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**BORDERS, BARRIERS, AND  
ETHNOGENESIS**

Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Edited by

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BREPOLS

developments, while of fundamental significance, do not seem to have had a direct influence on the decision-making process leading to the construction of strongholds.

The circular ringforts emerged as a Central European phenomenon of the early Middle Ages, first tested against Viking raids into coastal areas (Netherlands and Frisia),<sup>29</sup> then against Slavic and Magyar attacks across the Elbe. This type of stronghold was later adopted by Vikings (e.g. the so-called Trelleborg forts in Denmark<sup>30</sup>) and Slavs. By the late 800s, the geographic distribution of circular strongholds had reached the river Oder. Shortly before or after 900, it crossed the Vistula.

From the point of view of fortification methods, the eastern frontiers first of the Carolingian and later of the Ottonian Empire were much more areas of cultural equalizing, compensation, and exchange than a shield of civilization against barbarians.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For the Netherlands, see R. Van Heeringen, P. A. Hendriks, and A. Mars, *Vroege-Middeleeuwse ringwalburgen in Zeeland* (Amersfoort, 1995). For Holstein, see Dirk Laggin, 'Die Stellerburg in Ditmarschen', *Hammaburg*, 9 (1989), 191–98. For Brittany, see Jean-Pierre Nicolardot, 'Éléments de datation du champ de Péran, Plédran (Côtes-du-Nord)', in *Bretagne, pays de Loire, Touraine, Poitou à l'époque mérovingienne: Actes de la VI<sup>e</sup> Journée Nationale de l'Association Française d'Archéologie Mérovingienne, Rennes, Juin 1984* (Paris, 1988), pp. 73–77.

<sup>30</sup> Else Roesdahl, 'Dendrochronology and the Viking Studies in Denmark, with a Note on the Beginning of the Viking Age', in *Developments around the Baltic Sea in the Viking Age: The Twelfth Viking Congress*, ed. by Björn Ambrosiani and Helen Clarke (Stockholm, 1994), pp. 106–16.

<sup>31</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Angela Ehrlich (Frankfurt am Main) for the computer-graphics drawing of Figures 2 and 3.

## The *Limes Saxoniae* as Part of the Eastern Borderlands of the Frankish and Ottonian-Salian Empire

MATTHIAS HARDT

Following the so-called Migration period and the first mention of the Slavs in East Central Europe, a new frontier region developed, which divided Europe into a Germanic and Romance West, on the one hand, and a Slavic and nomadic East, on the other. While in Antiquity the contrast had been between a civilized South on Mediterranean shores and a barbarian North beyond the rivers Rhine and Danube, the early medieval division of the European continent into a western Frankish-Saxon and an eastern Slavic area followed a line running from the Bay of Kiel in the North to the Bay of Trieste in the South. People speaking Germanic and Slavic languages intermingled in several settlement areas along this invisible line: between the Baltic Sea and the Elbe River (the focus of this essay); west of the Elbe in the regions of Lower Saxony and Sachsen-Anhalt known as the Hannoversches Wendland and the Altmark;<sup>1</sup> in the region to the south from Magdeburg; in Thuringia, west of the Saale River (Fig. 1); along the Upper Main River and west of the Regnitz River in Upper Franconia, as well as in the Böhmerwald, the mountain range separating Bavaria from Bohemia; in Upper and Lower Austria; in the Drava valley, as well as in the mountains of Austrian Carinthia and Slovenia.

The frontier emerged in several phases. Initially, there seems to have been large forested areas, swamps, and marshlands separating Saxons, Thuringians, Bavarians,

<sup>1</sup> Matthias Hardt, 'Das Hannoversche Wendland – eine Grenzregion im frühen und hohen Mittelalter', in *Beiträge zur Archäologie und Geschichte Nordostniedersachsens: Berndt Wachter zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Wolfgang Jürries (Lüchow, 1991), pp. 155–67; Matthias Hardt and Hans K. Schulze, 'Altmark und Wendland als deutsch-slawische Kontaktzone', in *Wendland und Altmark in historischer und sprachwissenschaftlicher Sicht*, ed. by Roderich Schmidt (Lüneburg, 1992), pp. 1–44.



Figure 1. Slavic peoples and marches between the Elbe, Saale, and Oder Rivers during the tenth century. Source: *Otto der Große, Magdeburg und Europa*, ed. by Matthias Puhle (Mainz, 2001), p. 66.

and Lombards from the Slavic groups to the east. Following the integration of the former into the Frankish kingdom, especially after the Saxon wars of 772–805<sup>2</sup> and Charlemagne's coronation as a Roman Emperor, a true frontier organization came into being in apparently close imitation of the Roman frontiers of Late Antiquity along the Rhine and the Danube.<sup>3</sup> While the Diedenhofen capitulary of 805 mentions a few places in the eastern borderlands of Saxony, Thuringia, and Bavaria, which served for the control of trade, especially with weapons, with the neighbouring Slavs and Avars,<sup>4</sup> in 806 Charlemagne for the first time ordered the building of forts on the banks of the rivers Elbe and Saale.<sup>5</sup> For a short while during the early 800s, the Empire was thus protected on the eastern border by a series of forts built along the main rivers, with at least two bridgeheads at Magdeburg, on the Elbe, and at Halle, on the Saale River.<sup>6</sup> The archaeological evidence suggests that the system remained in existence in the northern districts only during the life of Charlemagne and, possibly, the reign of his successor, Louis the Pious. By 850, for example, the Hühbeck fort in the Hannoversches Wendland, located across the Elbe from Lenzen, the tribal centre of the Slavic Linones, had been completely abandoned.<sup>7</sup>

The picture began to change shortly after Charlemagne's intervention in the region north of the Elbe River. First, the Emperor transferred in 804 the entire area between the Elbe and the Eider rivers to the Slavic tribe of the Obodrites, who had

<sup>2</sup> Lothar Dralle, 'Wilzen, Sachsen und Franken um das Jahr 800', in *Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter*, ed. by Helmut Beumann and Werner Schröder (Sigmaringen, 1978), pp. 205–28.

