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Viking Denmark and Early Medieval Italy: a possibility for a comparison

Introduction

Signs of cultural and economic change can be traced in the transformation of settlement patterns, given that their structure was usually determined by inhabitants and political authorities interested in controlling and economically exploiting the territory.

Therefore it could be relevant to discover which important transformations in settlement patterns were taking place in different areas of Europe during the same chronological period. In Romance Europe when the feudal system was already in use, a new concept emerged in the administration of land property, the so-called *incastellamento*, implemented by local landowners (nobles or clergymen) in order to display their personal power and wealth.

The decadence of the Roman *villa* system generated a situation of instability, and as a consequence settlements were abandoned or reorganized around a new centre, the castle, so that they would be protected and controlled in a more efficient way.

However, during the research for my master thesis,¹ it was possible to verify that similar dynamics were recognizable also during the Viking Age in Denmark. Danish aristocratic manors and Italian castles had a similar history: they were both first residences for landlords, and then they became real settlements with military, commercial, and productive activities within their walls.

Moreover towns in Denmark had been founded since the late Viking Age (around the tenth-eleventh centuries), often in places already in use for commercial or political purposes. Before towns all the

productive activities were usually limited to the domestic sphere. Towns offered a new environment more similar to the one known in other European areas.

In Italy the situation was different. Towns and bigger cities were inherited from the Roman Age with a long tradition derived from Greek colonies and Etruscan areas. But during the Middle Ages Italian towns were in decline, suffering a deep crisis related to economic and political problems.

After having a look at similar examples, I think that Viking Age in Denmark and the Early Middle Ages in Italy (more or less from 800 until 1100-1200) were both a period of experimentation, with changes in economy, society and, as a consequence, in settlement pattern.

Therefore this article presents a possibility to compare early medieval Italy and Viking Age Denmark, two realities traditionally considered very different from the point of view of transformations of settlements patterns. I believe that such a study could be useful in order to better understand what was happening in medieval Europe concerning the relationship between social background, settlement patterns, and the adoption of new models. My aim is to here make a base for a comparative study, discussing structural analogies of settlement patterns and building technique, introducing only some issues related to social and political background, which could be treated more efficiently in further research.

I hope to be able to refer to these analogies in the future, extending this comparison to Scandinavia and other areas in Southern Europe; therefore I am introducing a formal approach, in order to individuate valid elements extracted from the structure of settlements. This approach basically consists of a system of five parameters freely inspired by Weber's ideal-types method, as presented by David L. D'Avray.²

In the following section, I present settlement patterns in Italy and Denmark by showing the most discussed settlements, in order to offer a general overview, focusing on chronology, archaeological data, and related problems.

The third section describes my method of analysis in order to obtain a more systematic point of view. My method is then applied in the fourth section, where settlements from Italy and Denmark are discussed from a comparative perspective in order to research analogies and differences; and in the fifth section

conclusions and possible future research is presented.

General overview: looking for analogies between Denmark and Italy

This article has as its main point to compare the Viking Age in Denmark and the Early Middle Ages in Italy; I have already fixed the geographical context, presented by the territorial extension of Denmark and Italy, more or less as they are today. It could be interesting to find a chronological frame in which to study changes in settlement patterns, as a process. I will start to look at the two countries and the two periods separately, analysing their individual limits as defined by the previously conducted studies.

Traditionally the Early Middle Ages in Italy is supposed to have begun in 476, with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the deposition of the last emperor, the young Romulus Augustulus, by the barbarian Odoacer. From that moment the Western Roman Empire was officially decayed and new entities were to replace it, the so-called Roman-Barbarian kingdoms, with a mixed population (Latin and Barbarian) ruled by barbarian kings; only the Eastern Roman Empire survived, with its capital in Byzantium.³

This period has traditionally been called the Middle Ages by historians, in opposition to the Roman Age, and the result was a polarization: the Roman Age was described as an advanced time, with a good lifestyle, sophisticated culture, and an efficient central organization, while the Middle Ages represented only decay in civilization.

It has generally been supposed that a proper civilization started again only after the year 1000, which represented a crucial moment in history: new technologies, the wider spread use of coins, economic growth, and the founding of new market places. Therefore it became common to distinguish between the Early and Late Middle Ages, separated by the eleventh century, as conventional reference. This flourishing was supposed to have continued until the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Renaissance, traditionally fixed to the last twenty years of the fifteenth century.

But this was the traditional chronology, while according to more recent studies,⁴ the period between the

fifth and the seventh centuries had a specific cultural context derived from a mixture of different elements: Germanic and Eastern European elements brought to Italy with the barbarian invasions and preserved in the Roman-Barbarian kingdoms; Oriental from the Eastern Roman Empire and Byzantium, whose soldiers were a constant presence on Italian territory, as they had been ordered to restore the extension of the Roman Empire.

Following these new definitions, scholars do not consider the year 1000 as crucial anymore. Today more attention is given to finding a gradual transition between the Early and Late Middle Ages. Therefore it is now generally supposed that the Early Middle Ages started around the eighth century and ended more or less during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.

The chronological definition of the Viking Age was no less problematic. Hence it has been suggested that the definition of Viking Age be applied to the period between the first Danish and Norwegian raids in Western Europe, about the 800, until the total collapse of Danish power in England, in the middle of the eleventh century.

Viking raids are still a difficult phenomenon to explain, and therefore it has been suggested that the lack of land and famine caused by huge demographic growth, induced a great part of the population to travel, trade, and steal goods from other European countries.⁵

But looking at the territorial situation of the Scandinavian countries, it seems that Denmark and Sweden could offer enough cultivable land to the local population, maybe only in Norway could the situation be problematic because a vast area of its territory is occupied by mountains.

Hence it was proposed that Vikings went to Western and Eastern Europe in order to collect precious goods and establish new trading connections with other countries.⁶ As proof of this theory could, in fact, be seen that the most important consequence of the raids was the creation of a broad trade-network involving Western (the British Isles, Frankia, the Low Countries, and Germany) and Eastern Europe (Finland, the Baltic countries, and Russia), as well as the Atlantic regions (Iceland, Greenland, and Anse-aux-Meadows in Canada).⁷

Another important issue is represented by the conversion to Christianity, which was completed only in the beginning of the Middle Ages (around the eleventh and twelfth centuries). Danish Vikings, the first Scandinavians touched by conversion, were suspended between the traditional pagan religion and the new imported cult. Moreover, around the eleventh and twelfth centuries important changes took place in society and a new balance was established in the state.⁸

It is interesting to note that after the process of conversion was completed, Vikings were involved in a different kind of military expedition: crusades to convert Eastern Europe and the Baltic area to Christianity. Therefore it seems that the Middle Ages in Scandinavia started at the latest in the twelfth century, as proved by some relevant phenomena dated to that period:⁹

1. The constitution of medieval states, which were the starting points for the modern ones.
2. The conversion of all Scandinavia to Christianity and the banishment of the old religion.
3. The end of the raids directed to Western Europe.
4. The permanent loss of the domination of the British Isles always contended between Denmark and Norway.

Now, if I try to compare the chronological limits between the Viking Age in Denmark and the Early Middle Ages in Italy it is possible to find a real correspondence: they more or less comprehended a period between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, and this could be one point to consider in my research.

Considering the archaeological data it is possible to see that they present more or less the same characteristics in both countries. Buildings and other structures were made of perishable materials, therefore very little of them have been preserved until now, only negative impressions in the soil such as post-holes, ditches or ground layers have survived. This means that the building quality was not generally as good in Denmark as it was in Italy, although the quality was quite poor in both areas. The economic investment in private houses was usually low and people often built their own houses. It also means that methodological problems in studying and excavating Denmark and Italy are not very different.

