



# THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL CITY OF DENMARK

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Geografisk Tidsskrift, Bind 75 (1976)

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# THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL CITY OF DENMARK

## A study of two medieval founded market-towns

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Viggo Hansen, 1976: The pre-industrial city of Denmark. A study of two Medieval founded market-towns. *Geografisk Tidsskrift* 75: 51-57. København, juni 1, 1976.

*Medieval times saw the foundation of a great many market-towns in North Europe, including Denmark. The paper studies the street grid of two of these and propose, that a deliberate planning has taken place, and that the first town layout has preconditioned a social and economic segregation, evidenced by 17th and 18th century documents.*

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While Roman planned towns are well known from Southern and Western Europe and may be detected from their particular street grid system, it is more difficult to find confirmations of a system of corresponding medieval towns, when these were founded, not by a superior central power like the Roman but by regional and local authorities and also founded to fulfil trading aims instead of military ones. Medieval town plans most often result from local conditions like relief and defence possibilities, differing from one place to another. In other words it is not possible to find a common model of a medieval town or city in Europe. For such reason each town must be studied by itself in order to find evidences of planned resp. spontaneously grown towns of Medieval age.

Such case studies in urban history are numerous and have resulted in statements of planned cities, but in many cases these are based on speculations and assumptions from the study of the street plans, and less upon detailed analyses of these. An absolute claim in the research must be that the »medieval« city or at least part of it must show unrefutable signs of a plan. In many cases excavations may reveal a medieval plan, as for instance reported lately by M. Briddle and D. Hull (*Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. I) for some British towns of Saxon age, and in the same way North German studies show strong indications of medieval planning, reported in *Die Landschaften Niedersachsens* (1965) and *Topographischer Atlas Schleswig Holstein* (1963).

North West German town plans have been objects of research by Erich Keyser (1958), while British geogra-

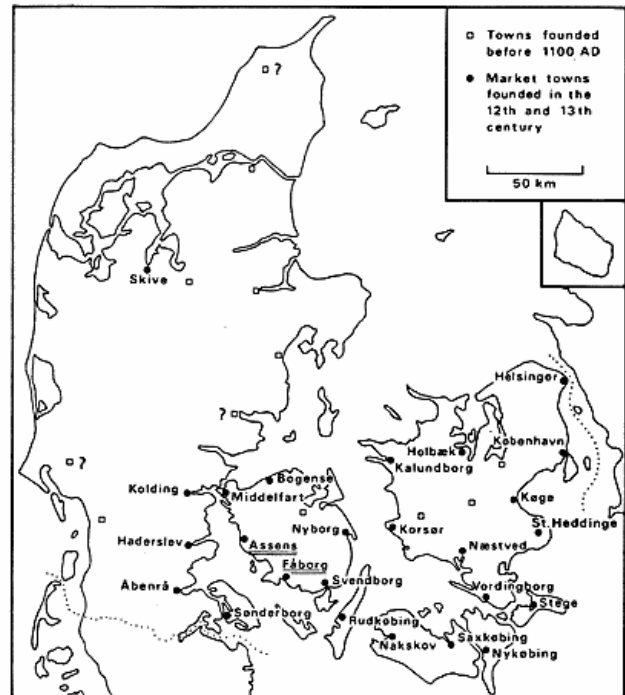


Fig. 1. Medieval founded market towns in Denmark.  
Fig. 1. Højmiddelalderens købstadsdannelse i Danmark.

phers like John Patten (1970), W. F. Beresford (1970) and others have studied street grids in England and Scotland.

Danish contributors to the study of urban history are fairly many. Most prominent is Hugo Matthiessen, who has an extensive and outstanding authorship of general urban history (1922 and 1933) as well as of case studies (1926). The study of old street grids has been the subject of several historians like Vilhelm Lorenzen (see Mackeprang) and Erik Kroman (1957). Also many monographies contribute to the knowledge of specific towns, and among these the present author is much indebted to two historians: Aage Fasmer Blomberg (1955/56), who wrote the town history of Faaborg, and Lauritz Maaløe, the author of *Assens gennem 700 Aar* (1936).

