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Collected Information for teachers

Topic: Overcoming Borders

The Heritage Site, and especially the Danevirke, contains the issue of a border complex.
Hedeby facilitated exchange between trading networks spanning the European continent, and – in conjunction with the Danevirke – controlled trading routes, the economy and the territory at the crossroads between the emerging Danish kingdom and the kingdoms and peoples of mainland Europe. The archaeological evidence highlights the significance of Hedeby and the Danevirke as an example of an urban trading centre connected with a large-scale defensive system in a border complex at the core of major trading routes over sea and land from the 8th to 11th centuries. Features of the natural landscape and man-made structures were combined intentionally to form a border complex at a natural bottleneck in the Viking Age between the eighth and eleventh centuries.

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 Europe between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD. 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 defensive system of the Danevirke and the trading centre of Hedeby consists of a spatially linked complex of earthworks, walls and ditches, settlements, grave fields and a harbour across the Schleswig Isthmus on the Jutland Peninsula in Northern Europe from the first and early second millennia AD. Features of the natural landscape and man-made structures were combined intentionally to form a border landscape at a natural bottleneck in the Viking-Age between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD. Here, at the Schleswig Isthmus, the singular geographic situation created a strategic link between Scandinavia, the European mainland, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea.

A Baltic Sea inlet, rivers and extensive boggy lowlands constricted the north-south passage across the peninsula while, at the same time, providing the shortest and safest route between the seas across a narrow land bridge. Closely tied to the isthmus situation, Scandinavian, Slavonic, Frisian, Saxon and Frankish peoples and kingdoms met in this important borderland. The Danish king Godfred – the reported founder of Hedeby – was the same king who plundered the Frisian coast and probably also the Carolingian emporium of Dorestad with an alleged number of 200 ships in 810. These actions illustrate the deliberate creation of a trading centre strategically

located on an isthmus in order to take control of the long-distance trade networks in Northern Europe, thereby greatly increasing revenues and political power. The key role of Hedeby in long-distance trade is reflected by the formidable quantities of valuable import items from all over Europe and beyond.

Hedeby and the Danevirke functioned as demarcations, fortifications and displays of power, and as a means of controlling exchange, trading routes, the economy and the territory at the crossroads between the emerging Danish kingdoms and the kingdoms and peoples of mainland Europe. Ramparts and other defences are preserved from more than six centuries, including wooden structures, stone and brick (then novel building materials), all of which were effectively combined with natural obstacles. Exceptional archaeological remains of the urban settlement, the harbour and the cemeteries have survived in Hedeby, testifying to different cultural traditions from the eighth to eleventh centuries. The archaeological evidence highlights the significance of Hedeby and the Danevirke as an outstanding example of a landscape in a borderland embodying territorial control and political and economic might.

Modern borders between nation states have mainly either developed over centuries through warfare and political negotiation or have been imposed by foreign regimes. Today, we usually perceive borders by their institutionalised lines and clear demarcations, such as the borders between European states in the twentieth century or, even more clearly, the fence on the US-Mexican border, the Berlin Wall or the military demarcation line between North and South Korea. Modern borders delineate the territorial and political boundaries of a state more or less precisely and permanently. But political borders cannot be reduced to demarcation. Borders have a strong societal dimension that impacts on the regions in the vicinity of a border and their inhabitants. Communities and social practices on either side of a border have been shaped by the political and social processes which often shifted and eventually established the border, and which have thus created distinct borderlands between modern nations. While there is a vast amount of literature on the analysis of borderlands and political boundaries in modern times, comparatively little has been said about historic and archaeological borderlands. One exception is, for example, research on the Roman Limes and its role as a frontier between the Roman Empire and its neighbors of nomadic cultures and ’barbarians’. Archaeological evidence clearly shows that Germanic or Celtic material culture can be found on the Roman side of the Limes, while Roman artefacts, technology and even settlements can be found in the "Barbaricum". The Roman Limes and the Great Wall were in fact a frontier or borderland based on the extremely different cultural and territorial practices on either side of the borders, as often historically found in connection with empires. During most periods of history, borders were not fixed lines but subject to dynamic interaction and negotiation between political entities, people and the landscape. Certain landscape conditions or fortifications, such as rivers, embankments, palisades or stone walls, were used as boundaries.

They served manifold functions: to demarcate different judicial areas or realms, symbolise power, control trade routes, dominate territories or act as hubs of exchange and trade. Borders in prehistory, Antiquity and the Middle Ages were less political borderlines and more borderlands or frontiers describing narrower or broader zones which were more or less vaguely defined, open for cultural, social and economic exchange, and which comprised natural and/or artificial boundaries, both linear and non-linear. In the context of this nomination a border landscape is understood as an area between territories – in a borderland – where territorial control, power politics, socio-cultural exchange, and separation are manifested in physical form. Thus, border landscapes must be seen as a type of cultural landscape representing the "combined works of nature and of man" as designated in Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention.

Border landscapes are part of a borderland which includes the broader context of a border and its geographical setting. This wider context includes the site's topography, geomorphology and natural features; its built environment, both contemporary and historic, including archaeological layers; its land use patterns and spatial organisation; its visual relationships; and all other elements of the structure of a borderland. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes, and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity, all of which establish the basic role of the border as a manifestation of human territorial behaviour.

The Archaeological Border Landscape of Hedeby and the Danevirke furthers the understanding of the different notions of historic and contemporary border landscapes and the imprint of human territorial activities on the environment. Moreover, the archaeological border landscape exemplifies the development of territory in the Middle Ages and modern times and therefore the motion of the border region between Denmark, the Frankish Empire and its successors and neighbours.