My goal is to prove that, between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, a phenomenon of redefining the settlement patterns happened in a similar way in both Denmark and Italy. I do not expect to find any direct

connections or exactly the same processes, but I want to find and show some analogies concerning innovations in settlement patterns and building techniques derived from social and political changes.

In the following section I present the general situation of the two countries, focusing on the development of settlement patterns, by showing some examples focusing mainly on:

1. The structure of settlement patterns, paying attention to function and people.
2. The planning and founding of settlements by political authorities.
3. The changes in settlement patterns as the consequence of social and political changes.

This data could say something more about Europe between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, if applied to a larger European context, given that the economy was generally based on agriculture, and that political authorities always took care of the same major problems: war and defence, administration of territory, and interaction with religion.

Denmark

It is generally possible to recognize four kinds of settlements in Viking Age Denmark: rural villages, towns, aristocratic manors, and circular fortresses.

Generally speaking, the building technique was quite simple and based on perishable materials: wooden posts and planks were the backbone of the buildings, straw and wattle with clay, mud, and cow dung formed the main structure of walls and roofs of the houses.

The most common kind of settlement was the rural village, with a structure determined mainly by the necessities connected with agriculture and breeding, the most popular activity during the Viking and the Middle Ages.

A rural Viking village was basically composed of a group of farms, each of them located on an elevated position, a small hill called *toft*, and delimited by fences or ditches dug into the ground. Every farm

comprehended a variable number of buildings, all of them disposed around the central area of the *toft*, which was left empty. The central area of the whole settlement was sometimes left empty, probably because the whole community used it for social purposes. This peculiar configuration is called by the old Danish word, *forte*, which indicated the central empty area. A good example of this pattern is represented by Sædding and some Iron Age villages,¹⁰ like Hodde from the last century BC and Vorbasse in the fifth century,¹¹ the last phase before the Viking Age village.¹²

The most important building in a farm was certainly the long-house, a huge building divided into two main rooms: a longer one used as a stable and a shorter one used as dwelling quarters.¹³ The internal area was further divided into three naves by freestanding posts, called *suler*-posts, which carried the roof. The *suler*-posts gradually disappeared and by the end of the Viking Age the roof was carried only by the perimeter walls.¹⁴

Around the long-house there were several smaller outbuildings, structured as pit-houses and pit-huts, sunk deep into the ground and of different shapes (round, oval, and rectangular), all of them had a specific purpose: storerooms, smithies or workshops for making textiles.

Several Viking villages presented a gradual shift in their location, usually after a period of circa one or two generations. Therefore archaeologists started to talk about “wandering” or “migrating villages”. A number of explanations were proposed to understand this phenomenon, for example: geological transformations or the frequency of sand storms, an acceptable theory for the area around Vorbasse but not for everywhere.¹⁵ Then it was suggested that farmers were moving simply because they were looking for new territory to exploit,¹⁶ and this seemed to fit with the fact that Viking villages became permanent at the end of the Viking Age when new technologies were discovered in agriculture, such as the wheel plough, which was used by all the inhabitants. It is possible that people started on similar occasions to show a new interest in keeping their land and tying ties of solidarity with other farmers in the village. Moreover the concept of land-property also became more relevant in the new law code.¹⁷

For example, the village at Vorbasse presents two sectors of occupation: the Eastern sector, the older part of the village, dated to between the eighth and tenth centuries, it represents the usual long houses with *suler*-posts. The Western sector, dated to the eleventh century, included three farms and represented the

new kind of long houses with the roof carried by the walls and the central room left completely free. The village was again moved 500m further south during the twelfth century to the place where the actual Vorbasse lays.¹⁸

Viking Age villages were very traditional settlements, while towns were a brand new pattern, which created a different environment for human activities.

Danish towns arose in several ways: some of them were previously seasonal market places, other towns were founded directly by a king for special reasons, and lastly some towns were the meeting places for the *ting* or for celebrating religious rites.

Towns, that were seasonal market places, had their first phase of occupation around the eighth century, which is testified by very simple structures, such as houses or huts sunken into the ground and mostly used as shops or workshops.

Later, usually around the ninth and the tenth centuries, the urban phase started because the king wanted to have permanent buildings built in those areas as well as defensive walls in order to much as possible exploit the productivity of these places.¹⁹

Ribe, a town located in Western Jutland on the river Ribe, followed this development: it was a seasonal market place around the year 700, with a good number of workshops that occupied the same area for a long time. It was even supposed that, before the urban phase, the king or one of his officers ruled the place, assigning space to merchants and artisans.²⁰ As the site grew, it received defensive walls and became a permanent settlement. It also moved from the Northern to the Southern bank of the river, where the cathedral was built. In the twelfth century, at the end of the Viking Age, Ribe was a lively town with a bishop and a famous trading place.

Another group of towns was directly founded by the king for special purposes, as in the case of Hedeby in Schleswig, Northern Germany. Hedeby was founded by king Godfred at the beginning of the ninth century, probably to improve the defence of the borderline, the Danevirke.²¹ Later the city became a market place where merchants and craftsmen had to pay tribute to the king in order to rent space for their

activity. Soon the place attracted a lot of people from everywhere, and in the ninth and tenth centuries at least one thousand people lived there, a church and a mint for coins were built, and from 948 the town is mentioned in written sources as the seat of a bishop.

The foundation of Ribe and Hedeby can be connected with king Harald Bluetooth, who was also involved in the building of the monumental area at Jelling, the circular fortresses, and then in the process of conversion to Christianity.

Ribe, Hedeby, and Århus started their urban phase in the same period, around the ninth and tenth centuries, and they all had a circular defensive rampart with the same kind of building technique and structure known from the circular fortresses Trelleborg, Fyrkat, Aggersborg, and Nonnebakken.²²

The last group of towns I am going to consider includes places used for social purposes such as the *ting* meeting or pagan rites.²³ They were turned into towns by the kings at the end of the Viking Age by receiving administrative and market centres as well as new sacred and residential areas. Later on those settlements followed the same development already presented from the afore mentioned examples.

However, this theory is a little controversial because it is mainly based on place names or on small archaeological finds connected to rituals. For instance Lund, a town in Scania (in Southern Sweden), was founded by Sven Forkbeard. In the ninth century Lund became a trading place, and then in the tenth century under the reign of Cnut the Great, it was mentioned as one of the largest towns in Denmark, well known as a centre for religion and trade. Not very much is known about Lund before it became a town; however, archaeologists suppose it was a sacred area basically because the name Lund means “little wood”.²⁴

A similar origin could be recognized for Ringsted, while Odense and Viborg were probably used for the *ting* meetings. Moreover also Odense had a circular fortress, indicating the strategic position of the site itself: located in the middle of the island of Fyn, on the fjord.²⁵

In conclusion I can argue that Denmark had its first towns in the Viking age, where there before were trading or social meeting places. Then the Danish kings wanted to plan the structure of those places in

order to make them permanent and more productive, and therefore they set defensive walls and administrative centres, and people were allowed to live and work in towns in exchange for paying rents and tributes. Towns, with their market places, permitted a better development of the economic activities giving new relevance to the creation of better quality artefacts, usually connected with the domestic sphere.²⁶ In that way the settlement became more similar to our concept of a town: a geographic area with a good number of people, a particular juridical status and economic activities, evolving gradually into a proper cultural and social context.²⁷ When Christianity came to Denmark the process continued in a way more similar to other European areas. Moreover clergymen had churches built in towns, and they represented a religious authority connected to the central hierarchy, reinforcing the connections with the core of Europe.

