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BARBARIANS, CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY AND THE RISE OF WESTERN EUROPE: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ESSAY

I INTRODUCTION

The idea of centre and periphery — of place-conditioned, stratified relations between societies and peoples — is at once a vision of order and of process. It is a projection of our own world-picture: of action and its results; of disruptions and consequences; and of development, upheaval and new submission. Since the early days of diffusionism and the theory of the *Kulturkreis*,¹ images have subsisted of “ourselves” and the “barbarians”, of Roman and Germanic peoples, of “us” and the Third World — images which are in fact embedded in our own civilization’s self-perception. “Centre and periphery” is not just a theory within archaeological and other studies of society, but is virtually an academic mental archetype. This is not to say that the idea is false; on the contrary, it has demonstrated its power by its continuing ability to explain new relations and to create new images.

It is in light of this, and of the rapidly changing image of archaeology and the images, or results, archaeology itself creates, that I shall venture to highlight a number of issues concerning Europe in the first millennium B.C. and the first millennium A.D.² These are issues which, precisely because they are linked to changing centre-periphery conditions, are not just of importance to archaeologists. Phrases such as “Greek colonies” or “the fall

¹ This theory was elaborated to explain the ethnographic record by the Austrian school, especially Graebner and Schmidt.

² References for what follows are of course legion. They can here only be given to certain sites, concepts, issues, arguments and so on, in particular as they appear in recent literature. For concepts and studies of “centre and periphery” in archaeology, see, for example, T. C. Champion (ed.), *Centre and Periphery: Comparative Studies in Archaeology* (One World Archaeol., xi, London, 1989). For the general perspective, a number of topics and many of the regions and localities mentioned below, see K. Randsborg, *The First Millennium A.D. in Europe and the Mediterranean: An Archaeological Essay* (Cambridge, 1991); K. Randsborg, *The Second and First Millennia B.C. in Europe and the Mediterranean* (provisional title; forthcoming).

of the Roman empire" are evocative for us all, but I should state that the representations in the following — in spite of the well-known elements — to a considerable extent follow new paths, often determined by new archaeological finds and observations. So the reader will have to settle with his or her own conscience whether the points presented are simply an expression of "passionate intensity", or represent genuine "conviction", to paraphrase W. B. Yeats in his prophetic poem about history with its famous stanza: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold".³ In this process of change lies a key to the continuing topicality of the centre-periphery relationship.

Seeing the world from Europe — if we are Europeans ourselves — we are emotionally deeply engaged in the history of this part of the world and the shifting relations and connections which have fostered the development of "our" Europe, that of the second millennium. This is especially the case for the western Europe which in spite of a lack of political integration has played such a central role in world history — perhaps by virtue of the fact that economic relations within an open-ended social system, and not imperial mega-states, have primarily determined its social and cultural reproduction.

II

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY FROM 1000 B.C. TO A.D. 1000

At least three decisive social processes occurred in Europe and the Mediterranean region in the first millennium B.C. and the first millennium A.D.: first, the rise of the world of classical antiquity, its culmination and transformation; secondly, the birth of western Europe; and, thirdly, the integration of the so-called barbaric world into this development — or to put it succinctly, "the end of prehistory". Each of these processes can be studied, with variable success, both through text-based history and archaeology, or what one might rather call material history. Man-made material reality and its remains, so well distributed in time and space and — like pollution — to be found even in wastelands, constitute an ideal medium for the study of the relation of centre

³ W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming" (1921), in W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London, 1963), p. 211.

and periphery: for example, in the three social processes identified above.

During the latter part of the first millennium B.C., and especially during the first millennium A.D., interrelations between European societies — indeed the societies of the whole ancient world — became so numerous and so close that significant events in one region could have an immediate effect on other, even very distant, areas. Centre and periphery relations were not, as in a remote Neolithic age (with the great problems of communication over long distances), of an indirect and one-sided nature, but were as a rule reciprocal: the centre influenced the periphery and the periphery the centre. Furthermore the time perspective altered, so that we have both what we might call political-historical connections, and phenomena which belong to Fernand Braudel's *longue durée*, the “long-wave” course of socio-economic and cultural history. I readily grant that such extremely broad attempts to find a new order in the chaos of the past are not exactly in vogue in our post-modernistic age, in which history and culture are often either brought to a standstill or are considered to be without contours, an ever-changing element in a state of changelessness. I also acknowledge that such attempts are not exactly in line with the circles traced around norms within the traditional subject boundaries. All the same, I shall make the attempt.

