

## Spätantike, frühes Mittelalter und Mittelalter

Joachim Henning (ed.), **Post-Roman Towns. Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium. Volume I: The Heirs of the Roman West. Volume II: Byzantium, Pliska, and the Balkans.** Millennium Studies in the culture and history of the first millennium C. E. Publisher Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York 2007. 565 and 707 pages.

It is thirty-five years since Herbert Jankuhn, Walter Schlesinger and Heiko Steuer organized a major conference at Göttingen (18–24 April 1972) on the origin of European cities that led to a two-volume collection of essays: *Vor- und Frühformen der europäischen Stadt im Mittelalter* (Göttingen 1973). Joachim Henning's reprise, based upon a conference held in Bad Homburg in 2004, could not be more different from the ground-breaking enterprise at Göttingen. The focus of the 1972 conference and subsequent two volumes were essentially restricted to the Baltic Sea and selective regions of eastern Europe. This was quite natural given Jankuhn's own contribution based upon his long association with Hedeby (Haithabu). So sites on the then East German and Polish littoral figured prominently, as did then

newly excavated sites on the North Sea like Dorestad. London, though, was absent, as was York. Instead, Winchester and, in its shadow, Hamwih (Anglo-Saxon Southampton), as it was then known, were introduced to a wider, principally German and Scandinavian audience. But the heart of the seminal Göttingen volumes was composed of major essays by German historians who examined urban history with the barest reference to the archaeological evidence. More than thirty years on, Henning's two volumes containing sixty essays and reports reflect a different age. The geographical scope is far greater – not only are Italy, the Balkans and (Byzantine) Anatolia considered in important papers but there is also a brief contribution devoted to post-Roman Tiberias in Palestine. No less importantly, more than half of the papers cover projects in eastern Europe with special emphasis being given to Henning's own excavations at Pliska in Bulgaria. The methodological approach is very different too. Henning's own introduction immerses itself in reviewing historical paradigms, setting the scene, appropriately, for Michael McCormick's elegant and thought-provoking essay where, as a historian, he provocatively challenges current archaeo-

logical scholarship. Most of all, the past thirty years have brought to light a fascinating level of new detail that is not critically compared in these two volumes – there is no ground-breaking conclusion – yet now published it means that scholars have a mine of information that was simply unimaginable in Göttingen in 1972.

Two issues are central to the scope of these papers: first, what factors led to the creation of post-Roman urbanism, and second, the extraordinary differences in urban scale described in the many contributions to these volumes.

Urban origins. Joachim Henning's introduction looks to craftsmen as »the keepers of the light of the urban economy«. They were no less important, he contends, in making the ninth-century command economy in Carolingian monasteries. Michael McCormick in his essay ›Where do trading towns come from?‹ considers an entirely different answer – »reges ex machina«, kings as town-makers. The bipolar configuration of wics and royal sites found all around Europe, he argues, is certainly compelling. However, he provocatively speculates that »the new towns may be the consequence, rather than the cause of their growth«. In other words, places that began as the focus of exchange between traders and craftsmen were eventually appropriated by the political elite. McCormick is rightly attracted to the chronological convergences wherein towns from the Baltic to the Adriatic appear suddenly to prosper around A. D. 800. Without mentioning it, he is plainly seduced by the world systems model, and, for example, in an important analysis of recent archaeological research, he re-visits Sture Bolin's arguments linking the rise of ninth-century southern Scandinavia to a sudden influx in the Baltic sea region of Arabic silver dirhams. Taking this further, McCormick examines the first results of Bjorn Ambrosiani's 1990s excavations at Birka (Sweden) to consider whether the Arabic and other resources reached the Baltic by way of the Rhineland (and North Sea), and ultimately by way of Venice in the Mediterranean. Johan Callmer also contributes to the debate about urban origins in northern and eastern Europe. He acknowledges the association of emporia with political elites, but argues that they were not »initiators«. Instead, the role of these political elites was »one of passive profiteers«. More explicitly than Henning, he identifies »the leading groups of the traders and organisers of shipping« as the »active agents at the emporia«. He mediates this conclusion with the speculation that »a balanced mutual relationship between agents of trade and local elites is likely«. Not all the participants were readily persuaded by the diminished role of the political elite in town-making. This is especially evident in the chapters covering southern and eastern Europe as well as Byzantium. In Rome, for instance, Paolo Delogu identifies »a patriarchal economy« managed by the papal government of aristocrats. Likewise, in his elegant contribution about the Moravian centre at Pohansko, Jiří Macháček offers a compelling account of a place that may have been a palatium with an emporium »that

