

Authors: Matthias Maluck, Luise Zander

### Collected Information for teachers

Topic: History

The border landscape of Hedeby and the Danevirke was at the centre of political and military struggles for dominance over Jutland between Danish, Carolingian and, later, German sovereigns. The border marked the end of the Carolingian expansion to the north, after the Frisians and Saxons had been subdued and incorporated into their realm in the course of the eighth century. Hedeby and the Danevirke represent a significant cultural, political and economic phase in the history of Northern Europe, reflecting the specific nature and the development of borders in connection with the formation of states in Viking-Age. This landscape is a unique case study for the development over centuries of the architecture of fortified boundaries in conjunction with trading centres which are strategically integrated into their natural environment.

The history of the Danevirke's construction spans more than 500 years, from protohistoric times to the Viking Age and the High Middle Ages. The linear defences of the Danevirke dominated the Schleswig Isthmus before the eighth century. Depending on strategic requirements in the border area between the Danes, Saxon tribes and the Frankish and German Empires, they were extended and reinforced through repeated building activity and the addition of stretches of ramparts. As a consequence, in the course of half a millennium the largest archaeological monument in Northern Europe came into being. The most striking stages of construction include the fieldstone wall in the Main Wall from around 740, the Connection Wall with Hedeby's link to the Main Wall in about 970, the Kovirke shortening the line of the ramparts in the late tenth century, and the great brick wall in around 1170. As a result of planned development and the sub-division of the flats on the shoreline, Hedeby developed during the Viking Age from an unfortified eighth-century settlement to the south of what was to be the Semicircular Wall into a trading and crafts centre for several regions. Hedeby began to serve as a nodal point for long-distance trade and mass production between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, playing an increasingly important economic and political role in the Nordic region. The development of the settlement in Hedeby intensified and the harbour facilities were expanded in the 880s. Landing stages for heavy merchant ships served as a market area. The mass production of goods was as important for the new economic developments as trade. Specialized craftsmen produced items for the home market as well as for export. Thus, the production of craft goods from Hedeby grew considerably. This prime time for Hedeby lasted throughout the tenth century. Further inland, other areas were developed for settlements, workshops and graves. Around the middle of the century, the centre was surrounded by ramparts and structurally connected to the Danevirke. When changes in around the year 1000 put an end to the old emporia in many parts of Northern Europe, the focus of the settlement on the Schlei also successively shifted to the opposite north bank. However,

there are only clear archaeological traces of the subsequent settlement at Schleswig from the 1070s on. The oldest mention of Hedeby and the Danevirke region as a borderland is the Old English Widsith poem, whose origins have been dated back to the sixth century. It tells the tale of a battle on an island in the Eider between the king's son Offa and two opponents, suggesting that it lay between two territories. At the time, the region was probably very sparsely populated. Settlement activities are known only from finds of gold bracteates from the second half of the fifth century between the Eider and the Schlei, and finds in Angeln, Schwansen and Husby from the late seventh and early eighth centuries. These activities seem to gather pace again from the middle of the eighth century, as shown not only by Hedeby's southern settlement but also by settlement finds from nearby Selk and Föising on the Schlei, and numerous graves on both sides of the Schlei. Archaeological evidence indicates the existence of travelling routes along the Schleswig Geest, probably since as far back as the Bronze Age, signalled by rows of burial mounds built alongside the routes. A gateway which was unearthed during excavations at the Danevirke shows the regular use of the route in the centuries after the erection of the first ramparts before the sixth century. Little is known about the earliest building phases of the Danevirke from before 737. At least three phases of earthen banks have been demonstrated. The Frankish expansion under Charles Martel and Charlemagne resulted in several military campaigns against the Frisian and Saxon tribes west of the River Elbe before 734 and again between 777 and 804. The Danes were well aware of the events in Saxony: the Frankish annals record the Saxon leader Widukind taking refuge in Denmark during the campaign from 777–785. The extension of the power of the Frankish Empire towards the River Elbe might have been a strong trigger for building measures at the Danevirke. This would make the re-enforcement a reaction to the threat to Saxon groups living north of the Elbe River and therefore in the long run also to the Danish territory. About 740, or soon after, the earlier ramparts of the Danevirke were enlarged and partially reinforced. This made it the largest structure in Northern Europe at this time. Certainly, the massive extension of the Danevirke is a clear and early indicator in the archaeological record of the extension of territorial power by Danish kings at home. A Danish king possessing previously unheard-of power thus marked the border of his territory. The eighth century represents the most intense period of development of the entire Danevirke fortification system. Since 1972, several dendrochronological dates from different sections have identified the years around 737/740 as one of the main building phases of the Danevirke. In about 740 or during the following decades the Main Wall was enlarged and almost completely reinforced by one or more phases consisting of a palisade front and a retaining wall from fieldstones. At the transition between Lake Dannewerk and the swampy lowlands west of the Schlei, the North Wall, an earthen bank with a palisade-faced front and a ditch, was erected in 737. In the west, alongside the carr bordering the Rheider Au river, the Crooked Wall was built and later extended several times. The Offshore Work, dated to the years between 730 and 740, was erected as a wooden structure of block construction at a particularly narrow point on the Schlei. Until now it has not

