

logical evidence over the past couple of decades is well supported by the existing textual records. From them we know that Pope Gregory made London a primatial see of England in 601, indicating that the place must have been important then. An Episcopal church was established in 604 at the site where St. Paul's Cathedral now stands. Written sources and the evidence of minted coins show that London was a thriving commercial center during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. Texts refer to the existence of a king's hall at London in the final third of the seventh century. Other texts attest to major fires in the town in the years 764, 798, and 801, strongly suggesting a densely built-up urban area.

Once established as an urban and commercial center following the advance of the Roman legions into Britain in A.D. 43, London continued to flourish, even during times of major political and economic change, to the present day. Other centers in northern Europe were first established during the Dark Ages, and many of them continued to grow and thrive throughout the medieval period and into modern times.

7

New Centers in the North



WHEN THE MISSIONARY ANSGAR ARRIVED AT BIRKA IN central Sweden,

King Björn received them cordially . . . Many of the people were eager to hear [Ansgar's] message [about the new religion]. Numerous Christians lived there as slaves . . . Soon a chapel was built.

At the trade port of Birka, there were many well-to-do merchants, an abundance of goods of all kinds, and much money and treasure.

These quotations give us important information about one of the new centers that grew rapidly in northern Europe and radically changed the political, cultural, and economic character of the continent. The quotes are from the biography of the mis-



Figure 7.1. Places mentioned in chapters 7 to 11.

sionary Ansgar, later Bishop of Hamburg, describing his visit to the northern trade port of Birka, on an island in Lake Mälaren in central Sweden. His visit was in the year 829, and the circumstances described are similar to those of the preceding century.

Three points in these quotations are especially significant. First, this growing trade center was ruled by a king, indicating

that it was part of a large and complex political entity. Second, Christian slaves were part of the community, implying that traders in the north had captured persons farther south, perhaps in France, Germany, or Anglo-Saxon England, who were already Christian; or perhaps the traders obtained them from merchants based in those lands. Third, the words in the last sentence indicate that the commercial activity at this site must have been very active. This biography of Ansgar was written by his successor, Rimbert, who was also based at Hamburg. Hamburg was a substantial trading city by this time, and if Rimbert tells us that Birka had “many well-to-do merchants” and “an abundance of goods of all kinds,” the commercial activity there must have been large-scale indeed.

This vivid description written by someone of the time gives us a feel for how the people of northern Europe regarded the growing centers in their midst. But for the earlier phases of development of Birka and most of the numerous other centers in northern Europe between 400 and 800, we have no written sources—only the material evidence of archaeology. In a sense, this lack of historical information and our need to rely on the archaeological data are key aspects of these new developments. The late Roman writers and most of their Dark Age successors knew nothing about these newly emerged centers (or if they did know, they chose not to mention them). But recent archaeological research tells us a detailed story about the dynamic development of new towns in northern Europe—towns that were to have an immense impact on subsequent European history.

GUDME

During the second century, around the time of peak prosperity for Roman cities and towns such as Regensburg, Mainz,

Cologne, and London, new centers of population and commerce were emerging in northern parts of the continent. These places were different in character from the Roman-style cities and towns of the provinces; they lacked the stone and cement or brick architecture of Mediterranean and provincial cityscapes. But in their regions, they came to play similar roles as political, economic, and ritual centers.

The best documented of these places is Gudme, in the southeastern part of the Danish island of Fyn, situated three miles inland from the coast. Indications that this place was becoming a central location of some importance appeared in the first and second centuries A.D., with unusually large numbers of imports from the Roman world in graves in the great cemetery of Møllegaardsmarken. In the third century, a major commercial and industrial site was established on the coast just east of Gudme, at Lundeborg; it served as the place of importation for a wide range of goods coming in from the outside world to the growing center at Gudme. Throughout the third and fourth centuries, quantities of goods from the Roman world arrived at Lundeborg, including especially fine pottery (*terra sigillata*) and glass in the form of vessels and beads, as well as Roman silver coins. We know about the importation of these objects at Lundeborg because of glass beads that were dropped and now found and because of the fragmentary remains of pottery and glass vessels that were discarded. No doubt quantities of other Roman goods, such as bronze vessels, also passed through the port, but because they did not break in transit, they did not leave direct evidence at this spot.

The Lundeborg port settlement, which extended about a thousand yards along the coast, was also a center of industrial activity. Extensive remains of ironworking are evident, as well as remains of the processing of bronze, silver, and gold. Amber,

bone, and antler were carved in workshops on the site. Iron tools suggest that shipbuilding was carried out here. From the third to the end of the seventh century, Lundeborg was the site of intensive manufacturing activity and long-distance commerce.

During this same period, Gudme, three miles to the west, thrived as a center of commercial, political, and religious activity. An enormous hall—the largest structure in northern Europe during this period—stood near the center of the Gudme settlement complex. This extraordinary building was 154 feet long and 33 feet wide. Unusual quantities of gold ornaments and coins found in and around it indicate its special importance in the political and economic life of this place. The great diversity of imported objects also attests to the political and economic significance of this northern center. These objects include bronze vessels, statuary, and personal ornaments as well as fine pottery from the Roman world through the fourth century, gold and other precious ornaments from southeastern Europe during the fourth and fifth centuries, and personal ornaments from central and western Europe during the fifth and sixth centuries.

