activity, did a corresponding merchant class emerge, or did effective royal monopolies on production and trade activities mean that ultimately such individuals remained tied to their superiors?

##### **(i) Identifying Artisans, Traders and Merchants**

In terms of tracing those individuals involved in urban manufacturing and trading activities, indications from British towns are, between the close of the Roman period and the seventh-century economic revival, markedly scarce. Artisans employed in the provisioning of aristocratic urban estates based in Lincoln, York and Winchester appear to have been the only town-based individuals involved in urban trade and manufacturing activity during this period. Support industries seemingly included bronzeworking and weaving at Cirencester and metalworking in fourth-century Winchester (Gerrard 1994: 90). The appearance of sizeable, sophisticated timber shops or residences in fifth-century Wroxeter in conjunction with possible stalls may represent a high-status artisan or socially superior group

(Barker *et al.* 1997: 235). Doubts remain, however, as to whether this would denote a resident population or occasional influxes of individuals from the surrounding region.

In Gaul, the persistence of urban nobility required their continuing provisioning. A restricted range of town-based craftspeople and artisans, including jewellers, carpenters and cobblers, provisioned elite households due to the fact that mass-productive industry was linked to the small towns and villas (Dixon 1992: 155). A change does occur, however, through the growth of extramural markets (*burgi*) centred on monastic or cult foci, notably around towns such as Narbonne and Poitiers. Stemming from a requirement to promote local Christian martyrial cults and to maintain attendant monastic support structures, the provision by the bishop of sheltering wall circuits and plentiful intramural space presented a conducive working environment for the development of markets and fairs. Accordingly, the populations of ecclesiastical cities such as Tours and Vienne would have included numerous low-class craftspeople and others associated with Church and monastery.

With the seventh century and the onset of concerted efforts on the part of the Church and increasingly powerful royal houses to regulate and exploit regional and inter-regional trade and exchange networks, craftspeople and merchants become readily visible in the archaeological record, notably in the context of the *wics*. Operating under the aegis of absentee royal figures, social stratification is apparent within these insubstantially populated settlements. Evidence of social ranking is less forthcoming from Britain in comparison to Scandinavian. Burial evidence from *Hamwic* does, however, invite comparison with Hedeby and the Trelleborg and the presence of small, predominantly male transient *wic* populations of foreign (Frisian?) individuals and/or local village inhabitants involved in trade and production (Brisbane 1988: 106). Economically significant Frisian colonies are attested along the Rhine and Moselle at Cologne, Trier, as well as Worms (where merchants held a monopoly on wine importation) and Mainz (where they occupied the *optimum partem civitatis* – the ‘best part of the town’) (Lebecq 1997: 76). The possibility that a Frisian merchant community based at or near eighth-century York was obliged to flee on the death of a local nobleman suggests a somewhat marginal status for its members in the local community. Alternatively, their continuing

presence may have been reliant upon the will of an individual rather than by the general community.

## (ii) Ecclesiastical and Royal Control Mechanisms

Economic considerations had always been a *primary concern* for those individuals and institutions in control of individual towns – in the case of Gaul this was increasingly the preserve of local bishops. Accordingly, commercial activity remained closely *controlled and regulated* by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, with few indications that artisans could control their own destinies beyond the acquisition of increased personal wealth.

In the case of the walled markets associated with Gallic ecclesiastical towns, the Church was, in effect, actively promoting economic and social relocation. With their regulated points of access, the walled urban markets provided the Church with ready control of artisans and merchants, whilst tolls and taxes assisted in its provisioning. With the progressive relocation of focus away from the former Roman cores of French towns such as Arras and Tours towards emergent ecclesiastical suburban foci, traders and artisans were, for the first time, impacting upon urban fabric. These developments were, however, completely at the behest of the Church and, ultimately, answerable to the controlling royal authorities.

The apparent decision of British kings to regulate activity from separate (albeit frequently close-by) sites – as in the case of *Hamwic* from Winchester – points to tighter regulatory control of the *wics*. Scandinavian market sites, however, show far earlier, closer and more direct royal involvement: hence sites such as Ribe acted as bases for royal officials and were subject to frequent royal visits (Roesdahl 1998: 118).

Royal control may also be seen in the regularity of street grids, property divisions and building size in the *wics* (Ottaway 1992: 126), as well as in the apparent setting aside of certain zones for seasonal occupation. In the case of Ribe land was allocated to travelling craftworkers and/or founders (Madsen 1984: 97) and, in the

case of Hedeby, to temporary merchants' camps (Jansen 1985: 201). Furthermore, the prolonged absence of defensive arrangements beyond symbolic defining banks and ditches on many of these sites may signify a belief by the controlling bodies that the attacking of secure trade points was not deemed a possibility. Alternatively, the withholding of defensive provision would have deterred the formation of potential strongholds. The narrow range of faunal remains from the Anglo-Saxon *wics* meanwhile further indicates that food was provisioned indirectly, and was dependent on external authority (Saunders 1995: 37). *Gipeswic* appears to be exceptional in terms of its likely self-sufficiency in agricultural produce (Wade 1988a: 97). In the *wics*, therefore, whilst royalty dictated the layouts, the traders and artisans themselves directed the input and character of the trade centres. Enhanced waterfronts, warehousing and provisioning systems all served to make for a more 'urban' settlement model.