been possible to reconstruct any upper structure which might have stood out above the water. At the entrance to Schwansen, an area of country settled by a Danish population and located to the south of the Schlei, the two sections of the East Wall were constructed. In the eighth century, economic structures in Northern Europe began to change together with the early development of trading centres, known as emporia. These “emporium” (a re-used term from Antiquity) were situated in borderlands or along coasts and along key trade routes. The trading centres can be described as gates between different cultural and economic traditions. The local inhabitants consisted of gateway communities of trade specialists coming from different trade systems. Often administered by a central or royal power, the emporia provided a safe place and the necessary infrastructure for exchange between faraway places and the hinterland enabling long-distance trade. Among the earliest examples of medieval emporia were Quentovic and Dorestad, Frankish emporia established in the sixth and seventh centuries at the main shipping routes in the North Sea. In Scandinavia the earliest of these trade settlements were established in Ribe in Denmark and in Birka in Sweden as far back as the eighth century, but a small settlement also emerged in Hedeby in the second half of that century. Fundamentally to this development, the Schleswig Isthmus constituted the narrowest land bridge between navigable waterways leading to the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Serving as a trans-shipment centre, Hedeby evolved in the Viking period from an unfortified eighth century settlement into an international hub for trade and crafts which today provides us with excellent insights into the development of urban settlements in Northern Europe. Around 740, the earliest settlement emerged at Hedeby, in the area referred as the “Southern Settlement”, south of the later Semicircular Wall. This has been confirmed by both constructional features and associated finds from the mid-eighth to the end of the ninth centuries, recovered during archaeological surveys in the twentieth century. With respect to the area within the later Semicircular Wall at Hedeby, isolated finds indicate the presence of a settlement as far back as the sixth and eighth centuries, but the extent and form of this is as yet unknown. The surveys also identified a further cemetery south of the Semicircular Wall. The oldest graves in the southern grave field probably date back to the eighth century, while most of the graves are likely to have been dug between the ninth and mid-tenth centuries. In the ninth century, Viking overseas expansion reached an unprecedented scale. The ensuing contacts with the empires and kingdoms in Western Europe influenced economic, political and social processes in Scandinavia strongly. Thus, it was during the ninth century that Hedeby became established as one of the crucial maritime emporia while Ribe, located further north in Jutland, experienced a considerable decline. The transport of goods across the Schleswig Isthmus must be seen in close connection with the start of trading activities in Hedeby. Early archaeological evidence for the route between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea from the eighth and ninth centuries is known from Elisenhof in Eiderstedt and Hollingstedt. Hedeby must also be seen as a centre of political power, shown by minting rights which could have been issued only by Danish kings, the rich boat chamber grave, and the rune stones around Hedeby. However, neither in Hedeby nor in its surrounding area has a royal seat