The large quantities of gold and of Roman objects that were deposited in graves, in hoards, and in houses at Gudme suggest that this center was different in its fundamental character from Roman towns in the provinces. Taking Gudme—and the contemporary center at Uppåkra, in southern Sweden—into consideration, it is clear that we need to thoroughly rethink our notions of what constituted a town or city in the first millennium in northern Europe. What combination of demographic, political, ritual, and economic factors made an urban center? The only way for us to understand the early medieval centers of temperate Europe is to develop a conception that includes the earlier Roman urban character, the new features that slowly emerged as the “Romanness” waned, and the new

towns in the north that were established well beyond the former Roman territories. In the tightly interconnected commercial centers of the Middle Ages, all of these components need to be given their due weight, and the interactions between them closely examined for what they can tell us about changes that were taking place all over the continent.

A whole series of other trade towns in northern Europe of the period of Gudme and Lundeberg have been identified, but so far only limited excavation work has taken place at them. They include Dankirke, on the west coast of Jutland; Sorte Muld, on the Danish island of Bornholm; and Stentinget, in northern Jutland. By the late seventh century, a major trade center was developing at Ribe, on the west coast of Jutland just north of Dankirke.

HELGÖ

Situated on an island in Lake Mälaren, in central Sweden, just west of the modern city of Stockholm, Helgö was established as a major center of manufacturing and trade around A.D. 400. The industrial evidence recovered at the site shows that intensive metalworking and other crafts were carried out here. The extent of the trade networks of which the community at Helgö was a part is evident in the recovery there of a bronze figure of Buddha from northern India and an ornate bishop's crozier from Ireland. Chapter 9 deals with Helgö's manufacturing activity.

RALSWIEK

Around the middle of the eighth century, merchants established a port settlement at Ralswiek, on the island of Rügen

in the Baltic Sea, off the northeastern coast of Germany. This commercial center, with settlement, shipping facilities, cemetery, and cult site, thrived for some five centuries before being replaced by new port cities of the Hanseatic League.

Houses on the settlement were sturdily built with planks and nails. The urban community was supported by cereal and vegetable crops grown in the agricultural lands inland from the port, and it was supplied with meat from cattle, pigs, and sheep. As we would expect at such a location, these farm products were supplemented by fish. Workshops at Ralswiek were engaged in iron smithing; copper and bronze working; carving of bone, antler, and horn; comb manufacturing; and glass bead making. Trade based at the site was local and long distance. Local trade brought farm products and raw materials into the port city. Long-distance trade brought raw materials such as stone for whetstones from Norway and the Rhineland, and finished goods fashioned in other parts of Europe, such as soapstone bowls, fine pottery, and jewelry.

A hoard of 2,211 silver coins found at Ralswiek brings home the extraordinary wealth and the long-distance interactions in which the community was engaged. The hoard was buried sometime in the first half of the ninth century, and the coins in it were mostly from central Asia and the Middle East. Like many other trade centers of northern Europe during these centuries, Ralswiek played a vital role in commerce that linked western Europe and southwest Asia.

STARAJA LADOGA

In the northeasternmost region of Europe, a trade center that developed into a town was established during the seventh century at Ladoga, on the Volkhov River in northwestern Russia.

As at other production and commercial centers discussed, here too metalworking is abundantly evident, including the processing of gold and silver, metals that were used exclusively for making ornaments and for storing wealth. Debris from manufacturing shows that bone and antler were carved on the settlement. Ships were built and repaired here.

Most significantly, the commercial town at Ladoga provided a major link in the trade networks that connected western Europe, the north, and Byzantium and Arabia to the east. Trade routes that extended from Ladoga south and east along the rivers of Russia to the Black Sea carried silver coins from the Arab lands, coins from Byzantium, and beads made from rock crystal and carnelian in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as other kinds of eastern jewelry. From the west came combs fashioned from bone and antler and ornamental glass beads.

After Ladoga had thrived as a trade center linking west, north, and east for a century or so, a new commercial town was established farther upstream on the Volkhov River. This town became the major medieval metropolis of Novgorod.

HAITHABU/HEDEBY

During the seventh century, a new town was established at the base of the peninsula of Jutland at a point where goods could be transshipped a distance of only six miles. This saved ships the long and dangerous journey northward around Jutland carrying cargoes of goods between the trade centers of the Baltic and regions to the east, such as Ladoga, and the commercial towns of the west, such as Dorestad. Haithabu (Danish Hedeby) was a wholly new town, established where there had been no substantial population before and founded expressly

as a transshipment place between western and eastern towns and markets. Here, too, archaeologists have recovered remains of extensive iron production, bone and antler working, pottery manufacturing, glass bead making, and textile weaving. The evidence for trade is extensive.