III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANCIENT WORLD AND EUROPE

Three thousand years ago, right after the collapse of the Aegean Bronze Age civilizations and the beginning of the late Bronze Age on the Continent, Europe and most of the Mediterranean region were populated by simple farming societies whose basis for existence was determined by local natural conditions, relatively primitive technology (even if its products were often quite sophisticated), and a minimum of trade and exchange. States in the later senses of the word implying government did not exist, but in most areas there were nevertheless social élites, no doubt in perpetual competition and potential conflict, and distinguished by “Homeric” virtues such as courage and hospitality. These groups contributed to the creation of uniform conditions and a measure of cohesion over large areas. In the Near East the old

civilizations in the main western centre of the Eurasian-African world had doubtless been shaken by the collapse of the Bronze Age palace economies, but Egypt had survived intact and in Mesopotamia, for instance, the creation of empires continued, based on the varied success of the local economies centred around the larger and smaller towns.

As always the Levant played an important role, and in fact conspicuous progress in settlement was visible there in the early Iron Age (from the close of the second millennium B.C.), bearing witness to social development, economic success and a sizeable population.⁴ In more or less the same period we notice a parallel development in other parts of the Mediterranean region, in Greece with the nevertheless slow rise of the *polis* city-state, in the so-called Villanovan culture in central Italy (after 1000 B.C.), on the European continent, and even in England and the Nordic region (before 800 B.C.), with the founding of chiefdom centres, in hill country often on elevated and easily defensible sites (these "hill-top settlements" were thus also symbolically situated "higher" than the general populace, and nearer to the gods). A detailed chronology for this phenomenon has not yet been established with certainty; new and very precise dates from *inter alia* Swiss dendrochronology have caused substantial alterations in traditional datings from the late Bronze Age Urnfield culture (an archaeological term stemming from the widespread use of cemeteries with funerary urns) in central Europe — pushing the end of the Bronze Age here back by a hundred or even 150 years to before or about 800 B.C. Since the central European archaeological sequences are closely linked to those established in Italy and beyond, the new datings may indirectly be significant for Italian and perhaps also Greek/Near Eastern absolute chronology.

⁴ A number of the chronological and other issues in the following are discussed in K. Randsborg, "Historical Implications: Recent Chronological Studies in European Archaeology, c. 2000-500 B.C.," *Acta archaeologica*, lxii (1991). For the early Greeks, see, for example, O. Murray and S. Price (eds.), *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander* (Oxford, 1990). For the Villanova culture, see G. Bartolini, *La cultura villanoviana: all'inizio della storia etrusca* (Rome, 1989). For the "Hallstatt princes", see P. Brun, *Princes et princesses de la Celtique: le premier âge du fer (850-450 av. J.-C.)* (Paris, 1987). For the Celts, a major new work may prove useful: S. Moscati et al. (eds.), *The Celts* (Milan, 1991). For pre-Roman development in western Europe, see, for example, B. Cunliffe, *Greeks, Romans and Barbarians: Spheres of Interaction* (London, 1988). For settlements, see, in particular, F. Audouze and O. Buchenschutz, *Villes, villages et campagnes de l'Europe celtique: du début du IIe millénaire à la fin du Ie siècle avant J.-C.* (Paris, 1989). For the north European lowlands, the reader is referred to J. Jensen, *The Prehistory of Denmark* (London, 1982).

