

THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF CRUSADING IDEOLOGY IN SWEDEN 1150 – 1350



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Front page: "Discovery of the True Cross" by Gustave Doré (1832 – 1883).

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Danish crusades historian Kurt Villads Jensen writes in an article concerning crusading historiography since the 1970s that whereas there has been an increased interest in the Church's and the religious orders' part in the organization of the crusades, similar studies of the kings' role and their interest in the crusading movement beyond appearing as pious men is strangely lacking. He also mentions an increased interest in the impact the crusades had on the societies that initiated them, as for example how they affected the position of those in power, and how such studies have been made on England, Scotland and the Spanish kingdoms.¹ With this historiographical background in mind, I would like to do a similar study on Sweden in the period from the alleged crusade of King Erik IX in the 1150s to the last major crusading enterprise in the east by King Magnus Eriksson around 1350.

Over a period of approximately 200 years the Swedes colonised Finnish tribes and incorporated their lands into the Swedish kingdom while occasionally threatening the Russian city-state of Novgorod. In 19th century historiographical tradition these developments were summarily ascribed to three Swedish crusades; one led by King Erik IX in the 1150s, another led by Birger Magnusson in 1249 and lastly one led by Tyrgils Knutsson in 1293, King Magnus Eriksson's fruitless campaign against Novgorod being excluded. At the same time there is not a single trace of evidence for the presence of Swedish crusaders in the Holy Land. Could this be telling us that crusading ideology in Sweden was a highly politicised force used mainly to legitimise worldly ambitions? Further, one could ask if the campaigns should even be considered as crusades, and if so; how important were the ideological motives of fighting for the Christian faith and the remission of sins compared with the more worldly motives of territorial conquest, plunder, controlling the Baltic trade and winning personal glory? Perhaps the importance of certain motives fluctuated over time and between individuals? In providing answers to these questions I hope to reach some conclusions regarding the political impact of crusading ideology in medieval Sweden, and considering the Swedish crusaders' seemingly ambiguous motivations this seems to be a fertile field of study.

Swedish Crusading Historiography

Swedish historiography has occasionally touched on the political impact of crusading ideology but the topic cannot be said to have attracted any great deal of research and only in recent decades have certain scholars given it their undivided attention. The scholars can be

¹ Jensen 1997: 4

grouped as either positivists or negativists according to what extent they are willing to accept that crusading ideology impacted political developments. Most of them agree crusading ideology provided a legitimising tool at some point in my period, while there is less harmony as to when this can be dated at the earliest. Another issue concerns whether crusading ideology might have provided not just legitimisation but also a motive in itself, and if so at what point it ceased being a mere legitimisation and how important did it become compared with secular motives. When it comes to the political consequences a major question is to what extent the conquest of Finland and the wars against Novgorod were fuelled by crusading ideology, and in what measure some of the more prominent participants derived their political influence from prestige won as crusaders.

The positivists can be said to be more inclined to believe crusading ideology impacted political developments in Sweden from an early age, possibly as early as the middle of the 12th century, and that it at some point was more than a legitimisation and improved the standing of those who were seen as successful crusaders. The negativist view disagrees with this and claims the impact of crusading ideology in Sweden was insignificant and did not provide a motive until Magnus Eriksson's days, if ever. Naturally then no one strengthened their position through glory won on crusades and crusading ideology did not play a large part in the conquest of Finland or the wars with Novgorod.

This is a rough and artificial outline as most of the scholars fall somewhere in between these two extremes, even so they all lean slightly towards either positivism or negativism. The general tendency can be said to be a movement from a somewhat uncritical positivism operating without a clear definition of the crusade, towards a more questioning, negativist approach where the significance of crusading ideology is held in greater doubt.

