4. The history of Sleswick until 1789

The name Sleswick derives from the city of Sleswick which itself is of Dano-Scandinavian origin and refers to a bay or harbour of the Baltic-Sea inlet called the “Sli” (Hanswilhelm Haefs: Die Ortsnamen und Ortsgeschichten von Schleswig-Holstein mit Fehmarn und Lauenburg sowie Nordfriesland und Helgoland, Norderstedt, 2004, ISBN 3833405090). The city itself is linked to the historical Viking trading place Haithabu of which it is its successor. However, in many early resources the area of what is nowadays considered as Sleswick is also often described as Southern Jutland, but Sleswick became the popular name during medieval times. The river Eider and the stream Levensau, which empties into the Kiel Fjord near Holtenau, as Sleswick’s southern border was a consequence of the peace settlement between the Danish Viking king Hemming and the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne in 811 who agreed the Eider becoming the border between the Danish kingdom and the Frankish-Carolingian Empire (Grænseforeningen: Sønderjyllands historie 800-1522, Rigs- og folkegrænser 800-1100, http://www.graenseforeningen.dk/leksikon/s/all/4795 ). Traditionally, the island of Fehmarn (now part of the district Ostholstein) was also a part of Sleswick until 1864 as was the island of Ærø.

Sleswick as a distinctive territory did not appear before the 10th century when its southern part was temporarily conquered by the Frankish Emperor Henry in 934 and described as the border mark Sleswick. It was re-covered by the Danish King Harald Bluetooth in 960 and slowly rose as a Danish border district with particular rights to strengthen the defense of the southern border of the Danish kingdom. To improve defenses, an interlocking fortification known as the “Dannevirke” was built linking also Haithabu through a causeway to the estuary of the river Treene into the Eider and thus to the North Sea. The first well known Earl of Sleswick was Knut Lavard who ruled from 1115 to 1131 and who also declared himself as Duke of Sleswick (Lars N. Hennigsen: Under Danmark, Sydslesvigs Danske Historie, Flensborg, 2009, ISBN 978-87-89178-2, page 14).

The area was originally settled by numerous Germanic peoples such as the Angles, Jutes, Ambronians and Saxons whose predominance have shifted during the previous centuries. The name of the region of “Angel” in the South-Eastern part of Sleswick clearly refers to the Angles but archeological finds also show that much of the original population migrated from the area in the period between the 3rd and 5th century. The Angles eventually participated in the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain and are referred to through the name “England” (Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte (GSHG): Angelsachsen, http://www.geschichte-sh.de/vonabisz/angelsachsen.htm ). The Jutes clearly left their mark in the name Jutland while the Ambrionians are possibly responsible for the name of the island of Amrum off the west coast of Sleswick (AmrumTouristik: Geschichte der Insel Amrum, http://www.amrum.de/insel/historie/ ). How much of these groups remained in Sleswick is up to dispute, archeological research point to a new wave of immigration into Sleswick during the 6th and 7th century.
Mainly responsible for this immigration were the North-Germanic groups who became the ancestors of the nowadays Jutes, Danes and Swedes and they spread from the North and East into Sleswick (Jann Markus Witt & Heiko Vosgerau: Schleswig-Holstein – Von den Ursprüngen bis zur Gegenwart, Convent Verlag Hamburg, 2002, ISBN 3-934613-39-X, page 72). On the Sleswick West Coast, however, the Frisians colonized those parts which became known as Northern Friesland (see also chapter 5.3). Finally, Saxon colonization spread from the area south of the Eider (which became Holsten) into the southern part of Sleswick (see also chapter 10.1), and the colonization resulted into establishing the three original languages of Sleswick: Southern Jutish, Low Saxon and North Frisian (Christian Hirte: Die jüngere Eisenzeit, Wikingerzeit: Grenzmarken, Christentum und frühe Staatlichkeit, Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins, Neumünster, 1996, pages 40/41, ISBN 3-529-02440-6). However, north of the line Eider-Dannevirke-Eckernförde no Saxon place names appear anymore while the Southern border of the Dano-Scandinavian place names appears to be the line Lunden-Wrohm-Nübbel-Emkendorf-Wrohe-Kiel which is mostly south of the Eider and therefore already in Holsten. In between is a mixed area were substantial parts were originally left vacant and the area was known as the Jernved in Danish and Isarnho (“Iron-Forest”) in Old Saxon. Colonization of this area began in the 11th century and both Danes and Saxons participated in the clearing of the forest and the drainage of the moorlands since both place-name elements are residing next to each other. However, the strong Holsten-Saxon presence spread the Saxon language and the area was linguistically predominantly Low Saxon from early on (H.V. Gregersen: Plattysk i Sønderjylland, Odense University Press 1974, ISBN 87 7492 118 5, see also chapter 4.1).