<sup>3</sup> Matthias Hardt, 'Hesse, Elbe, Saale and the Frontiers of the Carolingian Empire', in *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. by Walter Pohl, Ian Wood, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, 2001), pp. 224–32; and 'Prignitz und Hannoversches Wendland: Das Fürstentum der slawischen Linonen im frühen und hohen Mittelalter', in *Im Dienste der historischen Landeskunde: Beiträge zu Archäologie, Mittelalterforschung, Namenkunde und Museumsarbeit vornehmlich in Sachsen. Festgabe für Gerhard Billig zum 75. Geburtstag, dargebracht von Schülern und Kollegen*, ed. by Rainer Aurig, Reinhardt Butz, Ingolf Gräßler, and André Thieme (Beucha, 2002), pp. 96–98.

<sup>4</sup> Capitulary of Diedenhofen, in *MGH Legum II, Capitularia regum Francorum I*, ed. by Alfred Boretius (Hannover, 1883), p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Royal Frankish Annals*, ed. by Friedrich Kurze (Hannover, 1895; repr., 1950), MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:120.

<sup>6</sup> *Chronicle of Moissac* a. 806, ed. Georg H. Pertz (Hannover, 1826), MGH SS 1:308. See also Matthias Hardt, 'Linien und Säume, Zonen und Räume an der Ostgrenze des Reiches im frühen und hohen Mittelalter', in *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Vienna, 2000), pp. 42–45.

<sup>7</sup> The fort is mentioned for the last time in the *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 811, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:134. For the archaeology of Hühbeck, see Berndt Wachter, 'Das Hühbeck-Kastell bei Vietze', in *Hannoversches Wendland*, ed. by Berndt Wachter (Stuttgart, 1986), pp. 202–03. See also Hardt, 'Das Hannoversche Wendland', pp. 156–57.

been loyal allies of the Franks during the Saxon wars.<sup>8</sup> He also moved Saxon inhabitants of that area into the heartland of his Empire.<sup>9</sup> But these aggressive policies produced no long-term peace in the region. Five years later, the Emperor made the decision to build a fort at Esesfeld, in response to Danish raids from across the Elbe.<sup>10</sup> In 810, he summoned the King of the Obodrites in Verden, on the Aller River, to discuss the terms of the old alliance.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that an important item of the agenda was the status of the frontier separating the Saxon from the Slavic lands.<sup>12</sup> If so, whatever agreement was eventually reached, it must have been short-lived. The frontier was under attack in 817, during the anti-Frankish rebellion of Sclaomir, 'king of the Obodrites', who allied himself with the sons of the Danish king Göttrik.<sup>13</sup> Sclaomir was captured two years later by the 'prefects' of the *limes Saxonicus* and by the Emperor's *legati* who led a quick military intervention in the region north of the river Elbe. He was consequently brought to Aachen.<sup>14</sup> Nothing else is known about either the 'prefects' or their place of residence, but a few years later the *Royal Frankish Annals* report the fortification of yet another site called Delbende.<sup>15</sup> The exact location of that site in the region north of the Elbe River is still a

<sup>8</sup> Raimund Ernst, *Die Nordwestslaven und das fränkische Reich* (Berlin, 1976), pp. 154–74.

<sup>9</sup> *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 804, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:118.

<sup>10</sup> *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 809, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:129. For the topography and the strategic location of Esesfeld, see Herbert Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte: Vom Anfang der Völkerwanderungszeit bis zum Ende der Wikingerzeit* (Neumünster, 1957), pp. 73, 137, and 144. For Charlemagne's policies against the northern neighbours of the Empire, see Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 141–42 and 145–46; and 'Karl der Große und der Norden', in *Karl der Große: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, vol. 1, ed. by Helmut Beumann (Düsseldorf, 1965), pp. 699–707.

<sup>11</sup> *Annals of St Amandus* a. 810, ed. by Georg H. Pertz (Hannover, 1826), MGH SS 1:14.

<sup>12</sup> For the negotiations in Verden, see Arno Jenkis, 'Die Eingliederung "Nordalbingiens" in das Frankenreich', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 79 (1955), 81–104; Wolfgang Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte des Landes Lauenburg im Mittelalter* (Neumünster, 1960), p. 162; Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, p. 141; Elisabeth Noll, 'Der Limes Saxoniae und seine Burgwallanlagen aus archäologischer Sicht', in *Krieg und Frieden im Herzogtum Lauenburg und in seinen Nachbarterritorien vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des Kalten Krieges*, ed. by Eckardt Opitz (Bochum, 2000), p. 16. According to Karl Kersten, *Vorgeschichte des Kreises Herzogtum Lauenburg* (Neumünster, 1951), p. 117, the beginnings of the *limes Saxoniae* may be dated to the years between 815 and 817.

<sup>13</sup> Bernhard Friedmann, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des abodritischen Fürstentums bis zum Ende des 10. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1986), p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 819, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:149, English translation by Bernhard Walter Scholz and Barbara Rogers (Ann Arbor, 1970), p. 105. See also Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 137 and 141–42.

<sup>15</sup> *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 822, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:158. See Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, p. 142.

matter of dispute,<sup>16</sup> but it seems likely that the fort was built not far from the region in which the *limes Saxonicus* would reportedly emerge two hundred years later.