Among the former can be listed Erik Anthoni, Kustavi Grotenfelt, Jarl Gallén, Seppo Suvanto, Gisela Nordstrandh and to some extent John Lind. Anthoni takes the presence of crusading ideology for granted throughout my period and concludes its main consequence was the expansion of the Swedish state and Christendom, the motives being both religious and secular.² Grotenfelt, in dealing with the alleged crusade of King Erik IX, not only believes it took place but also that Erik built his very kingship on the prestige derived from it.³ Suvanto has dealt with the alleged crusade of Birger Magnusson and concluded that the Papacy considered Finland to be Sweden's crusading provinces and that Birger's "so-called" crusade changed Tavastia for all posterity by incorporating it administratively in the Swedish

² Anthoni 1955: 165, 168

³ Grotenfelt 1920: 118, 124 – 125

realm.⁴ Gallén, Nordstrandh and Lind all agree Birger led a crusade and derived his later political strength from the glory he won;⁵ Lind also argues that King Magnus must have been possessed by genuine zeal in his campaign of 1348,⁶ while Gallén holds there were both spiritual and worldly motives in the picture.⁷

Eric Christiansen, Dick Harrison and Thomas Lindkvist are three recent and source critical scholars who might be deemed negativists, although their views are not in complete compliance. What separates them from many of the earlier scholars is that they operate with a clear conception of what crusading ideology was and specifically attempt to analyse its impact on Sweden.

Christiansen believes the Baltic crusades were a result of how the Scandinavians (and Germans) saw their neighbours in a new light after having been integrated into Catholic Christendom, and now saw themselves as a bulwark against the unbelievers, a world view which provided a fertile ground for crusading ideology. Christiansen claims it was unnecessary to brand these campaigns as crusades in order to legitimise them, and that any efforts in that direction had a purely religious basis.⁸ However, when it comes to the nature alleged Swedish crusades he is far more critical; the first Swedish crusade Christiansen dismisses as a literary construct,⁹ the second and third he believes show no signs of being motivated by crusading ideology in the source material although he admits they might have been infused with religious significance to nurture support for them,¹⁰ and while Christiansen does brand Magnus Eriksson's eastern campaigns as crusades he believes it was only an ideological façade created in the hopes of getting the enterprise authorised by a crusading bull.¹¹ It could be said Christiansen comes dangerously close to contradicting himself with these arguments.

Lindkvist is less critical than Christiansen and claims the idea of the crusade was present in Sweden probably as early as the 12th century, but that the crusades carried out at this time were mainly a continuation or development of the Viking Age expeditions, although under somewhat different auspices. Crusading ideology in Sweden was mainly used to legitimise wars on the eastern frontier under the pretext of converting Finno-Ugric pagans and defending

⁴ Suvanto 1967: 226 – 227, 235

⁵ Gallén 1946: 98, Nordstrandh 1990: 29 – 31 & Lind 1990: 294 (1)

⁶ Lind 1991: 103 – 104 (2)

⁷ Gallén 1966: 6 – 9

⁸ Christiansen 1997: 259 – 260

⁹ Ibid. 114

¹⁰ Ibid. 117 – 122

¹¹ Ibid. 192

Christendom against the Orthodox Russians, Lindkvist concludes reminding us there is not one piece of evidence for the presence of Swedish crusaders in the Holy Land.¹²

Harrison stands somewhere in between the former two and argues that while crusading ideology was present in Sweden from 13th century it is not until the first half of the 14th century the sources allow us to establish a connection between crusading ideology and the wars with Finns and Russians. He sees this as a natural consequence of how the Swedish nobility was increasingly influenced by continental European culture, which made it far more natural for Swedish lords in the 1340s to be inspired by crusading ideology than it had been a century earlier. As a result it became easier to find support for wars that also had strong political and financial incentives behind them.¹³

In general it must be said the scholars have gone from operating with an undefined idea of the crusade and from a positivist take on its impact that possibly overemphasised it, to a critical approach with a clear definition of the crusade and a more negativist attitude towards whether the campaigns traditionally branded as the Swedish crusades can in fact be considered as such. Eric Christiansen may be seen as a high point in this critical tendency while Thomas Lindkvist and Dick Harrison can be considered as modifying influences on Christiansen's views by moving slightly back towards a greater political impact of crusading ideology.