Subsequently, the absence of intensive occupation or industrial and trading activity from seventh- to ninth-century sites such as Winchester demonstrates the tight restrictions placed upon these socially exclusive places by the upper echelons of society, and a sharp contrast with the *wics* (Biddle 1976: 119). The prevalence of exotic goods and silver coinage from Anglo-Scandinavian *Yorvik* similarly suggests the presence of a prosperous class of craftspeople, as do moves towards the exploitation of a broader range of resources from a wider catchment area (O'Connor 1994: 144). However, despite this broader social mix, and the fact that these individuals had increasing scope for the accumulation of personal wealth, they remained under the control of the Church and, ultimately, the royal houses. Towns had, by the tenth and eleventh centuries, emerged as tightly regulated, closed centres for elite goods exchange, distribution of agricultural surpluses from surrounding estates and market places for the supply of commodities to the peasantry. As their success was dependent upon their retention of market monopolies, they were not freely competitive market places (Saunders 1995: 41).

### (iii) Merchants and Traders: Investments and Returns

External trade contacts played a significant part in Roman urban economies, whilst

the subsequent emergence of ecclesiastical market settlements associated with Irish monastic houses and Gallic *burgi* ensured that foreign merchants remained key to the provisioning of town-based aristocracy. Incentives to mercantile activity included the tax exemptions granted to merchants in ninth-century Tours by Charles the Bald (Galinié 1978: 46). Such patronage would have assisted in the development of greater social complexity via the eventual emergence of a merchant class.

Hedeby appears to have been a socially-ranked, populous settlement, as indicated by its associated cemetery and possible royal burials, perhaps explained by its many central place functions and the implied presence of a branch of the Swedish royal family (Jones 1984: 112). Stratification in the cemeteries of Helgö also suggests a royal link, in this case inclusion within a royal estate (Ambrosiani 1983: 108). Variations in burial ritual at Birka meanwhile may support source evidence for the presence of two distinct groups, namely merchants and permanent residents (Foote & Wilson 1970: 208), although this need not imply a higher social standing of one over the other. The burials noted above reveal that individual traders and artisans could, potentially, gain wealth – vital in itself to encourage wider trade. Merchants had, by the later ninth century, the potential to acquire social status and wealth in their native lands in addition to gains from foreign rulers, as in the case of the Norwegian merchant Ohthere, who reported to the court of Alfred:

He was a very rich man in the sort of things their wealth is counted in, that is to say, wild beasts. When he visited the king he still owned six hundred tame beasts not yet sold – the sort of beasts they call ‘reindeer’...He was among the most important men of that country, but for all that he possessed no more than twenty cattle and twenty sheep and twenty pigs, and what little he ploughed he ploughed with horses.

(Paulus Orosius, *Historia Adversum Paganus*, quoted in Page 1995: 47)

Although the actions of craftspeople and visiting merchants were subject to close scrutiny and control, it was, nevertheless, in the interests of the regulatory authorities to extend protection to these individuals and their goods. Hence the construction of churches by the Scandinavian kings in Birka, Hedeby and Ribe for use by Christian merchants in order to engender feelings of security and so enhance trade. In Britain, Offa was a particular advocate of a mutually beneficial ruler-

merchant arrangement, securing the first known English commercial treaty with Charlemagne (Hobley 1988: 70). Legislation passed by Athelstan, in place c.AD 940, marked the final disappearance of single-function sites, the Second Code ordering the repair of burghal defences prior to the relocation of all trade activity – plus mints – into a single, multi-functional focus. Resident traders and craft workers retained their monopoly and privileges in return for the maintenance of the defences (Hill 1988b: 208). As with the earlier charters of Alfred, the intention was to offer economic incentives in return for permanent residence, not temporary refuges for the surrounding rural population (Biddle & Hill 1971: 83). Throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries towns such as Winchester and York progressively acquired a range of highly specialised productive zones, some out of sheer practicality, such as fulling and tanning, and others from (unregulated) traditional association, as with the moneyers in the High Street at Winchester (Biddle 1976: 119).

### **5.3.5: Urban Inhabitants**

As regards non-elite urban populations, we must consider whether they are archaeologically or historically visible and, if so, consider what their expectations of and roles in urban life might have been. To a large extent this body would have consisted of those individuals staffing the ecclesiastical and lay support structures, including artisans, merchants and servants. This populace must have had reasonably consistent needs, namely access to food, water, a church and a secure place of residence and employment. Whereas the nobility may have had scope and means to relocate when there was a perceived threat to their safety, we must doubt mobility or possible relocation on the part of the non-elite.