The next kind of settlement I will discuss is represented by aristocratic manors. These settlements present a central monumental area, with a huge long house as the main building, called “hall”. A series of pit-houses were placed around the hall and they were used as storerooms and workshops, like in a market place.

Archaeological materials found on these sites include high quality artefacts such as weapons, jewels, and amulets made of bronze, silver, and gold.

Structure and archaeological materials suggested to archaeologists that these settlements were aristocratic manors: the hall was the residence of the lord and workshops were collected all around it in order to provide anything the lord needed.

It is also possible that the lord wanted to hire merchants and artisans to work for him near his residence in order to control the commercial activity connected with his territory and probably collecting a rent for the space occupied by the workshops. It has also been suggested that he could offer special conditions to the workers to encourage them to come under his control by granting them favours, giving precious presents and by hiring a private army that could assure protection and stability for the settlement.

However, this kind of pattern represents an exception and only a few sites can be considered aristocratic manors. The most studied are Lejre and Tissø.

Lejre is today a small village, located on the river Lejre that flows into the Roskilde fjord on Zealand Island; the site was dated by the archaeological findings: it seems it was founded in the seventh and

abandoned in the tenth century.²⁸

The first mentions of Lejre in written sources come from Icelandic sagas, Danish chronicles and the *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus. Saxo wrote that Skjold, Odin's son and founder of the most ancient Danish royal dynasty, the Scyldings, chose Lejre to be their personal residence. Moreover *Lejre Chronicle*, written in the twelfth century, gives a long list of names: kings who lived there, many of which were related to the Scyldings dynasty.

Tissø has its location in Zealand too, on the lake Tissø, 7km from the *Store Bælt* coast. This area is famous since the seventies due to the discovery of precious archaeological materials, for example: in 1977 a two kilogram golden necklace was found and dated to the year 1000.²⁹ Then in 1979 two graves of decapitated men were discovered, dated by the C-14 method to a period around 1030-1040.³⁰ According to typological analysis conducted on the found material, it seems that occupation of the site started in the sixth century and ended suddenly in the first half of the eleventh century.

The monumental area at Tissø comprehended the hall and an enclosure, probably consecrated to Tir's cult,³¹ as testified by the finding of jewels and weapons in an area close to a hill, along the lakeshores. Traces of similar rituals were found in other places in Denmark, as the lake Søborg and the river Væreborg in Zealand, then in Kolindsund area in Djursland, Eastern Jutland.

It is remarkable that both places were connected with the Vikings' mythical traditions, such as old rituals or a holy dynasty of kings, and peculiar artefacts not known from other sites underlined their relevance. For example, glazed pot shards of lead were found at Lejre hall. They were produced with local clay but the shape and technique were very close to English pottery from the same period, the tenth and eleventh centuries. Therefore it was supposed that lords of Lejre hired English ceramists when England and Denmark were ruled by the same king.³²

A lead seal found at Tissø testifies the political relevance of this place; the seal represents the portrait of a military officer from Byzantium, Patrikios Theodosios who had the titles of *Chartularios* and *Protospatharios*. In 840 he was responsible for the armoury and the enlistment office; therefore it is possible that he came to Scandinavia to hire new mercenaries and to buy iron for the army.³³

These finds suggest that aristocratic manors had a special relevance. They were probably considered administrative centres, also known abroad; the same finds give us evidence of an aristocratic lifestyle and lords who were probably active in the exploitation of both trade and land-property.³⁴

At last a very interesting settlement pattern is represented by circular fortresses, which had a peculiar configuration, known only in a limited number of sites, all of them located in Denmark: Trelleborg in Zealand, Aggersborg, and Fyrkat in Jutland, then at last Nonnebakken on Fyn Island and another Trelleborg in Scania (in the Viking Age Scania was part of the Danish kingdom) were presumably circular fortresses, but a systematic study has not yet been done.

All the fortresses had a strong geometrical structure that can indicate the presence of a conscious project. It has been suggested that a similar pattern could be motivated by necessities connected with military activity.³⁵

The structure is almost the same in every place: a circular defensive rampart made of timber and covered with turf, which surrounded the core of the settlement. The street system included a circular road that followed the layout of the rampart and surrounded all of the inner space, and two main orthogonal streets, which started from the four entrances, located at the four cardinal points and crossing each other at the geometrical centre of the settlement.³⁶

The orthogonal streets divided the inner space into four living quarters, in which four houses were situated as in a square, with a square court and sometimes a smaller house in the middle; all the dimensions of the buildings were based upon a modified version of the Roman foot.

A different kind of long house was found in fortresses, called *trelleborg house*, after the name of Trelleborg, the first fortress to be excavated.³⁷ Those houses had basically the shape of a common long house, rectangular with bowed long sides, but with some structural differences: the roof was carried by a row of external posts, fixed into the ground at an angle of 20° towards the wall. Thus the inner space was divided into three rooms: two smaller rooms were located at the gables and used as storerooms, and a larger central room was used for living, as confirmed by the presence of fireplaces.³⁸

The discovery of circular fortresses immediately provoked a discussion and different theories were proposed to explain the structure and function of such a pattern. Moreover the fortresses were located in isolated places, on hills surrounded by waterways as impossible to sail in the Viking Age as they are today; therefore the theory that the fortresses would have been market places has been discarded.³⁹

At first it was suggested that Trelleborg was a kind of military centre, used to muster and train the army, thus it was also thought that Svein Forkbeard wanted the fortresses built, maybe in connection with the conquest of England, around the year 1013. This theory seemed partially proved by Icelandic sagas, in which special military places are mentioned where soldiers were trained for war, and women and children were not allowed to enter.⁴⁰

Further excavations at Trelleborg, and new ones at Aggersborg between 1945 and 1954, and then Fyrkat between 1950 and 1963 clarified the situation: a huge number of feminine jewels, especially brooches, loom-weights, and spindle-whorls, were found in the fortresses testifying the presence of women in the fortresses.⁴¹

Moreover, archaeological materials from Trelleborg were dated by dendrochronology to the years 980-981, the end of Harald Bluetooth's reign.⁴² The buildings in the fortress did not present signs of repair, indicating that they were only used for a short time, probably abandoned before the year 1000.

Data from the other fortresses correspond to the dating of Trelleborg, proving that Harald Bluetooth, and not Sven Forkbeard, was behind the planning of the fortresses. He probably wanted a place to muster his army and his officers, to assure better control over the territory of his kingdom, which comprehended all of Denmark and the islands, Schleswig in Northern Germany, Scania in Southern Sweden and Southern Norway.⁴³ Thus archaeological artefacts proved the existence of trading and handicrafts inside the fortresses, suggesting that the king hired artisans and merchants to provide anything needed.

In conclusion it is possible to say that settlement patterns and the choice of different kinds of buildings were determined by functional necessities, connected with economic or military activities. An authority (king or lord) often planned and decided the foundation of new settlements. This involvement depended on the possibility to take commercial or strategic advantages, therefore a settlement could sometimes not

survive, if an authority was no longer interested in it.