The area south of the Eider was dominated by the Saxons whose kingdom stretched out to the Rhine and Rothaargebirge. The area between the Eider and the river Elbe was divided into three districts (Gaue): Dithmarschen, Holsten and Stormarn and was incorporated into the Frankish-Carolingian Empire in 804 after the Saxons lost several decisive battles in Westphalia (Thomas Reyer zu Wigmodyn: Die altsächsische Stammesgeschichte, 5. Die Frankenkriege und ein erzwungenes Christentum, http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~bremhist/sachsen.html ) and they were forced to convert to Christianity. The three districts were eventually unified under the name Holsten (although Dithmarschen retained a high degree of autonomy until 1159) and where ruled by Counts. However, to the East (including the Sleswick island Fehmarn) a strong Slavonic element is found and this has also left traces in Sleswick itself as e.g. in the place names Windeby (The village of the Vendians) or Pommerby (The village of the Pommeranians).

Around the Kiel Fjord many Slavonic place names are found and Slavonic people helped colonizing this previous border area. The area to the west of Kiel shows Saxon-Holsten, Slavonic and Scandinavian place names which makes it a transitional area between these three cultures ” (Kleen/Reimer/Hedemann-Heespen: Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg, 12. Die Slaven. Die Leibeigenschaft. Die adeligen Güter, Westerrönfeld 1922, ISBN 3-921361-23-0, page 313/314 ).

In 1326 Earl Gerhard III of Holsten forced the Danish king Valdemar III to accept that Denmark and Sleswick are ruled by separate governments. In 1386 the dynasty of the Duke of Sleswick died out and the title for the Duke of Sleswick was lent to the Earl of Holsten which, in turn, increased the influence of the Holsten aristocracy in Sleswick and also renewed colonization from further south.
When in 1456 the dynasty of the Earldom of Holsten ruling the Duchy of Sleswick died out, the aristocracy of both Holsten and Sleswick chose King Christian I of Denmark to become Duke of Sleswick and Earl of Holsten, in turn, he had to guarantee that Sleswick and Holsten will “remain together eternally” (“dat se bliven ewich tosamede ungedelt”) which became known as the Treaty of Ribe and a major subject for the national disputes in the 19th century. (Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte (GSHG): Privileg von Ripen, http://www.geschichte-s-h.de/zeitreiseindex.htm ). This effectively created “Sleswick-Holsten” and in 1474 Holsten was also declared a “Duchy”. It also decreed that both Sleswick and Holsten should receive States General which were elected from the upper bourgeoisie and excluded all those not owing enough in wealth to be considered, teachers, women and Jews (initially) (Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte, “Ständeversammlungen”, http://www.geschichte-s-h.de/zeitreiseindex.htm).

It is, however, disputed whether this treaty could be interpreted as an eternal bond between Sleswick and Holsten, historian Carsten Jahnke argues that this “privilege” only expressed the desire for internal peace, thus a state peace and not that Holsten and Sleswick have to remain together eternally (Carsten Jahnke, “dat se bliven ewich tosamede ungedelt” - Neue Überlegungen zu einem alten Schlagwort, page 45, Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte (ZSHG), Band 128, 2003, Neumünster, Wachholtz-Verlag, ISBN 3-529-02328-0).

