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THE MAKING OF THE SCANDINAVIAN KINGDOMS

This paper has two main purposes. One is to give a brief account of our interpretation of the development of the medieval kingdoms of Scandinavia in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. The other is to argue that there has been a tendency on the one hand to exaggerate the power of earlier Scandinavian kings and the extent of their kingdoms, and on the other to underestimate the importance of the many powerful magnates on whose support they depended.

Before the eleventh century power was not in the hands of individuals ruling well-defined territories, but was shared between, or contested by, lords or chieftains who all had their own retinues of warriors. They tend to be obscured in contemporary sources, such as the Frankish annals and the *Vita Anskarii*, by the attention paid to more important kings. They do, however, figure more prominently in sagas written by Norwegians and Icelanders in the 12th and 13th centuries, although the best known of them, *Heimskringla*, has often been misleadingly described as *Sagas* or *Histories of the Kings of Norway*. Kings provided the chronological framework, but less attention is given to most of them than to jarls and other chieftains.¹

Until the 1260s, when the Icelanders submitted to the king of Norway, power in Iceland was divided between numerous chieftains called *goðar* (sing. *goði*). That title derived from the word for 'god', implying a priestly function, although in Old Norse "it came to acquire a legal and administrative function".² It was also used in Denmark; three tenth-century runic monuments on the island of Fyn commemorate two men described as *goðar*, and it has been persuasively argued that the runic monument at Karlevi, on Öland, dated c. 1000, commemorates another who was also described as a powerful warrior who ruled over land in Denmark.³ Originally a *goði* was a lord of men, not territory. His power was naturally based mainly on the district in which he lived, but it partly depended on men from elsewhere who acknowledged him as their lord. His authority was exercised publicly together with other *goðar* in local assemblies or *thing*, supported by his *thingmen*. Once a year all the *goðar* attended the *Althing* where questions of general importance were discussed. The number of *goðar* was gradually reduced either by conflicts, or more peacefully by marriage alliances, and by 1220 there were only five.⁴

Runic inscriptions show that in Denmark there were lordships similar to those in Iceland, although Danish kings were already by the early ninth century powerful rulers. The word *goði* is not recorded elsewhere in Scandinavia. However, Scandinavian poets had a large vocabulary for rulers in Old Norse.⁵ They sometimes used *kunungr*, but that origin-

¹ Mallika Pande Rolfsen, *Kvinner og menn i Heimskringla; eggarsken og kongen* (Diss., Trondheim 2002).

² Dennis H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic world* (Cambridge 1998) 33f.

³ *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, ed. Lis Jacobsen/Erik Moltke, 2 vols. (København 1942) nos. 190, 192, 209, 411; Stefan Brink, *Social order in the early Scandinavian landscape*, in: *Settlement and Landscape*, ed. Charlotte Fabech/Jytte Ringtved (Højbjerg 1999) 423–439, here 430f.

⁴ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth* (Odense 1999).

⁵ Raymond I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials and Myths* (London 1995) 16.

ally meant a minor chieftain.⁶ The long runic inscription at Rök in Sweden, dated c. 800, refers to the time no fewer than twenty *kunungar* sat in Sjælland for four winters.⁷ It is revealing that in Finnish this word, which was borrowed very early, was used not only for lords, but also for leaders of bands of workmen, for example those who cleared forests.⁸

Chieftains could collaborate for mutual defence, or for offensive expeditions, such as Viking raids. The 'Great Army' that campaigned in England from 865 to 876 had several leaders, distinguished in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as either kings or earls.⁹ There were also conflicts between chieftains that led to some being recognized as overlords by those who were less powerful or lucky. Such overlordships were a normal feature in much of early medieval Europe. Generally chieftains who were subordinated in this way retained local control; overlords were content to have their superiority recognized, and to receive tribute and, perhaps most important, military support. Many overlordships were short-lived but some were maintained for several generations. For example, Mercian kings were overlords of much of southern England for most of the time from the late seventh century to the beginning of the ninth. Powerful overlords could reduce the status of their tributaries, as happened in Scandinavia. Snorri Sturluson, in his discussion of the terminology of early poets, explains that "the first and highest term for man is when a man is called emperor (*keisari*), after that king (*konungr*), and after that earl (*jarl*)" and that:

It is normal for a king who has tributary kings (*skattkonungr*) under him to be called king of kings. An emperor is the highest of kings, but after him any king who rules over a nation is indistinguishable in all kennings from any other in poetry. Next are the people called earls or tributary kings.¹⁰

The bases or main residences of some local rulers have been located archaeologically by exceptionally large or rich burials, or by the discovery of settlements with very large halls and an unusual amount of other buildings in some of which very valuable objects, such as gold rings, have been found. A good example is the complex settlement recently excavated in west Sjælland on the shore of Tissø 'the Lake of (the god) Ty', in which numerous Viking-Age weapons, apparently offerings, have been found. A very large gold ring of the tenth century was found there in 1977. The settlement comprised several farms and two areas in which craftsmen worked and seasonal markets were held. It was dominated by a high-status residence that was gradually enlarged between c. 600 and c. 1050, when it covered four hectares and had a dozen substantial buildings. In the seventh century it included a hall that measured 11 × 36 metres and after several rebuildings was 12.5 × 48 metres. Adjacent to this hall there was an enclosed area that was apparently used for religious rituals.¹¹ Some similar sites from the period along the Norwegian coast had large boat-houses.¹² Elaborate runic monuments of the tenth and eleventh centuries, such as those commemorating *goðar*, some of them combined with

⁶ Green, *Language* 130–140.

⁷ Sven B. F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* (Stockholm 1987) 31–34.

⁸ *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder* 9 (København 1964) 17–20.

⁹ The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle a. 871 (trans. George Norman Garmonsway, London 1954).

¹⁰ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (ed. Finnur Jónsson, København 1926) 138, 123; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (trans. Anthony Faulks, London 1987) 145, 128.

¹¹ Lars Jørgensen, *En storgård fra vikingetid ved Tissø, Sjælland – en foreløbig presentation*, in: *Central Platser Centrala Frågor*, ed. Lars Larsson/Birgitta Hårdh (Stockholm 1998) 233–248; id., *Stormand og gode ved Tissø*, in: *Vor skjulte kulturarv; Arkæologen under overfloden*, ed. Steen Hvass/Det Arkæologiske Nævn (København 2000) 134f.

¹² Bjørn Myhre, *Boathouses and naval organization*, in: *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300*, ed. Anne Nørgård Jørgensen/Birthe L. Clausen (Copenhagen 1997) 169–183.

large burial mounds and stone settings in the shape of a ship, most potently at Jelling, also indicate the presence of powerful families.

In, or near, these power centres the freemen of local communities regulated their affairs in assemblies (*thing*) under the leadership of one or more chieftains. Some exceptionally important assemblies were attended by chieftains from many communities. The clearest example is the *Althing* through which the *goðar* ruled Iceland until the thirteenth century. Another was at Gudme on the island of Fyn, which flourished from the third century to the eighth. The name, 'Home of the Gods' suggests that, like some later Christian festivals, it was protected by supernatural, rather than secular, power.¹³

DENMARK

The centre of the power of the Danish kings named in Frankish sources in the eighth and early ninth centuries was apparently in south Jutland. One of their main concerns was to protect Jutland from incursions by Saxons, Slavs, Frisians or Franks. To do that they constructed, extended and maintained a barrier known as Danevirke west of Schlei Fjord.¹⁴ This was at first a simple earth bank made c. 700. In 737/38 at least seven kilometres of this bank were reconstructed on a massive scale with a timber facade. At the same time an underwater barrier was made in the fjord. This work required an estimated 30,000 oak trees to be felled, brought to the site and trimmed, and 80,000 cubic metres of earth for the bank. Only a king (or kings) could have commanded resources on that scale. Towards the end of the century, during the Frankish attempt to conquer the Saxons, part of Danevirke was reinforced by a stone facade. Other important developments in South Jutland in the first half of the eighth century were the establishment of the trading and craft centres at Ribe, c. 700, and Hedeby, immediately south of Danevirke about 50 years later.¹⁵ They were later under royal control and may have been at a very early stage.