After the Dark Ages urban life so to say was reborn all over Western Europe, including the Danish monarchy. To begin with the new urban centres grew up at intersection points on the overland routes or at river crossings.

But by 1200 A.D. the city pattern had changed. By now the royal power had been strengthened, society had been reorganized, and the surrounding seas freed from piracy. As a consequence a hundred market towns grew up round the Baltic Sea coasts, the trade was forced into new channels, and new markets created for the produce from the Nordic countries. On the Danish side of the Baltic Sea some 30 towns, founded since 1000 A.D., could be counted as a witness of a strong political and economic activity. A great many of the towns, initiated in this period carry suffixes as »borg« (castle) and »købing« (town). (See fig. 1).

Undoubtedly the king himself had a great economic interest in the creation of new urban centres, and in many cases evidences show that the monarch and his supporters among the ruling classes like the big landowners, the church and the monastic orders, initiated the planting of market towns on their land. By imposing land rent on the new city people and through the collection of market charges and custom duties the king was able to highen his income in order to pay for the increased military expenditures.

The spatial location of the new towns indicates, that they were not selfgrown (even if such ones also occurred), but due to a preceding plan. They were for instance all on the sea coast, at protected places as well as at deep water, and at important crossings. The main street is often seen to follow the long axes of an elongated hill and has a market square as an invariable part of it. In addition many were generously supplied with farm land, and farm production was a kind of safeguard against an often failing urban economy.

At the end of Medieval times close to 90 chartered towns were spread over the Danish monarchy, including the province of Skåne and the duchy of Schleswig-Holstein, showing a picture of a lively commercial activity in those days. But in the long run the economic investments in such a dense pattern of towns payed too small an interest, and several fell back into obscurity, when trade routes no longer favoured them after the great discoveries in the 16. century. Some survived as ferry ports, a few ones by taking an active part in the new long distance seaborne trades, as long as sailing vessels commanded the seas, and as long as time was of less importance in the World trade. With the coming of the steam engine most of them became losers in the battle of the long distance trade, and from now on had to fall back on local trade.

The two market towns of Assens and Fåborg (underlined on fig. 1) which are objects of this study, belong to this last group, and the reason for their specific choice is, that industrialization has not affected them to any degree, at least not in the centre, as well as they have gone more or less unmolested through the modern urban development. For instance super markets are absent in the old town,

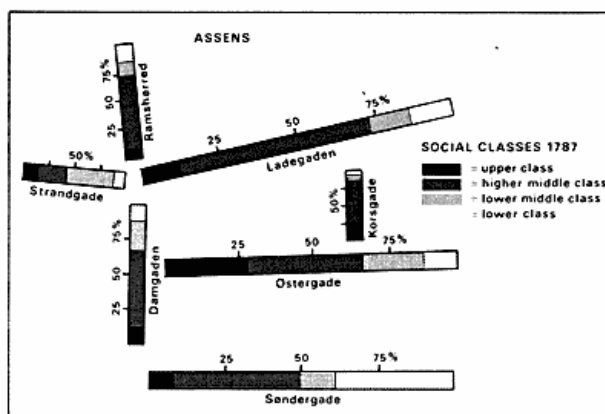


Fig. 2. Model of the relative distribution to streets of four social classes in Assens 1787. All households with an address to the streets are shown, in front houses as well as in back premises, and on both sides of the street. For explanation of the classes, see the text.

Fig. 2. Skematisk fremstilling af de social-økonomiske klassers fordeling på gader i Assens 1787 (iflg. folketællingen). Signaturforklaring: sort: overklasse, krydsskraveret: øvre middelklasse, enkeltskraveret: lavere middelklasse, prikket: underklasse.

and the bulk of the constructions are more than a hundred years old, and also stand on their old plot. This means that it has been possible to trace the history of each house back through several hundred years, more or less thanks to the fact, that the painstaking job in collecting and recording all real property deeds was done previously by local archive people and historians.