However, according to the eleventh-century chronicle of Adam of Bremen, the beginnings of the *limes Saxonicus* go back to the ninth-century construction of the fortified frontier along the Elbe and Saale rivers. Adam claims to have seen a charter of Charlemagne giving a description of the *limes*:

We have found a description of the Saxon frontier (*limes Saxonicus*) on the other side of the Elbe River, as designed by Charlemagne and other emperors. It ran as follows. From the eastern banks of the river it went to the little river called Mescenreiza by the Slavs. At its upper course, the *limes* turns away from that river and runs through the Delvenau forest to the Delvenau River. From there it proceeds to the Hornbek Mill River and to the springs of the Bille River. From there it goes on to the stone of Ludwine, to some marked birch trees and to the river Barnitz. From there it turns to the river Swamp- or Southern-Beste and reaches up to the Trave forest, then through that forest upward to the Blunkerbach lowlands. Then the *limes* proceeds to the woods at the fields' rim and then in direct way upward to the ford through the rivulet at the field rims. At that place Burwido has won a single combat against a Slavonic fighter who was then killed by him. There was a commemorative stone set in that place for the event. From that rivulet, the *limes* goes down to the Colse Lake, from there to the eastern Schwentinefeld and to the Schwentine River. Along that river the frontier goes on to the Scythian Gulf and into the Baltic Sea.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Hermann Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 56 (1927), 126–28; Kersten, *Vorgeschichte*, pp. 117–19; Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 143–44. See also Karl-Wilhelm Struve, 'Der Raum zwischen Elbe und Trave in slawischer Zeit', in *Kreis Herzogtum Lauenburg*, ed. by Fritz Rudolf Averdieck, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 118–19; Torsten Kempke, 'Bemerkungen zur Delvenau-Stecknitz Route im frühen Mittelalter', in *Archäologischer Befund und historische Deutung: Festschrift für Wolfgang Hübener*, ed. by Hartwig Lüdtko (Neumünster, 1989), p. 183; Torsten Kempke, 'Archäologische Beiträge zur Grenze zwischen Sachsen und Slawen im 8. – 9. Jahrhundert', in *Studien zur Archäologie des Ostseeraumes: Von der Eisenzeit zum Mittelalter. Festschrift für Michael Müller-Wille*, ed. by Anke Wesse (Neumünster, 1998), p. 376; Noll, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', pp. 17–20 and 32; Arne Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde im Kreis Herzogtum Lauenburg* (Neumünster, 2002), pp. 197–200.

<sup>17</sup> Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* II 18, ed. by Bernhard Schmeidler (Hannover, 1917), pp. 73–74: 'Invenimus quoque limitem Saxoniae, quae trans Albiam est, prescriptum a Karolo et imperatoribus ceteris, ita se continentem, hoc est: Ab Albiae ripa orientali usque ad rivulum, quem Sclavi Mescenreiza vocant. À quo sursum limes currit per silvam Delvunder usque in fluvium Delvundam. Sicque pervenit in Horchenbici et Bilenispring. Inde ad Liudwinestein et Wispircon et Birznig progreditur. Tunc in Horbistenon vadit usque in Travena silvam, sursumque per ipsam in Bulilunkin. Mox in Agrimeshou, et recto ad vadum, qui dicitur Agrimeswidil, ascendit. Ubi et Burwido fecit duellum contra campionem Sclavorum, interfecitque eum; et lapis in eodem loco positus est in memoriam. Ab eadem igitur aqua sursum procurrens terminus in stagnum Colse vadit, sicque ad orientalem

The description of the *limes* makes it clear that Adam must have taken it from some royal charter, possibly one accompanying a donation or the foundation of a bishopric.<sup>18</sup> From the 1700s onward, Adam's description has been taken literally as the basis for the reconstruction of a fortified frontier north of the Elbe River. Apart from a few details, scholars have long agreed on the precise location of the place names mentioned in the text (Fig. 2).<sup>19</sup> Today, it seems clear that the charter Adam saw contained a description of a border, with a number of names of rivers, woods, and landmarks. River names served to structure visually the landscape as a borderland. After the Elbe,<sup>20</sup> the most important river mentioned in the charter is Mescenreiza, whose Slavic name may be translated as the 'land between two rivers'.<sup>21</sup> That land must have been next to the mouth of another river flowing into the Elbe that is mentioned in the charter, the Delvenau.<sup>22</sup> 'Horchebici' may be translated as the

campum venit Zuentifeld, usque in ipsum flumen Zuentinam. Per quem limes Saxoniae usque in pelagus Scythicum et mare, quod vocant orientale, delabitur.' My English translation of the text follows closely the German translation by Werner Trillmich, *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches* (Darmstadt, 1961), pp. 247 and 249.

<sup>18</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> For the reconstruction of the *limes Saxoniae*, see Walter Lammers, 'Germanen und Slawen in Nordalbingien', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 79 (1955), 17–80 with map A; Franz Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen" und das Problem des Limes Saxoniae', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 88 (1951), reprint in his *Beiträge zur Siedlungsgeschichte und historischen Landeskunde: Mecklenburg-Pommern-Niedersachsen*, ed. by Roderich Schmidt (Cologne, 1970), p. 263 pl. 84. See also Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 96–115 and 137–50; Carl Matthiessen, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 68 (1940), 43–57; Kersten, *Vorgeschichte*, pp. 115–16; Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', pp. 257–69; Jan-kuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 137–40; Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, pp. 156–61; Helmrich Ostertun, 'Der Limes Saxoniae zwischen Trave und Schwentine', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 92 (1967), 9–37; Struve, 'Der Raum zwischen Elbe und Trave', pp. 116–17; Werner Budesheim, 'Der "limes Saxoniae" nach der Quelle Adams von Bremen, insbesondere in seinem südlichen Abschnitt', in *Zur slawischen Besiedlung zwischen Elbe und Oder*, ed. by Werner Budesheim (Neumünster, 1994), pp. 28–43; Ulrich March, 'Die Wehrverfassung der Grafschaft Holstein', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 96 (1971), 15–18; Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, pp. 115, 117–20, 169–74 with map 19, 370 with map 24, and 375; Hardt, 'Linien und Säume', pp. 46–51; Michael Schmauder, 'Überlegungen zur östlichen Grenze des karolingischen Reiches', in *Grenze und Differenz*, ed. by Pohl and Reimitz, pp. 58–62.

<sup>20</sup> Antje Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen des Kreises Herzogtum Lauenburg und der Stadt Lübeck* (Neumünster, 1990), pp. 387–89.

<sup>21</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 97–98; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, p. 407.

<sup>22</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 98–99; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, pp. 384–85.