One point seems to have been established: that this social and cultural development took place on a broad front, and that the Aegean region as yet did not play the special role which it assumed slightly later, and in particular after 600 B.C., when the creation of towns gathered momentum. However, the founding of Greek colonies in southern Italy in the seventh century B.C. (and slightly earlier) led to a reorientation of the Etruscan region, among others. The foundation of the colony of Marseilles around 600 B.C., similarly, came to have significance for western central Europe in early Iron Age Hallstatt D (c. 600-500/450 B.C.), an archaeological period characterized by, among other things, a new stage in the formation of proto-urban hilltop settlements and by princely graves with Greek and other imports. The early Iron Age Hallstatt culture was thus brought into direct contact with the new economic developments in the Mediterranean. Before then southern France had possessed trading connections with Etruria through which a quantity of Greek luxury items had been received.⁵ But the founding of Marseilles set local production, following the Greek model, in motion, and the wide distribution of foreign objects often ceased, since a lot of items were now locally available, and wine and olives were grown in the region. This last development in particular is clearly reflected in ceramics, especially amphorae. In fact this example from southern France shows how weak centre-periphery relations were, in economic terms, during the formative period of classical Greece.

The creation of colonies, which in many cases were established by the smallest and therefore the weakest Greek city-states, meant a relative decline in the dominance of the Aegean, although not necessarily in its capacity to purchase products, the primary purpose of trade in antiquity. In any case the result was that products from the old Greek region became less common in, for example, the western Mediterranean. The political systems in the old Aegean centre and its offshoots then found themselves forced into a policy of dominance or conquest in order to secure continued economic advantage, or perhaps even in order to survive, particularly in the face of multilateral competition. One of the

⁵ For ceramic (amphorae) and other data from the south of France, see, for example, M. Py, *La Liquière (Calvisson, Gard): village du premier âge du fer en Languedoc oriental* (Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise, supplément no. 11, Paris, 1984); M. Py, *Culture, économie et société protohistoriques dans la région nimoise*, 2 vols. (Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome, cxxxi, Paris, 1990), and references given there.

consequences of this development was an extremely steep increase in the sea-traffic on the Mediterranean in the second half, and particularly the last quarter, of the first millennium B.C.

In the early days of this development alliances, such as the so-called Athenian empire, were sufficient. As was the case in the eastern Mediterranean, however, we soon see the formation of formidable states, which, as in the example of Alexander's empire, were initially weak and unstable, but which in the form of the Roman empire attained a stage where an apparently stable relation between political power and economic growth and exploitation had been achieved. It is worth noting that economic exploitation — and thus the extent of the empires — was limited to include only those areas which were relatively highly developed technologically, economically and socially.

This process is clearly reflected in archaeological finds from settlements in southern France, such as pottery. Here Etruscan forms were dominant among the foreign material in the years around 600 B.C. In the course of the sixth century more and more Greek ceramics appeared, and in precisely that same period the colony of Marseilles was founded. By the mid-fifth century B.C. Marseilles pottery was completely dominant among the foreign, or "non-native", types found at the settlement sites in southern France, and this continued until around 200 B.C., when Italian forms including amphorae suddenly begin to appear. As early as the second half of the second century B.C. — exactly at the time when the southern French coast was integrated into the expanding Roman empire or confederation — Italian pottery became dominant. This constitutes a very good example of the close connection between political aspirations and economic interests characteristic of the empires of the Hellenistic period, including the early Roman state. The Roman élite had a pronounced interest in supporting initiatives such as Caesar's conquest of Gaul in the mid-first century B.C., which brought plundered goods and, primarily, raw materials and manpower to the centre of the empire, Italy, and to its capital, Rome. In the end this also created new problems and forced a change in the political and organizational structure of the Roman territories.

Trade, however, was not the dominant sector in the economic activities of classical civilizations: it was agriculture that took pride of place. Despite the classical cultural heritage which (rightly) commands so much of our attention, even Athens and

Rome consisted of small or large farming nations with colossal supply problems.⁶ The growth of towns, and particularly the explosive increase in the population of the capitals, led to agricultural over-exploitation of their hinterlands and especially of the various core regions, such as southern Greece in the classical period and central Italy in the time of the emperor Augustus, with devastating damage to the natural environment and extensive soil erosion as consequences. The primitive technical knowledge available to classical antiquity, and especially the primitive transport technology, meant that only rather small areas could be fully integrated into the economy of the state, the military and the élite, with their very large and particular resource-requirements. A politically developed society in classical antiquity could therefore only maintain its centre in a particular area for what archaeology and history show us to have been a couple of centuries at a time. By the end of this time the region would have degenerated so far that it would no longer be possible to produce a large surplus of foodstuffs, for example for export. New regions or centres — and thus often new states — had to take over.