The main aim of the study has been a research into the occupational structure and the spatial distribution of social and economic classes in the pre-industrial period. A further aim has been the finding out, how far back in time the economic and social segregation, which is still apparent in those cities, may be followed, and what circumstances created it. The two investigated market towns together with many others from the same period, show a lot of common features in the town scenery, features that also dictated the research line. These are for instance the main street, where shopping is concentrated and where also the largest house lots are situated, the market square on this with its townhall, the back lanes with their small modest houses, and the narrow connecting cross lanes with no or very little visible activity, the old church land bordering the market square but still in a secluded place, and finally the specific land use in the streets leading to the port area, where the public houses stand and the seamen live.

There is of course a reasonable explanation to such different kind of land use from one street to another. First of all a kind of predetermination lies in the different size of the burghers' plot and with that the difference in accommodation in reference to number and size of rooms, which

again is pictured in the functional possibilities of the house. These were to a certain degree determined ages ago, when the houses were constructed, each for its specific purpose and for the available money.

The first and obvious research way is therefore to make out, which social class acquired each piece of land, for which purpose, and when. An approximate line may be found in the study of property deeds as far back in time as possible. This of course will never lead to the very beginning of town history, as no records are found for that early period. The best data besides the recorded property deeds are assessment lists for the taxation of individuals as well as of properties. Such informations are available at least back to the 1680'es. Other data are census lists from the earliest enumerations, which took place in Denmark in 1769 and 1787. The later one has been used in this study, as it contains many more particulars, and also because it can be compared to a 1782 land registre.

The first time one in Denmark meet acknowledged social classes in historical records are in tax lists from the late 17th century. Here the citizens are grouped according

Table 1.

Social class and head of family	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
<i>Upper class</i>										
Bertel Ludvigsen	1	3	6	10	6	6	6	3		
Jens Clausen	1		2	2	2	4		5		
Chr. Clausen	1	1	5	17	4	12		2	16	20
Erik Nielsen	1	4	10	10	2			6	1	
Chr. Jacobsen Brun	1		4	2	1					
<i>Upper middle class.</i>										
Niels Sørensen	1	1								
Thomas Ifversen	1	5	4	9	3	1		1	3	
Jens Kier	1		3	2	1					
Jørgen Paulsen	1	6	4	4	3	6		5	8	
H. Hansen Ebeltoft	1	3	2	2	2					
<i>Lower middle class</i>										
Jens Hansen	1									
Jørgen Pedersen		1	1	2	1					
Søren Tamdrup	1				1					
Laurids Olufsen	1				1			1		
Mads Hansen	1									
<i>Labour class</i>										
H. Olufsen Kylling	1							1		
Oluf Andersen	1				1					
Andreas Sørensen										
Laurids Nielsen	1				1					
Jens Jacobsen	1									

A sample of 5 households from each of the four tax paying classes in Assens in 1682.

En sample på 5 husstande fra hver af de 4 skatteklasser i Assens i 1682, med angivelse af husstandens størrelse og husdyrbestande.

I. Wife.	VI. Young cattle.
II. Children.	VII. Calves.
III. Servants & dependents.	VIII. Pigs.
IV. Horses.	IX. Steers.
V. Cows.	X. Sheep.



Fig. 3. The spatial location of family heads in the front houses in Assens according to occupation and social level in 1787. Explanation of signatures: Black: upper class, double hatched: upper middle class, single hatched: lower middle class, dotted: lower class.

