This polyglot dictionary draws on the vast and vibrant range of vernacular legal terminology found in medieval Scandinavian texts – terminology which yields valuable insights into the quotidian realities of crime and retribution; the processes, application and execution of laws; and the cultural and societal concerns underlying the development and promulgation of such laws.

Legal texts constitute an unparalleled – and often untapped – source of information for those studying the literature, languages and history of medieval and Viking Age Scandinavia. The Lexicon is a welcome contribution to the study of medieval Scandinavia on two counts: firstly, it makes accessible a wealth of vernacular historical documents for an English-speaking audience. Secondly, it presents legal terminologies that span the languages and geographies of medieval Scandinavia, drawing on twenty-five legal texts composed in Old Swedish, Old Icelandic, Old Norwegian, Old Danish, Old Gutnish and Old Faroese. By collating and juxtaposing legal terms, the Lexicon thus offers its readers a fascinating, comprehensive window into the legal milieu of medieval Scandinavia as a unified whole.

It is in this respect that the Lexicon differs from the other major lexica that came before it: where relevant, it gathers closely related terms from multiple Nordic languages beneath single headwords within single entries. This approach illuminates the differences (and similarities) in usage of specific lexical items and legal concepts across geographic areas and through time. This book is an indispensable resource for scholars and students of medieval Scandinavia.

The Lexicon is an ongoing project with a digital counterpart (http://www.dhi.ac.uk/lmnl/) created within the department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism at Stockholm University. It is part of the wider 'Medieval Nordic Laws' project based at the University of Aberdeen.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.

Cover image: Carta marina, a wall map of Scandinavia, by Olaus Magnus, 1539, Wikimedia, public domain, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carta_Marina.jpeg

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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.


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. fjóðunar.

landamaeri, landamäre (OSw), landamæri (Olce) n.
Boundary or border/border area between provinces. In Olce it refers to border land or border marker.
Refs: CV s.v. land-; KLNM s.v.v. gränsläggning, rigsgrænse; Schlyter s.v. landamaeri.

landamærki (OSw), landamerki, landsmerki (Olce) n.
Border marker between provinces in VgL. In Olce 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’.

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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.


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. rågäng, gränsläggning; Schlyter s.v. markar skæl; Tamm and Vogt 2016 s.v. markeskjal, 332.
skoghaskæl (OSw) n.
Woodland boundary.
Ref: Schlyter s.v. skogha skæl.
takmark (Olce) n.
Border, frontier.
Refs: CV s.v. takmark; Fritzner s.v. takmark; Schlyter s.v. takmark.

Boundaries between fields or meadows

engimark (Olce) 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 (vapfa v.) or ride (ripha vapfa) 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 (Olce) 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
Appendix C: Borders, Boundaries and Boundary Markers

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 lýrittar, mark, marksteinn, mærki, tiældrusten.

Refs: Fritzner s.v. lýrittarstein, lýritti; Hertzberg s.v. lýriti, lýrritarstein; KLMN s.v.v. fordejendom, 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: KLMN 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: (bolstaþa), ‘village’ (UL, VmL), (delda), ‘strip field’ (UL, VmL), (farvegs 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: KLMN 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 (Bib 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: KLMN s.v. gränsläggning; Schlyter s.v. tompta ra, ra; 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 skil 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; tiældruhyrd: to move a boundary stone to another place.

Refs: Schlyter s.v. tiældra.

þræstene (OSw) n.
A boundary marker consisting of only three stones.
Refs: Schlyter s.v. þræstene.
Boundaries at sea

marbakkí (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).