Within the Roman empire, whose borders stretched as far north (and south) as it was worthwhile to expand, we can see in the course of time an economic “oscillation” from region to region, reflected in the places of origin of imported goods brought to Ostia to provision Rome.⁷ At Ostia Italian products were already few in number in the second century A.D., and had virtually disappeared from the import market of the late Roman period (c. A.D. 200–400). The main tendency was a shift in imports from areas in the northern and western parts of the empire (Gaul and Spain) to regions in the southern and eastern parts (Tunisia and the Aegean). This tendency ran precisely parallel to the shift in settlement development which can be observed in the late Roman period and in late antiquity (c. A.D. 400–600), when first Africa (Tunisia) and later the Levant in particular experienced very powerful growth, while the north-western and central areas of the empire, including Rome, experienced a related recession. In the Levant, as in many other areas of the late eastern Roman

⁶ For changing patterns and degrees of settlement in classical antiquity and the later ancient civilizations of the Near East, see K. Randsborg, “Between Italy and Afghanistan: Archaeological Surveys and Ancient Civilizations”, *Acta archaeologica*, lx (1989), pp. 175 ff.

⁷ For amphorae at Ostia, see Randsborg, *First Millennium A.D. in Europe*, pp. 127 ff., with references.

empire — which had Constantinople as its capital, not Rome (since the latter now lay in a crisis-stricken region) — the time of the fall of the western Roman empire (the fifth century A.D.) in fact constituted a positive economic boom. In the west this century saw the lapse of Roman political and military control, economic marginalization and crucial cultural transformations, initiated by the Germans among others.

If we were to seek an example of this process from another, more marginal or peripheral area, we could again examine the coastal strip from north-eastern Spain to Marseilles. Here we can observe a drastic slump in the frequency of locally made amphorae found on late Roman sites, followed by the appearance of a large quantity of imported amphorae (predominantly filled with olive oil) from north Africa.⁸ Later, after the fall of the western Roman empire in the fifth century A.D., this import was supplemented with others from the still-powerful eastern Mediterranean. Thus we can also see in this last example how the large is mirrored in the small, and how the fall of the Roman empire was inherent in the structure on which the society of classical antiquity was based, with its great difficulties in achieving an integrated economic system, over-exploitation of certain regions — the socially determined “centres” — and the resulting problems in sustaining the supra-regional political and military system.

In spite of their very significant cultural legacy, the classical centres were only a limited success story in economic terms. Nevertheless the political, military, economic and ideological influence which they had on other social systems was of course significant. But it is worth noting that this influence as a rule had a number of negative consequences for the societies with which the classical world came into contact. The picture of the barbarian as the destroyer of civilization should rather be turned on its head. The classical societies set up divisions between the peoples of Europe, and the developing strength of the advanced cultures thus had an inbuilt inertia.

We have seen in the case of Marseilles how an initial influence can be halted when the periphery develops to come into line with the original centre, which is then forced into a wholly new development process. This phenomenon first appeared in the classical

⁸ For amphorae in north-eastern Spain, see S. J. Keay, *Late Roman Amphorae in the Western Mediterranean, a Typology and Economic Study: The Catalan Evidence*, 2 vols. (Brit. Archaeol. Reports, internat. ser., cx cvi, Oxford, 1984).

age with the founding of the Greek colonies, and a second time as the Roman empire developed and expanded, causing a consequential decline in the Italian centre. Its original strength was thus weakened, and instead of an open, expanding system, borders were set up and oppositions created which could lead to "Viking-like" conditions, with predatory expeditions against centres of civilization, such as the so-called migrations of the Celts and the later movements of Germanic peoples. For example, in central Europe the establishment of the Roman Rhine-Danube frontier resulted in all kinds of links and interrelations — in most cases of several thousand years' standing — being torn asunder; in social systems being destroyed, people being separated, technologies forgotten and so on. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the late Celtic urban or *oppida* culture, spanning wide regions from southern England to eastern central Europe, where the trans-Rhine and trans-Danube societies did not survive the disappearance of their counterparts in the south and west when the latter were integrated into the expanding Roman empire.