In terms of visibility, lesser individuals and social groupings are not always apparent. In the case of England, archaeology has demonstrated that sizeable areas of fourth-century towns such as London and York were devoid of housing and, in certain instances, of street grids, the land given over instead to cultivation or industrial activity. By this period, although still regional administrative and market

centres, these were seemingly places that individuals increasingly eschewed in favour of rural settlement; indeed, even at their height most appear to have lacked substantial resident populations. Leicester at its peak may have had a population of three to four thousand (Wacher 1995: 78), whilst Hinton suggests pre-eleventh-century estimates of 6000 for Canterbury, 3000 for Gloucester and 2000 for Worcester (1992: 32). Although suggestions of the perpetuation of market activity into the post-Roman period from Chester, Exeter, Leicester and, notably, Wroxeter, implies their continuing use at a level sufficient to make such an undertaking viable; the majority were, conceivably, non-resident visitors from the surrounding area.

The overall impression from the fourth century is, indeed, one of increasingly depopulated and decaying urban landscapes. Nonetheless, as noted, we should not expect wholesale desertion. Two groups may still be recognisable: firstly, as detailed in Section 5.2.3, certain non-elite individuals appear to have chosen to remain in order to make selective, sporadic (re) use of relict space and buildings (with or without official sanction) involving the selective salvaging of construction materials. A second group is likely, present out of obligation of duty and/or financial necessity in the service of remaining aristocratic families resident on urban estates attested at towns such as Lincoln and Winchester. Although comprising primarily specialist artisans, their number would doubtless have included non-skilled servants.

Conversely, the longer-established and more sustainable Gallic towns appear to have been effectively continuously occupied by (more) sizeable populations; indeed, Woolf has recently proposed population estimates for the Roman *civitates* of around 35000 for Lyon, 20-25000 for Bordeaux and Toulouse, and 6-9000 for Paris (1998: 138). Archaeology indicates the persistence into the medieval period of substantial suburban areas (albeit subject to contractions and retreats to the protection of walled areas) and, by implication, a broad range of social groupings in the form of merchants, dockworkers, sailors and craftspeople. The picture appears particularly pronounced in the Rhône Valley and Mediterranean coasts, where the wealthy and stable urban network of sizeable, populous towns exerted a considerable influence over the majority of the region's population.

Although the vast majority of the population of Gaul (as elsewhere) was rural – perhaps 90% during the Roman period (*ibid*) – it is evident that many towns were the subject of visits by the rural populace of the dependent urban hinterlands, for acts of pilgrimage, tax payment and attending market in Church festivals. Two points are clear: firstly, substantial numbers of people did choose to remain in towns out of security, community and employment, processes in which the Church played a prominent role. Evidence for late Roman and sub-Roman conversions of previously public classical spaces and structures into private housing attested in towns such as Arles and Vienne (detailed in Sections 5.2.4. & 5.2.5) is, moreover, indicative of influxes of individuals into intramural urban areas, whether as civilian refugees, economic migrants or troops. Frequent references in Merovingian documents to dense housing, such as that grouped around a town gate at Paris, and burgeoning numbers of extramural churches (Samson 1994: 114) offer evidence that, at least within walled urban areas, space for permanent occupation continued to be at a premium.

In Italy, it is evident from towns such as Verona that, whilst street frontages or facades remained in active use, the interior zones of *insulae* went out of use, subsequently to be occupied by churches or cemeteries (N. Christie, pers. comm.). Secondly, these resident individuals were, along with occasional visitors, actively engaging in the towns and assisting in their continuing economic viability. Uncertainties arise when attempting to determine whether these were individuals previously inhabiting the suburban peripheries or else newcomers drawn at times of uncertainty by the promise of largesse and refuge on the part of the bishops and/or secular authority. These actions do, however, support the notion that these places continued to be symbolic, to certain elements of society, of shelter and protection.

Turning to the seventh and eighth centuries and the establishment of the trading settlements across the former Roman provinces and the Scandinavian region, sites such as *Gipeswic*, *Hamwic*, Ribe, Hedeby contained densely-populated zones closely associated with productive and market activity. The specialist (economic) function of these sites suggests, however, that the controlling royal houses would have exercised regulatory control in order to prevent the accumulation of sizeable non-artisan populations, along with central-place functions, for reasons of political

control (Ottaway 1992: 132). Dense, permanent residential areas would, moreover, impinge on valuable productive space. The impermanent, transitory character of earlier occupation at *wics* such as Helgö and Ribe, generally in association with seasonal markets, coupled with the prolonged absence of defensive provision and the unsuitability of residence on heavily industrialised sites further militates against the notion of substantial residential presences. Subsequently, in return for the upkeep and garrisoning of the *burhs* at times of heightened insecurity, local populations were provided with secure (temporary) refuges. Legislation provided for the manning of the defences from the surrounding rural hides or estates, as laid down in the Burghal Hidage. Consequently, 1,600 men were required from Wareham's hides to line its ramparts, whilst the former Saxon Shore fort of Portchester required 500 (Radford 1970: 99). The carefully-planned, standardised plan of the *burhs* demonstrates the intention of the authorities to create permanently populated, defensive towns, with economic incentives encouraging non-elite occupation (Biddle & Hill 1971: 83). Consequently places such as Wareham, Winchester and Oxford rapidly attracted sizeable populations, evidenced by the development of suburbs and the explosive growth in urban churches and chapels – Winchester had 57 by 1100 (Ottaway 1992: 136).

