CASTELLA MARIS BALTICI 6
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On September 18–22, 2001 the Symposium Castella Maris Baltic VI was held in Lithuania. This is already the 6th symposium for the researchers of the medieval castles. The first symposium was held in Turku, Finland in 1991, the second – in Nyköping, Sweden in 1993, the third - in Malbork, Poland in 1995, the fourth - in Estonia in 1997, and the fifth – in Denmark in 1999. The topic of the conference held in Lithuania was “Contacts and Genetically Dwellings in the Castle Buildings”. Over 40 scientists participated in the conference from Denmark, Belarus, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Great Britain, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. In the conference there were not only reports presented but also the most famous castles of Lithuania visited in Vilnius, Trakai, Kernavė, Kaunas and Klaipėda. The time of this conference coincided with the European Heritage Days “Defensive Fortifications in Lithuania”.

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Dr. Albinas Kunčevičius
Ist die Steger Burg eine dänische Holzburg?


Eine bis auf 3,5 Meter hohe Palisade von leicht abfallenden, aufrechtsstehenden Eichenplanken stabilisiert den Rand eines großen Wallgrabens zwischen der Burginsel und der Stadt, während ein anderer Typ von Konstruktion, eine Bohlenwand von waagerechten Eichenplanken befestigt in eingerammten Pfählen, die Burginsel umgibt. Es erhebt sich die Frage, ob die Verteidigungsanlagen aus einem Erdwall oder einer Backsteinmauer bestanden."
Stege castle is situated at Stege town on the island of Mon close to the border between the Danish inland sea and the Baltic Sea. Presumably Stege castle was a royal castle built by the king Erik Menvæd as one of his military centres set up to suppress revolts, which were all built in AD 1314 (Jaubert 1986). Stege castle though is the only 1314-castle in this part of Denmark and was never mentioned in the written sources alongside with some of the others (Kalø castle north of Århus on the east coast of Jylland is the best known of king Erik Menvæd’s castles dating from 1314. The ruin of this spectacular castle, built of stones and bricks, is today a tourist attraction.). It is possible that the castle in Stege was built for other purposes, i.e. a starting point of the king’s policy of aggrandizement in the Baltic, or as a royal stronghold in an area, which was often in pawn to foreigners. It is also possible that Prince Vitzlav of Rygen, who had a mortgage on Mon for several periods in the years around 1314, built Stege castle. Vitzlav was a vassal of king Erik Menvæd, but probably never personally set foot on the island of Mon.).

After the death of king Erik Menvæd in 1319 Denmark came through almost one hundred years of civil war. Stege castle’s part in this is not revealed in the written sources. The only traces of maintenance of the castles defences are dated to late 14th century. Perhaps the castle very soon after 1314 lost its military importance and was transformed into an administration centre.

Stege town and castle

Stege town of today is a small provincial town with a well preserved medieval town plan (Figs. 1,2), an early 13th-century church and a late 15th century defence wall. Stege castle though was demolished centuries ago and the exact place of the castle was forgotten until 1976 when a small archaeological excavation revealed the castle’s entrance gate (Fig. 6) (Bekmoose, Nielsen 1978).

Stege town was in the Middle Ages and is today situated on a peninsula pointing to the south. Stege castle was built on an artificial island south of the town, behind the harbour. Since the Middle Ages the town has expanded to the west and south and the area of the castle is today part of the modern harbour.

The excavation

In the summer of 2000 due to modern building activities the north-western quarter of the 1314 castle was excavated by The Museum of South Zealand (fig. 2) (Sydsjællands museum, Vordingborg). The castle ruins were thoroughly investigated during 19th century building activities, and a possible rampart or ringwall have left no traces. The only exception is the wooden foundation of a gate building excavated in 1976. Only the lowest parts are preserved. These wooden constructions were originally erected under water and have since the filling up of the area been covered by water soaked gyttja and earth, which has preserved most of the wood but none of the iron.