Fig. 3. Forhusenes husstande efter social-økonomisk klasse i Assens 1787. Signaturforklaring som fig. 2.

to their ability to pay taxes. The lists record all adult persons, including domestic servants, journeymen, apprentices, farmhands etc., and also children, except those under 10 years in the lower classes. For this last reason the lists unfortunately are not complete for computations of the total population. The families were taxed according to the number of adult persons in the household, and furthermore placed in classified groups. In Assens for instance there was an *upper class* (I), which counted 5 households with 45 persons and was burdened with a tax of 4 Rigsdaler (Rgd.) for each adult person, 2 Rgd. for each child, and ½ Rgd. for a domestic servant and other dependents. An *upper middle class* (II), comprised 25 households with 164 persons and paying 1½ Rgd. for each adult person, ½ Rgd. for a child and 1/3 Rgd. for a domestic servant. A *lower middle class* (III), counted 94 households and payed ½ Rgd. for an adult person, 1 Skilling for a child and the same amount for a servant. A *labour class* (IV) of 18 households payed ½ Rgd. for an adult person and 1 Skilling for a child of over 10 years, and lastly a *poor group* (V) of 76 households payed no taxes at all. Here it is necessary to insert, that the grouping into tax levels was constantly under surveillance and might be changed yearly, depending on the total amount of taxes that was required of this town for that year. But even if the above shown figures are only valid for 1682, the figures for the following years confirm the classification of the citizens in social classes, which also do tax registres from 1671 and a list of households with domestic servants. A sample from the 1682 list is given in Table 1.

This inventory list shows some very big households in Assens, in which servants and dependents like journeymen, apprentices and farm hands were quite numerous. Unfortunately the registres do not account for the occupational structure, except in the case of public servants, or if they are named by their profession like skippers, dyers, smiths etc. From other sources however it is possible to detect, that aldermen, the parish vicar, other public servants, merchants and sea captains were among the two upper classes as well as some of the more prosperous families from the craft professions.

Also it is obvious from the table that part of the family income was derived from farming or from an activity as carrier. The lists even distinguish between draught horses and plough horses. In most cases farming was a side business or rather a supplementary business to a main business as dealer in cattle or as a processor of skins and hides. In this connection it must be mentioned that the town of Assens in the greater part of the 17th century was a busy cattle trading port between the Danish islands and destinations on the western Baltic Sea. The transfer of cattle from road to ship, which furthermore was charged with a tax, of course occupied many loading hands and crews and also stimulated businesses in crafts like skinner, tanners, dyers and saddlers. Previously in the century the cattle export had amounted to as much as over 5000 animals a year, but since the 1660'es the export had diminished, in some years to less than a thousand animals.

These tax registres are the first Danish entry into those days' household statistics, and it is the first acknowledgement of a social class stratification in Danish cities, and of an economic stratification as well, even if income taxes were not known at that time. Unfortunately it is not possible from these records, with a few exceptions, to localize the names to an adress in the town, and therefore it is impossible to state that a spatial segregation of the social classes existed at that time.

An exact household localization is only possible a hundred years later by the aid of the first enumeration in 1769 and again in 1787, and then again only with the assistance of a contemporary land registre, stating the names of the different land proprietors and the cadastral numbers. The use of the land registres and the cadastral numbers enables one to find out, who lived on the premises, because as a rule the person, who occupied the front house on the plot also was the owner, while on the other hand he might have renters in the back premises, mostly labourers and widows.

The 1787 census supplies a lot of information on the occupational and social structure, including the family structure, and as stated, it is possible to tell, where that and that family lived. Table 2 gives an idea of the number of each profession and its location to street. The most