By the end of the eighth century Danish kings may have ruled the whole of Jutland and its neighbouring islands, but they did not have the same authority elsewhere. Many scholars have argued that the Danish kingdom was almost as extensive in the eighth century as it was four centuries later. If so, it was a very different kind of kingdom in which many parts were controlled by local chieftains or magnates, like those based at Tissø. Some of them acknowledged the kings as overlords, but direct royal control, with the help of agents, did not extend beyond Store Bælt until the mid-tenth century. Many of the magnates who controlled the eastern islands and Skåne were probably willing to contribute contingents to royal armies and fleets in the hope of profiting from successful campaigns. Some of the twelve Danish envoys who negotiated peace with the Franks in 811 were probably such tributary magnates.¹⁶ One of them was Osfrid 'of Skåne' (*de Sconaowe*), but that does not mean that Skåne was then integrated in the Danish kingdom as closely as the frontier region of Schleswig.

The negotiations of 811 followed the assassination of King Godfred. Frankish sources, in which he is first mentioned in 804, show that he was a powerful ruler and

¹³ The Archaeology of Gudme and Lundeberg, ed. Poul Otto Nielsen/Klavs Randsborg/Henrik Thrane (Arkæologiske studier 10, Copenhagen 1994).

¹⁴ H. Hellmuth Andersen, Danevirke og Kovirke. Arkæologiske undersøgelser 1861–1993 (Højbjerg 1998).

¹⁵ Birgit Sawyer/Peter Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* (Berlin 2002) 106–111.

¹⁶ *Annales regni Francorum a. 811* (ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [6], Hannover 1895) 133–135.

was even considered to be a serious threat by Charlemagne. His hegemony extended well beyond Danish territories. He exacted tribute from the Abodrites and Frisians and was acknowledged as overlord by 'the princes and people of Vestfold' (west of Oslo Fjord) who rebelled after his death.¹⁷ He was presumably also overlord of the coastlands east of Kattegat. The fact that Ohthere called that region *Denemearc*, i. e. the boundary territory of the Danes, and described Sjælland as 'belonging to Denmark (*in Denemearce hyrað*)' suggests that Danish overlordship east of Store Bælt continued for much of the ninth century.¹⁸

The last reference in ninth-century Frankish annals to Danish kings is in 873, when Sigfred and his brother Halvdan sent envoys to Louis the German to settle border disputes and ensure that merchants from both kingdoms could cross the frontier in peace.¹⁹ The Danes were still a force to be reckoned with. In 880 they inflicted a crushing defeat on a Saxon army killing two bishops, twelve counts, and eighteen royal vassals.²⁰ However, after about 900 the power of the Danes declined, and in 934 they were defeated by the Germans and forced to pay tribute.²¹

NORWAY

It was in this period of Danish weakness that a Norwegian, traditionally known as Harald Finehair, began to establish an independent hegemony in west Norway.²² Harald died c. 931 and is generally supposed to have become king in about 871, mainly because the Icelanders believed that the Norwegians who began to emigrate to Iceland at that time did so to escape Harald's 'tyranny'. A reign of 60 years is, however, most improbable, and there are reasons to believe that the first Norwegian settlers in Iceland came via the British Isles.²³ The sagas greatly exaggerate Harald's power, claiming that he made one or two expeditions to the British Isles. As there is no hint of such activity in the contemporary Irish annals, the tradition is probably based on the expeditions of a later Norwegian king (Magnus Bareleg) in 1098 and 1102.²⁴ Another anachronism is the report in Egils Saga that Harald made a royal visit, of the kind familiar later, with 300 men to gather tax in north Norway.²⁵ At that time the overlord of north Norway was Håkon Grjotgardsson, Jarl of Lade. The historical value of the sagas concerning Harald's reign has recently been vigorously questioned by Sverrir Jakobsson who argues that the Harald depicted in the sagas is a myth.²⁶

References to a Norwegian king of *Lothlend* or *Laithlind* in Irish annals in the mid-ninth century have been taken as evidence for a kingdom in Norway earlier than Harald's. This claim has been convincingly refuted by Donnchadh O Corráin, who has

¹⁷ *Annales regni Francorum* a. 813, ed. Kurze 137–139.