could only be built by a man in possession of the highest authority in the country«. Then, too, the series of long essays and reports dedicated to the immense metropolis of Pliska in Bulgaria convincingly demonstrate that its underlying military prowess was sustained by »a strongly centralized society«, according to Joachim Henning. The Byzantine model is evidently in his mind. New evidence of middle Byzantine towns certainly affirms the continuing presence of urbanism in the eighth and ninth centuries. At the Byzantine cities of Amorium and Thessalonike – described in two important chapters in the second volume – the decisive role of a local »strategos«, appointed by the emperor in Constantinople, was fundamental to the administration of all elements of urban life including active artisanal production. In the light of this important debate about origins and indeed the investment of political versus mercantile and artisanal power, perhaps the most telling contributions to these volumes, however, are those dealing with urbanism in the heart of the Carolingian kingdoms. Egon Wamers' account of the topography of ›Franconofurd‹, early medieval Frankfurt, shows how extraordinarily modest this important one-street riverside town was. It was essentially a combination of a palace with its cathedral, separated from a discrete settlement that grew up alongside the riverside road – the so-called ›one-street settlement«. Wamers draws parallels with other one street settlements now known on the Danube and Rhine – Regensburg, Cologne, Mainz and Strasbourg. Being in the shadow of Charlemagne's palace at Frankfurt, it might have been supposed that a great trading community would have taken shape. The archaeology, or rather the absence of it, is striking. Further afield in the Carolingian kingdom, Frans Theuws describes the archaeology of Maastricht and Namur which were slow to evolve as urban centres and now do not appear to have readily supplanted the coastal emporia as urban foci. Theuws explains the slow growth of these inland urban centres as a consequence of the ruralisation of the later Merovingian and Carolingian aristocracy. Instead, in this »age of experiments«, he speculates that Carolingian production was concentrated at monastic sites and asks if commercial activities were also moved to these places. The archaeology of the great north German monastery of Fulda described in an important contribution by Thomas Kind certainly illustrates Theuws's point. The evidence for production as well as traded commodities is compelling. It is no less compelling for the west Hungarian monastery of Mosaburg (Zalavár) described by Béla Miklós Szóke founded in about A. D. 850. The existence of workshops clearly associated with a basilica constructed to deploy its relics in a ring crypt further illustrates, as Theuws had noted, the complex relationships in the Carolingian world between the church and state as experiments were made in new economic ventures.

So, in essence, we are left in no doubt about the centralised administrative political authority in town-build-

ing in Byzantium, which was perhaps interpreted in different forms in south-east Europe and Rome, where the legacy of the old Roman Empire was strongest. But in northern and western Europe between the river Po and the Baltic the circumstances were more variegated. Perhaps missing in this latter case is a fuller picture of the beaching places or periodic markets now well known from Denmark, the North Sea littoral and England. Were certain of these impermanent or periodic beaching places, once subjected to patronage by the political elite, precursors of the successive urban sites like Hamwic, Quentovic, Dorestad, Ribe and Haithabu – and perhaps of the Po-estuary emporia of Comacchio near Ravenna, the precursor of Venice, elegantly described by Sauro Gelichi in these volumes? Whatever, as Henning and Theuvs in different chapters point out, the Carolingian aristocracy had essentially taken up residence in the countryside. Moreover, notwithstanding the reforms instigated in the economy at the Council of Frankfurt in A. D. 793 these appear to have led to very limited production and commercial activity close to the secular centres like Frankfurt (in sharp contrast to comparable administrative centres in Byzantium) yet, clearly lead to marked investment in monasteries which, to quote Henning, became the epicentres of the short-lived Carolingian command economy. In this differing circumstances we must assume entirely different models for implementing taxation or tribute systems – in England as Byzantium the urban centres surely played a major role whereas in the Frankish kingdom this cannot have been the case.