The increasing dependency Sleswick’s on Holsten lead also to many traders from Holsten and Lower Saxony settling in the towns and cities of the Sleswick and subsequently Low Saxon became the dominant language in all larger towns and cities of Sleswick from 1250 onwards while the language of the countryside remained Southern Jutish (Lars Hennigsen: Under Danmark, Sydslesvigs Danske Historie, Flensborg 2009, ISBN 9788789178752, page 15/17).

Although Holsten officially remained a fief of the Holy Roman Empire while Sleswick remained a Danish fief, the Eider border became insignificant internally which was also demonstrated through the common coat of arms displayed from 1400th century onwards (Jessen-Klingenberg/March: Kleiner Atlas zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins, Braunschweig, 1986, ISBN 3-14-10099-6, page 1).

In 1542 the reformation was adopted by Christian III of Denmark and thus extended to the Duchies of Sleswick and Holsten.

In 1544 Christian III decided to allocate parts of the Duchies to his two brothers which lead effectively to a partition of Sleswick-Holsten and the founding of two parallel dynasties, further subdivisions in the 16th and 17th century lead to new dynasties being established, among them the dynasty of Sleswick-Gottorp and Sleswick-Holsten-Sønderborg-Augustenborg whose successor Christian August was also suggested as successor of the Duke of Sleswick-Holsten in the 19th century after the Danish royal dynasty died out.

In an attempt to gain more control, the Gottorp dynasty allied themselves with Sweden during the great Nordic war and the final settlement lead to the Danish king incorporating those territories held by the Gottorp dynasty in 1713. After the dynasty of Holsten was entitled with the throne of the czar of Russia they denounced their rights for Holsten and the title of Duke of
Holsten was also taken over by the Danish king in 1773 which lead to both Sleswick and Holsten becoming an integrated part of the Danish Commonwealth which also included Norway, Iceland, The Faeroes and Greenland (Jessen-Klingenberg/March: Kleiner Atlas zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins, Braunschweig, 1986, ISBN 3-14-10099-6, page 7).

By the end of the 18th century Sleswick and Holsten where ruled by the Danish king as part of the Danish Commonwealth, both were part of the Commonwealth’s customs union and all merchant ships from the harbours of Sleswick and Holsten sailed under the “Danebrog”, the Danish flag. Since Holsten still formed a fief of the Holy Roman Empire the Danish king attained a seat in the Empire’s Assembly and retained that seat in the new German Federation after 1815 until 1864 (Jessen-Klingenberg/March: Kleiner Atlas zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins, Braunschweig, 1986, ISBN 3-14-10099-6, page 7).

Although the duke of Sleswick and Holsten was the Danish King, this did not withhold the spread of the Low Saxon language from the areas just North of the Eider further into Svansø (Schwansen in German) and subsequently Angel and Middle Sleswick and the standard German language became the predominant language of administration in Sleswick after Low Saxon lost its status as official administrative language in the 17th century. This resulted in Sleswick becoming increasingly culturally linked to Holsten and to what was to become Northern Germany. The situation in the city of Flensborg by the end of the 18th century reflected in many ways the status of Sleswick:

The spoken language of daily business was Low Saxon, although with a considerable amount of Southern Jutish influence, written administrative language was in almost all situations standard German, school and church also used standard German. Southern Jutish and Danish became increasingly marginalized and survived only in areas which had continuous contacts to the surrounding rural areas and with seafaring, but in the case of Flensborg, it never ceased completely: The little Heligaandskirken in the centre of Flensborg has retained Danish as church language from 1588 until today. The linguistic situation nevertheless did not alter anything towards the loyalty to the Danish king because the growing prosperity of the city seemed only to increase the loyalty (Lars Hennigsen: Under Danmark, Sydslesvigs Danske Historie, Flensborg 2009, ISBN 9788789178752, page 21).