Italy

Archaeological data related to the end of the Roman Age and Late Antiquity, between the fifth and the eighth centuries, shows a change in settlement patterns and building techniques throughout all of the Italian territory, for example: from an organic and centred pattern to a more fragmented one and then from brick and stone to perishable materials.⁴⁴

Most of the information concerning the Early Middle Ages comes from sites abandoned around the fifth or the sixth century or converted into Lombard cemeteries where buildings could leave evident traces in the ground without being compromised by new structures.⁴⁵

This entire phenomenon was probably produced by an economic recession, connected to the political situation left by the so called Gothic War (535-553) fought between Barbarian and Byzantine armies, and the decline of the Latin-Barbarian ruling class, which created a fragmentation of the central power into smaller entities.⁴⁶

In that situation all Roman infrastructures, such as streets, bridges and public places could not be maintained as before for economic or bureaucratic reasons, and also because the social context was changing and a lot of these structures were simply abandoned or used for other purposes.

The Italian territory was at this time administrated only on a local scale, without central coordination, contrary to the Roman Age. As a consequence of this situation the Roman *villa* system decayed and a relevant reduction was registered in the number of organic and centred settlements.⁴⁷

Unfortunately there is not enough information to precisely describe all the phases in settlements and the evolution of houses: written sources are not detailed, they usually do not mention the configuration of the settlement and only sometimes, if relevant, the type of buildings and their disposition. Especially for the

sixth and seventh centuries archaeological traces consist only of ground layers or post-holes.

A possible pattern of evolution has been proposed, articulated into three stages and based on the combination of historical and archaeological sources, and sometimes on analogies between different areas in the Italian territory:

1. From the fifth to the sixth century a chaotic pattern is usually found,⁴⁸ characterized by a parasitic occupation of old buildings, made of brick and stone, incorporated into new wooden structures. Stone and brick were only used for special elements such as roofs, fireplaces and foundations.
2. From the sixth to the seventh century wood became the most important building material together with straw, clay or mud and vegetable bindings. The most common buildings were long houses and huts, sometimes sunk deep into the ground. This phase is characterized by few and fragile traces that are not easy to recognize as they are compromised by more recent buildings made of bricks and stones, which have been built over them at least since the eleventh century.
3. From the eighth to the tenth centuries, perishable materials were still used and a new kind of hut appeared, rectangular in shape with wooden posts as the load-bearing structure.

Then at the end of the tenth century stone and brick gradually started to be used again, especially for aristocratic and defensive structures.

In the countryside perishable materials have always been used, and only around the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries is it possible to find the first rural houses made of brick, while the last two phases of occupation are represented by wooden buildings and settlement patterns comparable to the Danish ones. These changes were brought by economic and technical necessities since people were building or adjusting their own houses in towns as well as in the countryside, and perishable materials were cheap, easy to find in woods and not very difficult to use. Therefore old techniques, never abandoned in the countryside, were rediscovered in the towns, maybe also thanks to the introduction of Barbarian customs.⁴⁹

During the Roman Age professional builders were often hired from the central state to build new structures or to maintain the older ones, but now the lack of a strong central power, the fragmentation of the territory together with an economic crisis (partially derived from the Gothic war) created a situation in

which common land workers had to take care of the maintenance of buildings, even though they did not have the necessary skills.

However, settlement patterns were determined by economic and work necessities, and in the Early Middle Ages it is generally possible to recognize three types: rural villages, towns, and castles.

In Early medieval Italy the general situation in the countryside appeared precarious after the crisis and the abandonment of the Roman villas, rural villages were simply groups of houses spread over the territory.

During the Early Middle Ages several settlements changed their location because farmers were looking for safer places to live or because a local authority (noble or clergyman) decided to change the location for economic and political reasons.⁵⁰

Many villages were moved to places naturally defended by mountains and hills, creating a new pattern: the so called hill-top village,⁵¹ characterized by a small extension, narrow houses very close to each other, and usually with several vertical levels.

Other villages remained on the lowlands but they were reorganized around new sacred places (a parish, monastery, or abbey) or around landowner's residence, becoming nucleated villages.

For instance Monte Zignago in Liguria (North-Western Italy) was a hilltop village, placed on a flattened crest with an average elevation of 670-680m above sea level. During the Early Middle Ages buildings were made entirely of wood or wood mixed with stone. The disposition of houses is peculiar because a certain distance was left between them in order to exploit the surrounding ground as an orchard. In the thirteenth century new houses, a tower and a fence were built with local stone and limestone.⁵²

Anteggi (Liguria, North-Western Italy) on the other hand continued to be a spread rural village until the beginning of the Late Middle Ages (around the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries) when it was abandoned. However, the building technique of this village followed the general tendency, and in the thirteenth century houses were made of local stone, cut and assembled with clay, forming an irregular texture.

But the situation of the countryside continued to be difficult for a long time, and many villages were abandoned or turned into different settlements, for example: hill-top villages, included in a big land property, were turned into fortified sites or castles.

In Italy the town pattern was inherited from the Roman Age, in fact most of the medieval towns were founded during the Roman Empire and they are still inhabited today, lying more or less on their original location.

However, Italian towns suffered a deep crisis that started after the falling of the Western Roman Empire and its ruling class; towns and big cities became smaller and lost their previous relevance until the thirteenth century when they gained a new independent status becoming *liberi comuni*.

The most visible effect of the urban crisis was a strong demographical contraction, which left large empty areas that were promptly converted into vineyards, and also fields and olive-groves. Therefore in the seventies and eighties scholars thought that the urban lifestyle became more similar to the rural one, so they invented expressions like *ruralisation* and *orchard-towns*.⁵³ But today this theory is no longer supported because archaeological material and written sources testify that, even during this crisis, towns maintained their economic and political importance in the territory because of the presence of market places as well as political and religious authorities.⁵⁴

Moreover, also rich landowners lived in towns, and they made an important contribution to preserving the urban lifestyle by competing against each other, and by building churches and palaces.

However, the urban crisis created different situations and deep changes. A good example is represented by Ravenna, a town located in central Italy, close to the Adriatic coast (Emilia-Romagna). Ravenna was founded by Valentinian III in the fifth century and the same structure is still preserved today. After the fall of the Roman Empire the town became one of the capitals of the Byzantine Empire and later of the Ostrogothic kingdom. Ravenna maintained its status but it suffered the crisis, aggravated by geological changes at the *burgus* of Classe, the commercial harbour of the town. The coastline started to advance and a broad, sandy plain appeared; today the same area is occupied by a pinewood.⁵⁵

The situation was different in Southern Italy, where more than half of the Roman cities were abandoned before the sixth and seventh centuries.

Other towns changed their location, for example Altino in Veneto (North-East Italy) and Ventimiglia in Liguria on the French border (North-Western Italy).⁵⁶

Other towns lost their relevance and were gradually isolated because of the new political balance or battles over territory.

For instance Luni, located in Liguria (North-Western Italy), was a very important Byzantine fortification (*castrum*) during the sixth century, defending a strategic place on the Ligurian hills not far from the coast. Things changed when the Lombards entered Italy in 568 under the reign of King Alboin, but they didn't take Luni until 640, after having already conquered its surrounding territory. Before 640 they changed the traditional road system to bypass the town, which was still a Byzantine possession. In this way Luni was excluded from the Lombard trading network and the Byzantine connections, and so its population gradually moved away and the town decayed. The total area of the town was reduced to occupy the square with the cathedral and its boundaries.