Within the Roman empire almost all the major Celtic *oppida* were abandoned. These *oppida* had been very significant — some, especially in Germany, were just as large or even larger than contemporary Rome. They were now given up partly because their position in the landscape was often determined by defence considerations, but in particular because their regional location was seldom suitable for integration into the highly ordered Roman system. Besides, there was often a newly-established larger Roman town in the vicinity of the old tribal centre. The Roman town served as territorial capital and could function as a new focus for the old élite (which with time became more Romanized) as well as for the rest of the populace and for newcomers.

It is an irony of history that the very same *oppida* societies in a number of ways were beyond doubt substantially inspired by the culture of the Mediterranean, and in particular by Hellenistic societies. This is apparent in small details such as Celtic coins, some craft products, and in more important matters such as the organization of the colossal late *oppida*, sometimes with streets in rectangular patterns, together with the extensive trade which went on, for example, in Italian wine. In passing it might be noted that before the *oppida* phase, in the very last part of the first millennium B.C., there had been a period — the "Viking Age" of the late early and even middle La Tène culture — when Celtic

warriors were widely used as mercenaries (though not by the Romans), and groups of Celtic peoples settled in the Mediterranean region, mainly in north-east Italy.⁹

In spite of these links and similarities, however, the differences between classical civilization and late Iron Age La Tène society are conspicuous, and it is no coincidence that we can so clearly identify Celtic aesthetics as something alien to such things as Roman art. In their applied art — their “style” — these peripheral cultures demonstrated a specific character which was partly inflected according to tradition and social structure, but was doubtlessly also formed as a result of interaction with the “centre”, the Mediterranean. A closely parallel phenomenon is known to us from the first millennium A.D., when Germanic zoomorphic ornamentation developed from the basis of late Roman decorative forms, but rapidly acquired an assertive character of its own, becoming a distinctive form of expression for the Germanic chieftain society of the north European late Iron Age, or, on the Continent, of the early Middle Ages.

In the beginning of the first millennium B.C. the farming societies of the north European plains, which we later characterize as “Germanic”, were part of the above-mentioned European *koine* of the late Bronze Age. We find in this periphery a number of imported goods from the central European Urnfield culture. We can also observe, for example in Denmark, the formation of small centres — the nuclei of settlements — in line with what can be seen in the contemporary fortified hilltop settlements of central, western and eastern Europe, and even, in fact, in the Mediterranean region, as in the future Etruscan area in north Italy at the start of the Iron Age in that region, the Villanova culture. The Villanovan centres, which in the Etruscan period became important towns, were founded just at the beginning of the first millennium B.C., and — it is worth stressing this — long before there is evidence of Greek or even Phoenician influence. But these broad relations and connections in Europe were destroyed (even if only indirectly), as we have seen from other examples, by the expansion of classical antiquity, which created differences between regions. This happened in part through a strong orientation in a particular direction — towards the southern “mega-centre”, the Mediterranean civilizations — and partly through the creation of closed centre-

⁹ La Tène is an archaeological term, in fact a locality in Switzerland, denoting the late, pre-Roman, Iron Age.

periphery relations which could not, or could only marginally, incorporate the more distant periphery, which was isolated by being put behind a boundary. In the early stages the periphery took the same form as the original centre (as in the case of the colony of Marseilles). Later on the late Hellenistic societies sought direct domination — by “empire-building” — over other societies as well as the potentially usable (that is exploitable) periphery. In the case of Rome this applied primarily to Gaul and perhaps also to Spain.

IV

AFTER ANTIQUITY

But the empires fell: in the first millennium A.D., in a slow and long drawn-out eastward development, which was clearly reflected in the changing geographical locations of the economic core or centre regions with their high productivity and large populations. This movement can perhaps most succinctly be represented in the relocation of the capitals: from Rome in the time of the emperor Augustus, Constantinople in that of the emperor Constantine — the fourth century A.D. — to the Damascus of the Umayyad dynasty around A.D. 700, still just in the Mediterranean region, and then to the colossal Baghdad of the Abbāsids (and of Hārūn al-Rashīd), together with — for a short period in the ninth century — the even larger but never completed Samarra, north of Baghdad. Baghdad was within its walled area several times larger than the Rome *inter muros* of the emperors, and about the same size as Paris in the year 1900; Samarra spread over a 35 km. stretch of the banks of the Tigris. It is also interesting that Damascus lies in the same region as Antioch, which was significantly larger than Constantinople, and which might well have been the capital of the eastern Roman empire in the period around A.D. 500. Antioch, as is known, did not achieve this status, and as a result of this “procedural error” in arrangements on the part of the imperial court, Constantinople — and thus an eastern Rome, the Byzantine empire — survived all onslaughts from Muslims, Avars and other antagonists in the first millennium A.D.