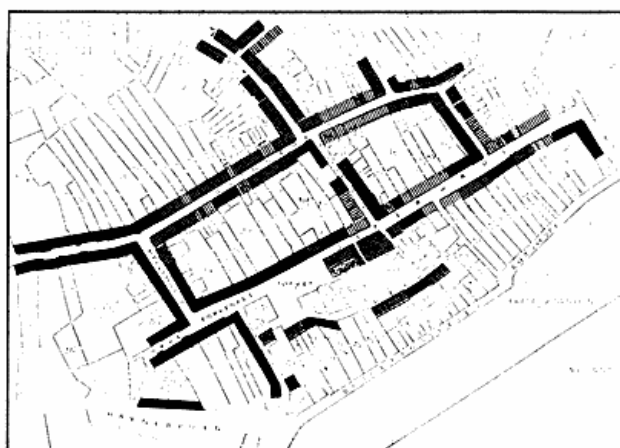


Fig. 4. The spatial location of family heads in the front houses in Fåborg according to occupation and social level in 1787. Explanation of signatures: black: upper class, double hatched: upper middle class, single hatched: lower middle class, dotted: lower class.

Fig. 4. Forhusenes husstande efter social-økonomisk klasse i Fåborg 1787. Signaturforklaring som fig. 2.

Table 2.

profession	street										total
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	
Clergymen & teachers	3				3	1		1			8
Civil servants	2	1		1		2	1	1			8
Town clerks	5			3	1	5	1		2		17
Military men				1	2	1	1	2			7
Pensioners & capitalists	3	1		5	5	1	1	2	1	2	21
Farmers & gardeners	2			3		3		8	2		18
Seamen & fishers	2	1		3	1		8			1	16
Artisans	17	11	2	28	17	14	8	13	9	3	122
Merchants	10	2				2					14
Other trading professions	4			3	4	5	3		1		20
Labourers				6	10	3		2	2	2	25
Others	2		2	2	6	1	3				16
Alms recipients	2	1		1	5	1		2	1		13
Total	52	17	4	56	54	39	26	31	18	8	
I. Storegade (Østergade)											
II. Korsgade											
III. Bastianstræde (Badstuestræde)											
IV. Ladegaden (Ladegårdsgade)											
V. Søndergade (Adelgade)											
VI. Damgade											
VII. Strandgade											
VIII. Ramsherred											
IX. Kindhestegade											
X. Kirkestræde											

Number of households according to profession and location to streets (1787).

Antal husstande i Assens 1787 og deres fordeling på profession og adresse i de nævnte gader.

numerous profession is the artisan group or the crafts. The 1787 census names 31 different branches, the foremost being the leather industry with 7 branches and 41 gainfully employed persons, followed by the manufacturing of textile goods with 7 branches and 37 persons, while manufacturing of wooden goods occupied 5 branches and 15 persons and metal goods 10 persons.

The study of the occupational structure has been done with the aim to define the different social levels and to analyze their spatial distribution in the town. A theory was forwarded, that high class people would show a spatial link to the main streets, while lower class people would live in the back lanes' frontages, and the lowest classes in the back premises. For that purpose it was necessary to construct a rather more simple classification of the different occupations and jobs. As a result of these reflections the following 4 classes are presented.

*Social class 1* (the upper class) includes civil servants and military personnels of higher rank besides clergymen and teachers, merchants, sea captains and »capitalists«.

*Social class 2* (the upper middle class) includes the craftsmen, farmers and carriers, and those widows who had a maid.

*Social class 3* (the lower middle class) consists of small town clerks, pensioners, seamen and military persons of low rank besides the rest of the widows.

*Social class 4* (the lower class) is composed of the labourers, the petty traders and those who are listed as poor ones or as alms recipients.

This classification of course is open to discussion, because for instance all members of the crafts are put in the same class, while it is well known that bakers ranked higher than weavers, that there obviously were wealthy as well as less prosperous tailors and tanners, and that farmers ranked higher than vegetable growers. Also it is important to note that only the head of the family is listed in Table 2, while members of the households (journeymen and apprentices) are excluded.

The above rank classification with all its flaws is used in the following figures. Fig. 2 represents a model giving the relative distribution of social classes on single streets in Assens. From this it is clear that class 1 plays a dominant role in the main street Østergade (Storegade in Table 2), where it occupied more than 25% of all adresses. Class 2 is more dominant in the back lane to the north of the main street, where more than 50% of the occupants belong to the artisans' class, as also is the case in the North-South running street (Ramshered). Class 3 dominates the street running to the port, where many seamen lived, while class 4 covers most households in the back lane to the South Søndergade (now Algade). Here the poor ones lived on land belonging to the church.

