The Viking cities

The earliest trading cities

Earlier, habitation had been scattered across single farms or small villages. During the Viking Age, when the towns were founded, the Vikings also lived in cities. Several cities were founded where earlier cult- and thing-sites had been established.

The earliest Danish city is Ribe which was established around AD 710 and developed around a market place. The market was situated by the Ribe Stream, from which goods could be sailed into the North Sea and beyond. Haithabu, by the Schleswig Fiord, was a trading centre too. Haithabu quickly became a large city with more than a thousand inhabitants. A huge rampart was constructed around the city to protect it from raids and plunder. It did not, however, serve its purpose well, as Haithabu was sacked and burned several times.

Like Haithabu the younger city of Århus was surrounded by a rampart. Ribe, Haithabu and Aarhus all acquired bishop's seats during the 10th Century, which testifies to the status attained by the three cities towards the turn of the millennium.

The royal cities

Around that time, Kings Sweyn Forkbeard and later King Knuth the Great, encouraged the founding of new cities. These cities were under the protection of the king, and in return the inhabitants had to pay a tax on trade, paying rent to the king twice a year. Ringsted and Slagelse are good examples of this.

The status of Slagelse as a royal city in late Viking Age is known from Knuth the Great's minting of coins there in AD 1020. The main church, St. Michael's, also dates from this period.