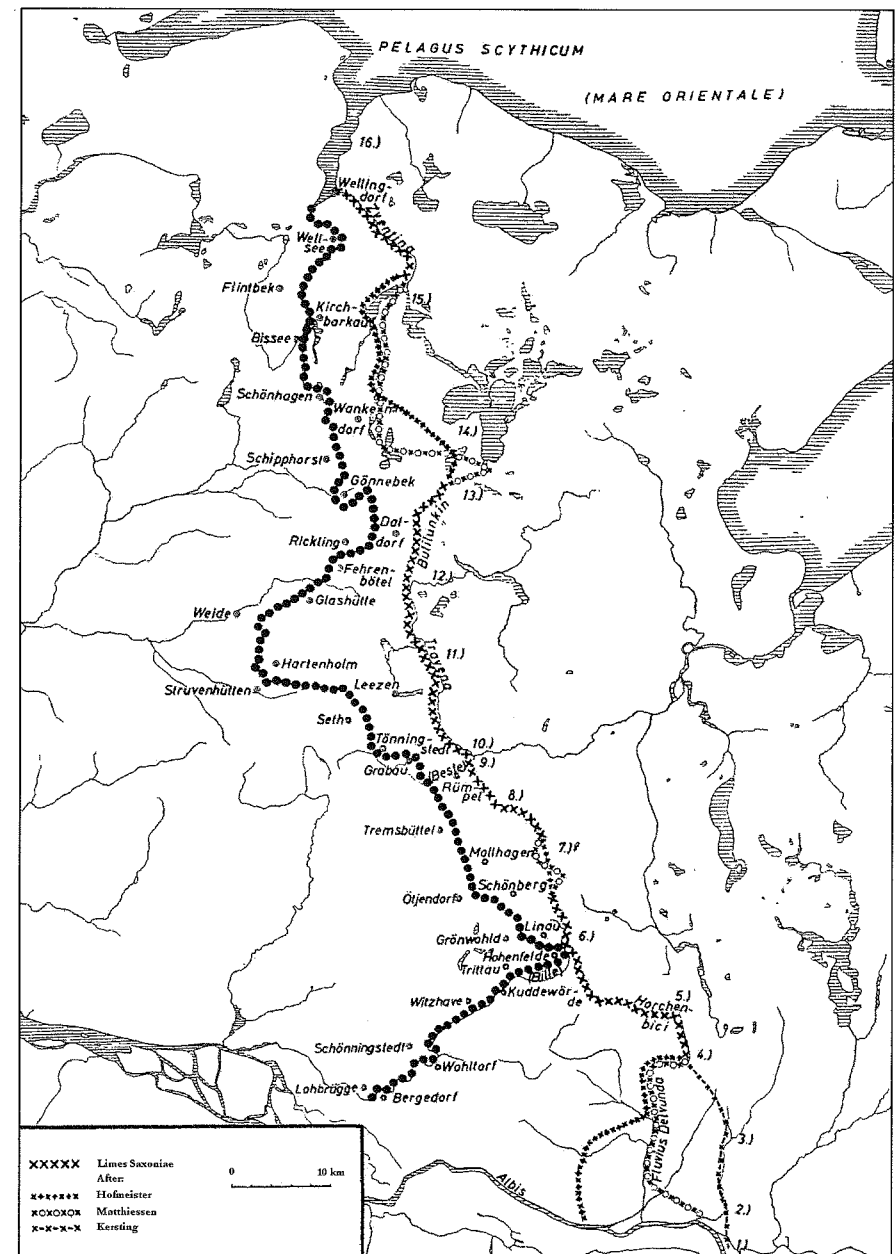


Figure 2. The *limes Saxoniae*.  
After Lammers, 'Germanen in Nordalbingien', map A.

Hornbek Mill River, which is a tributary of the Stecknitz River.<sup>23</sup> The 'Bilenispring' is obviously the source of the River Bille.<sup>24</sup> 'Liudwinestein' and 'Wispircon' may be interpreted as landmarks. The former was a stone set by or called after a person named Liudwin,<sup>25</sup> while 'Wispircon'<sup>26</sup> refers to a group of birch trees marked by special signs, perhaps crosses, in order to mark a border. Birznig is most likely the Barnitz River,<sup>27</sup> a tributary of the Beste, mentioned as 'Horbistenon' in the charter.<sup>28</sup> The Trave forest took its name from the river Trave,<sup>29</sup> which flows by Lübeck. 'Bulilunkin' may refer to the lowlands of the Blunkerbach near Blunk,<sup>30</sup> north of what later became the city of Bad Segeberg. According to Werner Trillmich, 'Agrimeshou' and 'Agrimeswidil' were the Old Saxon names<sup>31</sup> of an area along a little river now called Tensfelder Au.<sup>32</sup> More interesting is Adam's mention of a certain Burwido and of the duel which he had won against a Slavic warrior, perhaps over a border dispute. The stone commemorating that victory was certainly set to mark a frontier. Nothing else is known about this case and its participants, but it is not unlikely that the stone had an inscription, perhaps in runes, that mentioned the name Burwido. Lake Colse has a Slavic name, whose meaning suggests that it should be identified with the Stocksee<sup>33</sup> south of Lake Plön, near the modern city of Plön. The Zuentifeld is evidently named after the river Zuentina (Schwentine),<sup>34</sup> which flows into the Baltic Sea. Adam's rendition of Charlemagne's charter is thus a detailed description of the frontier between Saxons and Obodrites from the Elbe near Lauenburg to the Baltic Sea at the Bay of Kiel.

However, merely identifying the sites that Adam learned about from the Carolingian charter does not take into consideration the nature of the frontier region separating Slavs from Saxons during the early Middle Ages. Rivulets, lakes, stones,

<sup>23</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', p. 99; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, pp. 151–52 and 398.

<sup>24</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', p. 99; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, pp. 381–82.

<sup>25</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> Herrmann Hofmeister 'Wispircon im Limes Saxoniae (Sachsengrenze)', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 62 (1934), 311–19.

<sup>27</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', p. 100; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, pp. 378–79.

