

Who built the Olger Dyke?

Southern Jutland was dominated by two Germanic tribes when the Olger Dyke was erected: The Angles in the region of South Slesvig, and the *Varini* in the region of North Slesvig.

Traditionally, the Olger Dyke was understood as a defence structure erected by the Jutes, another Germanic tribe. We now know that the Jutes lived further north around this time, and that they were not neighbours to the Angles. This implies that the Olger Dyke must have been constructed by the Angles or the *Varini*.

The Romans called the border of the Roman Empire the *Limes*. Like the Olger Dyke it consisted of a palisade, a ditch/moat, and a bank. The palisade was closest to the Germans, against whom the Romans wanted to protect themselves.

Following this analogy, the Olger Dyke is oriented against the north because the palisade is the northernmost element. Consequently, the Olger Dyke is erected by the Angles.

The Olger Dyke is to be considered as an Anglian defence structure. According to legend, it may have been erected by Offa, the son of king Wermund and king of the Angles.

Captions:

King Wermund's son Offa after having killed the Saxon king's son and his strong giant with the sword Skræp. Drawing: Louis Moe 1891.

The myth about Uffe and Wermund is originally Anglian. It tells about the King Wermund and his son Offa and their fights against the Saxons. Offa is also mentioned in the OE poem Widsith where it says that Offa ruled Anglia and that he marked the border to the Myrginians, who must belong to the tribe of the Varini. Limes (Latin for path). Drawing: Jørgen Andersen, MSJ.

After the devastating defeat to the Germanic tribes at the Varus battle near Kalkriese in 9 AD, the Romans decided that the border to the Germans should largely follow the large rivers of the Rhine and the Danube. During the last half of the 1st Century AD, the border was fortified in almost the same way as the Olger Dyke. The only exception – as illustrated – is the presence of watchtowers.

Map: Jørgen Andersen, MSJ.