One might add that this also allowed Christendom to survive the Islamic expansion, but this conclusion would not be quite as accurate as it might seem at first sight. The empires as we have seen were in fact for the most part rather uninterested in econom-

ically marginal areas, and it is not wholly coincidental that the expansion of Islam — apart from plundering expeditions (and the conquest of Spain was precisely of that nature) — broadly speaking stopped at the borders of the areas of western Eurasia, including western Christian Europe, which were not, or rather were no longer, suitable for development and exploitation.

In the seventh century A.D. — the century of Islam — several apparently mutually contradictory social processes are discernible in post-Roman Europe.¹⁰ In the Rhineland, for instance, the expansion of settlements progressed with a new distribution of the land, for example into estates, and exploitation of it with new types of ploughs, tools and agricultural practices, including the three-field or a related system. Thus originated the Carolingian period's combination of fixed, established property and social relations with relatively poor use of agrarian resources in terms of the creation of an integrated economy. The former Roman towns on the Rhine and in the hinterland of Gaul generally existed only as placenames, traffic junctions and domiciles for clerical and certain other institutions.

In Italy our picture of the conditions is still unclear; parts of the classical settlement pattern seem to have persisted, at least around Rome, which was by then no larger than a small classical Roman provincial town, but the region was thinly populated and it was not until the tenth century that many new small towns and villages started to appear in, for instance, Tuscany, often on hilltops, creating the fixed and continuing settlement patterns for the Middle Ages and after. In south-eastern Europe all the Roman sites had been abandoned long before the seventh century A.D., and only in Bulgaria, down near the eastern centre of Constantino-

¹⁰ In general, for localities mentioned below (such as Pliska, Ingelheim and Jelling), and for a number of related topics and other issues (including the Near East), see Randsborg, *First Millennium A.D. in Europe*; cf. R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade, A.D. 600-1000* (London, 1982). For settlements in the Rhinelands etc., see Randsborg, *First Millennium A.D. in Europe*, pp. 65 ff.; for Bulgaria etc., see K. Randsborg, "Between Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages: New Evidence of Economic Change", *Antiquity*, lxiv (1990), pp. 122 ff.; for the general picture, see K. Randsborg, "Det syvende århundrede e.Kr.", in P. Mortensen and B. M. Rasmussen (eds.), *Høvedingesamfund og Kongemagt: fra stamme til stat i Danmark 2* (Jysk arkæologisk selskabs skrifter, xxii.2, Moesgård, 1991), pp. 11 ff. For various related themes, see also K. Randsborg (ed.), *The Birth of Europe: Archaeology and Social Development in the First Millennium A.D.* (Analecta Romana Instituti Danici Supplementum, xvi, Rome, 1989). In atonement for the rather limited attention paid here to the eastern parts of Europe, one might also consider M. Kazanski, *Les Goths (Ier-VII après J.-C.)* (Paris, 1991).

ple, is it possible to observe continuity in settlement and thus in agricultural methods from late antiquity or the Migration period until the earliest Middle Ages. This region was thus excepted from the collapse of Roman continental Europe. It should be noted, however, that the extent of settlement in Bulgaria in late antiquity was considerable, and that in this area it is not until the turbulent seventh century that we see a fall in population. This is completely in accordance with eastern Rome's strong position in exactly the phase when the western Roman empire declined or underwent transformation, as well as with the observations on the centre-periphery relationship offered above.