Comparative View on Danish and Norwegian Crusading Historiography

In Danish historiography the political impact of crusading ideology is usually seen as having been more profound in Denmark than in the neighbouring kingdoms of Norway and Sweden. The latest Danish authority on crusades is Kurt Villads Jensen, who in his article "Denmark som korsfarerstat" examines if Denmark can be considered as having been a crusader state. Villads Jensen argues that King Valdemar I not only expanded the Danish state but also strengthened his position as king both internally and externally through his involvement with the crusading movement, pointing out how his deeds as a crusader, the conquest and conversion of the Rugians, are emphasised in the epitaph on his tombstone and how Valdemar minted coins with crusading motifs.¹⁴ In addition to colonisation in the Baltic Villads Jensen

¹² Lindkvist 2001: 130

¹³ Harrison 2005: 464 – 465

¹⁴ Jensen 2000: 62 – 63

also makes it clear that the Danish kingdom was heavily involved in the crusades to the Holy Land from the very beginning.¹⁵

In the case of Norway the motives and consequences accompanying crusading ideology has barely attracted any scholarly attention at all. Arnved Nedkvitne is perhaps the first since Halvdan Koht to address the situation in Norway, in his article “Hvorfor dro middelalderens skandinaver på korstog” of 2002. Unlike the Danish crusaders in the Baltic, Nedkvitne argues, the Norwegians did not expand their realm or gain new political allies, hence territorial conquest can be dismissed outright as a motive. While Nedkvitne acknowledges the presence of religious motives he does not believe they were the reason why the Norwegians set out, as they are not given much attention in the primary source material, unlike the motives of winning plunder and martial glory, which are emphasised in both the campaign of Sigurd I Magnusson in 1108 – 1111 and that of Earl Ragnvald in 1152 – 1155, with the added motive of chivalrous distinction in the latter. As for the political impact of these expeditions, Nedkvitne believes they provided a venue for distinction from which King Sigurd, Earl Ragnvald and Erling Skakke could return as greater men and use their newfound prestige to strengthen their position at home.¹⁶

Glenn Thomas Solberg attempts to compare the motives of the Danish and Norwegian crusaders in his dissertation “Motiver bak de skandinaviske korstog” of 2005. For King Valdemar I of Denmark, Solberg argues, the main non-religious purpose of crusading was to acquire martial glory as well as new dominions, this way he both expanded his power by conquest and consolidated it by gaining the support of his vassals. King Sigurd’s and Jarl Ragnvald’s crusades on the other hand won them no land, which Solberg sees as an indication of a stronger religious incentive. Martial glory is a central motive for both the kings and the aristocracy, and although this is true for Jarl Ragnvald’s crusade too we now see how chivalric distinction had become an important factor. Solberg discusses the motives of the Scandinavian Church as well. During the earlier Scandinavian crusading ventures he sees them as closely resembling the motives of the secular aristocracy; expansion and material gain, whereas in the latter half of the 12th century Solberg points to a shift in the Church’s crusading policy with increasing focus on the spiritual aspects of a crusade; conversion, missions and Church building.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid. 53

¹⁶ Nedkvitne 2002: 114 – 126

¹⁷ Solberg 2005: 97 – 101

By comparing what the scholars have said about the political impact of crusading ideology in Denmark and Norway with whatever conclusions I arrive at I hope to put the situation in Sweden in its proper Scandinavian context and establish differences and similarities between the three countries. Then one can attempt a discussion of the possible reasons why developments in Sweden differed or not from those in Denmark and Norway.

Definitions of Terms

When working with the crusading movement the most central term to be defined is always that of the crusade itself. It is essential to establish what should be regarded as crusading and not, seeing as if any sign of the Church condoning a military expedition post 1095 is to be branded crusade then just about every armed conflict can be defined as one. A narrower definition if of course necessary, and the most narrow is the one used by the so-called traditionalists who define crusades as solely those military expeditions aimed at conquering the Holy Land, which is in turn too narrow to be applied to my thesis and in my opinion to crusading studies in general.

