



A Lexicon of Medieval Nordic Law

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Appendix C:

Borders, Boundaries and Boundary Markers

Strict borders with boundary markers can be found as early as in the Viking Age or the Scandinavian early Middle Ages (after c. 1050; Brink 2008b, 95). Apart from certain rune-stones, the oldest written documentation of borders concerns the borders between Denmark and the Continent and Denmark and Norway. The border between Denmark and Sweden is first documented in 1343. Before that this border was referred to as a *landamaeri* (border area) marked by stones or using physical land elements, such as streams, roads, mountains or wetlands. Border markers between Sweden and Norway are mentioned in manuscripts of the Norwegian law of the realm (thirteenth century) and other late medieval sources.

The Nordic provincial laws contain a wealth of different words and expressions for borders, boundaries and boundary markers. These may regulate borders between administrative units, provinces, districts or villages, but most rules in the provincial laws regulate boundaries between different landowners, and there seems to be no strict definition for any of the different words. These borders and boundaries may follow streams, roads, significant cliffs or hills, or be marked with stakes, stones, or sometimes even fences, a significant tree or an imaginative boundary off the shore. The form of the boundary marker may be described. The stones may number three to five, one in the middle and the others around it. If the boundary marker contains fewer stones something (for example a bone) would be placed under the stone. What was important was that you should be able to distinguish a boundary marker from an ordinary heap of stones. Boundary markers between strip fields may even be a furrow (*for*, SdmL Jb4). To move or destroy a boundary marker was heavily punished. Refs: Brink 2008b, 95; Holm 2003, 135–237; KLNLM s.v.v. *gränsläggning*, *rigsgrænse*, *rågång*; Tollin 1999, 11–26, 51–63.

Borders between provinces, districts or villages or with the type of border as part of the name

fjórðungamót (ON) n.

‘Quarter boundary’, i.e. the border between quarters in Iceland (Grg ch. 99).

Refs: CV s.v. *fjórðungr*.

landamæri, **landamäre** (OSw), **landamæri** (OIce) n.

Boundary or border/border area between provinces. In OIce it refers to border land or border marker.

Refs: CV s.v. *land-*; KLNLM s.v.v. *gränsläggning*, *rigsgrænse*; Schlyter s.v. *landamaeri*.

landamærki (OSw), **landamerki**, **landsmerki** (OIce) n.

Border marker between provinces in VgL. In OIce sometimes between estates.

Refs: CV s.v. *land-*; Schlyter s.v. *landamaerki*.

mark (OSw, ODan), **mark**, **mörk** (ON) n.

The word form *mark* n. represents three homonyms: 1) *mark* ‘mark, sign; border mark, boundary line’, 2) *mark* ‘unit of weight and coinage’, 3) *mark* ‘forest, wood; outlying field, outland’. For homonyms 2 and 3 the ON standard form is *mörk*.

The oldest sense of the neuter *mark* and the feminine variant *mark* (the latter originally collective plural) was ‘border/boundary mark’. Since forests often functioned as borderland the word *mark* also came to mean ‘forest, wood’, and (by extension) ‘land, field’.

The sense ‘forest, wood’ seems to be the usual one in ON, whereas the sense ‘cultivated field’ seems to be peculiar to ODan. The sense ‘land’ is also known from OSw and ONorw.

The name of the nation, Denmark (*Danmark*), contains the word *mark* ‘dividing forest’.

See also Appendix B.

Refs: Bjorvand 1994, 79–80, 158–59; 2007, 722; Brink 2008b, *passim.*; CV s.v. *mörk*; Fritzner s.v. *mörk*, *mork*; KLNm s.v.v. *-mark*, *mark*, *utmark*, *rågång*. Schlyter s.v. *mark*.

markrá (ONorw) n.

Boundary line.

Refs: CV s.v. *markrá*

markreina (OFar, ONorw) n.

Boundary line.

Refs: CV s.v. *markreina*.

markarskæl (OSw), **markeskjal** (ODan) n.

Boundary between villages or provinces or, in Denmark, between fields.

Refs: KLNm s.v.v. *rågång*, *gränsläggning*; Schlyter s.v. *markar skael*; Tamm and Vogt 2016 s.v. *markeskjal*, 332.

skoghaskæl (OSw) n.

Woodland boundary.

Ref: Schlyter s.v. *skogha skæl*.

takmark (OIce) n.

Border, frontier.

Refs: CV s.v. *takmark*; Fritzner s.v. *takmark*; Schlyter s.v. *takmark*.

Boundaries between fields or meadows

engimark (OIce) n.

Boundary of a meadow.

Refs: CV s.v. *eng*.

for (OSw) n.

A furrow and also a boundary line between strip fields.

Refs: Schlyter s.v. *for*.

hagamark (OFar) n.

Pasture boundary/border area, possibly referring to ‘where different pasture lands meet’.

See also Appendix B.

Refs: Hertzberg s.v. *hagamark*.

vap (OSw) n., **vap stang** (OSw) n.

(OSw) *vap* refers to a boundary between strip fields or meadows (SdmL Jb 4). To mark it you walk (*vapá v.*) or ride (*riþa vapá*) in a straight line between stakes (*vap stang*) set at the boundary markers (VmL Jb 12:1, DL Jb 22:2).

Refs: Andersson 2010, 16–19, 49–50; Schlyter s.v. *vap*.

Boundary markers

engjamerki (OIce) n.

Meadowland boundary marker.