¹⁸ Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred, ed. Niels Lund (York 1984) 22; Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 171.

¹⁹ *Annales Fuldenses* a. 873 (ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [7], Hannover 1891) 80.

²⁰ *Annales Fuldenses* a. 880, ed. Kurze 94.

²¹ Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 172.

²² Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 186–187.

²³ Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 144–146.

²⁴ Peter Sawyer, Harald Fairhair and the British Isles, in: *Les Vikings et leur civilisation*, ed. Régis Boyer (Paris 1976) 105–109.

²⁵ Egils Saga 11 (trans. Christine Fell, London 1975) 14–15.

²⁶ Sverrir Jakobsson, "Erindringen om en mægtig Personlighed". Den norske-islandske historiske tradisjon om Harald Hårfagre i et kildekritisk perspektiv, in: *Historisk tidsskrift* (Norwegian) 81 (2002) 213–230.

shown that it was a Viking kingdom in the northern part of the British Isles that probably included Orkney and the Hebrides.²⁷ In the eleventh century, when Norwegian kings claimed authority over those islands, the name (in the form *Lochlainn*), began to be used for Norway, a change that has caused much confusion.

SWEDEN

The medieval kingdom of Sweden combined the Svear and the Götar.²⁸ Svear was a collective name for the people living round Lake Mälaren and along the east coast of modern Sweden, while the Götar occupied the plains of central southern Sweden. They were separated by a wide belt of forest that was still a significant boundary in the later middle ages. Apart from Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* there is little textual evidence for the Svear, and less for the Götar, before the eleventh century. Discussion of their early history has, therefore, been based mainly on archaeological discoveries. However, their interpretation has been greatly influenced by three texts of very dubious historical value: the *Germania* of Tacitus, the Old Norse poem *Ynglingatal*, and the Old English poem *Beowulf*.

In *Germania* the king of the *Suiones* (Svear) is described as having unlimited power and the weapons of the Svear are said to be kept in the custody of a slave.²⁹ Many commentators have accepted this as reliable information, obtained ultimately from traders. It is, however, based on the commonplaces of classical ethnography that distant (i. e. uncivilized) peoples were peaceful and that their rulers were powerful.³⁰ Tacitus applied these *topoi* to the *Suiones* as they were the most remote people he described, apart from their neighbours, the *Sitones*, who resembled the Svear in all respects except that they were ruled by women.³¹

Ynglingatal is a poem based on a genealogical list of the kings of the Svear for many generations before they moved to Norway, where, in the ninth century, they became kings of Vestfold, west of Oslo Fjord. It was supposedly composed c. 900 and is preserved in full, and greatly amplified, in *Ynglingasaga*, the first part of *Heimskringla*, written in the 1230s by Snorri Sturluson. It is not quoted elsewhere, but information about some of the kings named in it is given in several twelfth-century texts. Claus Krag, however, has advanced good reasons for thinking that the *Yngling* tradition is a learned twelfth-century invention made in Iceland, possibly by Ari, that was altered during the century to meet changing circumstances before the version quoted by Snorri was made.³² *Beowulf* incorporates heroic traditions that were probably familiar to the audience when it was composed before the end of the tenth century, the date of the unique manuscript.³³ It describes the adventures and death of Beowulf in the course of conflicts between the Danes, Svear, and *Geatas*. In 1905 the Swedish archaeologist Knut Stjerna accepted the identification of the *Geatas* as the Götar and argued that the poem is evidence that the *Svear* conquered them in the sixth century, a development that he claimed was consistent with the archaeological evidence.³⁴ Few, if any, serious students

²⁷ Donnchadh O Corráin, *The Vikings in Scotland and Ireland*, in: *Peritia* 12 (1999 for 1998) 296–339.