The rural areas in Southern Sleswick down to the city of Sleswick were still Southern Jutish speaking by the end of the 18th century but standard German was the language of the church services which also lead to standard German becoming the language of education at school. The reasons for standard German being the language of church and education were due to divisions in the church administration: The Northern part of Sleswick received their local priests from priest schools in Haderslev, Ribe or Odense and were thus educated in Danish while the districts south of a line roughly running south of Tønder and north of Flensborg received their priests from the priest school of the city of Sleswick which used standard German as the educational language. The result was that in those districts which still spoke southern Jutish the standard German educated priest often found it difficult to communicate with the local population (Lars Hennigsen: Under Danmark, Sydslesvigs Danske Historie, Flensborg 2009, ISBN 9788789178752, page 22). But this was not so unique since one has to take in account that also...
in the Low Saxon and Frisian speaking areas of Southern Sleswick communications problems arose because standard German was just as much a foreign language for the local population and not understood by everyone. However, the linguistic distance between Southern Jutish and standard German certainly was even larger.

But the fact that the language of the general population was a different one than the one of the church service did not lead to consideration of changing the language of the church service; just as it was practiced in the Low Saxon and Frisian speaking areas in the whole of Northern Germany it was expected that the population acquired standard German knowledge which also consequently lead to standard German only education. Low Saxon and Frisian were not considered as languages in their own rights and Southern Jutish shared the same fate once the respective districts were dominated by a standard German educated upper class. Through the awareness that Low Saxon was closer related to standard German than Southern Jutish was while, at the same time, it was easier to be acquired because it was also closer to Southern Jutish than standard German was, many families south of the line Tønder-Flensborg switched from speaking domestically Southern Jutish to Low Saxon in order to make it easier for their children to follow school during the 19th century. This, in turn, lead to Southern Jutish disappearing almost entirely from Southern Sleswick with the exception of the Skovlund district, and Low Saxon, although discriminated itself by the standard German speaking upper class, becoming a stepping stone for the Germanization of Southern Sleswick (Lars Hennigsen: Under Danmark, Sydslesvigs Danske Historie, Flensborg 2009, ISBN 9788789178752, page 24).

4.1. Danish place-names south of the Eider and in Eastern Holsten

The fact that Scandinavian place names are found even south of the Eider is often overlooked or perhaps not even known but it shows that the borders where fluid. Lunden in Northern Dithmarschen refers to Scandinavian “Lund” according to Laur and Haefs (Wolfgang Laur: Historisches Ortsnamenlexikon von Schleswig-Holstein, Wachholtz, 1992, ISBN: 3529027260), Wrohm to “Vrå” and Nübbel on the Eider in the Rendsburg district to “Nybol” according to Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg (Kleen/Reimer/Hedemann-Heespen, Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg, Westerrönfeld 1922, ISBN 3-921361-23-0, Page 848: Nübbel 1429: Nubile, 1585: Nubel; ist nach seinem Namen jütischen Ursprungs.”). Although this assessment is denied by Laur and Haefs, close to Nübbel the following place names are also found: Garlbek > Jarlbæk (Kleen/Reimer/Hedemann-Heespen, Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg, Westerrönfeld 1922, ISBN 3-921361-23-0, Page 780). and in Elstorf-Westermühlen the field names “Lundhorst”, “Röhlund” and “Toft” (Kleen/Reimer/Hedemann-Heespen, Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg, Westerrönfeld 1922, ISBN 3-921361-23-0, Page 752). Although Scandinavian names are seldom a few other examples nevertheless exist in the same area making a Dano-Scandinavian origin plausible. Wrohe (Westensee) again refers to “Vrå” (Kleen/Reimer/Hedemann-Heespen, Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg, Westerrönfeld 1922, ISBN 3-921361-23-0, Page 314, Wrohe=Vrå (Corner)), and around 1200 Emkendorf was known as Emekenthorp and Emekenby (Kleen/Reimer/Hedemann-Heespen, Heimatbuch des Kreises Rendsburg, Westerrönfeld 1922, ISBN 3-921361-23-0, Page 415). Better known is the Scandinavian origin of the name of
Sleswick-Holsten’s capital Kiel which appears to be derived from Nordic “kill” > “narrow bay” and also the names of the city-districts of “Wik” and “Brunwik” may be derived from Scandinavian “Vig” (>Bay).