<sup>28</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 100–01; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, pp. 380–81.

<sup>29</sup> Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, pp. 427–29.

<sup>30</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 101–02 and 113.

<sup>31</sup> Trillmich, *Quellen*, p. 249.

<sup>32</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 102 and 113–14.

<sup>33</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', p. 103; Antje Schmitz, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen des Kreises Plön* (Neumünster, 1986), p. 217.

<sup>34</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 103–05; H. E. Hoff, 'Das Sventinefeld und der Limes Saxoniae', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 63 (1935), 357–68; Schmitz, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen*, pp. 242–44.

or specially marked trees were important for the description of settlement and property borders, and there is plenty of evidence for concerns with such landmarks in Carolingian and Ottonian charters.<sup>35</sup> Carolingian land surveying was in many ways a continuation of late antique agrimensural practices, but such practices had little, if any, application in the borderlands north of the Elbe River. The *limes Saxoniae* is mentioned as late as 1062 in a charter drawn for the Saxon duke Ordulf (Otto) to whom Emperor Henry IV planned to give the Ratzeburg castle. In the charter, Henry refers to the *limes* as distinct from his donation: 'castellum Razesburg [. . .] in proprium dedimus atque tradidimus salvo per omnia et intacto Saxonie limite'.<sup>36</sup> The wording of this document makes it clear that the *limes* was not a borderline as reconstructed with minute detail on the basis of Adam of Bremen's description. Moreover, that it was to be distinguished clearly from Henry's concession of the Ratzeburg castle suggests that the *limes Saxoniae* was not a line, but an area, namely a frontier district on which the Emperor intended to maintain his direct control and authority, regardless of who owned in fact the castle.

Fortifications on the *limes Saxoniae* have long been the object of archaeological research.<sup>37</sup> Such forts as Nütschauer Schanze on the Trave River or Sirksfelder Wallberg have been commonly viewed in relation to the frontier, the latter even as a Slavic stronghold designed to secure the Obodritic borderlands.<sup>38</sup> But as is often the

<sup>35</sup> Reinhard Bauer, 'Frühmittelalterliche Grenzbeschreibungen als Quelle für die Namenforschung', in *Frühmittelalterliche Grenzbeschreibung und Namenforschung*, ed. by Friedhelm Debus (Heidelberg, 1992), pp. 35–60. See also Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', pp. 260–62; Matthiessen, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', pp. 41–42; Karl Rübel, *Die Franken, ihr Eroberungs- und Siedlungssystem im deutschen Volkslande* (Bielefeld, 1904), pp. 102–04.

<sup>36</sup> *Die Urkunden Heinrichs IV., 1056–1076*, ed. by Dietrich von Gladiss (Hannover, 1941), no. 87, also published with German translation in Karl Jordan, 'Ratzeburg im politischen Kräftespiel in Nordelbingen', in *Ratzeburg – 900 Jahre, 1062–1962*, ed. by Kurt Langenheim and Wilhelm Prillwitz (Ratzeburg, 1962), pp. 34–35. See Erwin Aßmann, 'Salvo Saxoniae limite: Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Limes Saxoniae', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 77 (1953), 195–99; Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', pp. 270–71; Jordan, 'Ratzeburg im politischen Kräftespiel', pp. 25–28.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Schuchhardt, 'Ausgrabungen am Limes Saxoniae', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 15 (1913), 1–26; Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 115–37; Kersten, *Vorgeschichte*, pp. 117–22; Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 140 and 142–44; Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, p. 163; Ostertun, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', pp. 31–33; Karl-Wilhelm Struve, 'Archäologische Ergebnisse zur Frage der Burgenorganisation bei den Sachsen und Slawen in Holstein', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 106 (1970), 48; Schmauder, 'Überlegungen zur östlichen Grenze', pp. 60–61; Noll, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', pp. 25–34; Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, pp. 21–26, 30–31, 117–20, 158, and 172–73.

<sup>38</sup> Hofmeister, 'Limes Saxoniae', pp. 122–23 and 127; Kersten, *Vorgeschichte*, pp. 112–14, 117, and 121; Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 142–44; and 'Die Nütschauer Schanze', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, 79 (1955), 257–66; Walter

case in the contact regions between Germanic and Slavic populations, there is very little information about power or administrative structures that can be gleaned from the analysis of archaeological material, especially pottery.<sup>39</sup> It remains unclear who exactly had control over these forts at any given time. The Slavic settlement area extended over the *limes* along the Delvenau River, up to the Bille River,<sup>40</sup> but it is not known whether that expansion pre- or post-dates the first description of the *limes Saxoniae*. The ninth- to twelfth-century history of the settlement pattern in the region between the Elbe River and the Baltic Sea is one of continuous change,<sup>41</sup> and it is not altogether impossible that the border stones mentioned by Adam of Bremen had been erected in commemoration of violent conflicts between Saxons and Slavs.<sup>42</sup>

A number of place names in the region described by Adam allow a somewhat more detailed insight into the nature of the *limes Saxoniae*. Franz Engel has already pointed to the significance of the Mannhagen place names to be found not only north of the Elbe River, but all over north-eastern Germany, especially in Mecklenburg and Pomerania (Fig. 3).<sup>43</sup> According to Engel, the limits of the Slavic settlement-areas were protected by man-made barriers planted in neighbouring woods. At a height of about 2 m from the ground, all trees were cut off and tree-tops turned into hedges and palisades that, added to already existing thorny bushes, made the area impenetrable. Passage through the barrier was permitted only at specific points.<sup>44</sup> Such barriers are referred to in medieval sources as *indagine*,<sup>45</sup> and a variety of place names of Slavic origin seem to support Engel's interpretation. Indeed, such

Lammers, *Das Hochmittelalter bis zur Schlacht von Bornhöved* (Neumünster, 1981), p. 145; Noll, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', p. 32; Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, p. 118.

<sup>39</sup> Noll, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', pp. 20–25 and 28.

<sup>40</sup> Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, pp. 119 and 167.