In order to present a more exact picture of the localization of the four classes the households in the front

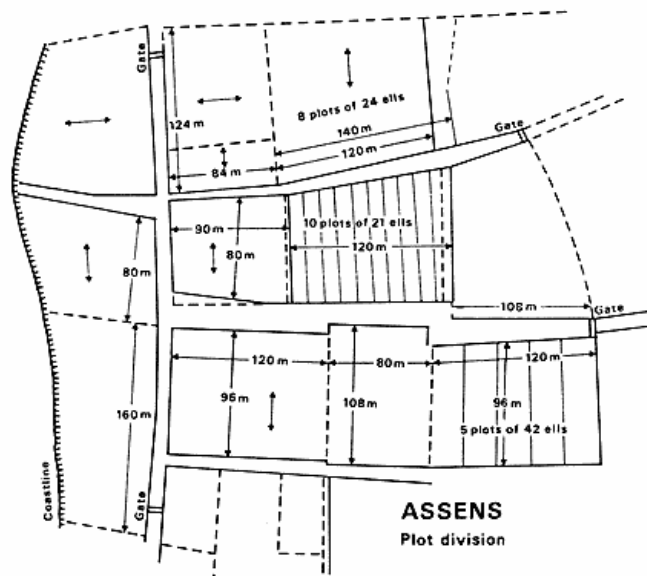


Fig. 5. Model of street blocks and burghers' plots in Assens after a town plan from the late 19th century. The hatched lines give the location of cross lanes. The arrows with meter entry give the width and length of the blocks/plots, while those without entry indicate the long axes direction of plots not shown.

Fig. 5. Målforhold for gadeblokke og parceller i Assens. Noget skematiseret.

houses alone have been extracted and depicted in fig. 3. This emphasizes the predominance of the upper class to the main street, where 10 merchant families out of a total of 14 in the whole town lived and worked on the premises with their families, servants, journeymen, apprentices and renters. In the back lane to the North (Ladegaden, now Ladegårdsgade) 28 households out of a total of 40 houses and 56 households belonged to the crafts. But it is worth noticing that the two sides of the street were occupied by different classes, corresponding to a difference in the size of the plots. The South side, which is also the back side of the big main street plots, has only small plots, which leave very little space for a backyard and consequently must have had a rather restricted activity pattern, while the North side plots are much wider and longer and thus leaves plenty of land for space demanding activities and for more roomy houses.

The same classification of the citizens of Fåborg (fig. 4) to social classes and to adresses confirms and emphasizes the findings from Assens. In Fåborg the social segregation is still more distinct. The upper class dominates the main street as well as those leading to it and to the market place, while the upper middle class is more or less confined to the back lane to the North (Grønnegade). Whenever the upper class shows up here, it is on street corners, except on adresses where retired persons from this class are housed. The two lower classes are here

concentrated to a small part of the back lane, opposite to parcels in the main street, that are owned by upper middle class people. Few from the lower class are shown on the sketch, because they lived on the back premises. One may conclude from this that a pronounced social and economic segregation was a fact in the small market towns of Denmark as long ago as 200 years and probably also long time before then.

As no records are available either to prove or to contradict such a theory, the oldest town sketch being from 1677, the answer must lie in the town plan itself. Consequently a measurement of all street plots has been worked out. The result of this measurement is presented on a sketch of the street plan of Assens (figure 5), giving figures for the width and depths in meters of the central blocks. It is clear that some figures are repeated over and over again as for instance 84, 96, 108 and 120 meters. The common denominator seems to be 12 meters, which is also the width of one set of plots, while another set, that of the merchants' plots in Østergade is 24 meters wide. Converted to a medieval standard measure the 12 meters correspond to 21 ells of 57,14 centimetres or 42 feet of 28,57 centimetres. The 21 ells (42 feet) standard was common in the allocation of farm land in Jutland in early times. Undoubtedly the measurement of the plots were done with a rope or a chain of that length. Previous figures for the length of the Jutland ell, which was also used on the island of Fyn, are 56,6, 56,9 and 57,4 (Poul Rasmussen 1967), while this research adds the figure of 57,14 centimetres.