The definition favoured by the crusades scholars known as pluralists puts papal indulgence as the necessary factor, and Jonathan Riley-Smith is one of its leading proponents.¹⁸ He writes that “a crusade was a holy war fought against those perceived to be the external or internal foes of Christendom for the recovery of Christian property or in defence of the Church or the Christian people [...] directly authorized by Christ himself, the incarnate God, through his mouthpiece the pope.”¹⁹ Deciding on a fertile definition is difficult, as it must encompass the crusading movement in areas as diverse as the Middle East, Iberia and the Baltic region, all of which were acknowledged by the Papacy as legitimate arenas of holy war, while at the same time maintaining that what the contemporary mentalities considered crusading might not even be sanctioned by the pope. As a solution I will define a crusade as a holy war sanctioned with Papal indulgences and fought for the expansion or protection of Christianity, with Papal indulgences as the essential ingredient; holy wars fought for the expansion or protection of Christianity without indulgences will not be considered crusades.

Accordingly it is necessary to discuss just what a holy war is; crusades were after all “merely” expressions of the medieval European adaptation of this concept. The Christian criteria for a war to be deemed holy were laid clear as early as the fourth century; a right intention on the part of the participants, which should always be expressed through love of

¹⁸ Tyerman 1998: 2 – 3

¹⁹ Riley-Smith 2001: XXVIII

God and neighbour; a just cause; and a legitimate proclamation by a qualified authority.²⁰ That being said, it is not sufficient for the crusading version of holy war, two additional premises need be added. The first is that violence – defined, as an act of physical force that threatens homicide or injury to the human body – was not considered intrinsically evil. It was morally neutral until qualified by the intention of the perpetrator. If his intention was altruistic then the violence could be regarded as being positively good. The second premise is that sacred violence always stemmed from the conviction that Christ's wishes for mankind were associated with a specific political system or course of political events in this world.²¹ More precisely, the crusading version of holy war is a war in which violence is not only a necessary means to reaching a sanctified goal; it is in itself beneficial if applied to legitimate targets, to the point where one believed, to put it crudely, that this kind of violence would compensate for any amount of sin even if the grander enterprise it was part of failed.

Now, a valid question is whether crusading figured in the contemporary mentalities as an ideological package deal including a clearly defined set of beliefs, or if it was just an addition to a soup of general Christian ideas about holy war. Therefore, in order to examine what the contemporary mentalities understood as crusades it is necessary to establish whether or not they expected a remission of sins in return for military actions, as this is what separates crusading ideology from other Christian ideas concerning war and religion.

My aim is to examine the political impact of the crusade in Sweden. By "crusade" I am referring to a Christian holy war with Papal indulgences fought to spread the faith and/or defend Christendom, while I also maintain that my analytical concept of a crusade might not always correspond with the mentality of the contemporaries, in whom crusading ideology may have figured as a motive alongside a number of other motives. Hence I will also be examining just how the Swedes related to the concept of the crusade and the relative importance of crusading ideology in my period. By "political impact" I mean how the presence of crusading ideology might have impacted political developments by legitimising a territorial acquisition at the expense of non-believers, by giving prestige to an individual participant who in turn derived greater political influence thereof or by providing a political tool for whoever could use it to further some agenda.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Sources and Method

The primary sources I will be working with are the Old Swedish rhymed chronicles *Erikskrönikan* and *Förbindelsedikten*, the two Latin hagiographies *Vita et Miracula Sancti Erici Regis Suecia* and *Legenda Sancti Henrici*, the text known as *Birgittas Uppenbarelser* in its Old Swedish version and *The Chronicle of Novgorod*, in addition to a selection of letters in both Old Swedish and Latin. The primary sources will be introduced in greater detail as they become relevant.

When it comes to method, it will mainly concern how I shall work to extract relevant information from my primary source material. First and foremost it is a matter of asking the basic questions of who is writing, what message the writer is trying to convey and who the intended audience is. With these being answered much can be said about the text in question from a source critical point of view. The analysis of the nature of the sources follows and many of the sources I am dealing with are narratives. This entails the classical problem of discussing whether the sources should be used as verifiable sources to the actual times and events described, or as written sources that primarily give us information about the writers and their own time and mentality rather than that which they are meaning to portray.