The strongly Christianised identity of many towns and their saint protectors meanwhile brought pilgrim interest and local devotion, with saints' festivals resulting in periodic urban overcrowding. In some cases this resulted in the development of walled secondary developmental foci centred on a church or monastery, as noted at Arras, Narbonne and Tours. By AD 954 at Sithium for example, there were enough people there to cause a disturbance involving 'a multitude of people' (James 1982: 68).

In Scandinavia, the coastal and regional settlement/trade foci must have continued to be dominated by craftspeople and merchants until the eleventh century and the eventual emergence of the complex, multi-functional royal towns. Accordingly, the progressive provision of towns such as Ribe with churches throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries stems more from a requirement of the kings to provide for the needs of visiting or native Scandinavian Christian merchants and traders rather than for any non-artisanal individuals (Skovgaard-Petersen 1981a: 22). Similarly, in

Britain and Ireland, Scandinavian input in urban development resulted in an increasing consolidation of urban populations in tandem with the increasing centralisation of urban functions in single foci, notably in the case of Dublin and York, and the eventual appearance of the burghal towns with substantial non-productive populations. Whilst it is known that these populations were present, it is, however, difficult to tease out information regarding these peoples. Problems are further compounded by fluctuations in urban economic activity, with varying levels of pottery survival over certain periods and zones serving to reduce the physical visibility of urban populations.

#### **5.4: SUMMARY: AGENTS AND AGENCIES**

The above discussions demonstrate the range of potential agents and agencies serving to impact upon towns. The key points may be summarised thus:

- From the later Roman period onwards north-west European towns underwent diverse physical and functional developmental changes, the twin key factors serving to drive these being the twin processes of Roman break-up and later state formation and, subsequently, the Church. Ironically, whilst both secular and ecclesiastical authorities used the creation and control of urban and proto-urban settlements as a means to consolidate their hold over emergent territories, this could not occur prior to the establishment of effective regional control frameworks.
- Although the methods employed to maintain this control naturally varied as to particular circumstances, the primary aim remained a constant: namely, a wish to establish and consolidate control over a particular territory via the manipulation and exploitation of regional economic activity.
- The period of study is characterised by the eventual recognition on the part of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities across all the regions of study that multifunctional central foci – namely, towns – were the most effective (though not sole) means of establishing and retaining regional power. Certain administrations chose to, or were capable of, adopting the concept more readily than others, and the means by which they chose to interpret it varied

considerably. However, the very fact that all eventually adopted urbanism as an agency of control testifies to its universality and efficacy.

- Urban form was never a precious, idealised and monolithic concept, even at the height of the classical city. It was, and continues to be, subject to dynamic, adaptive change and reworking as those guiding its development saw (see) fit to best suit their requirements – which, nonetheless, remain effectively constant and consistent over space and time. The results were frequently unique in form and function.
- In those regions with an inherited urban legacy, relict as well as extant towns were viewed by both administrations and individuals (non-elite as well as of those of the lower social echelons) as a *resource* to be selectively drawn upon and variously perpetuated, emulated or adapted as required, whether for economic, political, propagandist or simply practical ends.
- As a result, each town followed an individual, varied trajectory, defined by shifting patterns of activity and functional foci, with, at its core, the largely consistent and unchanging ecclesiastical and secular administrations. Whilst other socio-economic groupings (artisans, merchants, proletariat) came and went through personal choice, a proportion of the nobility remained, as these were the individuals with the greatest investment in the towns, as indicated by their continuing participation in urban administrations.
- The classical towns served to *influence but not dictate* urbanism. Hence the survival of the Roman urban past was variable and subject to perpetuation, adaptive reuse or selective removal at the behest of changing administrations and populations. Available options ranged from (i) the continuing maintenance of existing structures and stylistic emulation through new construction, via (ii) the adaptation and change of pre-existing buildings for new purposes, to (iii) the total rejection and abandonment of relict structures in favour of new forms. The chosen course of action chosen by the authorities appears, therefore, never to have been the subject of constraint or hindrance from inherited urban form. Indeed, certain authorities were inspired to draw upon the past in order to create new town forms. In the case of Scandinavia, regions lacking the constraint of pre-existing towns, rulers had markedly free rein to create settlements as best suited their purpose.