for the king been identified as in Adelsö near the Swedish emporium of Birka. During the course of Frankish expansion to the north, when Charlemagne threatened to cross the Elbe River after subjugating the Saxon areas in 804, conflicts arose between Emperor Charlemagne and the Danish King Godfred. Godfred then appeared twice with a fleet at Hedeby, now first referred to by its Saxon name "Sliesthorp" (meaning "village on the Schlei"). In 808, according to the Royal Frankish Annals, he also reinforced the Danevirke at this point. The existence of a "munimentum valli", attested to in the Royal Frankish Annals for 808, has not yet been backed up by archaeological evidence in the wall stratigraphy of the Danevirke. However, recent excavations at the gateway through the Danevirke indicate that the fieldstone wall, so far connected with the building phase of 740, could indeed be some decades younger – which would fit much better with the Danevirke mentioned in the Annals. Following the death of Godfred in 810, the river Eider was stipulated as the border between Frankish and Danish territories after negotiations between Godfred's successors and Charlemagne and Louis the Pious at the Eider River. Negotiations on the Elbe did not prove fruitful and led to Northern Albingia being occupied by Charlemagne. Neither the Eider nor the Elbe or the Danevirke seem to have been enduring borders at the time: instead, they were repeatedly contested by all sides. Thus, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the clashes over the border region between the Danish, Frankish and East Frankish rulers continued.

According to the Frankish Annals, the Danish King Godfred destroyed the emporium of Reric – today identified near Groß Strömkendorf at Wismar Bay – and evidently relocated merchants from there to Hedeby. An archaeological survey has revealed that the settlement inside the town wall was gradually extended from just before the 820s and more intensified from the 830s. However, settlement in Hedeby first began south of the later town wall earlier, around the middle of the eighth century. Besides hundreds of burials of various forms there are also chambered burials from the first half of the tenth century, some of which are richly furnished. Due to its extremely rich and magnificent grave goods, the most elaborate grave, the so-called boat-chamber grave, is associated with the Danish King Harald Klak, who was buried around the middle of the ninth century. The shore areas serve as hithes (i.e. small havens/landing places for boats) with an associated market. The intensive development of the settlement in the boggy zone by the water's edge eventually coincided with an expansion of the harbour facilities in the 880s. Landing stages, where heavy merchant ships could also berth, were built extending far out into the water. They also served the trading centre as a market area, which is shown by the large number of finds of items lost during trade activities on the landing stages. Besides scales, balance weights, coins and pearls, 41 press dies used for modelling golden pendants were among the most notable objects. Besides long-distance trading, economic life was also characterised by the intensive and highly specialised production of craft items made both for the home market and for export. Consequently, as early as the middle of the ninth century, Hedeby had emerged as a maritime trading centre where traders from all points of the compass met, as confirmed by both historical sources and

archaeological finds. Evidence of a mint and reports of a Christian mission in Hedeby underline the important role of the place: the minting of coins began in the 820s and ceased in about 860 then resumed towards the beginning of the tenth century, lasting until the end of the tenth century. Numerous coins have been found which were produced in Hedeby. Coins used as a means of payment (and sovereign right) were based on Continental or English models. However, the evidence shows that minting was only of a temporary nature in Hedeby. The minting of silver denarii was modelled on Frankish coins issued by Charlemagne from 793/94. Their production ceased in the second half of the ninth century. The reported building of a church in about 850 by St Ansgar (d. 865), and the establishment of a bishopric about 100 years later, mark important missionary activities. The site of these first churches is as yet unknown, however. In the late ninth century, Rimbert (an archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg) reported on Ansgar's travels with the Danish kings Godfred and Harald Klak, as well as on his journeys to Birka where he also established a church. It was via Hedeby that the German missionary Ansgar visited Birka in Sweden in 829 and established the first known Christian congregation in Scandinavia. Other historical texts attest to the central role of Hedeby with respect to trade in Northern Europe: in around 890, an Old English text tells of the journeys of the Norwegian trader Ottar, who travelled from the trading place of Skiringssal, near the Gokstad mound in Vestfold, to Hedeby. The fact that Christian and heathen beliefs appeared together in Hedeby is additionally proven by grave goods with clearly Christian symbols, such as a wooden coffin fitted with an iron cross. While archaeological research has answered many questions relating to the development of Hedeby, the exact dating of the Hill Fort, its function and its association with Hedeby remain uncertain. The Hill Fort is situated on a moraine ridge north of the Semicircular Wall. As early as the late ninth century, the settlement in Hedeby appeared to change. This is manifested in a more regular pattern of settlement, a more uniform expansion of infrastructure, better quality and more advanced house constructions and the further extension of the landing stages. In addition, areas further to the rear were developed for settlement purposes. Workshops were founded there, mainly established in small sunken-floored buildings. The settlement also began now to encroach onto parts of the cemetery in the southwest of Hedeby. From the end of the ninth century, the landing stages were built successively further out into the water due to the silting-up of the harbour basin and the simultaneous increase in the size of the cargo vessels. At the same time, they were extended into large platforms, presumably running along the entire length of the shoreline, which also served as a market place. The core area of the harbour, enclosed by both ends of the Semicircular Wall, was surrounded by a port palisade which possibly marked a separate jurisdiction. From the ninth century, other Viking-Age settlements were also established near Hedeby, in Schuby and west Kosel. Finds of tools, raw materials and semifinished and finished goods show that these places also produced crafts and took part in foreign trading via Hedeby rather than making agricultural products. Due to its burgeoning economic significance and its border location, political leadership in Hedeby was at times contested by Danish and East