The last type of settlement I am going to introduce is the early medieval castle, which was an evolution of the Byzantine *castrum* pattern, a small, fortified village with military defences.⁵⁷

Between the eighth and the tenth centuries new leaders tried to impose themselves, taking advantage from the disorder left by the fall of the Roman ruling class. They tried new strategies to administrate their land properties from the eighth century on, with visible changes in the structure of settlement pattern. The new rulers were local landowners (noblemen, warriors, clergymen and kings) who needed a political act to affirm and increase their personal control on land property. Hence they tried to concentrate rural settlements in the countryside in order to be able to control the population.⁵⁸

Since the seventh century, new villages were founded around a recognizable centre, which was sometimes built on the ruins of the Roman villas, such as an administrative place, the lord's residence or a religious place (a parish, church or monastery).

This new elite increased its land property in a short time, especially the clergymen who received donations from lords or kings. Aristocratic landlords and military officers were often in charge of administering the king's (Germanic or Byzantine) property. Therefore they could expropriate other people because they were judged guilty or unable to pay their debts. With time minor landowners began to give their land to the lords, out of their own free will, preserving the right to live in their houses and work their land.⁵⁹ They received protection and security by paying tribute to the new landowner.

However, as it is difficult to know the founders of the castles, historians decided to consider the first owner of a castle, mentioned in written sources, as the founder. The typical owner of a castle was a member of the new ruling class, such as clergymen, mostly bishops or abbots, officers or noblemen, members of aristocratic families with political and juridical charges, or just a rich private persons without any specifications.⁶⁰

Castles were often founded in already established settlements (such as *curtes* and villages) simply by adding a fortification to the settlement. For instance Scarlino, located near Grosseto, was founded in the tenth century, on a previous *curtis*. During the first phase all the buildings were made of wood, then, starting in the eleventh century, they were changed into stone, and a tower and living quarters were added. Poggibonsi was a small village from the fifth and the sixth centuries, located in the countryside controlled by Siena, on a hill on the borderline with Florence. The castle was built around 1155, and it was supposed to be used as a military fortress.⁶¹

Other castles were founded in areas not previously inhabited for political and economic reasons: for instance Rocca S. Silvestro, located in the countryside around Massa, which was founded by a Tuscan lord in order to exploit the local mines. It is first mentioned in sources from the first eleventh century.⁶²

Written sources from the eighth and the ninth centuries and later,⁶³ mention castles built in the Early Middle Ages and Late Antiquity without making any distinctions. Thus castles are considered outbuildings, (a smaller structure detached from the main building but close to it, usually with a specific function, like storage or workshop, usually with a specific function, like storage or workshop) and called by the name of the place, the previous settlement, the borders of their area, and sometimes by the name of the resident farmers. But even these first castles played a political and administrative role in the countryside, forming quite real territorial districts.⁶⁴

Moreover written sources from the tenth and eleventh centuries, often mention castles to indicate a whole area, even after the destruction or abandonment of the castle itself. Moreover, from the tenth century on, more and more castles are recorded, sometimes with their whole history (as in the case of Marlia in the countryside outside Lucca, and Barga in Garfagnana, both in Tuscany). A possible explanation could be that castles were becoming gradually more representative of their territory.

These sources describe all the architectural elements of the castles, but not the building material, which is only known thanks to archaeological excavations. Thus, at the present time, it is possible to say that the first castles founded in the eighth and the ninth centuries were made of wood, protected only by fences and moats. But during the tenth century, the classical period of *incastellamento*, castles were gradually transformed into buildings of stone and brick and new defensive structures were added. Moreover, it is supposed that professional builders were hired by the lords to improve the quality of their residences, for example at Poggibonsi, from the tenth century; the walls were made out of travertine blocks which formed a regular texture. The work was probably done by professional workers who were paid by the founder, Guido Guerra the head of the family of the counts of Guidis.⁶⁵

The situation changed again around the eleventh and the twelfth centuries: towns were growing and getting stronger, and they became *liberi comuni* with local and autonomous legislation. At the same time towns started to compete, and fight against the castles over control over the countryside,⁶⁶ and by the end of this fight, during the thirteenth century, towns destroyed castles or reduced them to small fortresses to control the countryside.

A comparative method

This section proposes a comparative approach, which could help me find some specific elements to compare and formalize our discussion. This method is inspired by Weber's system of ideal types and it includes five parameters,⁶⁷ extracted from the structural analysis of the different kinds of settlements known in Italy and Denmark, which are: configuration, activity, stability, building technique, and actors.

The first parameter is “configuration”, which includes settlement structure, organization, and disposition of

the buildings, for example if a settlement was spread through a territory or concentrated around a centre. In some cases we consider the evolution of a settlement from its original structure, for example: Viking towns and Italian castles were generated from a different pattern, hence describing their evolution can help us understand which events were involved in urbanization.

The second parameter is “activity” which deals with economic or social activities known to have occurred on the site: for example farming, handicrafts, military defence, and religious ritual.

The next parameter is “stability”, which considers whether or not the site was permanent, wandering or if it changed its location. This is relevant for both Danish and Italian villages at the beginning of the *incastellamento* process.

“Building technique” refers to the materials used and the quality of the buildings. This data, together with configuration, can inform us of economic investments related to a settlement, if an authority planned the structure of a settlement, if professional builders were hired and if good materials were used. This is particularly relevant if we think of Italian castles, which at the beginning were poor wooden structures and were only around the tenth and the eleventh centuries turned into stone and brick by the owners.

The fifth, and last, parameter is “actors”, which considers the people responsible for the life and the structure of the settlement. These actors could be inhabitants, professional categories as farmers, artisans, and merchants, secular or religious authorities such as kings, members of the aristocracy, landlords, and clergymen. They determined the configuration of the settlement, through conscious or unconscious acts derived from their personal interests. For example the village pattern is related with farming and it was mainly inhabited by farmers, in Italy as in Denmark, while political authorities, together with trading and handicrafts, and gave an important contribution to create the peculiar configuration of towns. This is visible especially in Denmark, where towns rose for the very first time at the end of the Viking Age; in Italy the picture is more complex because urban tradition came from the ancient period and in the Middle Ages towns were in decline.

I hope that this approach can help us lay the foundation for our study, which at the moment mainly considers structural characteristics of settlements, but our intention is to better discuss the social meaning of these structures.

Comparison: Italy and Denmark in a parallel perspective

In this section we present the settlement patterns in Italy and Denmark from a comparative perspective by applying our system of parameters in order to find comparable elements, and discuss them. Settlement patterns are presented in this order: first villages, then towns, and lastly aristocratic places, such as Danish manors and fortresses and Italian castles.

Rural villages

In Italy rural villages were touched by deep changes during the seventh and eighth centuries. During the Roman Age the traditional rural settlement was represented by *villas*: big farms with a main building as the dwelling for the owners, outbuildings intended for productive activities and houses for slaves and workers. After the falling of the Roman Empire and its ruling class, the *villa* system collapsed, and as consequence the countryside was occupied by houses spread on the territory without a specific plan. However, since the seventh and eighth centuries religious and secular authorities consciously decided to concentrate these settlements around a religious or an administrative centre in order to control their territory from a military and an economic point of view. As a result of this process it is possible to find organic groups of houses, usually placed on an easily defensible place such as elevations and hills (hilltop villages).

In Denmark villages were inherited from the Iron Age, and with the same pattern: houses were usually organized in a recognizable group, every farm occupied a hilltop or simply an elevated place (the *toft* system).

Both Italian and Danish villages owed their organization to agriculture, which was the most practised economic activity; hence cultivable land was usually selected for the founding of a village. The shape of the houses and outbuildings was derived by necessities connected with the harvest, animals and manual work such as, for instance, the preparation of food, weaving and handicrafts. The same kinds of buildings were to be found both in Italy and Denmark: long houses divided into dwelling and stable rooms, huts sunken into the ground, pit-huts used as storerooms, a weaving room and a smithy.