<sup>41</sup> Lammers, *Das Hochmittelalter*, pp. 144–50; Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, pp. 162–63 and 348–49; Jordan, 'Ratzeburg im politischen Kräftefeld', pp. 27–28.

<sup>42</sup> Erich Hoffmann, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte der Obodriten zur Zeit der Nakoniden', in *Zwischen Christianisierung und Europäisierung: Beiträge zur Geschichte Osteuropas in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Festschrift für Peter Nitsche zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. by Eckhard Hübner, Ekkehard Klug, and Jan Kusber (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 22–25.

<sup>43</sup> Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', and 'Mannhagen als Landesgrenzen im nordostdeutschen Kolonisationsgebiet', *Baltische Studien*, 44 (1957), 27–48.

<sup>44</sup> Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', pp. 250–53; and 'Grenzwälder und slawische Burgwardbezirke in Nordmecklenburg: Über die Methoden ihrer Rekonstruktion', in *Siedlung und Verfassung der Slawen zwischen Elbe, Saale und Oder*, ed. by Herbert Ludat (Gießen, 1960), pp. 125–40. See also Matthias Hardt, 'Ödland und Ödmark', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer, vol. XXI (Berlin, 2002), p. 582. For the distribution of forested lands in the region of the *limes Saxoniae*, see Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, pp. 348–49; Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, pp. 126–29, 147–49, 151–53, and 158.

<sup>45</sup> Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', pp. 242–43.

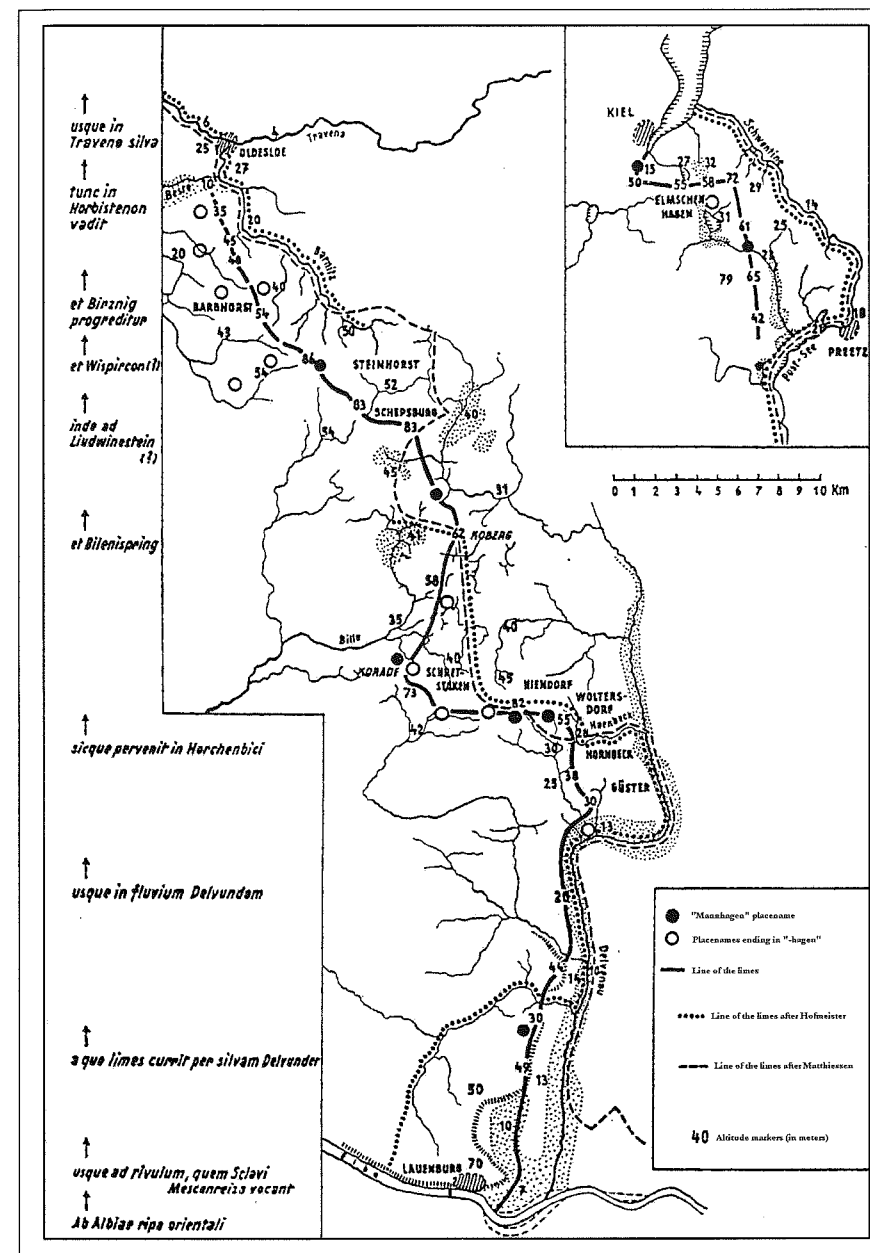


Figure 3. *Limes Saxoniae* according to Adam of Bremen's description. After Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', p. 263, fig. 84.

toponyms as Ossek, Presieka, or Zasek may refer to clearings of the particular kind described above. Given their distribution within the network of roads and passageways in the region, it seems probable that such place names indicate the checkpoints where traffic and trade were monitored and regulated.<sup>46</sup> One Mannhagen place name<sup>47</sup> is located west of the Slavic stronghold at Hammerburg<sup>48</sup> that controlled traffic on the early medieval road linking Hamburg — the successor of the Esesfeld fort<sup>49</sup> — to Ratzeburg, the major centre of the Polabian Slavs.<sup>50</sup> The same road<sup>51</sup> running across the western region of the *limes* could have been controlled from the Sirksfelder Wallberg stronghold.<sup>52</sup> The place name 'Witzeeze' north of modern Lauenburg may also be interpreted as an indication of an earlier element of the *limes Saxoniae*.<sup>53</sup>

Elsewhere in East Central Europe, but especially in Bohemia and Silesia,<sup>54</sup> barriers were in existence in places still called Presieka. More than written sources, interdisciplinary historical and onomastic research has greatly contributed to the understanding of the Saxon-Slavic relations in other regions than that north of the Elbe River. Jan Lesny demonstrated that a borderland of a similar nature existed in the

<sup>46</sup> Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', p. 249; Aurelia Dickers and Matthias Hardt, 'Deutsch-Ossig im Tal der Lausitzer Neiße: Bemerkungen zu den Ausgrabungen in einer Dorfkirche südlich von Görlitz', *Arbeits- und Forschungsberichte zur sächsischen Bodendenkmalpflege*, 40 (1998), 191 and 197.