In the Rhineland the general, and conspicuous, decline in late and post-Roman settlements can be observed as early as the third century A.D., and Frankish or "Merovingian" settlements here had a consistently different placement in the landscape from the Roman ones. Something similar can be seen in the Danube area, but at various periods, earliest in the north and north-west, rather later further south and east. Roman towns were partly given up, and partly reduced to small clerical centres, just as in the Rhineland, and they have often left traces of agricultural activity (incidentally, it is these conditions — with continued use of placenames and continued mention of activities in the "town" — that have often resulted in historians who rely on written sources believing in a stronger continuity from Roman to post-Roman times than do archaeologists). It is characteristic that the large early Bulgarian capitals — for example, the relatively little-known Pliska, much larger than Constantinople, but probably less densely populated — were situated in quite different places from the old Roman towns. In dating and function these south-eastern centres were thus paralleled by the contemporary Carolingian *Pfälzen* (palaces) such as Ingelheim, west of the old Roman city of Mainz. Slavonic equivalents included the large fortress-towns in the Great Moravian empire; a later Nordic parallel is Jelling in Denmark. Apart from some of the Carolingian royal palaces — notably in *western* Europe — few of these centres became medieval towns of significance.

But wherever the Roman empire had laid down its road-network, with junctions in the form of larger and smaller towns, a framework had been created for new expansion. For example, during the Carolingian period many settlements were established in the Rhineland that still exist, and in the tenth century A.D.

there was a stabilization of settlement over large areas of western Europe (in eastern Europe this did not happen until much later). Villages and other settlements in most cases remained situated from that time onwards in the same place as they were to be found in more recent times, and indeed often where they can be found today. This continuity probably resulted partly from fixed property regulations which nevertheless allowed division, and partly from stable forms of cultivation and therefore a stable social structure, probably centred on the individual family.

To this must be added the fact that Europe in the high Middle Ages, as in the time of the Roman empire, and especially in late Roman times, now had an integrated network of larger and smaller towns with a relatively short distance between them.¹¹ This network of provincial towns can account for new and important functions in fields such as craft production, and in particular the distribution of products. In these spheres a distinct contrast can be seen with the dispersed trading stations of Carolingian times, such as the renowned emporia — Hamwic at Southampton, Quentowic on the coast of northern France, Dorestad on the lower Rhine, or Hedeby between Saxony and Denmark — which were to be found on the borders between two or more major regions, not sited centrally in a productive countryside. The new provincial towns from around A.D. 1000 and after also witnessed comprehensive building activity, especially church-building, which brought them great prestige and resulted in their being treated as costly objects of investment by the élite.

This actually formed the basis for the western Europe we know in later times and in many respects for today's Europe, building on two traditions: concretely, and no doubt most importantly, on the farmer (and craftsman) and his or her work; and, at a more abstract level, on organization, much of which can be traced back to classical concepts or physical structures, even though these have often meanwhile been altered or misunderstood.

Viewed in the context of this subsistence and market-based organization of landscape and production, political conditions are less significant. It is probably an important characteristic that empire-like conditions in our millennium on the European continent have been linked as a rule to relatively weak and poorly integrated economic systems, typically at the periphery of the

¹¹ Cf. R. Hodges, *Primitive and Peasant Markets* (London, 1988); Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*.

continent. The Führer, making propaganda for a thousand-year Reich, *de facto* a Nazi-dominated empire with its centre in central Europe — just where empire-like superstructures have almost always been doomed to failure — entirely overlooked the fact that Europe had already produced its own thousand-year empire, but one that had not been primarily political in nature. The secret of western Europe's long-term success seems to be that its economic structure has worked together with a relatively non-centralized, perhaps even on some points weak, but nevertheless dynamic, political structure; ensuring the existence of integrated centre-periphery relations in which isolated powerful centres are not allowed to dominate. If the centres become too large their development, for instance their decline, will become too great a factor in determining the history of the whole structure (the same can, of course, be said of the social élites should they become too powerful, or too greedy).