Even in Eastern Holsten and on the island of Fehmarn Scandinavian place names are present, although only few in number. Burg on the island of Fehmarn (part of the Duchy of Sleswic until 1864) was also called “Burgheby” in 1320 (1231: Castro) and Dänschendorf (1231 Daenskaethorp) obviously refers to the “village of the Danes” (Hanswilhelm Haefs: Die Ortsnamen und Ortsgeschichten von Schleswig-Holstein mit Fehmarn und Lauenburg sowie Nordfriesland und Helgoland, Norderstedt, 2004, ISBN 3833405090). Furthermore, Wagrien may derive from Nordic “Våg” and Hohwacht in Wagrien could also have a Scandinavian background since it sounds similar to Scandinavian “Højvåg”, meaning “High-Bay” which would correspond to the topography of the location. In “Historisches Ortsnamen Lexikon von Schleswig-Holstein” by W. Laur, the origin of the place name is not known before 1557 and is described as of around 1557 “na der Hohenwacht” and 1649 “Hochwach”, nd. “tor hogen Wach” (Wolfgang Laur: Historisches Ortsnamenlexikon von Schleswig-Holstein, Wachholtz, 1992, ISBN: 3529027260). The old fortress findings at Stöfs, a village next to Hohwacht at the Binnensee, appears to have hosted besides the Slavonic Vendians also Vikings as some archeological findings show (Hohwacht – Perle der Ostsee, Chapter 8: Rund um den Großen Binnensee - Ein Gang durch die Geschichte, http://www.hohwachterbucht.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Documents/Perle_der_Ostsee.pdf) making a Scandinavian connection plausible. Finally, according to Laur the name of the island of Fehmarn is a Germanic name and may also be derived from Dano-Scandinavian where the old Latin form ”Imbria” may correspond to ”Himmer” (light) (Wolfgang Laur: Historisches Ortsnamenlexikon von Schleswig-Holstein, Wachholtz, 1992, ISBN: 3529027260).

Thus, the transitional area between predominantly Dano-Scandinavian and Holsten-Saxon begins already south of the Eider and would also allow for claiming a Dano-Scandinavian element in Northern Holsten as much as there is a Holsten-Saxon element in Southern Sleswick.

The northern extent of Holsten-Saxon place names is somewhat difficult to assess since place name elements such as –bek/bæk, -holm, -dorp/torp/trup, -au/å, -burg/borg, -mühlen/möhlen/mølle, -see/sø and –sted/sted can be Holsten-Saxon as well as Dano-Scandinavian. In addition, a pre-Dano-Scandinavian North-Sea Germanic element is present in some of the place-names throughout the Jutland-peninsula which makes it difficult to assess whether this is of Holsten-Saxon origin or is derived from another North-Sea Germanic group such as the Angles. However, the Southern Sleswick place-names of Goosefeld, Hütten, Ahlefeld, Lohe and Hamdorf are certainly of Holsten-Saxon origin, Saxtorf in Svansø / Schwansen also refers to the Saxons (Saxons-village) (Hanswilhelm Haefs: Die Ortsnamen und Ortsgeschichten von Schleswig-Holstein mit Fehmarn und Lauenburg sowie Nordfriesland und Helgoland, Norderstedt, 2004, ISBN 3833405090).