<sup>47</sup> Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', p. 257; Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, p. 223.

<sup>48</sup> Hammerburg is on the Stecknitz River and may have been easily accessed by boat. The site has been dated to the early ninth century by means of a cross-shaped belt mount of the Blatnica type. It is therefore possible that Hammerburg served as a port of trade in the immediate vicinity of the *limes Saxoniae*. See Kersten, *Vorgeschichte*, pp. 122–23, 127, 129–30, and 248; Kempke, 'Bemerkungen zur Delvenau-Stecknitz Route', pp. 178–82; Noll, 'Der Limes Saxoniae', pp. 30–31; Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, pp. 118, 139, 145, 173, 229–38 with map 28, 379 with map 34, and 385.

<sup>49</sup> Jankuhn, *Die Frühgeschichte*, pp. 144–46.

<sup>50</sup> Jordan, 'Ratzeburg im politischen Kräftefeld', pp. 144–46.

<sup>51</sup> Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, pp. 51–52, expressed doubts as to the medieval age of the road.

<sup>52</sup> See note 38 above. Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, pp. 52 and 163, was unsure about the association between the Sirksfelder Wallberg stronghold and the road between Hamburg and Ratzeburg.

<sup>53</sup> Schmitz, *Die Ortsnamen*, p. 319.

<sup>54</sup> Winfried Schich, 'Die "Grenze" im östlichen Mitteleuropa im hohen Mittelalter', *Siedlungsforschung: Archäologie-Geschichte-Geographie*, 9 (1991), 135–46; Walter Kuhn, 'Der Löwenberger Hag und die Besiedlung der schlesischen Grenzwälder', *Schlesien*, 8 (1963), 5–20; Hans-Joachim Karp, *Grenzen in Ostmitteleuropa während des Mittelalters: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Grenzlinie aus dem Grenzsaum* (Cologne, 1972), pp. 72–81; Hardt, 'Linien und Säume', p. 53.

Drawehn Hills (Fig. 4),<sup>55</sup> the west of a Polabian Slavic region — later to be known as the Hannoversches Wendland — adjacent to the Saxon lands around Lüneburg, the headquarters of Herrman Billung, the powerful Ottonian margrave in charge of the north-eastern borderlands. Just south of the point where Adam of Bremen places the southern end of the *limes Saxoniae*, Lesny's study revealed the existence of a string of place names of Slavic origin pointing to the existence of a forest barrier.

Similar conclusions could be drawn on the basis of the archaeological evidence from the Machnower Krummes Fenn settlement excavated in the 1970s by Adriaan von Müller. The dendrochronological analysis of wooden remains in the central Brandenburg region of Teltow (to the south-west from Berlin) showed a fortification date of c. 1200 (Fig. 5). At that time, the place was a checkpoint of a passageway through a densely forested area separating the Ascanian margraves of Brandenburg from the Wettinian duchy of Meißen, both engaged in aggressive territorial expansion. When the Wettinians were eventually expelled, the region was subject to a process of *melioratio terrae*, one result of which was the transformation of the old checkpoint into a small village. The village was abandoned some decades later, and its inhabitants seem to have moved a few kilometres away, to Zehlendorf, at the invitation of the Cistercian monks of Lehnin. The name of the village founded on the checkpoint site is unknown, but it is quite possible that its name was Mannhagen, Ossek, Zasek, or the like. As elsewhere, the collective memory could have preserved the original function of the checkpoint on the passageway through the woods.<sup>56</sup> This was certainly the case of many villages that appeared in the *limes* area and in the Drawehn Hills south of the river Elbe. Following the implementation in the second half of the twelfth century of territorial power on both sides of the former frontier, the vast forested lands considerably shrank due to systematic clearing efforts, as local Saxons and Slavs, together with incoming Western immigrants, began turning the *limes Saxoniae* borderlands into a predominantly agrarian landscape.<sup>57</sup> By the late 1200s, following the integration into the Empire of the Slavic principalities in Eastern and Central Germany, the lands on the eastern frontier of the Ottonian and Salian Empire had totally lost their function of frontier regions.<sup>58</sup> They were replaced

<sup>55</sup> Jan Lesny, 'Domniemane przedłużenie limesu saskiego w zachodnim Wendlandzie', in *Słowiańszczyzna polabska między Niemcami a Polska*, ed. by Jerzy Strzelczyk (Poznań, 1981), pp. 245–54; Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', pp. 274–78.

<sup>56</sup> Willy Bastian, 'Neue Forschungen zur slawischen Befestigung', in *Probleme des frühen Mittelalters in archäologischer und historischer Sicht*, ed. by H. A. Knorr (Berlin, 1966), pp. 141–54.

<sup>57</sup> Engel, 'Die mittelalterlichen "Mannhagen"', p. 271; Prange, *Siedlungsgeschichte*, pp. 353–54; Schmid-Hecklau, *Slawenzeitliche Funde*, p. 134.

<sup>58</sup> Hardt, 'Linien und Säume', pp. 54–56; Engel, 'Grenzwälder und slawische Burgwardbezirke'.