In Italy, after the founding of hilltop and nucleated villages, it seems that new activities were introduced in the villages, such as military defence, religious rituals and professional handicrafts. Danish villages changed their location several times, therefore it has been suggested that they were wandering settlements, and that new generations were moving, looking for new cultivable land in the area. At the end of the Viking Age these moves are no longer registered. For this reason it has been suggested that villages became permanent, maybe thanks to technology, as discussed in the second section of this article.

In Italy villages were supposed to be permanent settlements, but that does not seem to be the case in general. If we consider the history of these villages, they were originally houses spread throughout the countryside, then they were collected in organic settlements, and a lot of people were encouraged to move to these settlements. As a result entire new villages were founded in new places, on hilltops or in the lowlands.

All the structures excavated in villages were usually made from perishable materials but during the end of Late Antiquity and the very beginning of the Early Middle Ages in Italy (more or less around the eighth century), buildings were made partly of stone and partly of wood either because materials were taken from older buildings, or because the whole structure was built on ancient ruins.

The inhabitants of villages were farmers in Italy, as in Denmark, but if we consider the people who were responsible for the village structure, the situation seems quite different in the two countries: in Denmark it is not possible to recognize the presence of an authority, the structures of villages came from a consolidated tradition and continued to be in use because the farmers wanted it so. In Italy it seems that an authority has always been involved in changes, and when the authority disappeared a lot of new problems were created. Farmers and those who worked the land had to invent a new way of life for themselves after the Roman villas decayed. During this period villages were fragmented and spread in the countryside without any precise organization. In time, by the decision of new leaders, there was reorganization of rural production, and as a consequence an inversion of the trend toward centred settlements. During this phase landlords could introduce other economic activities: some villages became castles and got new relevance in their territory.

Figure 1

<i>Rural villages</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Configuration	toft, forte	Originally spread houses; nucleated, hilltop
Activity	agriculture and domestic handicrafts	agriculture and domestic handicrafts, later religion and military defence and professional handicrafts
Stability	permanent, but changing locations (wandering)	permanent and changing location
Building technique	perishable materials	perishable materials
Actors	farmers	farmers, aristocratic landlords, clergymen

Towns

Italian and Danish towns look very different: in Denmark they were a brand new settlement, with limited extension and entirely made of wood. In medieval Italy towns were inherited from the Roman Age with an already evolved and complex structure because the concept of town appeared in Italy during the Etruscan period, and in the Greek colonies in Southern Italy. The history of Italian towns continued in the Roman Age with the creation of big cities, like Rome, hence medieval towns represented a sort of regression.

As a configuration, towns present an organic structure with a distinction between different kinds of buildings: houses, workshops, administrative centres, churches and cathedrals.

In Denmark we have an evolution from sites occasionally used for special purposes, which already had social or political relevance: meeting places for the *ting*, sacred areas to celebrate rites, areas on borderlines and strategic locations. It is also possible to recognize a process of evolution derived from conscious political acts mostly realized by kings.

In Italy that process was already completed in the ancient age, but after the urban crisis, which derived from the falling of the Roman Empire, Barbarian migrations and the Gothic War, urban life became more

difficult. Maybe due to all these problems towns changed. They maintained their peculiarity as commercial and administrative centres, but the density of population diminished and many areas were deserted and turned into fields. Towns continued to evolve gradually, until in the thirteenth century they became *liberi comuni*, getting a new, independent status.

In Danish and Italian towns all activities were centred: trading and handicrafts, administration, military defence and, thanks to the clergy, religion. The introduction of towns created a different context, in which economic activities could better display their potential, and the kings could prove their ability in organizing and planning settlements. In this way I think it is possible to say that the foundation of towns, in Denmark, was already a big step in the direction of the Western and Southern European contexts.

It is also interesting to notice that in Italy the urban crisis had some consequences, as we have already said in the second section of this discussion: in the end most of the towns continued to be inhabited until today even if some of them were abandoned and others were moved to new locations.

Danish towns started as seasonal or occasional meeting places, but they had to be transformed into permanent settlements to attract new people and to grow.

It is possible to see some differences in building techniques: in Denmark everything was built with perishable materials, while in Italy the picture appears very varied. During Late Antiquity (more or less from the fifth and sixth centuries), it is possible to find a chaotic and parasitic occupation of ancient buildings made of stone in the towns. Wooden structures were integrated in these older buildings, in order to repair walls or add new rooms. Gradually wood became the most used material. However, similar changes depended on the economic condition of the people involved: for examples lords' urban houses were usually made of stone, or maintained peculiar architectural elements made of stone or brick. In all other cases houses were simply made of perishable materials.

The actors involved in urban life were the same in both Italy and Denmark: kings, merchants, artisans and clergymen, especially bishops. The construction of a cathedral in a town could have crucial consequences in its structure and the urban life. The bishop was included in an international hierarchy, with contacts to all of Europe. Moreover, in Italy a bishop could also be a landowner with particular interests in the

organization of a territory. A good example of this was the bishop of Lucca (Tuscany, Italy): while he was active as a clergyman in Lucca, he had remarkable land property and was responsible of the founding of a number of castles in the countryside, for example S. Maria a Monte, Moriano and Pietrabuona⁶⁸.

From this point of view it seems that the growth of a town represents a convergence derived from the intentions and interest of an authority that was able to invest many resources in a town “project”.

Figure 2

<i>Towns</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Configuration	originally seasonal market, social meeting place, new settlements founded by kings; towns centered settlements with planned structures	towns centered settlements with planned structure inherited from the Roman Age, but smaller and with a smaller density
Activity	trading, handicrafts, administration, military defense, religion	trading, handicrafts, administration, military defense, religion
Stability	seasonal or occasional occupation, permanent	permanent, occasional move and abandon
Building technique	perishable materials	perishable materials, stone and brick work
Actors	kings, merchants, artisans and bishops	kings, merchants, artisans and bishops

Aristocratic manors, fortresses, and castles

This part is the most interesting and complicated to consider in a comparison, because it involves three different kinds of settlements and these settlements did not have precisely the same correspondence between the two countries during the considered period (the eighth to the twelfth centuries).

I have to mention that circular fortresses were a Danish phenomenon related to the Viking Age, while castles can be found in Italy but not yet in Denmark. Italian castles can be equated to Danish aristocratic manors, and maybe aristocratic manors could be considered as an embryonic form of castle, however they

were surely of different types.

The circular fortresses represent a typical Danish pattern, limited only to the Viking Age, while the typical fortress in Italy was the so called *castrum*, which was known since the Roman Age and is considered an ancestor of the castle type; therefore, I argue, that in Italy there was a fusion between aristocratic manors and the fortress pattern in castles.

Even though it is not impossible to recognize similar characteristics, for instance if we think of the configuration of all these three settlements, we will discover that they were organic, centred settlements that included a lord's residence, a sacred place, workshops and houses.

The lord's residence was the centre and the main focus in aristocratic manors and in Italian castles, especially from the tenth and eleventh centuries, when stone and brick were increasingly used for construction. The situation appears quite different when it comes to fortresses, which were more military than aristocratic compounds; in fact all the houses inside the rampart were equal: it is not possible to recognize a royal quarter even if the king, Harald Bluetooth, wanted them built and maybe had to spend some time inside to muster and prepare his army.