- Towns carried different meanings and resonances to different social groups – and continue to do so today. Hence, post-Roman royal houses are likely to have been increasingly aware of the potential of urban form for the furtherance of power, personal prestige and wealth. In the former Roman provinces this involved the adoption and adaptation of the relict towns and, in those regions lacking an urban heritage, selective borrowings from a range of influences encountered personally via diplomatic and trade contacts. As regards the expectations of those individuals at the lower end of the social scale, however, these will have been somewhat more practical – namely, food, water, employment, safe refuge and a place of worship.
- Whilst non-elite residents and/or visitors served to impact upon the urban fabric in a generally piecemeal and insubstantial manner, their intrusions into and adaptation of former communal space and structures is, nevertheless, representative of fundamental changes governing attitudes to towns. In the majority of cases it remains unclear whether these actions were undertaken at the behest of the authorities. If so, this would appear to signal official acknowledgement of the functional redundancy of inherited urban elements and that the lower social orders were now sanctioned to adapt redundant structures and spaces as they saw fit – with the presumed proviso that this work did not impinge upon the official governing structures of the town. The readiness of non-elites to modify the town fabric indicates, moreover, that these individuals were not over-awed by the relict urban past and did not hesitate in reworking it to their own purpose. Nor were they seeking to bolster their own social position through use of the Roman urban legacy, as were certain aristocratic and/or royal individuals and groups.
- The symbiotic relationship between the Christian Church and secular authority is evident in terms of the consolidation and furtherance of regional power; as the former gained stature so it increasingly gained a physical and economic urban presence. The secular authorities granted land and financial privileges in return for their assistance in the consolidation of royal power over the nation states. In certain instances the Church ultimately assumed sufficient power to challenge and hinder secular rule.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

# **LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL URBAN RESEARCH: CONCLUSIONS, PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL**

### **6.1: INTRODUCTION**

On the basis of the preceding investigation of past and contemporary attitudes and images of the late antique and early medieval town and the detailed examination of town patterning across three regions, this final chapter summarises the key debates and problems of recent and ongoing research. A number of research aims and questions are then proposed as pointers for urban studies in the future which will be applicable to other provinces of the former Roman empire as well as regions beyond its frontiers.

### **6.2: LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL URBAN FORM AND FUNCTION: COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY**

This survey has, above all, served to demonstrate the intricacy and temporal and spatial diversity of urban form and developmental trajectories. Towns are strongly individualistic, with a heavy dependency upon setting, role and, in particular, human presences. Hence the difficulty (or effective impossibility) of formulating predictive models for urban development and internal evolution/devolution. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this work has served to establish that a series of key common thematic and functional threads serves to link the disparate study regions across the late antique and early medieval periods. Distinct roles, focal shifts and requirements are particularly noticeable in each of the towns examined:

- *State/Royalty.* Whether as permanent residents or sporadic visitors, royal houses were crucial to urban development across all regions; indeed, towns and their markets owed their continuing existence to state/regal authority. Kings physically imposed their authority upon urban space, structures and populations

in order to consolidate and further economic and political territorial control. The efficacy of this control and resultant impact on the towns could be challenged or compromised by competition from other administrations or a strong Church presence; hence the early attrition of Roman attributes may demonstrate a weaker royal/state hold or a lack of concern to maintain the political upper hand. Ultimately, however, such factors did not constitute a serious or lasting challenge to the supremacy of royal power over the towns.

- *The Church.* As with secular authority, ecclesiastical administrations were early and permanent fixtures in the urban context. Towns were characterised by the symbiotic relationship operating between Church and state, a mutually beneficial interdependency heightened by the merging of secular elites into Church administrations and the receipt by royal houses of revenues from ecclesiastical economic ventures. In certain instances this balance failed and, where secular control was weaker, the Church was more readily able to assume (symbolic) dominance over a town. Paradoxically, however, even in these circumstances the ultimate supremacy of royal power prevented ecclesiastical control from subsuming its lay counterpart; the interdependency of the two more often than not resulted in balanced sharing of power and influence.
  
- *Economy.* If towns (or town survivals) were a manifestation of increasingly centralised royal and Church power, so economic activity was its enabling medium. Recognising from an early date the potential political capital to be made from dominating trade and manufacturing, emergent leaders initiated a sequence of events beginning with the establishment of specialist productive and trading foci, via the development of inter-regional market economies, and culminating in the focussing of economic functions into the medieval town. The design of many proto-urban settlements and towns betrays the primary importance of their trade and manufacturing functions, roles which merited protection and strict regulation and which, if necessary, obliged wholesale transfer of their inhabitants elsewhere. The growing role of the Church in urban economic life challenged secular dominance of town-based markets whilst simultaneously promoting (sub)urban development and, in certain instances, serving to draw activity away from secular foci.