There are indications that, during a period in or after the Middle Ages, the water level in Stege was app. half a meter higher than today. The sea deposits (gyttja) which have gradually filled up the mounds were settled right up to modern water level, which means that at some time, during a period, the water level must have been higher than today. But this observation is not confirmed elsewhere. In any case what is preserved today is the lowest part of the constructions, which were covered by water in the Middle Ages.

To remove the large quantity of earth covering the remains of the castle an excavator was working for the archaeologists from start to end of the archaeological excavation. Samples for dendrochronological analysis were collected from all the different constructions. A total of 39 samples are examined and 30 samples are dated (Fig. 4). The results of the dendrodating are unambiguous, Stege castle was radically rebuilt in 1314 BC (Daly 2001). 25 planks and beams were during the excavation-period closely examined for traces of reuse, transportation, saws

The old stege castle

The castle built in 1314 has a predecessor which is briefly referred to in written sources and registret during the archaeological excavations. Very little is known of this castle. It dates back to early 13th century or even before and was situated on the same site south of Stege town. The artificial island though was much lighter supported than the 1314 castle. One of the excavated wells most likely belongs to the old castle (Fig. 3).

Fig. 2. Stege town today. A: bridge, B: Stege Cove, C: Stege Bay, D: archaeological excavation, E: town square, F: late 16th century town defence, G: church. The medieval coast is indicated by a dotted line.

Fig. 3. Sectional view of castle island and masts from the east. To the left are the original island and the row of pikes, which hold the artificial island of the old castle. The rest of the structures belong to the 1314 Stege Castle. In the left side of the large mast is the wall of framed horizontal planks. In the right side is the small mast behind the palisade.
The western part of the large moat is delimited from the original shallow coast-area to the west by a palisade, which like the northern palisade was originally standing in the water. Because of the excavation-limitations the south and east sides of the castle are not known. But it is unlikely that there was a moat at the south side, as the west side moat is least deep to the south. This also leads to the supposition that it was never an intention of the constructor to allow ships into the moat (at the south-east end of the excavation), to the west of the castle-island the moat is less than 1 meter deep, i.e. less than 1 meter below modern water level. To the north the moat is 3.50 meters deep. Perhaps the water level was considerably higher in 1314 and would allow for deep-draughting ships to sail into the moat. But it is striking that a meant-to-be passage would be least deep. Therefore it is more likely that from the start ships were not allowed into the moat and some other kind of defence was chosen, in the sea to the south and south-west.

The earthworks

The castle-island, which is artificially enlarged, was originally situated 20 meters south of the coast in a shallow area. Before deepening the moat between the castle-island and the coast the whole area in question must have been diked and continuously drained during the extensive earthworks and the erection of the wooden constructions.

A moat 15-20 meters wide and 5.50 meters deep was dug into the seabed between the castle-island and the coast and at the west side of the castle-island. Between the large moat and the coast is another much smaller moat, 4 meters wide and 2 meters deep. The two moats are right next to each other, mainly separated by the palisade and by their different depths. As both moats were originally full of (salt) water the impression must have been: one big moat with a palisade in the water 4 meters from the coast. If there is even further defence-works to the north of the small moat, closer to the town, is unknown.
The palisade

As regards all of Stege Borg the wooden palisade is preserved up to modern water level. The palisade forms an angle to the north and west side of the castle-island. It is situated at the farthest side of the large moat (Fig. 5). The palisade consists of vertical oak planks, up to 3.50 meters long and 0.45–0.70 meters broad. The planks lean by 15° backwards to the abrupt slope of earth and clay created when digging the large moat (Figs. 7,8). At the bottom of the moat the planks are fixed by beech beams (5–7 meters long and 0.40x0.40 meters thick), which are held to the bottom by beech pegs (0.50 meters long) (Fig. 6). A necessary section at a higher level of the planks is not preserved. At the top of what is preserved are, behind the planks, oak beams (5–7 meters long and 0.26x0.25 meters thick) which the planks rest onto and which are fixed to the earth and clay slope by (1 meter long) oak pegs (Fig. 3). The original height of the palisade is not known, but it is known that, at the top, the planks were tapered, so as to give a general impression the palisade was jagged (Fig. 9).