Frankish rulers. The successful military campaign by the East Frankish king Henry I against Hedeby and the Danevirke in 934 does not, however, appear to have led to lasting East Frankish supremacy. The names of the defeated King Gnupa and his son Sigtrygg are known from two rune stones outside Hedeby. They probably lost their kingdom shortly afterwards to Gorm the Old, the founder of the Jelling dynasty. Around this time in the middle of the tenth century, Hedeby was fortified with the building of the Semicircular Wall. At this time, the Semicircular Wall evidently enclosed what was then the furthest reaches of the settlement and had two gates. The ramparts were built in several stages. Also, in the tenth century, minting resumed, with thin silver coins again based on denarii being made in Dorestad under Charlemagne. Through the building of the Connection Wall after 968, Hedeby became incorporated into the defensive system of the Danevirke for the first time. This demonstrates a new strategy by the Danish kings regarding the relationship between the emporium and the border fortifications; one underlined by the construction of the Kovirke only about a decade later. Apparently Hedeby was not supposed to be situated south of the Danevirke line any more – be it for protective reasons or because of the legal implications. According to Adam of Bremen, Thietmar of Merseburg and other contemporary writers, the East Frankish Emperor Otto II launched a crusade against the Danes in 974, conquering the Danevirke in the process. There are reports that Otto II only conquered King Harald Bluetooth of the Jelling dynasty with great difficulty, then built a fortress near Hedeby before advancing to the Limfjord in North Jutland. Thus, from 934 on, the Kingdom of the East Franks strengthened its influence to the north and directly ruled the border lands, at least for some time. It is during this phase of increased East Frankish influence that the bishopric of Hedeby was founded in 948, along with Ribe and Aarhus, as suffragans of the archbishopric of Bremen. Svend Tveskæg, the son of Harald Bluetooth (d. 987), was, however, able to recapture Hedeby in a joint Slavic and Danish revolt against East Frankish rule in 983. Following liberation from East Frankish rule soon after 983 the Kovirke section was built south of the existing ramparts. This resulted in the shortening of the defensive line and meant that Hedeby was no longer situated in the forefront of the Danevirke but was now located behind the fortified boundary of the Danish Kingdom. The straight, uniform design of the Kovirke is an outstanding technological achievement, and the ramparts differ clearly from previous stages. Given the structural and chronological analogies to the contemporary Trelleborg fortresses in Jutland and on the Danish isles, the building of the Kovirke is also likely to have been carried out on the orders of King Harald Bluetooth. During the tenth century, the settlements around Hedeby continued to grow in density, as can be seen from the many impressive weapon and equestrian burials around the Schlei, for example in Thumbby-Bienebek. These graves, and richly equipped settlement sites such as that near Füsing, are interpreted as indicators of elites or a royal entourage (Eisenschmidt and Arents, 2010). Five rune stones from the tenth and eleventh centuries were found near Hedeby. As written sources, they are an important addition to the rich archaeological finds from Hedeby. With their comparatively long texts, the stones provide the most detailed contemporary information on individual