²⁸ Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 66–67.

²⁹ Tacitus, *Germania* 44 (ed. Allan A. Lund, Heidelberg 1988) 104.

³⁰ Alexander C. Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure* (Toronto 1983) 42–50.

³¹ Tacitus, *Germania* 45, ed. Lund 104.

³² Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga. En studie i historiske kilder* (Oslo 1991).

³³ *Beowulf* (ed. and trans. Michael Swanton, Manchester 1978).

³⁴ Göran Behre, *Svenska rikets uppkomst* (Göteborg 1968).

of the period now accept that the Svear conquered the Götär in the sixth century, or ever; their unification was the result of a long and complex process, not conquest. Nevertheless, many believe that even before the ninth century the Svea kings were exceptionally powerful. Support for this view has been found in the Old English version of Orosius, produced c. 900. This includes a description of a voyage in the Baltic by Wulfstan, who is reported as saying that Blekinge, Möre, Öland and Gotland belonged to the Svear (*hyrað to Sweon*).³⁵ Some have interpreted this as meaning that the Svea king ruled or had hegemony over the east coast of Sweden and these Baltic islands. Lars Hellberg has even argued that place-names show that the colonization of Möre by the Svear was a centrally controlled enterprise.³⁶ There is no reason to doubt that Svear raided, traded and settled around the Baltic, but that does not mean that they recognized the king in Uppsala as their ruler; linguistic and cultural unity did not imply political unity in Scandinavia any more than it did in England or Ireland.

The main contemporary source of information about the Svear before the eleventh century is the *Vita Anskarii*, written by Rimbert, Anskar's successor, c. 875. Rimbert emphasises the limited power of the Svea king: "it is the custom among them that all public business is arranged rather by the wish of the whole people than by the king".³⁷ On important matters the king had to consult the *principes* and their decision was the basis for discussion in larger assemblies of the people. According to Rimbert, in the 850s, after a pagan reaction, Anskar was only permitted to revive the mission after the approval of two assemblies in different parts of the kingdom, which suggests that one of the king's functions was to unify different groups of Svear.³⁸ The *principes* made decisions by casting lots to determine the will of the gods. This could only be done in the presence of the king, which explains why public assemblies could not be held in his absence.

Although Rimbert does not mention Uppsala there are many indications that long before and after the ninth century it was a major cult centre, presided over by a king whose power was religious rather than secular.³⁹ It was also the location of a great winter fair that was attended by traders and trappers from distant parts of Scandinavia. Its name, *Distingen* 'the assembly of the *Diser* (female goddesses)' shows that it had pagan roots, although it is first recorded in the thirteenth century.⁴⁰

The chamber/boat-grave cemeteries north of Lake Mälaren must have been the burial places of the *principes* of the Svear.⁴¹ Each contains a regular sequence of burials from the sixth century or earlier until the eleventh, with apparently one inhumation in each generation, while other graves were cremations. In most of them men were buried with rich furnishings in chambers or boats, but in at least one, at Tuna in Badelunda in Västmanland, west of Uppland, the men were cremated and only women were inhumed. It has often been assumed that these leading families were subordinate to the king in Uppsala and acted as his agents. That would imply that his kingdom did not extend south of Mälaren. It is, however, more likely that they were independent chieftains who accepted the religious leadership of the Uppsala king, and cooperated in order to gain

³⁵ Lund, *Two Voyagers* 22–23.

³⁶ Lars Hellberg, *Forn-Kalmar. Ortnamnen och stadens historia*, in: *Kalmar stads historia* 1, ed. Ingrid Hammarström (Kalmar 1979) 119–166, here 138.

³⁷ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 26 (ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. separatim editi* 55, Hannover 1884) 56.

³⁸ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 27, ed. Waitz 58.

³⁹ Bo Gräslund, *Folkvandringstidens Uppsala. Namn, myter, arkeologi och historia. Kärnhusets i riks-äpplet*, in: *Uppland* 1993.