This relates in turn to the method of gaining understanding of texts known as discourse analysis, where the relationship between the written text and its wider context is explored. In my case the wider context would be the motivation behind the text, as in a political or religious agenda. Medieval history writing was rarely done for the sake of scholarship alone. The challenge then is being able to identify how this potential agenda could have led the author to distort the facts where it would be advantageous from a propagandist point of view, a likely problem to encounter when dealing with a phenomenon as ideologically charged and politically consequential as crusading.

Just as relevant is considering the background of the author – the social groups or milieu in which both the author and the work was shaped. Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, operated with the term “social fields”, meaning the social arenas where a group of people manoeuvre and struggle for desirable resources, whatever these may be. According to Bourdieu such fields consist of a system of social positions, structured internally in terms of power relationships, and when a person writes a text this text can be related to the nature of the person’s social field. With regard to my topic the secular and spiritual aristocracy of medieval Sweden are the two main social fields in which my primary source material was authored. Even though Bourdieu did state that social classes do not necessarily enter into it I doubt he had the social stratification of the middle ages specifically in mind when doing so. In

separating the sources according to whether they were written by secular men or those of the Church, it becomes obvious the literary demands were quite different in each group. The texts demonstrate how their influences, purpose, thematic emphasis and style were affected according to who wrote them and which audience they were written for. I believe this awareness of the social fields and classes can be instrumental when examining how crusades are portrayed in my sources.

Theoretical Approach

What I am searching for is the political impact of crusading ideology in medieval Sweden; how it impacted political developments by legitimising violence and providing a venue for increasing ones honour capital.

Max Weber defined a state society as a monopoly of legitimate violence within a given geographical area, as opposed to a stateless society where there is no monopoly and ample room for private, individually motivated use of violence. When applying this theoretical model to my material there are three elements that need to be factored into the equation; the king or central authority, who sought to introduce a monopoly of legitimate violence; the aristocracy, who desired to retain their influence; and the Papacy, concerned about Christendom and the *libertas ecclesiae*, who affected the course of events throughout by confirming or condemning the central authority and granting crusading indulgences. In my period we witness a transition from the reign of King Erik IX to Earl Birger, where Sweden goes from being a fractioned political structure to becoming a unified kingdom, a sure indication the central authority had managed to extend its monopoly of legitimate violence. Then in the reign of King Birger an aristocratic insurgence ousted him from the throne and re-established electoral kingship, making Magnus Eriksson king in 1319. Magnus Eriksson's reign would prove tempestuous and end with his dethronement. What we are seeing is a fluctuation in the state's ability to enforce the monopoly of legitimate violence and it is interesting to examine if and how crusading ideology might have impacted these developments.

Pierre Bourdieu has dealt with the concept of honour: he describes it as a form of symbolic capital that only exists through its reputation, through how society perceives it and the extent to which people share a common view of how certain actions are honourable or dishonourable. Bourdieu also believes political power grows from an accumulation of different types of symbolic capital and that the centralised state is a product of this concentration of capital. Prior to the emergence of the centralised state the symbolic capital of

the European nobility, honour and reputation, depended on social consensus alone, Bourdieu writes.²² In applying this to my material we could ask if the people involved in Swedish crusading, in particular the leaders and/or instigators, may have used it as a venue for increasing their honour capital, which in turn would have translated into influence and enabled them to play a greater part in politics back home. Thus when I refer to honour, glory or prestige it is with Bourdieu's notion of honour capital in mind.

My approach will be chronological, starting in the 1150s with King Erik IX and ending in the 1350s with King Magnus Eriksson. A chronological approach provides for an orderly survey of the developments throughout my period. It enables us to measure the impact of crusading ideology at different points in the timeline and invites comparison between them.