The activities attested in all these sites were almost the same: trading, handicrafts, military defence and religious rites, as testified by the found structures: sacred areas, many amulets buried as offerings, and smithies.

All of these settlements did not show a systematic change of location, maybe they were supposed to be permanent, but in several cases they were abandoned. In Denmark fortresses were abandoned after Harald Bluetooth died around the year 986, and aristocratic manors were abandoned around the tenth and eleventh centuries. In Italy castles suffered a deep crisis during the twelfth century when towns became *liberi comuni* and got control of the territory for themselves. It seems that after they lost their function they were abandoned or turned into something else, for example some castles were destroyed in fighting against towns or they were conquered by towns and used as fortresses to control the countryside.

Quality and building techniques are similar, if we consider the first period of castles. As already said,

Italian castles were poor structures made of wood in the beginning, and they represented the same kind of buildings as known in Denmark: long houses and pit huts. However, in Denmark we have some peculiar buildings, which were a variation of the long-house type: the so called *trelleborg* house in fortresses and big long-houses in aristocratic manors, while in Italy there was always the classic rural long house.

The difference became more pronounced during the tenth and the eleventh centuries: when fortresses and aristocratic manors were abandoned, castles were rebuilt in stone or brick and professional builders were hired by the lords, as testified by the good quality and regular texture of the walls.

In the end, when considering the actors, it is possible to find an interesting correspondence: kings, lords, merchants, artisans and soldiers were all connected to these settlements. These sites probably had their origin in a conscious project, by the will of an authority (king or landowner); soldiers and royal officers lived there along with merchants and artisans who supplied what the soldiers and officers needed. Moreover fortresses were built for military purposes, while the military function was added to the castles and aristocratic manors later in order to guarantee security, defence and stability for the settlement.

In regard to religion, every Italian castle had a church and sometimes a special chapel for the lords, and in some cases clergymen themselves were landowners. As already said, monasteries, abbeys and bishops had great power over territory.

In Denmark Christianity was not as strong during the Viking Age. Officially the new cult was already imported, but as proved by the existence of places like Tissø, the pagan religion was still very strong. Thus religious activity should be connected more with the traditional cult: Tissø was a sacred place dedicated to Tir and, according to the legend; Lejre was the first terrestrial residence of Skjold, Odin's son.

Clergymen started to impose their influence first at the end of the Viking Age and the beginning of the Middle Ages (the twelfth century).

In conclusion, the intention behind the foundation of fortresses, aristocratic manors and the Italian castles could be related to similar reasons such as the control over territory and the display of power.

It is relevant at this point to consider Lejre and its origin because it is supposed to be founded by the first dynasty of Danish kings; maybe they could have had an interest in being officially recognized as kings throughout their entire kingdom by creating a rich manor for themselves.

Therefore it is possible to say that aristocratic manors, fortresses and Italian castles mixed the same elements together: authority, economic activities (trading, handicrafts), the army and military defence (fortified walls and soldiers) and eventually religion.

Figure 3

<i>Aristocratic manors and fortresses, castles</i>	<i>Denmark aristocratic manors, fortresses</i>	<i>Italy castles</i>
Configuration	organic settlements with a lord's residence, sacred place, workshops and houses	organic settlements with a lord's residence, sacred place, workshops and houses
Activity	trading, handicrafts, military defence and religious centre	trading, handicrafts, military defence and religious centre
Stability	permanent, abandoned	permanent, abandoned
Building technique	perishable materials	perishable materials, stone and brick work
Actors	kings, lords, merchants, artisans and soldiers	kings, lords, merchants, artisans, soldiers and clergymen

Conclusions

In this article I have discussed settlement pattern in Viking Age Denmark and Early medieval Italy by fixing chronological limits between the eighth and the twelfth centuries. My goal is to compare settlement patterns from a synchronous and diachronic point of view, finding analogies and differences, even if it was very difficult to manage with different terminology relating to the Italian and Danish chronological contexts.

First one can see that in Italy the settlement pattern was influenced by many unsolved socio-political problems derived by the fall of the Western Roman Empire, which left great instability aggravated by the

Roman Barbarian Kingdoms and the Gothic war (535-553). Thus the Italian territory was not anymore considered as a whole as it was partitioned into smaller entities administered on local scale by noble landowners or clergymen.

On the other hand Denmark was already recognized as a kingdom ruled by only one king. Moreover Denmark was expanding its territory, until it comprehended Schleswig (Northern Germany), Scania (Southern Sweden), Southern Norway and the British Isles. At this time many people started to travel from their home country throughout Europe, also reaching Iceland, Greenland, and the Canadian coast (Anse-aux-meadows).

However, it is possible to find similarities between Danish and Italian settlements. The application of a series of five parameters (configuration, activity, stability, building technique, and actors) helped to underline common elements and processes.

Political, social, and cultural processes had clear consequences on settlement life: the conversion to Christianity in Denmark and battles between the Byzantines and Barbarians in Italy could cause abandonment, destruction or creation of new centres, the moving of people and transformations in trading networks. Therefore it is relevant to check the “configuration” of a settlement. This is usually based on productive “activities”, its “stability”, quality of “building technique” and the people involved in settlement life, inhabitants or local authorities, the “actors”. These elements can reveal interesting connections between changes in settlement patterns and the general context.

My schematic approach helped find common elements for a comparative study; it permitted me to create a more formal and systematic point of view, as these parameters offer a homogeneous terminology, as the standard forms are usually country and period specific.

Moreover, the case of Italian castles versus Danish aristocratic manors and fortresses quite clearly shows that similar structures and functions can be recognized between settlements that seem very different at first sight. Castles are a medieval product while circular fortresses and manors came from the Viking Age and are represented only by a limited number of settlements. However, it was possible, with this approach, to compare these different patterns, discover similar structures in them and more or less the same elements:

military defence, the presence of an army and of an aristocratic authority, sacred places, productive activities and control of the territory.

I hope that this formalization could be useful as a starting point for a comparative study extended to Scandinavia and Southern Europe, focusing more on Christianity and its consequences on the economic and political context in order to get more information on the organization of territory in medieval Europe. Following this research it will be interesting to study how communication systems (roads, bridges and rivers) were administered in connection with political and economic changes in Denmark and Italy, but also in other countries, between the eighth and the twelfth centuries.

From this same point of view, demographic studies of medieval population can provide us with some interesting information to evaluate the relevance of a place. This is an interesting question if we think about the recently founded Danish towns and Italian towns with long traditions but in decline. It was also interesting to think further, and focus on aristocratic settlements in general, because we could understand better the effective influence exercised on people by territorial authorities.

Streets, bridges, rivers, and mountain passes have always been important to secure trading connections and an efficient control of the territory. Therefore it could be interesting to discuss the functions of the communication systems, pointing out how the different features of the landscape influenced trade and communication, how authorities were involved in their building and maintenance in connection with economic and political processes. This study could answer interesting questions concerning territorial policy, and a comparative perspective could help us find similar processes going on in different European areas.⁶⁹

However, I aim to discuss differences in order to respect the peculiarity of the considered areas and to find new interesting questions, which could open new perspectives and tell us more about the diffusion of ideas and models in medieval Europe, still an open argument in this first phase of my study.

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Notes

¹*I vichinghi: insediamento e vita quotidiana*, Master's thesis, E. Marchetti 2003, Århus (Denmark) and Torino (Italy).

²As from d'Avray 2001: *Comparative History of the Medieval Church's Marriage system*, pp.209-221, in Borgolte. *Das europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs*. Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2001.