⁴⁰ *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon* 3 (København 1958) 112–115.

⁴¹ Erik Nylén/Bengt Schönback, *Tuna i Badelunda: Guld Kvinnor Båtar*, 2 vols. (Västerås 1994).

the stability needed to ensure that *Distingen* and other markets in the region could function to the benefit of all. This interpretation of the situation in east Sweden is consistent with what is known about the process of conversion in the eleventh century. The kings of the *Svear*, who were already Christian before the end of the tenth century, were not powerful enough to stop pagan rituals at Uppsala before about 1080. Nevertheless, the hundreds of eleventh-century Christian runic inscriptions in Uppland show that many were converted long before that, which suggests that the initiative was often taken by chieftains.⁴²

THE MAKING OF THE MEDIEVAL KINGDOMS

The period of Danish weakness at the beginning of the tenth century did not last long. By the end of the century the Danes were no longer threatened by their German neighbours, the area directly controlled by royal agents had been extended beyond Øresund and the main centres of royal power were Roskilde and Lund in what had been 'Denmark'.⁴³ This transformation was mainly the work of Harald Bluetooth and his son, Sven Forkbeard. It is not known how much Harald's father Gorm, who died in 958/9, contributed; the only contemporary references to him are two runic inscriptions in Jelling, where he was buried. Harald's relations with the Germans were generally hostile. His conversion to Christianity c. 965 was partly to deprive Otto I of an excuse to invade, as his father had done thirty years earlier. He reinforced Danevirke and unsuccessfully invaded Saxony in 973. A year later the Germans conquered south Jutland but were driven out nine years later, with the help of Håkon, Jarl of Lade. It was in preparation for that campaign that in 979/80 Harald built the ring forts at Trelleborg in west Sjælland, Nonnebaken in Fyn, and at Fyrkat and Aggersborg in north Jutland. They were soon abandoned, allowed to decay and forgotten; they are not referred to in any written source. At exactly the same time he built a bridge, 700 metres long, at Ravnings Enge across the valley of the river Vejle, south of Jelling. The fact that the surface of that bridge shows only slight traces of wear, and that it collapsed after at most five years and was never repaired, supports the argument that its purpose was to facilitate the movement of troops in 983, and that the forts were centres in which contingents of warriors could be mobilized for that campaign.⁴⁴

In 987 the Danes rebelled, probably because of the heavy burdens he had imposed, and he died soon after being driven into exile. He was succeeded by Sven who, free of German pressure, was able to lead Viking raids on England where he gathered huge tributes of silver that greatly strengthened his power. Early in 1014 Sven died soon after conquering England. The English refused to acknowledge his son Knud as king, but he returned, and by the end of 1016 was king of all England before he succeeded his father as king in Denmark. As king he could tax the English and was consequently even richer than Sven had been.

The Danes had many advantages: a relatively numerous population, easy access to all parts of their territory. They also controlled the entrance to the Baltic which enabled them to regulate and benefit from the trade between western Europe and the Baltic that was of growing importance at that time. Their growing power under Sven and

⁴² Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford 2000) 124–145.

⁴³ Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 174–196.

⁴⁴ Mogens Schou Jørgensen, *Vikingetidsbroen i Ravnings Enge – nye undersøgelser*, in: *National Arbejdsmark* (1997) 74–87.

Knud provoked opposition. Erik, king of the Svear, allied with the Polish ruler Boleslav III, but they had little success, and by the end of the century Erik's son and successor, Olof, acknowledged Sven as his overlord. The English found it difficult to combat Sven's raids in 991 and 994 and, therefore, in 995 they encouraged Olav Tryggvason, who claimed to be the son of a minor Norwegian king, to win recognition as king of Norway in order to keep the Danes occupied at home. At about that time Håkon, jarl of Lade, who was Sven's most important tributary in Norway, was murdered. This removed the main opposition to Olav's ambition. Håkon's young sons went into exile and Olav was recognized by many Norwegian leaders. His reign did not last long. In 999 he was killed in battle against Sven who thus regained hegemony in Norway. He may have retained Viken in his own hands, but most of Norway was ruled, for Sven, by Jarl Håkon's sons.