- *Non-Elites.* Archaeological and historical evidence strongly suggests that, in most regions, the majority of late classical and early medieval towns were not populous, as their frequently strongly elite and/or economic character militated against substantial resident populations. Despite occupational contractions and expansions of non-elite residents, however, the maintenance of lay and ecclesiastical support structures would have required the continuing presence of core staff serving as artisans, merchants and servants. This social dependency would have minimised the possibility of mobility or relocation on the part of these non-elites. Similarly, whereas the expectations and roles of socially advantaged individuals would be subject to variation and change over space and time, the requirements of the non-elite urban populace are likely to have remained largely consistent: namely, access to food, water, and places of worship, work and residence. Whether or not present out of obligation and/or financial necessity, these markedly less visible individuals are indirectly detectable via selective, piecemeal adaptive (re)use of relict buildings and structures. Whether or not officially sanctioned, such actions demonstrate the ability and readiness of non-elite groups to impact upon and modify the urban fabric to their own (largely utilitarian) ends.

### **6.3: LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL URBANISM: DEFINITIONS**

Urban form was, and continues to be, a dynamic force subject to considerable adaptation and remodelling on the part of authorities, who sought to control and guide its development as best suited their (albeit remarkably consistent) requirements. Consequently even the classical town did not constitute an idealised and static concept and, as such, frequently produced towns, each with their own unique blend of form and function(s), whether as royal, episcopal or garrison towns, places of pilgrimage, production or market centres or any combination thereof. Whilst the range of available influences was particularly marked in the case of the former Roman provinces, this did not exclude authorities in Ireland and Scandinavia, regions without an urban tradition, from being cognisant of and selectively drawing from these forms.

By the close of the early medieval period a common need linked the disparate regions and urban forms: namely, the recognition by the controlling authorities of the efficacy of concentrating disparate administrative, defensive and economic foci in a single, central location. The ultimate result was the formation in Britain of the defended, populous burghal town with permanent royal and Church administrations; as such this was the culmination of the lengthy process of state formation initiated centuries before. In Gaul we see the reinforcement and perpetuation of urban secular and ecclesiastical administrative functions beyond the classical period via increasing elite identification with and involvement in the Church, developments epitomised by the rise of the aristocratic bishops.

Despite their evident diversity of form and function, all late Roman and early medieval towns shared a common thread: namely, the fact that all were *instigated, guided and controlled by centralised power*. Whilst the various functional and occupational foci served to ebb and flow and shift their location across time, the ecclesiastical and secular administrations remained constant fixtures at the urban cores. Furthermore, the actions of controlling elite administrations, whether powerful individuals, secular or ecclesiastical institutions or their representatives, either present in the towns or based elsewhere, were key to all the developments detailed above. Common to all the possible permutations of urban form and function was the central tenet of developmental control in the guise of the individuals who created the towns and fostered and guided their development. It was, conversely, equally in their power to withhold patronage, in which case these settlements would wither and die. However, the very fact that the vast majority of towns *did* survive adaptive remodelling of their form as well as function testifies to their continuing viability as agencies of social control.

The principal point to emerge from the above is the fact that, whilst towns in certain regions were subject to major fluctuations in their populations and in their economic, political and military functions, virtually all *did eventually re-emerge*. Ultimately towns continued to exist because they were, and continue to be so, *viable centres of social, political and economic control*. The small minority that failed did so due to irreconcilable changes in the prevailing political system and trade patterns. In the main, however, conservatism, logic and practicality dictated that if an

efficient, workable system was already in place, then it should continue to be made use of.

It is, consequently, a misconception to question whether or not a settlement is deemed worthy of the label 'urban' at any particular stage in its history. Although various factors including suburban occupation, economic emphases or military considerations may have impacted on a town, none of these need be deemed *vital* to a town's continued existence. Hence, although any combination of their number may have vanished from a site, in virtually every case an element of political and/or administrative central place function remained, forming a key, vital thread of continuity through to such time as the town subsequently revived.

In the case of Scandinavia, a region where the dividing line between 'urban' and 'proto-urban' is considerably blurred, such attempts at defining town status are especially difficult, as demonstrated by the continuing inconsistent use of epithets by researchers. In such cases it may be that we are too cautious in our application of labels; if these sites were, indeed, significant stages in the development of the medieval town, they should be acknowledged as such and allocated a suitable title – though the question remains: which is the most appropriate? The use of terminology should undoubtedly be consistent, and it can be argued that use of the terms *wic* and *emporium* are the most appropriate and with the greatest inter-regional application for the present.

Substantial populations did not in reality make a town, nor did market functions. Their absence did not threaten the continued existence of central places such as Metz or Winchester (whether or not they merited the term 'town'). What counted was the presence of authority, whether ecclesiastical or secular. The existence of these authorities in any particular location served to exert control over a range of functions, frequently ranged over several locations; the efficacy of control did not necessarily dictate their clustering in a single location.