Refs: CV s.v. *eng*.

lýritti (ON) n.

Three boundary stones marking divisions between properties. According to Jó Lbb 3 (and MLL VI.3) these are also called *marksteinar*. Associated with the power of ‘veto’ (ON *lýrittr*). It has been suggested that these stones serve as

a type of witness and derive their name from the legal term for a three-man oath (ON *lýrittareiðr*), though at least one scholar has argued that the stones predate the oath (cf. Páll Vídalín 1854 s.v. *lýrittar*).

See also *lýrittr*, *mark*, *marksteinn*, *mærki*, *tiældrusten*.

Refs: Fritzner s.v. *lýrittarstein*, *lýritti*; Hertzberg s.v. *lýriti*, *lýrittarstein*; KLNLM s.v.v. *jordejendom*, *lýrittr*; Páll Vídalín 1854 s.v. *lýrittar*.

marksteinn (Olce) n.

Boundary stone.

Refs: CV s.v. *marksteinn*.

mærki (OSw), **merki** (ON) n.

A mark of any kind. When meaning boundary marker, it is often preceded by a qualification: *ra*- ‘stake’ (VgL), *rör*- ‘cairn of stones’ (MELL), *skóga*- ‘forest’ (ON), *skogs*- ‘forest’ (HL), *sokna*- ‘parish’ (YVgL), *sten*- ‘stone’ (HL), *træ*- ‘wooden’ (HL).

Refs: CV s.v. *merki*; Schlyter s.v. *mærki*.

merkibjörk (ON) n.

A birch tree which served as a boundary marker between land plots in Iceland.

Refs: CV s.v. *merkibjörk*; KLNLM s.v. *gränsläggning*; NGL V s.v. *merkibjörk*.

merkióss (ON) n.

The outlet of a river or lake serving as a boundary marker.

Refs: CV s.v. *merkióss*.

ra (OSw) n.

A stake used as a boundary marker and, when preceded by a qualification, the boundary itself: (*bolstapa*), ‘village’ (UL, VmL), (*delda*), ‘strip field’ (UL, VmL), (*färvægs* UL), ‘highway’, (*tompta* UL, SdmL, VmL), ‘plot’ or ‘village’. *Tompta ra* is supposed to have been a boundary marker in a corner of the boundary enclosing all village plots. Another word for this is *skötra* (‘corner’ + ‘boundary marker’, DL). The marker as a whole was a stake (*ra*) thrust into a small cairn of stones (*rör*).

Refs: KLNLM s.v. *gränsläggning*; Schlyter s.v.v. *tompta ra*, *ra*; Tollin 1999, 51–63.

rör (OSw), **hreysar** (ON) n.

Boundary marker consisting of a small cairn of stones. According to UL (Blb 18) the *rör* should consist of five stones, one in the middle and four around it. The text continues describing when a *rör* may contain fewer stones. The important idea was that you should be able to distinguish a *rör* from an ordinary heap of stones. The alliterative expression *ra oc rör* is generally used where an attribute to *ra* is not specified. The marker as a whole was a stake thrust into a small cairn of stones, the *rör*.

Refs: KLNLM s.v. *gränsläggning*; Tollin 1999, 51–63.

skæl (OSw), **skial** (ODan) n.

Boundary or boundary marker. Often preceded by a qualification, *bolstapaskæl* ‘farmland-’ (SdmL UL), *byaskæl* ‘village-’ (SdmL), *skoghaskæl* ‘forest-’ (SdmL), *tomptaskæl* ‘plot-’ (SdmL). Etymologically related to a verb originally meaning ‘to split’ realized as *skilia* in OSw. See *skæl* in the lexicon.

Refs: Gammeldansk ordbog (beta online) s.v. *skjal*; ONP (online) s.v. *skil*; Schlyter s.v. *skæl*.

sten ok ren (OSw) n.

‘Stones and edges’ i.e. boundary markers standing on the edges of a field (VgL).

tiældra (OSw) n.

Boundary marker. *Tiældrubrut*: to break up the stones of a boundary marker; *tiældru sten*: stone used to form a boundary marker. In YVgL Jb 22 it says that two stones should be dug into the ground with a third on top to form a boundary marker; *tiældrubyrð*: to move a boundary stone to another place.

Refs: Schlyter s.v. *tiældra*.

præstene (OSw) n.

A boundary marker consisting of only three stones.

Refs: Schlyter s.v. *præstene*.

Boundaries at sea

marbakki (ON) n.

Translated in Jó Llb 68 as ‘sea bank’. A note in the translation says that this is ‘the border between the shoal and deep water along the coast’ (cf. CV) and was relevant to ownership rights of fish, seals and porpoises on the shore. Hertzberg mentions it as well and equates the term with both ON *mararbakki* and *marreinsbakki*.

Refs: CV s.v. *marbakki*.

netlag (OIce) n.

‘Net-laying line’. See *rekamark* below.

Refs: CV s.v. *reki*. KLNm s.v. *reki*.

rekamark (OIce) n.

‘Drift boundary’. Iceland is surrounded by ocean currents (Gulf Stream, Polar Stream) so the rights to gather driftwood and other things washed ashore was important and strictly regulated in the laws. A landowner had parts in the shore and had the right to collect anything that drifted ashore on his part, but also between the shore and an imaginative ‘boundary’ (*rekamark*) out in the sea. He also had the right to all catch, with certain limitations, within another restricted area with a defined boundary (*netlög*).