²² Bourdieu 1994: 55, 61 – 65

Chapter 2: The Crusade of King Erik IX

According to two hagiographic legends written in the late 13th century, King Erik IX Jedvardsson ruled Sweden in the 1150s and launched an *expedicio* to convert the pagans in Finland together with Bishop Henrik of Uppsala. Having defeated and baptised the Finns, Erik returned home to reign in Sweden as an exemplary ruler and lawgiver in the mould of the Old Testament kings, while Bishop Henrik remained in Finland to consolidate the hold of the Catholic Church. It did not take long however before they both suffered martyrdom; the king at the hands of a political rival and Bishop Henrik at the hands of a Finnish farmer. Miracles soon occurred in connection with their dead bodies and from then on they were considered as saints.²³

Two Hagiographic Legends

The *Vita et Miracula Sancti Eriki Regis Suecia* and the *Legenda Sancti Henrici* are our only substantial narratives of these events. They were both written down sometime during the latter half of the 13th century; a hundred years or more after the events they describe took place. The legends display a large degree of interdependence; some parts are near identical, which is unsurprising given their contemporary relationship. The author(s) has not been established with any certainty, but King Erik's *Vita* is usually attributed to Bishop Israel Erlandsson of Västerås.²⁴ They were written down at a time when Sweden and the Church sought to expand further into Finland, ushering in what tradition established as the Third Swedish Crusade of 1293.²⁵ For this reason the legends, especially King Erik's, are usually considered legitimising instruments of their own time rather than windows on the past.²⁶ Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen for instance invokes the British sociologist Michael Mann and suggests the legends of King Erik and Bishop Henrik were written not just for religious purposes but with a politico-ideological plan to redefine reality in order to seize the ideological upper hand.²⁷

Was it a Crusade?

The complete lack of contemporary evidence for King Erik's expedition to Finland, in addition to the *near* complete lack of evidence for the king's existence in the first place, has led the scholars to wildly disparate conclusions. From the end of the 19th century the *Vita et*

²³ Heikkilä 2005: 398 – 419 & Schmid 1954: XI – XIII

²⁴ Christiansen 1997: 114

²⁵ Lindkvist 2006: 34

²⁶ Lindkvist 2001: 123

²⁷ Lehtonen 2006: 8

Miracula Sancti Eriki Regis Sueciae was subjected to an intense criticism by the scholars which deprived it of all value as a primary source.²⁸ Since then the debate has swung back and forth between scholars willing to believe there is a historical core to the legend and those unwilling to see it as anything but a literary construct of the late 13th century.

Kustavi Grotenfelt, writing in 1920, believes King Erik did in fact embark on a campaign to Finland, a crusade even, pointing to how there was a long tradition for military endeavours in the east and how it was necessary to retaliate against pagan pirates coming from this area to raid Sweden, raids that were all the more unbearable now that Sweden was a Christian kingdom. Grotenfelt also claims the king was spurred on by the Church, as it was seemingly the Church that took control in Finland after Erik's army left,²⁹ if we are willing to accept what the legends tell us.

Sven Tunberg on the other hand is somewhat more critical when he concludes in his assessment of King Erik's legend that it is a synthesis of fact, fiction and hagiographic conventions, all of which need to be picked apart before we can arrive at the core of truth. Tunberg does not dismiss the Finland campaign as fiction, arguing that there was nothing unusual about such an expedition, that it was perfectly in line with King Sverker's previous foreign policy, and he points to a Papal letter to Sweden from the 1170s where the Pope complains of how the Finns abandon the faith as soon as the Christian military presence disappears, believing this to be evidence for forced conversions at the hands of the Swedes.³⁰

Even more positively inclined towards the legend of King Eric is Erik Anthoni, who in his article of 1955 argues against what he sees as hypercriticism and claims King Erik's campaign was instrumental in establishing Christianity in Finland.³¹

Eric Christiansen's view however can be considered to be a continuance of the earlier hypercriticism; he dismisses the whole *Vita* as crusading propaganda from the late 13th century and believes any Finnish campaigns in King Erik's time would be more in continuity with Viking raids than crusading ideology.³²

Thomas Lindkvist is less bombastic and does not believe it is possible to say for sure whether or not King Erik embarked on a crusade; while maintaining that military campaigns

²⁸ Lindkvist 2006: 33 – 34

²⁹ Grotenfelt 1920: 116 – 118

³⁰ Tunberg 1941: 267 – 269

³¹ Anthoni 1955: 158

³² Christiansen 1997: 114

to the east were ordinary he wonders if these in Erik's time were seen in extension of the viking raids or crusading ideology.³³