There is reason to believe that the primary allotment of the burghers' plots in Assens comprised only the land adjacent to the main street (Østergade) with its market square, and that the plots were obtainable in two different sizes. Also there is reason to believe that the burghers who moved in were given additional land for farm use as well as for horticultural use from the crown. At the same time land was also given to the church and to a monastery, that disappeared after the reformation. As previously mentioned many burghers had an income from farming and cattle rearing, and that part of the economy must have been even more important in the early stages of urban life, in addition to the chartered monopoly to buy and sell the excess farm production from the neighbouring villages.

A supposed first stage of urban development in the case of Fåborg is shown in figure 6. At this time it is assumed that no segregation in social classes existed. The burgher's family lived with his whole domestic stock under the same roof in a patriarchal society. Selling and buying, storage of goods and production of different commodities took place on the same plot. Second noticeable step in town development took place, when town activity grew and further urban specialization set in. Back streets were planned, and the new street frontages were

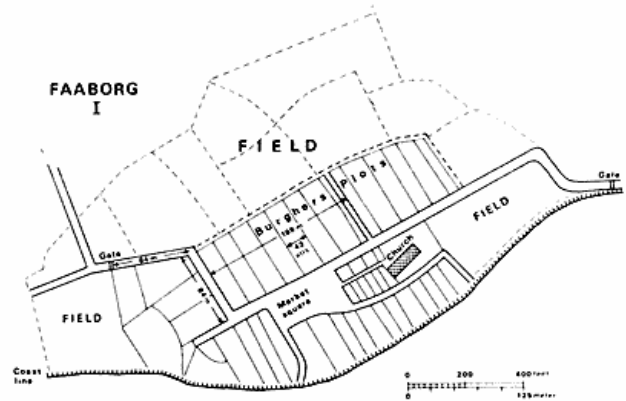
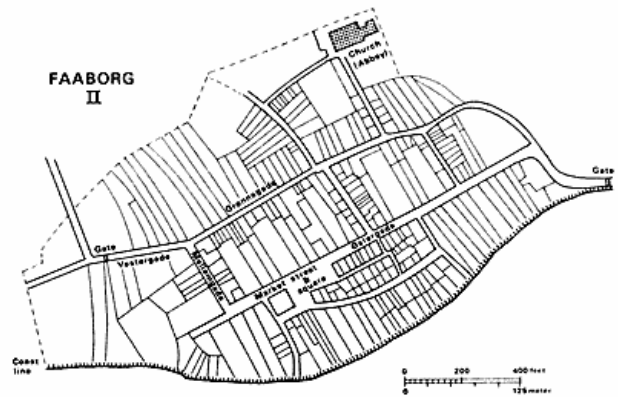


Fig. 6. Hypothized town plan development of Faaborg. I. First lay-out of burghers' plots in standard measures of 24×84 meters along the main street and across the market square.



II. A second (and third?) stage includes the adding of a northern back lane (Grønnegade) and several cross lanes. Part of the former field is made into new burghers' plots, and the opposite lying old plots are subdivided and made into craftsmen's lots. The older parish church, except the bell tower, is demolished, and the abbey church is converted to new parish church after Reformation.

Fig. 6. Hypotetisk model af byudviklingen i Fåborg. I: Tænkt første fase med udlæg af købstadsgrunde omkring torv og hovedgade. II: Anden fase med etableret baggade (Grønnegade) og tilføjelse af nye parceller langs denne.

subdivided and sold to more or less independent crafts of different kinds. Along the new back streets the previous field was taken in and allotted to a new set of burghers. These also combined urban activity with farm work, as it may still be seen in the house constructions.

