

Michael Swithinbank

English summaries

Stefan Leenen: 'Old Snail City' and 'Dragon's Citadel' – Fortifications in Vietnam

In Vietnam, large fortifications were built from the 5th century BCE onwards, mostly measuring several square kilometres. Even into modern times, the defensive lines generally comprised a rampart and moat; the overall conception was more or less based on Chinese models. The origin of the CỎ Loa site, dating from the Iron Age, remains largely unknown, but on the other hand, following the area's incorporation into the Chinese Empire for approximately 1000 years, the construction of the capitals Hoa Lư or Thăng Long was unmistakably an element in the indigenous rulers' power politics. Tây Đô, which was the capital for a few years around 1400, is exceptional. The walls, built out of enormous blocks of stone, have no parallel anywhere else in Vietnam. When the country was divided, between the 16th and 19th centuries, smaller fortifications were built, and it was only with the advent of the Nguyen dynasty that a construction boom began, in the first half of the 19th century, before Vietnam again lost its independence for nearly 100 years.

Felix Biermann/Dominik Nowakowski/Normen Posselt: Medieval mottes in the lowlands of northern Silesia

The essay discusses mottes dating from the 13th to 15th centuries in the north of Lower Silesia, primarily from the archaeological point of view and with a focus on two new excavations of the mottes at Dittersbach (Zwierzyniec) and Klaptau (Kłopotów) near Lüben (Lubin). The central issues concern the function and dating of the castles, who built them, the form they took and their architectural and defensive elements. There are a great many mottes in the region, which is not surprising in such flat terrain. What is noteworthy on the other hand is that, in this area – which until the first half of the 13th century had featured ramparts of timber and earth – the motte-type castle, which had originated in Western Europe, did not experience its heyday until the 14th century and the first half of the 15th. This very clearly confirms the established impression that castles of this type spread through Europe very slowly, becoming prevalent in Eastern Central Europe far later than in the West.

The innovation of the motte was adopted in Lower Silesia in the second half of the 13th century, probably at about the same time both for ducal fortifications and for the seats of the lower nobility who moved into the area during that period or had close contacts with the West. Mottes did not subsequently become a significant feature of ducal castles, because the latter soon came to be defended by more imposing fortifications using stone or brick, but mottes became a central feature of the military architecture of the lower nobility.

Excavations show that a considerable variety of earthworking techniques were used to build mottes in Northern Silesia: some mottes were completely artificial, while others exploited natural elevations in the landscape or were built on older ramparts or archaeological strata; some, which were built on marshland or between rivers and therefore needed securing, were equipped with batters (steep revetments) and/or beam substructures; in addition to mounds erected to provide a site for buildings, earth was sometimes heaped up around towers. All in all, the sites in the region conform to an observation made elsewhere as well, namely that rectangular, flat and extensive mottes tend to be more recent than conical, round mottes with small plateaus.

As most of the sites are of fairly late date, it is no surprise to find that buildings were commonly erected on them: stone buildings are more the rule than the exception, and whole groups of stone and half-timbered houses can be found on the plateaus of some mottes, nearly always accompanied by towers; courtyards were paved, buildings had glass windows, heating and tiled roofs, while wooden palisades and plank fences afforded protection. Thus mottes not only performed a display function but were also comfortable dwellings which were commensurate with the social status of their occupants. The fact that mottes also performed an important defensive function, in addition to their residential and symbolic functions, is attested by the numerous weapons excavated, as well as fire layers and other destruction layers. Their military purpose was by no means a secondary consideration; the fortifications may have been modest, but that is primarily a reflection of the resources available to a likely attacker, for example a neighbouring

member of the nobility. At the same time, they were centres of economic activity: farms, agricultural equipment and metalworking workshops were often associated with castles. Thus mottes shed light on numerous architectural, military, social and economic aspects of late medieval society, and archaeological and historical research into them makes important contributions to our knowledge of those subjects.

Michael Kirchschlager: Catapult stones – how a projectile became a decorative element

Considerable numbers of catapult stones, which served as ammunition for catapults ('Bliden'), are to be found in castles and museums. They are unique archaeological relics and bear witness to military conflict. However, very little research into them has so far been conducted.

Catapult stones provide unequivocal evidence for the existence and use of catapults. They were mostly produced by masons in quarries close to the sites of sieges.

They were also stored in towns and large castles. It has been shown that round catapult stones were in use as early as 1244. As regards the types of stone favoured, the main ones were basalt, granite,

limestone and sandstone. The stones were shaped using a stone mason's hammer and chisel or with a point (to smooth them). Many catapult stones were also polished, as a result of which they have frequently tended to be mistaken for cannon balls.

A characteristic feature of catapult stones for use in a 'Blide' is that they possess one or more conspicuously flattened surfaces. This prevented them from rolling away or rolling out of the catapult when the weapon was primed by moving the beam into position, and helped to retain the projectile in the sling. While the mason was shaping the stone, the flat surface already helped to steady it. A few specimens have crosses or other symbols engraved in them. The stones ranged from 10 to 120 kg in weight: specimens weighing less than 15 or more than 150 kg are rare. They are a source of information about the size, performance and means of launching of the projectiles. The largest which have survived in Germany (basalt lava, polished smooth, quarried near Groß Steinheim, in the region of Hanau) are thought to have been used in battle outside Castle Tannenberg in 1399 (diameter: 62 cm; weight: 286.4 kg).

In future, greater attention ought to be paid to catapult stones in castle research, as they can provide interesting information about the ways in which castles were besieged, and about other similar matters.