Scale: this variation of political versus commercial and artisanal authority in town-building has to be viewed through the intriguing prism of scale – the one archaeological index, given the small excavated sample in most towns, which is incontrovertible. The Göttingen conference created a paradigm that viewed the emporia as huge sprawling centres, but in fact the differences in scale are extraordinary. Birka and Haithabu covered twelve and twenty-four hectares; Staraja Ladoga, according to Johan Callmer, was four to five hectares in area while he reports Kiev to have occupied eighty hectares by the tenth century. Dorestad and Quentovic probably occupied about thirty to forty hectares, while Hamwic, Ipswich and Lundenwic occupied about fifty hectares or more. The Adriatic towns of Comacchio and Venice, according to Gelichi, were of the same order of magnitude, as were the Moravian towns described by Poláček. Pliska in Bulgaria was colossal, occupying more than two thousand hectares, and surely compares with Constantinople, as Henning cautiously observes. The range of sizes must be compared with palatial sites like Frankfurt or Pohansko, on the one hand, or on the other hand Carolingian age monasteries like Fulda and Mosaburg (Zalavár). Comparing like with like, of course, can be often difficult, yet a few observations emerge from the many essays in these volumes. First, before the tenth century the Baltic sea system of emporia from Staraja Ladoga in the east Baltic to

Kaupang and Ribe in the west Baltic gave rise to small urban places, mostly of ten hectares or less. Second, the Anglo-Saxon emporia were the largest around the North Sea, exceeding in terms of size those of Dorestad, Quentovic and probably Rouen. Third, the latter, if Gelichi's first observations about Comacchio and Venice prove to be substantiated, were comparable in size to the Adriatic sea emporia. Fourth, the emporia located on the frontiers of the Carolingian kingdom were considerably larger than any sites in the Rhineland or Seine valley. Fifth, monasteries and possibly palaces were the largest urban-like places with the Carolingian kingdoms and these were planned and developed on an urban scale comparable with, for example, the Baltic emporia. Lastly, the eastern and south-eastern European centres were certainly envisaged – in terms of their defences at least – on an earlier Byzantine scale which were sustained in only selective points in the empire such as at Amorium and Thessalonike.

Surely, then, the scale informs the debate about origins and purpose, as much as the far-flung connections that appear to link so many of these places around A. D. 800. Great centres like Pliska and London with their planned fortifications and often-repaired gravelled street grid, respectively, must owe their origins to the intervention of a *reges ex machina*. On the other hand the smaller Baltic sea emporia may be the result of local traders or artisans, whereby liminal exchange nodes were eventually given new status as local potentates appreciated the economic and social importance of these places. Between these two poles, then, is the intriguing situation in the Carolingian kingdoms where a ruralised kingship eschewed the urban administrative programmes of the Byzantines and the town-building prowess of the Anglo-Saxons and Moravians.

With more archaeology the debate about the origins and evolution of early urbanism has developed remarkably since the landmark Göttingen conference of 1972. Nevertheless, the extraordinary wealth of archaeology from all over western Europe begs many new historical questions of the geo-political circumstances and challenges accepted historical tropes. Joachim Henning must be congratulated for convening and publishing these volumes. With time, as for the 1972 conference, these papers will be regarded as major contributions in a paradigm shift in our understanding of the making of early medieval Europe.

Philadelphia

Richard Hodges