After Sven's death the English king Æthelred adopted the same policy as he had done twenty years earlier, by supporting another Norwegian adventurer, Olav Haraldsson, to claim the kingship of Norway. In March 1016 he defeated Jarl Sven, who died soon afterwards in exile. By the time Knud had won England, Danish authority in Norway had been undermined. Knud still claimed to be the rightful Norwegian king, but it was not until 1028 that he invaded Norway, driving Olav with his young son Magnus into exile in Novgorod. Knud revived the custom of ruling through a native jarl. Håkon Eriksson, grandson of the Håkon who had submitted to Harald Bluetooth and Sven, was the ideal choice, but he was drowned in 1029. Olav believed that he could recover his kingdom but was opposed by the men who had rejected him in favour of Knud and was killed in a battle fought at Stiklestad at the head of Trondheim Fjord on 29 July 1030. He was soon regarded as a martyr, and became a symbol of Norwegian independence.

Knud then made the mistake of attempting to impose his own son, Sven, as king under the tutelage of the boy's English mother, Ælfgifu. Danish overlordship had earlier been exercised through native jarls who were happy to acknowledge the authority of distant Danes. The direct rule of an Anglo-Dane was less acceptable; Sven and his mother were soon very unpopular and were forced to leave Norway by 1034. It was in that year that Olav's ten year old son Magnus was brought back from Russia and proclaimed king while Knud still lived. When Knud died in 1035, Danish hegemony in Norway and Sweden was ended although there were later attempts to revive it.

Sweden was the last of the Scandinavian kingdoms to be established.⁴⁵ During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Svear elected or acknowledged several kings who were Götar. This was an important factor in forming the medieval kingdom. The process was, however, hindered not only by the physical barrier of forest but also by religious disunity. An overlordship did not depend on religious uniformity; the unity of a kingdom required the formal acceptance of the same religion, at least by the leading men. It was not until the pagan cult at Uppsala was suppressed in about 1080, that Christian kings could claim direct authority over the whole of Svealand. Even after that Swedish kings only had direct control over part of the country; elsewhere they were little more than overlords, largely dependent on local rulers called jarls or, in Latin, *duces*. It was not until the latter part of the twelfth century that Swedish kings had to be members of a royal family. Many earlier kings were not, including Sverker, from Östergötland, who was king from about 1132 to his assassination in 1156, and his successor, Erik, who was killed in 1160 and soon regarded as a saint. For the next hundred years all Swedish kings were descendants of these two men. The first ruler to be called *rex Sweorum et Gothorum* was Karl Sverkersson in 1164, and the first who is known to have granted land and privileges in most parts of the kingdom, and who struck coins in both

⁴⁵ Sawyer/Sawyer, *Die Welt der Wikinger* 251–267.

Götaland and Svealand was his successor, Knut Eriksson, who died in 1195 or 1196 after a reign of little more than three decades.

The Christian conversion of rulers was probably the most important factor in the consolidation of the kingdoms. The church brought many benefits. The clergy were literate and members of an international organization based on written law, that by the twelfth century had a relatively elaborate machinery to implement it. They emphasized the role of kings as upholders of justice and encouraged them to act as law-makers. What is more, the church played an important part in determining the limits of the kingdoms. The archiepiscopal provinces were, in effect, precursors of medieval Norway and Sweden. The province of Nidaros, created in 1152 or 1153, included Iceland and Greenland, and other Atlantic islands that had been colonized by Norwegians, although it was a hundred years before Iceland and Greenland were incorporated in the kingdom. Similarly, the Swedish archbishopric of Uppsala, founded in 1164, included the bishopric of Åbo in south-west Finland, some decades before that diocese was incorporated in the Swedish kingdom. The province of Uppsala, by joining the two Götaland sees with the three in Svealand, was an important factor in unifying these two original components of the kingdom. The provincial councils summoned by archbishops or papal legates were, indeed, the first national councils in both Sweden and Norway.

