Episode 1: The time before 1510: Vikings and Ashfisers

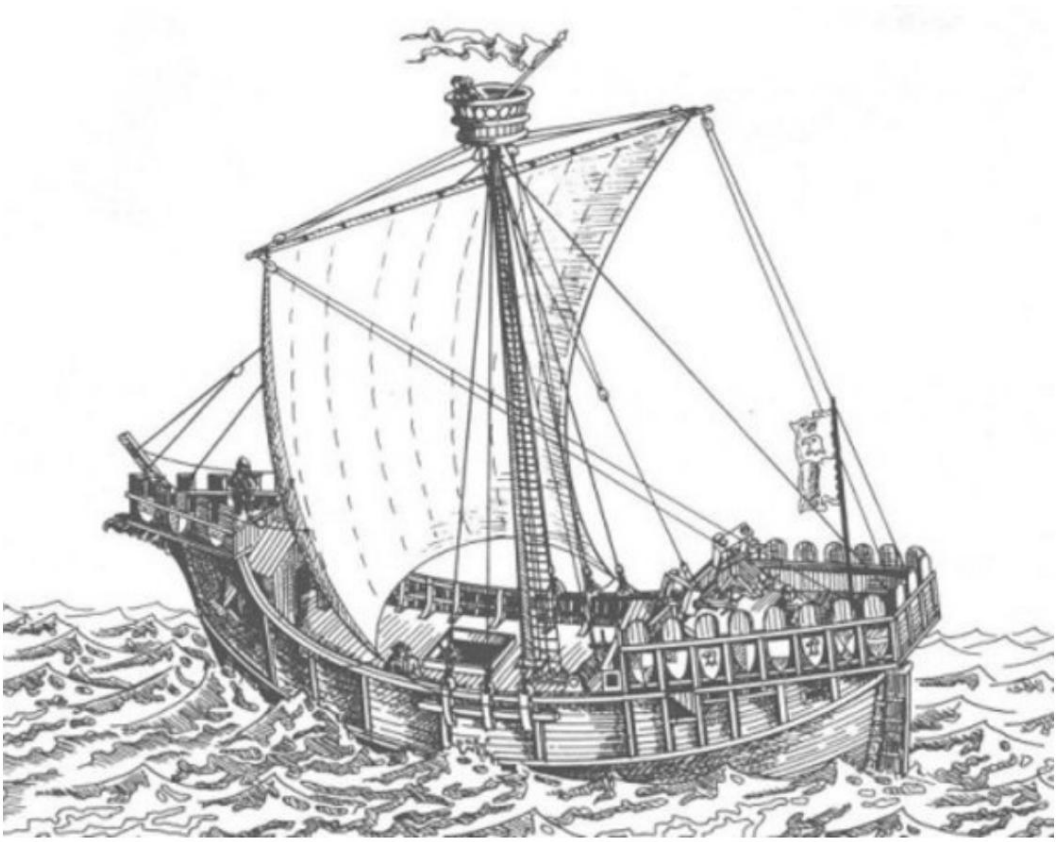


Viking ships came in many models and sizes. What they had in common was that they were seaworthy and well-sailed, and at the same time, due to their shallow draft, they could go far up rivers and streams. They could go for sails and oars.

In terms of construction, they constituted the high technology of the time.

(source: Viking Ship Museum - photographer Werner Karrasch)

After the Viking ships came the so-called Kogger, which were rather clumsy, but they could, on the other hand, hold a relatively large load.



(source: Die Phieleasson-Saga)

From here, the so-called kravels were developed, an actual warship, which, however, at the time were called peace ships - with "gays", that is, with handguns and cannons.

The birth of the navy is officially dated to 10 August 1510. But before then we had had a navy in Denmark for around 700 years. However, one cannot directly say that there to the royal power or the state power in the Viking Age, an organized fleet belonged.

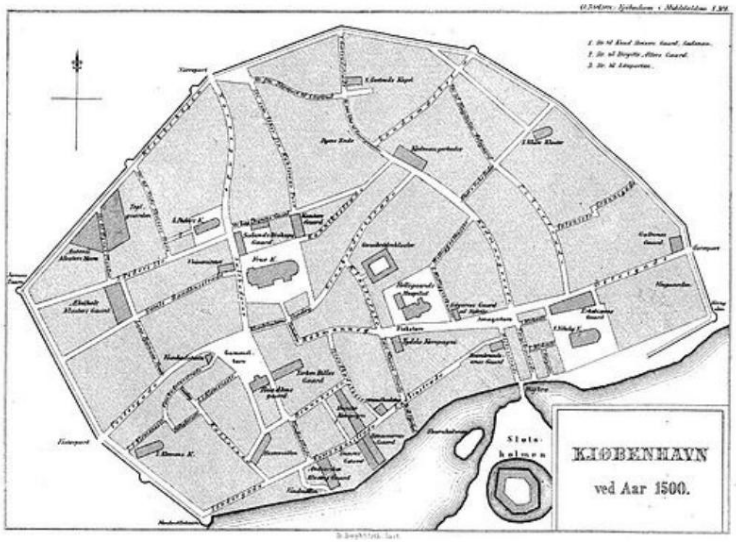
The king could, under certain circumstances, assemble large naval forces.