personages from around Hedeby. The original stones are today all in Hedeby Viking Museum and Gottorf Castle, with copies replacing them at their presumed locations in the buffer zone. The inscriptions are in Viking-Age runic writing and are written in Old Norse. The rune stones from Hedeby are the southernmost in Scandinavia, where there are still more than 3,000 existing rune stones. Those found at Hedeby are memorials to fallen warriors who were in close contact with the town's royal rulers. It was the mention of the place name Hedeby which led to the settlement being identified in the nineteenth century. Today, the stones are mostly named after the names inscribed upon them: the Erik stone, the Skarthi stone, the big Sigtrygg stone, the small Sigtrygg stone and the Schleswig Cathedral stone. Finally, in 1025 or 1035, the Kingdom of the East Franks, or now of Germany (later known as the Holy Roman Empire) formally gave up the area between the Eider and the Schlei on Henry III's engagement to the daughter of the Danish King Canute the Great. The area to the south of the Danevirke leading up to the Eider once again gained prominence due to the border jarldom of Schleswig, in the Danish kingdom. This area with a special legal status within the Kingdom of Denmark, comparable to a march (also a kind of borderland, in other mediaeval European kingdoms) later developed into the Duchy of Schleswig (also known as Sleswick). Archaeological evidence for the settlement in Hedeby in the eleventh century is elusive. However, it is certain that the place was occupied until the middle of the century. The port underwent its final extension in the early eleventh century. In the middle of the century, the town suffered destruction on several occasions. Political and ecclesiastical meetings at the highest level are, however, evidence of the undiminished significance of Hedeby at this time. Sporadic settlement activities in areas more distant from Hedeby Noor within the Semicircular Wall have been demonstrated until the end of the eleventh century. The emporium of Hedeby was abandoned in the eleventh century after it was destroyed twice within a short time. Conquests by Norwegians and Slavs are recorded historically in 1050 and 1066. Later accounts by Snorri Sturluson, from the twelfth century, connect the Norwegian King Harald Hardrada with the destruction of Hedeby in around 1050. Harald Hardrada (1045-66) is often regarded as "the last Viking king" of Scandinavia. He was defeated and killed by the English King Harold Godwinson at Stamford Bridge, in his attempt to invade England in 1066. However, several historic events still mark the importance of the town. Here, Danish kings met several times with archbishops of Hamburg and Bremen in 1042 und 1052/53. Furthermore a synod of bishops was planned by archbishop Adalbert in 1063 which never took place. In the late eleventh century, the medieval settlement of Schleswig emerged on the northern shore of the Schlei. Hedeby's function for trading and transshipment was taken over by Schleswig, which also provided more favourable conditions for the larger ships of the time. Notably, its name was derived from the Frankish, German and Saxon names for Hedeby Sliesthorp/Sliaswich. Schleswig was to maintain and expand the outstanding functional significance of Hedeby as a transshipment centre between the North Sea and the Baltic for a further 200 years before this role was taken over by the Hanseatic town of Lübeck. During this period, only few rural settlements developed around Hedeby and

Schleswig, such as those known from pit houses near Brekendorf and longhouses from the eleventh and twelfth centuries near Tüdal by the middle reaches of the Treene. In Hollingstedt, however, there is definite evidence in the twelfth century of a trading station on the Treene which benefited greatly from the land connection to Schleswig. Under the Danish king Valdemar I and his son Valdemar II, the border jarldom becomes the Duchy of Schleswig, initially passed down to the king's second son where possible over several generations. Valdemar I did not obtain the Danish royal crown until 1157, after years of civil war; during the first years of his reign he also had to battle stiff resistance within Denmark. At the same time, he ran military campaigns and crusades against the Slavic Obotrite tribe. From 1162 to 1181, Valdemar was also forced several times to give in to German feudal lords. As a reaction to such political and military challenges, Valdemar I had the front of the Main Wall reinforced with a wall of brick, presumably soon after 1162. At the time, bricks were a novelty in Northern Europe, and their use on the Danevirke can thus be seen as an expression of great political and military power. The significance of the wall in terms of power politics is made especially clear by two inscriptions on Valdemar I's grave and the earliest histories of the Danes, written in the same period by Saxo Grammaticus and Svend Aggesen. Valdemar's Wall is the largest and the oldest secular brick structure in Northern Europe. Valdemar's successor, Canute, was the first to refuse to give an oath of fealty to the German rulers. Valdemar II, who succeeded Canute, followed a policy of expansion towards Holstein and into the Slavic areas along the Baltic Sea coast. A Golden Bull issued by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1214 confirmed his conquests. However, an attempt to extend his realm to Holstein failed when he was defeated at Bornhöved south of Kiel in Holstein in 1227. Under Valdemar II, the Danevirke played an even more important role as part of his expansion policy; it was probably still maintained at this time and only abandoned entirely after his death. The Danevirke eventually lost its meaning in the course of the Middle Ages.

---