

The bocage in Denmark, a short account

V. HANSEN ⁽¹⁾

In Denmark true bocage is only found in the Southeastern part of South Jutland, where it is continuous with the Knicklandschaften in Schleswig-Holstein. (see enclosed map from the parish of Løjt).

This kind of bocage is evidenced at least back to 1641, where it is shown on a map by Johannes Mejer, and documents, recorded by Troels Fink in his dissertation on early enclosure in Sønderjylland, reveal the existence of hedges in the beginning of the 17th century. The hedges were likely the result of an early enclosure among partly free farmers, very much against the will of the local sovereigns. Not until 1700 the administrators were more generous in overlooking the law breakers. This Danish bocage is only found on undulating relief, rich on forest growth.

Elsewhere in Denmark the open field system survived until the 1780 'es in areas of nucleations as well as of dispersion, and straying animals were allowed to graze on harvested fields, surrounded by moveable fences, and they were under supervision of herdsman. In areas with dispersed farms the cattle was normally tied or more closely supervised.

While the «true» bocage shows a pattern of curved lines, separating the fields, another type of bocage became widely spread on the Danish islands and in Easten Jutland after enclosure. A decret of 1794 ordered fencing between neighbours in case that one neighbour claimed it. The same decret recommended the erection of following types of fences:

- 1 - Stone fences of a height of 140 centimetres
- 2 - Earthen walls, 2 metres wide, with a double ditch,
- 3 - Walls of earth or turf, 2-3 metres wide and 160 centimetres high
- 4 - Wattles or seaweed fences.
- 5 - Fences built of wooden rafts.

Furthermore the law advised the planting of low bushes or trees on top of the fence. The enclosed photos show different types of fencing in the 1950 'es.

At the beginning of the 19th century it was quite common in many areas to find fence or hedges not only between neighbours, but also between the single fields in the rotation scheme. The primary idea was to protect the crops against straying animals, secondly the hedges, when cut earth 6-7 years, supplied the farm with fuel for the stove and with material for making wooden baskets, used locally or sold in town. Also the twigs were used for wattle in the bottom of the tree growth or round the paddock (toft).

On the other side the fencing was not very popular in many areas of Jutland, even if one was fined for letting one's animal stray onto the neighbour's land. Few farmers claimed the fine from his neighbour in fear of getting unpopular in the village. So why should he plant hedges round his own fields.

As early as the 1820 'es agriculturalists and land economists were quite aware of the drawbacks of intensive planting of hedges, and for the following reasons :
The hedges shaded the fields,
The plant roots hampered field work and stole the

(1) Geografisk Centralinstitut, Københavns Universitet Haraldsgade 68, 21 00 København O.

nourishment,
The hedges collected snow,
The hedges took up too large an area of field,
The hedges hindered the airing of the soil.

Still hedges and fences could be found all over until the 1920 'es, when hedges were replaced by fences of rafts or barbed wire. To-day one may find a few

hedges on estate land and partly between two neighbours, and also stone walls are conserved as well as hedges of special interest for their plant growth. But generally the Danish landscape of today is again an open field landscape, where most hedges and fences have disappeared in order to ease the working of the land with combiners and tractors plows.



Note des éditeurs :

Il a malheureusement été impossible de reproduire les illustrations. Veuillez nous en excuser.