A consistent feature of Denmark's history is that for many years the country's inhabitants have been able to navigate the seas with great skill. As a result, an extensive maritime trade has arisen, which has led to a natural need to be able to protect this trade against threats. From pirates as well as competitors. Right up until the 19th century, the warships brought trade goods, and the merchant ships were armed. So it has been difficult to distinguish precisely between warships and merchant ships, as well as between private enterprise and state power.

First, it concerns the Viking naval forces, which were sometimes under the king's command.
They weren't his ships. They often belonged to rich large farmers and merchants, and it required a certain form of agreement in the kingdom to "lead". The Vikings used their various ship types very skillfully.
Some were slim, fast and fit for battle. Others were wide and more clumsy, but could carry larger loads, such as horses. Usually the ships were used to transport warriors, who were otherwise the same as the ships' crews, and the battles usually took place on land.
On rare occasions, the ships fought at sea, going up on the side of the enemy and using bows and arrows, swords, axes and fire. Today, quite a lot is known about the art of shipbuilding from that time, but otherwise the historical knowledge of naval affairs up to the birth of the navy in 1510 is rather sporadic and incomplete.

In the latter part of the Viking Age, a kind of conscription was established in connection with leadership, where the land was divided into small areas, ("ship pens"), each of which had to provide a ship, crew and provisions for 16 weeks. If you went in the lead, that is to say on a war march, there were sometimes some who chose to stay at home and warm themselves by the home fire, and they were not very well regarded. The Vikings called them "ashers".

In the transition period from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages, Copenhagen was made the country's capital.
They chose to make the city the country's capital because it was located in the middle of the Danish kingdom.
Since Skåne, Halland and Blekinge at that time belonged to Denmark.
In Copenhagen, a kind of naval station was established, traces of which can still be found today, under the current National Archives and Slotsholmsgade, in the area between the current Ministry of Finance and the War Museum.



Unfortunately, there are no maps from that time, but on this map from 1560, you can get an idea of where the ships have been

(source: The National Museum's digital collections)

The leadership system was changed under Valdemar the Great and Bishop Absalon, who needed a fleet every spring when the Wends had to be fought. It was then turned into a tax, which had to be paid by those who did not provide ships and crew.



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Valdemar the Great
1131-1182



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Bishop Absalon
1128-1201

Later, Valdemar Sejr was able to assemble a large fleet, which in 1219 brought such large forces that the northern part of Estonia could be conquered.



(source: Statens museum for art)

Dannebrog falls to the sky Battle of Lyndanisse 15 June 1219



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Valdemar Victory

1170-1241



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Erik Menved

1274-1319

The management system died out around the year 1300.

But when King Erik Menved suddenly needed a fleet in 1304, he had to establish a modernized version of the command:

For each group of farmers who had an income of 10,000 marks, a quiver of 50 loads had to be equipped,[1] with manpower and provisions for 16 weeks.

That system lasted only a few years, and then it died out.

When Valdemar Atterdag needed a fleet around 1350, he instructed the market towns and the sheriffs to set it up.

This fleet captured Gotland a few years later, which is why the Swedish king Magnus Eriksson had to ask the Hansa[2] for help against the Danes.



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Valdemar Atterdag
1320-1375



Margrethe d. 1
1353-1412

(Source: KGB digital collections)

In 1384, it is Queen Margrethe the First who promises to come to the Hansa's aid against pirates and Denmark provides nine ships.
Of these, seven probably belonged to noblemen and two to the queen, but it is unclear, as there are no detailed records of this.
Just as it is also unclear whether the queen and the nobles in reality funded the pirates to annoy the Hansa.
In each case, in 1385, Denmark regained control of the Scanian market and the Scanian castles from the Hanseatic League.

The ships were also called "peace ships", and around 1398 ships with "guns" (cannons and guns with gunpowder) were introduced.

There were great commercial interests at stake in the Baltic Sea, and the Danish king sat on the entry and exit, as both coasts of the Øresund were Danish. Almost all trade took place on keel (that is, by ship), as transport over land was not a realistic alternative over longer distances. The Great Belt was very difficult to navigate through until the early 1800s, so all trade went through the Øresund.
So with a fortress on either side of the Sound and warships nearby, tolls could be levied for passage.

This was the background for the building of Kronborg near Helsingør and the fortress Kärnan in Helsingborg.



(Source: KGB digital collections)

With this, from 1429 the Danish king got a good income for the treasury, The two fortresses alone were however, not enough to completely ensure collection. The king could therefore rely on his harsh privateer captains who had the task of bringing up the ships that tried to evade paying sound customs.

What the ships looked like at that time, we only know from a series of inaccurate frescoes.

L.E.K

Notes:

[1] A last is a very old term for either a dry cargo between 1.3 and 3.1 cubic meters of dry cargo or in more modern times a ship load of 150 cubic feet with a normal weight of 2.6 tons. Roughly calculated it had a quiver of 50 loads a load capacity of approx. 100 tons.

[2] The word Hansa is derived from an old German word Hanse for an association, here an association of the most important trade centers in Northern Europe.