## **6.4: LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL URBANISM: DEBATES AND DIRECTIONS**

Having defined the principal research themes, what gaps in our knowledge require attention? Progress has begun to be made in addressing these issues, due in large part to the fact that current researchers are more questioning of data than their predecessors, and are increasingly moving away from the simplistic compilation and discussion of lists of urban criteria that characterised debate in the 1960s and '70s. There is, rather, increasing recognition of the necessity of endeavouring to distinguish and monitor activities of those individuals and social groups who drove town development rather than dwell on sterile debates concerning what properly constitutes the epithet 'urban'. In this regard, Martin Carver has undertaken a wide-ranging and deliberately provocative discussion of ongoing issues in early urban studies in addition to suggesting guidelines for future research that have the same relevance to Scandinavia and Ireland as in the former Roman provinces (1993). In a field of research that is as heavily reliant upon a continuing supply of fresh archaeological data as early urban studies, but one that is necessarily dependent on schemes of urban excavation, we are held back by decelerated urban growth and thus exploration, a lack of research excavation and a continuing backlog of publication.

The majority of these problems are likely to remain for the foreseeable future in light of current urban planning policy for the minimising of developmental impact upon central urban areas and their deeply stratified archaeological deposits. As a result, much archaeological attention has shifted towards investigation of the less sensitive suburbs and urban hinterlands, to the detriment of our understanding of the key urban cores and their secular and/or ecclesiastical administrative associations. In the case of Britain the problem is compounded by the continuing limited nature of publication of the major excavation projects undertaken since the 1960s in, for example, Chester and Winchester. Hence, the developmental sequences of certain towns remain better understood than others, British towns continuing to be generally characterised by a relative lack of knowledge of their ecclesiastical history, defensive arrangements and hinterlands (Figure 1). As regards Gaul (Figures 21 & 22), the disproportionate academic attention focussed until recent

years on ecclesiastical structures has highlighted the priority of exploring issues of urban defence and economies. A combination of developer-driven archaeological projects and the Ministry of Culture's research guidelines is, to a limited extent, serving to redress this imbalance through the definition of prioritised areas of future work. However, in a town-planning climate that seeks to minimise impact on the archaeological heritage, this will effectively long remain an idealised wish list. Hence the necessity of prioritising research utilising all available archaeological and historical data sets from previous and ongoing projects, in conjunction with current urban research themes and theory, is readily apparent from these shortcomings. A number of recent and ongoing research projects by archaeologists and historians targeted at individual towns, in addition to more generalised, synthetic studies, offer the potential to compensate for these insufficiencies via the application of findings to individual towns or study regions elsewhere.

By virtue of its undisturbed greenfield setting, Wroxeter, currently the subject of a multidisciplinary research project, constitutes the greatest opportunity thus far to observe a British Roman town in its proper economic and social setting. Indeed, such is the significance of the excavations undertaken by Philip Barker and Roger White on the site of the baths basilica (Barker *et al.* 1997) that they still continue to dominate academic debate on late and sub-Roman British urbanism. Conversely, the exceptional character of this occupation – if accurate – may have limited potential application to other British towns, given its atypical ('failed') trajectory.

Anglian occupation on the site of the Roman fortress basilica at York has similarly drawn a range of interpretations concerning the actions of and control over urban populations, with potential implications for sub-Roman activity encountered in other towns such as Winchester (Carver 1995; Philips & Heywood 1995; Roskams 1996). Again, however, such is the contentious nature of the evidence that the excavators' interpretation is at variance with that of their editor. Elsewhere, the recognition that post-Roman inhabitants of Chester, as probably also Leicester, were seemingly choosing to live amidst increasingly ruinous former Roman structures requires us to requestion old data from other towns (Strickland 1988; Connor & Buckley 1999). Consequently, whilst all these towns have yielded occupation that has provoked widely divergent interpretations, their principal value lies in their

contribution to the wider urban debate of possible actions and agendas of non-elite individuals.

Turning to Gaul, the 1990s witnessed the publication of studies utilising both archaeological and historical data in moves to place towns in their regional landscape settings, salient examples including Provost's work on the Loire Valley (1993) and Rebourg's study of the commune of Autun (1993). Attention has latterly turned to urban defensive provision (Garmy & Maurin 1996, Esmonde Cleary *et al.* 1998) and Gaul's Frankish legacy. Individual town studies have included Guy Halsall's research into administrative continuity in Roman and Merovingian Metz (1995a, 1995b, 1996). Simon Loseby's study of the impact of social and political change upon the fabric of late Roman Arles raises important issues regarding the increasingly Christianised identity of late classical Gallic towns (1996) which may be applicable to the British evidence. For Scandinavia and Ireland, meanwhile, emphasis continues to lie too strongly with Viking impacts and feudal growth to the detriment of exploration of the origins of urbanism and the role of insular influences.