On the old burghers' plots development did not stop. As time went on the old buildings, often after fire, were rearranged to build street fronts, at the same time as the store houses behind were put together to form enclosed court yards, each part or wing with a specialized function. But much of this story will only be revealed through the work of urban archaeologists, and it is the wish from the present author as a human geographer that archaeology, history, urban architecture and geography one day shall work hand in hand in an effort to reveal many more details of the changing urban history.

## RESUME

Efter nogle svage tilbøjeligheder til bydannelse i Danmark i tidlig middelalder bredte bycivilisationen sig i det 12. århundrede til Nordeuropa, og i løbet af relativ kort tid var der etableret et tæt net af byer ved Østersøen, deraf alene ca. 30 på dansk territorium, et vidnesbyrd om en stærk politisk og økonomisk aktivitet, der giver grund til at antage, at en planlæggende myndighed har stået bag, formentlig kongemagten. Til denne bygruppe hører Assens og Fåborg, der allerede ved deres beliggenhed og ved anlæggets generelle karakter bærer præg af en planlæggende hånd. Det er således muligt at påvise, at afskæringen af gaderne og udstikningen af bygrundene langs hovedgaderne er sket i lodder på 21 enh. 42 jyske alen á 57,14 cm. På et senere tidspunkt er parallelgaderne (baggaderne) mod nord og syd anlagt, ved hvilken lejlighed der blev udstykket et nyt sæt parceller på disses yderside, hvilket samtidig gav mulighed for at udlodde hovedgadeparcellerne bagside i mindre parceller. Hermed var grundlaget lagt til den rumlige, økonomiske og sociale opdeling af byerne (segregation), som den kan påvises gennem skatteregistre fra slutningen af det 17. århundrede. I disse skelnes der ved forskellige skatteskalaer mellem en overklasse, en øvre middelklasse, en lavere middelklasse, en arbejderklasse og en fattigklasse (se tabel 1). På dette tidspunkt (1680'erne) er det endnu ikke muligt med sikkerhed at fastslå de skattepligtiges adresse i byen. Den må afvente de første folketællinger (især 1787) i forbindelse med samtidige ejendomsregistre. I tabel II er opført de enkelte husstande efter profession og bopæl. Professionsbetegnelserne har dannet basis for en opstilling af 4 sociale klasser, og af figur 2 fremgår det, at socialklasse I fortrinsvis bebor hovedgaden, mens over 50% af husstandene i Ladegårdsgade tilhører håndværkerklassen (klasse II). Indtrykket forstærkes af figur 3, hvor beboerne af forhusene er trukket ud for sig. Heraf fremgår det yderligere, at der er forskel i social klasse på de to sider af Ladegårdsgade, svarende til at parcellerne er af meget forskellig størrelse og med forskellig mulighed for aktivitetsudfoldelse. Den samme klassifikation af borgerne til social klasse er anvendt over for Fåborg (figur 4). Her er den sociale segregation endnu tydeligere, når man betragter Torvegade respektive Grønnegade. Figur 6 illustrerer en hypotetisk opfattelse af Fåborgs byudvikling ud fra et primæranlæg med udlodning af parceller på 21 alens bredde (som Assens), og som senere er blevet udvidet med anlæg af parallelgaden Grønnegade, mens udviklingen mellem torvet og havnen er mere dulgt, idet kvarteret omkring den i det 16. århundrede nedlagte sognekirke har oplevet store ændringer. Artiklen konkluderer, at de to undersøgte byer (og sikkert mange andre fra samme periode) er planmæssige anlæg, og at dette anlæg i forbindelse med senere udvidelser har været forudbestemmende for den sociale og økonomiske segregation, der kan konstateres allerede i 1600-tallet, og som endnu den dag i dag giver sig til kende i gadernes fysiologi.

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