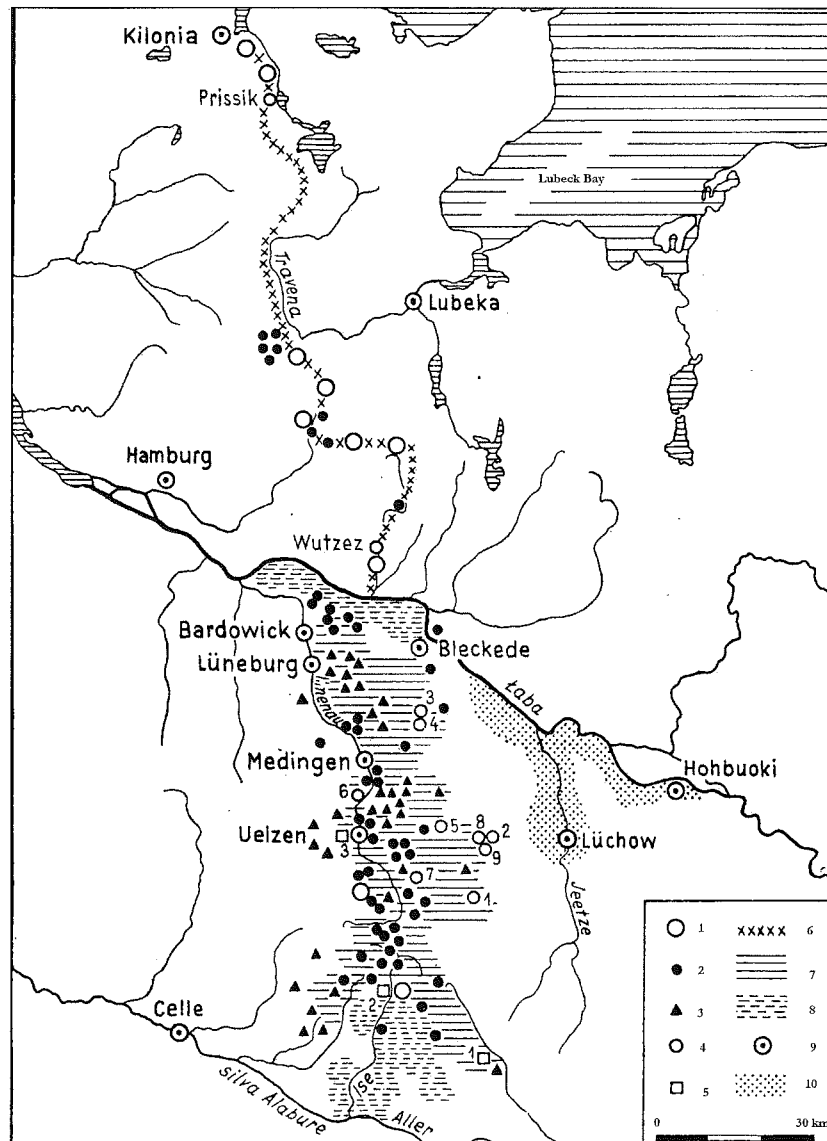


Figure 4. Place names and frontier north and south of the Elbe River: 1. 'Mannhagen' place names; 2. place names in '-hagen'; 3. place names in '-hege' (after Franz Engel, with additions); 4. 'Presieka' place names; 5. 'Brona' place names; 6. the line of the *limes Saxoniae* after Engel; 7. the region of the *limes* in the Wendish lands; 8. swamps (as in existence in the late 1800s); 9. important centres; 10. the Slavic settlement area in the Wendish lands. After Lesny, 'Domniemane przedlużenie', p. 246, fig. 1.

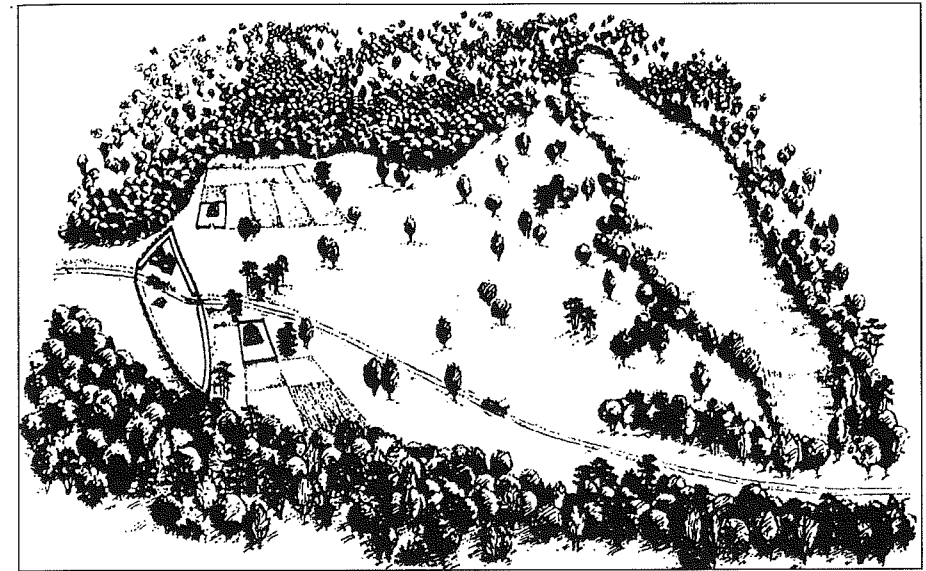


Figure 5. The Machnower Krummes Fenn stronghold. Source: A. von Müller, *Museumsdorf Düppel*, 5th edn (Berlin, 1991), p. 21.

by a new concept of frontier emerging in the Prussian lands beyond the Vistula River that came under the control of the Teutonic Knights.<sup>59</sup> The history of the *limes Saxoniae* is thus part of the long-term change of borderlands into frontiers<sup>60</sup> and of the process of *aedificatio terrae* in East Central Europe.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Karp, *Grenzen*.

<sup>60</sup> Hans F. Helmolt, 'Die Entwicklung der Grenzlinie aus dem Grenzsaume im alten Deutschland', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 17 (1896), 235–64.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Higounet, *Die deutsche Ostsiedlung im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1990); Christian Lübke, *Das östliche Europa* (Munich, 2004), pp. 276–89 and 354–64.