Immensely valuable though these various studies are, one cannot expect any single model to be applicable across the European (or even British/ Gallic/ Irish/ Scandinavian) board. Even if the broad socio-economic/politico-military context does indeed create specific socio-urban responses, each urban centre will respond differently to these stimuli as, it is hoped, the preceding discussion has amply demonstrated. At the same time, it must constantly be borne in mind that towns cannot and do not exist in splendid isolation; they are of necessity tied up in often complex economic, political and religious linkages with, and obligations to, dependent territories and with other centres further afield. Hence the need for a broadly thematic study focussing on a research area of sufficient spatial and temporal depth to be capable of detecting these wider patterns and yet small enough to detect variations at the individual site level. Whilst it is, therefore, readily apparent that early urban studies continue to suffer shortcomings and inconsistencies at both individual town and regional levels, it is equally evident that this study and other recent avenues of research offer the potential to open up debate beyond insular regional confines. But the final question remains: how do we proceed from this juncture?

## **6.5: LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL URBANISM: NEW AIMS, NEW QUESTIONS**

Researchers of post-classical urbanism have available to them a diverse and substantial body of archaeological and historical data, the inconsistencies and gaps, of which do, however, cause dispute, debates and inconclusive deductions. Consequently, archaeologists and historians should be prepared to turn their attention elsewhere, to other town-periods and to alternative regions, as has been attempted, in this thesis, in order to address or bridge these shortcomings. Indeed, it was not the intention of this study to provide in-depth coverage of a single region and so retread old ground; the intention was rather to search further afield for comparisons, contrasts and alternatives, and it is hoped that this work provides potentially fruitful future research themes. The work involved has been both substantial and extensive, involving the utilisation of considerable secondary literature, but also, vitally, drawing upon a wide range of primary sources, since these constitute an essential guide and, indeed, starting-point. As fieldwork and literature pertaining to early urban studies expand, so it will be increasingly difficult for the future researcher to cover a similarly wide study area. In such a scenario a number of possible themes for future research are offered which, it is believed, are equally applicable to specific study regions as to wider territories:

- *The Modelling of Urban Form.* The late Roman and early medieval periods were characterised by the development of an extremely broad range of (proto-and) urban settlement types arising from a diverse set of influences. The result was an unprecedented range of settlement types. This study has attempted to examine and classify these town models. The complexity of the task is, however, evident and demands further research as a basis for comprehending the intentions of those serving to drive these developments.
- *The Regulation and Manipulation of Urban Space and Structures by Urban Authorities.* The examination of the various uses to which urban space and structures were put by individuals and social groups in positions of authority (whether physically present or located elsewhere), either through adaptive or continued use of pre-existing structures or new construction, for both practical

and propagandist ends, merits continuing investigation, such as through a focus on structural types – entertainment, legal or religious edifices.

- *Defences.* Were wall circuits serving as protective devices or defining units to urban (and proto-urban) centres? Although walls have been studied as archaeological and architectural monuments in the past (e.g. Garmy & Maurin 1996), their social and ‘urban’ role still requires fuller study (Christie 1997).
- *The Physical Impact of Non-Elites upon Urban Space and Structures.* Non-elite individuals and social groups evidently maintained a presence in towns throughout their history, whether as sporadic visitors or permanent residents. If these people were indeed serving to impact upon the urban fabric, were these events the result of individual (unofficial) initiatives, or were their actions (and, indeed, their occupancy) formally sanctioned by the regulatory authorities?
- *The Inter-Relationship Between Town and Urban Hinterland.* Linkages between towns and their territories continue to be poorly understood, notably as regards the post-Roman period and the attendant loosening of rural-urban connections. Multidisciplinary projects such as the Wroxeter Hinterland Project and the *Carte Archéologique de la France* series provide models for future working practice – albeit undertakings entirely reliant upon continuing funding at the national level.
- *The Trading Wics.* Whilst excavation of and research into the seventh- and eighth-century productive and trading settlements continues in Britain and Scandinavia, their Gallic counterparts remain poorly understood. The initiation of comparative studies between this and other regions may serve to elucidate this as-yet scarce corpus of sites.
- *Abandoned Towns and Suburban Zones.* Whilst instances of total urban failure have been shown to be exceptional, a study comprising the comparative examination of the few known examples from Gaul and Britain may, nonetheless, further our understanding of the reasons for their abandonment and the persistence of others. Similarly, all late classical towns appear to have undergone shrinkage of their suburban areas. In many cases the precise reasons for these abandonments are obscure and would benefit from inter-regional comparative research.

There are, consequently, many new directions and questions yet to be pursued from both old and current data. Only as work progresses on these and new fronts and as the archaeology (and its funding) likewise evolves will a clearer understanding emerge of the character, function and populations of towns between AD 300 and 1050. In the context of the early twenty-first century – with the ancient and medieval urban heritage increasingly subsumed beneath ever-expanding towns – a fuller understanding of the origins of those towns is increasingly vital in order that we do not lose sight of the complex origins of our heavily urbanised present-day society.

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