³Zanini 1994, p.119.

⁴The first studies on the Byzantine Empire and Late Antiquity were begun in the last thirty years (Zanini 1997). Now all the contemporary studies on the Middle Ages consider this new chronology to be correct.

⁵Sawyer 1997, p.3.

⁶Sawyer 1997, pp. 1-18.

⁷Kaland & Martens in Fitzhugh & Word 2000, p. 42.

⁸Graslund in Fitzhugh-Word 2000, pp. 60-61.

⁹Sawyer 1997, pp. 1-18.

¹⁰A village located on the western coast of Jutland, 8km North-West of Esbjerg.

¹¹The village at Hodde is located on Jutland, close to Blåvand on the Western coast (Stoumann 1980, pp. 98).

¹²Hvass 1980, Schmidt 1997, pp. 68-70.

¹³Stoumann 1980, pp. 106-110, Schmidt 1997, pp. 12, Roesdahl 1982, pp. 57-64

¹⁴Schmidt 1997, pp. 89-90 and p. 102.

¹⁵Hvass 1980, p.140.

¹⁶Roesdahl 1982, pp. 50-64, Schmidt 1997, "migrating villages" p.12.

¹⁷Carelli 2001, pp. 29-40.

¹⁸Hvass 1980, pp. 140, 155, 171.

¹⁹Roesdahl 1982, pp. 68-70, Sawyer 1991, pp. 329-330.

²⁰Jensen 1991, pp. 5-11.

²¹Sawyer 1991, pp. 320-322, 330-333, Roesdahl 1982, pp. 54, 70-76.

²²Madsen 1996, p.113, Schmidt 1997, p.25.

²³The *ting* was a periodical assembly of people in which legal and social issues were decided.

²⁴Sawyer 1991, pp. 322-327.

²⁵Sawyer 1991, pp. 327-330.

²⁶Roesdahl 1982 p.68.

²⁷Carelli 2003, pp. 99-105.

²⁸Christensen 1991 p.183.

²⁹The gold necklace is documented in an article published in Skalk (Andersen 1977, pp. 4-7).

³⁰Jørgensen 2002, p. 221.

³¹Tir was the god of the sky and of battle; he took care of the cosmic order of things.

³²Christensen 1996, p. 8.

³³Jørgensen 2002, pp. 241-243.

³⁴Christensen 1991, p. 183.

³⁵Roesdahl 1982, pp. 147-155, Nørlund 1948, Olsen & Schmidt 1977, Roesdahl 1977, Nørgaard, Roesdahl & Skovmand 1986.

³⁶Schmidt 1997, pp. 61-66, 94-102.

³⁷Trelleborg was excavated in the thirties and the excavation has been documented by Poul Nørlund in his book *Trelleborg* from 1948.

³⁸Schmidt 1997, pp. 30-34, 43-44.

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- ³⁹Roesdahl 1982 p.152, Roesdahl 1977.
- ⁴⁰Brøndsted 1967, pp. 171-184.
- ⁴¹Nørgaard, Roesdahl & Skovmand 1986 p.68, Nørlund 1948.
- ⁴²Harald Bluetooth was killed in 985, or at the latest in 987.
- ⁴³Nørgaard-Roesdahl-Skovmand 1986 p.90.
- ⁴⁴Cagnana 1993 p.172, Wickham 1981 p.97.
- ⁴⁵Valenti in Brogiolo 1996 p.82.
- ⁴⁶Wickham 1981, pp. 92-98, 105-109.
- ⁴⁷Most of the Roman villas were definitively abandoned by the end of the seventh century (Francovich in La Rocca 2002, pp. 150-167).
- ⁴⁸As Valenti for the Tuscan area; in Italian: "*insediamento caotico*" (Valenti, pp. 81-106, in Brogiolo 1996).
- ⁴⁹Cagnana 1993, pp. 171-172.
- ⁵⁰Wickham 1981, pp. 100-105, 109, Wickham in La Rocca 2002, pp. 122-125, 133-134.
- ⁵¹"Hilltop village" from the Italian "*villaggi d'altura*" (Francovich in La Rocca 2002, pp. 144-150).
- ⁵²Cagnana 1993, pp. 172-175.
- ⁵³Zanini 1997, pp. 104-111, Gelichi in La Rocca 2002, pp. 181-186.
- ⁵⁴Wickham 1981, pp. 83-89.
- ⁵⁵Zanini 1997, pp. 128-133, Zanini 1994, pp. 131-134.
- ⁵⁶Wickham 1981 p.81.
- ⁵⁷Zanini 1997, pp. 163-165, Wickham 1981 p.81, Cagnana 1993, pp. 171-172.
- ⁵⁸Wickham in Francovich 1992.
- ⁵⁹Wickham in Francovich 1992.
- ⁶⁰There were some regional differences: for Northern Italy the owners most recorded in documents are bishops and archbishops. For central and Southern Italy documents mostly mention officers and noblemen (with the remarkable exception of the bishop of Lucca in Tuscany, who built S. Maria a Monte, Moriano and Pietrabuona) (Francovich & Ginatempo 2000 p.45).
- ⁶¹Francovich & Valenti 1997, pp. 37-38.
- ⁶²Francovich & Ginatempo 2000, pp. 51-53.
- ⁶³The whole number of *castra* and *castella* mentioned by texts, until the ninth century, is about 15 (Francovich & Ginatempo 2000).
- ⁶⁴Castles connected with old *curtes* are mentioned as outbuildings of the *curtis* itself: "*curte cum/et castello*"; but since the tenth century the written sources reported "*castellum cum curte*" (Francovich & Ginatempo 2000 p. 32-34, 43).
- ⁶⁵Francovich & Valenti 1997, pp. 50-53.
- ⁶⁶Francovich & Ginatempo 2000, pp. 205-232.
- ⁶⁷As presented in d'Avray 200, pp. 209-221.
- ⁶⁸Francovich & Ginatempo 2000, p. 209.
- ⁶⁹About Denmark: A. Andrén: *Den urbana scenen: Städer och samhället i det medeltida Danmark*, 1985 Malmö. P. Carelli: *En kapitalistisk anda: kulturella förändringar i 1100-talets Danmark*, 2001 Stockholm. J. Jensen: *Danmarks oldtid- Yngre jernalder og vikingetid 400 e. Kr.-1000 e. Kr.* vol.n.4, 2004 Copenhagen. E. Roesdahl: *Dagligliv i Danmarks middelalder- En arkæologisk kultur historie* pp.54-81, 172-205. P. Sawyer: *Da Danmark blev Danmark. Fra ca. år 700 til ca. 1050*, Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarks historie vol.3, 1988-91 Copenhagen. About Italy: A. Colecchia: *Geografia umana, geografia politica, geografia religiosa: aspetti di organizzazione e gestione del territorio in un'area della collina abruzzese tra età tardoantica e medioevo* pp.101-129, in *Archeologia Medievale XXVII*, 2000 Firenze. G. Macchi Jánica: *Il problema della misurazione delle distanze fra insediamenti umani nella ricerca archeologica* pp.7-19 in *Archeologia Medievale XXVII*, 2000 Firenze; *Sulla misurazione delle forme di occupazione sociale dello spazio medievale* pp.7-21 in *Archeologia Medievale XXVIII*, 2001 Firenze. G. Tabacco: *Egemonie sociali e strutture del potere nel Medioevo italiano*, 1974 Torino. P. Toubert: *Dalla terra ai castelli: paesaggio, agricoltura e poteri nell'Italia medievale*, 1995 Torino