The palisade served at least two purposes. First of all it was designed to hold the abrupt slope of earth created when digging the large moat. Secondly it was a traditional palisade. Further more it has contributed considerably to the castle castles imposing outlook.

The castle-island

The castle-island was enlarged with material from the deepening of the large moat, mainly clay. To hold the clay from slipping into the moat a wall of framed horizontal planks surround the island (Fig. 10). The wall consists of vertical oak posts (0.20x0.35 meters thick) pointed and hammered into the seabed and of horizontal oak planks (0.9–1.30 meters long and 0.30–0.60 meters broad). The planks are joined in rabbets cut in the posts. It is not known whether this wall originally rose above the water level. The excavated north-west corner of the castle-island forms an acute angle, which fits into the shape of a trapezium quadrangle seen on a 17th century map showing the castle-ruins ground plan (Bekmose,Nielsen 1978:100).

The bridge

The bridge is situated on the north side of the castle-island. In this place the large moat was presumably 15 meters wide. Pointed oak-pillars (0.30x0.40 meters thick) were hammered 2–3 meters into the seabed to support an almost 6 meters wide bridge of unknown construction. According to the dendrodotating the bridge was only repaired once in the late 14th century. On the castle-island part of a wooden foundation of a gate-building or gate-tower was excavated in 1976. It has not been possible to reconstruct this building.

Rampart or ringwall?

In the large moat, on top of the natural sea deposits, just outside the castle-island there are several piles of broken bricks and mortar. These are the remains of buildings pulled down for reuse of the bricks. It is formerly conjectured that Stege castle had a ringwall of bricks. But if that was so, the remains probably would have been found all the way around the castle-island and not as it is in well-defined piles. Possibly the
defence of the island consisted of an earth rampart and a wooden palisade. It is impossible to determine whether the brick-buildings were houses or towers and whether they date back to 1314 or if they are much younger.

It is possible that the Stege castle which was built in 1314 was a genuine wooden castle. On the other hand the fact that the under-water constructions are made of wood must not lead to overreaching interpretations. The well-defined piles of bricks in the moat do as mentioned above indicate an earth rampart. But a ringwall of bricks is not definitively out of the question.

Artefacts

Artefacts are found in the moat close to the bridge and in the wells. Down-at heel leather shoes and small, manufactured, wooden sticks, presumably parts of furniture, bone material and potsherds are the most common artefacts in Stege Borg. But there are also parts of cross bows, dice, pieces, handles of knives, a seal, a sword pomme1 etc. The most remarkable finds are the ornamented pieces of birch bark (Fig.13), which have never been seen in Denmark before. Similar pieces are excavated in Kernäve in Lithuania along with a stamp used to strike the ornaments on to the birch bark. The ornamented birch bark and the stamp from Kernäve are on view in the Kernäve museum of archaeology and history (Vilkūnas, Luchtana, Grigonienė 1999). Ornamented birch bark and other artefacts from Stege castle are on view in Mørns Museum in Stege, Denmark. Possibly these pieces of ornament have been used to decorate baskets, boxes, quivers etc.}

Future excavations of Stege Castle

Only one quarter of the 1314 castle has been excavated. The two quarters of the castle to the south are occupied by modern harbour-activities and have been exposed to many building-activities during time. Probably little is left of the castle in that area. The area to the east, which is today undeveloped, apparently has never been demolished to the same degree as the now excavated area. If the future building-activities cause archaeological excavation in this area, perhaps foundations of buildings and the layout of this part of the castle-island will be brought to light.

Anders Reisnert

SOME SCANIAN AND SCANDINAVIAN CASTLES AND THEIR RELATIONS TO THE LIVONIAN ORDER

Einige skanische und skandinavische Burgen und ihr Verhältnis zum Livischen Orden


Anders Reisnert
Blfr. Stadsantikvarie
Malmö Kulturmiö
Box 406
201 24 Malmö