Possible Absence of Papal Involvement

There are no preserved Papal bulls or letters of any kind that can be connected to King Erik's campaign with any certainty. There are however two letters from the Pope to the Swedish court that *might* be related; the aforementioned letter of the 1170s, whose correct dating seems to be 1165, and another letter from 1216. In the former Pope Alexander III writes to the Swedish lamenting how the Finns only accept Christianity when they are in need of protection from Christendom, yet as soon as they are safe attack the faith and its preachers.³⁴ In the latter Pope Innocent III writes to King Eric X Knutsson, confirming his rule of the Swedish realm and the land his "glorious forebears took from the pagans", as well as any additional gains he might win from the same land, authorising the Swedish king to set up one or two bishoprics.³⁵ Nothing is said of any Papal indulgences in either of the letters, but indulgences or not it seems reasonable to assume the Swedes had some kind of presence in Finland by 1216, possibly as early as the 1160s, one which involved conquest and conversion and was approved by the Pope, if only in posterior.

The Motive of Conversion

The two letters are of course insufficient to vindicate the two saints' lives as sources, but they make it seem more likely than not that the legends contain a core of truth, at least as far as the Finnish campaign goes. Conversion of the Finns emerges as a motive for the Swedish presence in Finland in both letters, and we find the same motive is emphasised in the legends.

If we look at King Erik's *Vita*, we can read how the king first offered them conversion, but the Finns refused to accept Christianity and King Erik decided to attack them. After the battle was won the king wept for all the souls who were now lost after having died without receiving the sacrament of penance. The campaign was then over and King Erik returned home while Bishop Henrik stayed to continue the work of converting the pagan Finns and

³³ Lindkvist 2006: 36

³⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&Datering=117&-max=10&-recid=32847&-find=>

³⁵ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Personnamn=Innocentius%20III&-max=10&-recid=32991&-find=>

raising churches.³⁶ Bishop Henrik's *Vita* gives a briefer but near identical account of the same events. It too emphasises conversion as the main motive.³⁷

Just how much of these accounts can be taken at face value and to what extent they are distorted to suit the purposes of late 13th century propaganda remains open to discussion. Even so, in light of the letters of 1165 and 1216 it might be unwise to dismiss them completely. Perhaps it is reasonable to assume they are in fact based on actual events, although retold in the late 13th century in a manner that served contemporary agendas. This poses the problem of disentangling truth from distortion and fiction, and conversion is exactly the kind of motive it would have been opportune for the propagandists of the late 13th century to impose on the past. In light of the letter of 1165 however it seems more reasonable than not to assume King Erik did lead a campaign to Finland to convert the Finns.

Erik Christiansen dismisses this possibility entirely and believes the conversion of Finland began with two Danish crusades in 1191 and 1202, not King Erik. He points to a letter from the Pope to the Archbishop of Lund in 1209, where it is said that a certain land, called Finland, has lately been converted to the faith by the exertions of certain noble personages.³⁸ One might ask though if not both parties could have contributed to the conversion of the Finns.

The Remission of Sins

Seeing as King Erik and Bishop Henrik were declared saints there is no doubt they received a remission of sins. What can be doubted is whether they received it on the Finnish campaign or if it was only later on and solely through their *martyrium*. In the case of King Erik there is nothing in either his legend or the Papal letters to suggest he expected a remission of sins in

³⁶ Schmid 1954: XII: "Postremo vero ut supra dixerimus edificata ecclesia ordinato regno ad inimicos fidei et hostes populi sui manum conuertens coadunato exercitu et assumpto secum ex ecclesia upsalensi beato henrico episcopo versus finnonnes expeditionem dirigit. Ipsosque fide christi prius oblata ac pace exhibita renitentes et rebelles in ulcionem sanguinis christiani manu valida aggreditur ac bello deuictos victor prostrauit. Cumque tanta potitus victoria in oracionem se prostrasset atque cum lacrimis ut semper piissimi cordis erat oraret ad dominum. Interrogatus a quodam suorum familiarium cur fleret cum de victoria hostium christi pocius esset gaudendum sic dicitur respondisse. Gaudeo quidem et dominum glorifico pro data nobis victoria sed vehementer doleo quod tot eorum anime hodie perierunt qui si sacramenta fidei recipissent ad salutem fuissent perpetuam reseruati. [...] Conuocato igitur qui remansit populo terre pace data predicata christi fide baptizatis plurimis fundatis ecclesiis positoque ibidem quem supradiximus beato henrici episcopo..."