From northern Europe came amber, furs, honey, soapstone vessels, and beeswax. From the Rhineland to the south and west came glassware, grindstones hewn from basalt, ornate metal jewelry, pottery, and wine. Textiles came from the lands around the mouth of the Rhine. A mint began producing coins at Haithabu, so important was the commercial function of this place. During the ninth and tenth centuries, Haithabu was one of the largest towns north of the Alps, rivaling in size and economic activity major old Roman cities such as Cologne.

By the ninth century, the time at which the changes brought by Charlemagne were having wide repercussions throughout Europe, the northern coasts of Europe were dotted with thriving towns and cities. In addition to those mentioned in chapter 5 were Dorestad, in the Netherlands; Southampton, Ipswich, and York, in England; Dublin, in Ireland; Kaupang and Bergen, in Norway; Birka, Åhus, and Uppåkra, in Sweden; Ribe, in Denmark; Haithabu/Hedeby and Ralswiek, in Germany; Grobin, in Latvia; and Ladoga, in Russia. A new form of urban center, different in many respects from that of the Roman world, had emerged in northern Europe. These new urban centers could grow and prosper because of great technological advances that were being made in the countryside where food and supplies (such as hides, leather, textiles, bone, antler, and timber) that were needed by the expanding towns and cities were produced.

(chapter 1), are good places to find bibliographies of works about special topics. Population estimates for Roman Britain: D. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC–AD 409* (New York: Allen Lane, 2006). On the city of Rome, see N. Christie, "Lost Glories? Rome at the End of Empire," in J. Coulston and H. Dodge, eds., *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City* (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2000), pp. 306–31. Cologne: N. Aten, "Römische bis neuzeitliche Befunde der Ausgrabung auf dem Heumarkt in Köln," *Kölner Jahrbuch* 34 (2001), pp. 623–700. Mainz: H. Cüppers, ed., *Die Römer in Rheinland-Pfalz* (Stuttgart: Konrad Theiss, 1990). Isis and Mater Magna sanctuary in Mainz: M. Witteyer, *The Sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2004). Boats from the Mainz Hilton: B. Pferdehirt, *Das Museum für antike Schifffahrt* (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 1995). On continuity of urban life, see B. Hårdh and L. Larsson, eds., *Central Places in the Migration and Merovingian Periods* (Lund: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002).

6 From Roman Londinium to Saxon Lundenwic: Continuity and Change (A.D. 43–800)

J. Hall and R. Merrifield, *Roman London* (London: Museum of London, 2000), is a well-illustrated little book that provides a fine introduction. More detail is provided in A. Vince, *Saxon London* (London: Seaby, 1990), I. Haynes et al., eds., *London Under Ground: The Archaeology of a City* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000), C. Thomas, editor, *London's Archaeological Secrets: A World City Revealed* (London: Museum of London, 2003), and R. Cowie, "The Evidence for Royal Sites in Middle Anglo-Saxon London," *Medieval Archaeology* 48 (2004), pp. 201–9. On the Thames River, see J. Schneer, *The Thames* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Spitalfields graves: *The Spitalfields Roman*, 2d ed. (London: Museum of London, 2001). Lives of the people: A. Werner, *London Bodies: The Changing Shape of Londoners from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* (London: Museum of London, 1998). On the tablet that documents the sale of a slave, see R. S. O. Tomlin, "'The Girl in Question': A New Text from Roman London," *Britannia* 34 (2003), pp. 41–51. Walbrook finds:

R. Merrifield, "Roman Metalwork from the Walbrook—Rubbish, Ritual or Redundancy?" *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 46 (1995), pp. 27–44. Temple of Mithras: J. D. Shepherd, *The Temple of Mithras, London* (London: English Heritage, 1998). Evidence for changes in the late Roman period: B. Watson, ed., *Roman London: Recent Archaeological Work, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series*, no. 24 (Portsmouth, R.I., 1998).

7 New Centers in the North

These quotations (in my translations from the German) from the biography of Ansgar are from pp. 41, 43 (first quotation) and pp. 59, 61 (second quotation) in R. Buchner, ed., *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 11, Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, trans. by W. Trillmich (Berlin: Rütten & Loenig, 1961). On Gudme, see P. O. Nielsen, K. Randsborg, and H. Thrane, eds., *The Archaeology of Gudme and Lundeberg* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1994). On the great hall there, K. K. Michaelsen and P. Ø. Sørensen, "En kongsgård fra jernalderen," *Årbog for Svendborg & Omegns Museum* (1993), pp. 24–35. On Helgö, see chapter 9. All of the sites mentioned here are discussed in H. Clarke and B. Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, rev. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

8 The Revolution in the Countryside

The quotation at the start is from A. R. Benham, *English Literature from Widsith to the Death of Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), p. 26. Fundamental to this discussion is L. White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). Recent treatments of the issues are R. Friedel, *A Culture of Improvement: Technology and the Western Millennium* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), and J. Mokyr, *Twenty-Five Centuries of Technological Change* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990). Brebières: P. Demolon, *Le village mérovingien de Brebières, VIe–VIIe siècles* (Arras: Commission départementale des monuments historiques du Pas-De-