V

EPILOGUE: THE NORTH WITHIN EUROPE

Perhaps this account is a little Nordic in character, and not completely without reason. In this discussion so far we have primarily been concerned with the parts of Europe which belonged to the Roman empire, and which underwent major changes in the light of the empire's development and later fate. These changes appear also to have affected the adjoining areas in what the Romans themselves called "Free Germany", and in corresponding regions of southern Europe — in other words the near periphery. Further north the clearly negative results of the Roman empire's expansion and fall seem to have been weaker. At sites such as Vorbasse in central Jutland (for which we have unusually full information in archaeological terms), uninterrupted continuity of settlement (though not of individual sites) can be demonstrated for the whole of the first millennium A.D.¹²

The north European lowlands received a number of technological, economic and organizational — including military — impulses

¹² S. Hvass, "Eine Dorfsiedlung während des 1. Jahrtausends n.Chr. in Mittelljütland, Dänemark", *Bericht der römisch-germanische Kommission*, lxvii (1986), pp. 529 ff. For Gudme-Lundeborg below, see K. Randsborg, "Beyond the Roman Empire: Archaeological Discoveries in Gudme on Funen, Denmark", *Oxford Jl. Archaeol.*, ix (1990), pp. 355 ff.

from the Roman empire, as is clearly shown, for instance, by Roman products, from the Rhine provinces in particular, found in graves and as offerings. Ideologically, however, one might speak of a certain screening process: scarcely any aspect of Roman culture was adopted as a coherent whole, as we can see in the case of zoomorphic Germanic decoration.

At Vorbasse links with the Roman empire are reflected not only in some imported goods, but also in a change in building patterns which occurred after *circa* A.D. 200: large farms, as a rule of almost the same size, on independent rectangular plots of significant dimensions — almost like small Roman villas — replaced the more irregular system of the local early Iron Age. This reorganization evidently mirrored a change in the structure of society, doubtless the growth of some kind of lineage- or family-determined right of use with associated military service, as evidenced by large finds of weapons employed as offerings and the long border-ramparts. To this was probably added a political superstructure with a social élite extremely dependent on production and exchange, and — particularly indirectly — on relations with the Roman empire and other states such as Roman Byzantium. A colossal coastal settlement such as Lundeberg, in south-eastern Funen, which was established in the third century A.D., shows with all possible clarity that there existed an intimate connection between such commercial and craft centres and royal settlements (which were also religious centres) — for instance Gudme, situated only 4 km. from Lundeberg. The royal lands were extremely productive — for example in agrarian terms — and thrived on exchange, for only through exchange could the élite convert agrarian products to foreign luxury goods, like gold and silver, which could be “invested” in further social expansion and territorial control.

It is a related structure we meet again in the earlier part of the Viking Age at the end of the first millennium A.D. The craft and commercial centres have simply become larger and more permanent, in step with political developments and the close relationship with Carolingian western Europe.¹³ It goes without saying that the fate of the royal settlements — the centres — was dependent on alliances, agreements and socio-economic agility. They were

¹³ For an Anglo-Saxon case-study, see R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement: Archaeology and the Beginnings of English Society* (London, 1989); for Denmark, see K. Randsborg, *The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of a State* (London, 1980).

therefore rather transient phenomena. But the agrarian underlayer of society and the primary settlements show a remarkable continuity throughout this long period, even if there are also, naturally, traces of change. Continuity can be seen in the house types, in the structure of farms, and in the very subdivision of the landscape into stable economic units. The increase in the construction of farms is conspicuous in the third, the eighth and particularly the eleventh centuries A.D., in the last case with the founding of the last of the Viking Age villages with very large farms, each on a plot which could be up to 2 hectares in size, with main buildings, veritable halls, of up to 500 square metres. This gives an idea of how productive the still prehistoric agricultural systems in northern Europe actually were.

We know, of course, that everyone did not enjoy the fruits of this development to the same extent, but to characterize the peripheral societies of Europe of the period between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 1000 as generally primitive, and the living standards of the time as low, would be clearly wrong. On the contrary, one could actually maintain, for example, that the major primary producers in the Nordic region never lived better than at the end of the Viking Age, and they did so without destroying natural conditions and thereby the basis of their own existence, unlike the classical societies. For "civilized" Europe the Migration period was a necessary pause in a process of development which had involved powerful centres wreaking environmental, social and even economic destruction. In the Nordic region, however, a steady development had been able to take place, far removed from the Roman empire and its collapse or transformation — progress which in Merovingian and Carolingian times, and particularly in the high Middle Ages, could be integrated with that of western Europe. Through this process new centre-periphery relations were established on the basis of agrarian solidity and relatively weak social élites and political systems.

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