³⁷ Heikkilä 2005: 402: "Cum vero plebs Finlandie, tunc ceca et crudelis gentilitas, habitantibus in Suecia gravia dampna frequenter inferret, sanctus rex Ericus, assumpto secum ab ecclesia Upsalensi beato Henrico collecto exercitu, contra nominis Christi et populi sui inimicos expeditionem dirigit. Quibus potenter fidei Christi et suo subiugatis dominio, baptizatis plurimis et fundatis in partibus illis ecclesiis, ad Sueciam cum gloriosa victoria remeavit."

³⁸ Christiansen 1997: 115. The letter can be read here: <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1209&-max=10&-recid=32961&-find=>

return for his efforts. In the end it was his death at the hands of Magnus, a son of the Danish king, which propelled him into sainthood.³⁹ On the other hand being killed did not lead to sainthood by itself, meaning King Erik must have been qualified for it prior to his death, and among the many commendable acts attributed to Erik in his *Vita* the expedition to Finland is given the most attention, implying it was, in the eyes of the late 13th century at least, a major part of what qualified him for sainthood. Even so, this does not change the fact that there is nothing to suggest he expected a remission of sins for the campaign.

Bishop Henrik makes for a more ambiguous case. Henrik never left Finland, and hence it is hard to establish when he in fact stops being part of the campaign or possibly; crusade. As with King Erik there is nothing to suggest he expected a remission of sins in return, although his efforts in converting the Finns and building a church organisation is undoubtedly a part of what qualifies him for sainthood when he is killed by a murderer whom he tried to give canonical punishment.⁴⁰

The Campaign of King Erik in a Crusading Context

On the basis of what we have been through so far we may easily conclude that King Erik's Finnish campaign was not a crusade according to our definition. This might come less easily however if we consider the expedition in its contemporary context.

Crusading ideology first entered the Baltic region towards the middle of the 12th century, making it another arena for crusading alongside the Holy Land and Iberia. The unprecedented step was taken in 1147, when Bernard of Clairvaux preached the Second Crusade following the fall of Edessa to the Muslims. While the French and southern Germans willingly set out for the Holy Land, many northern Germans were reluctant, as they felt they already had a pagan enemy at their doorstep. Bernard referred the matter to Pope Eugenius III, who issued the Papal bull named *Divina dispensatione*; where he authorised the Christians of northern Europe to make war on their own heathens, and their privileges, merits and insignia were to be exactly the same as that of those who fought in the Holy Land. A new crusading arena had been created. Soon afterwards the Saxons and the Danes carried out what has been deemed the first northern crusade, against the Slavic tribes along the Baltic coast.⁴¹

Could it be possible that King Erik launched his campaign to Finland in extension of this? If so it would mean he believed the expedition enjoyed Papal indulgences and earned him a

³⁹ Schmid 1954: XIII

⁴⁰ Heikkilä 2005: 406, 408

⁴¹ Christiansen 1997: 53 – 55

remission of sins. It is of course purely circumstantial and presumes Sweden in the 1150s was abreast of the latest developments in northern Christendom, which could be debated. King Sverker, who ascended the Swedish throne in 1130, did embark on a program of Europeanisation during his reign; working closely with the Catholic Church in establishing a monarchy based on the continental, Christian model.⁴² How deeply these continental influences penetrated at first is however difficult to say, and King Erik was a rival of Sverker and probably hostile to his political program. Or was he? Judging by the two hagiographic legends King Erik worked with the Catholic Church as well when he organised the Finnish campaign, but whether this reflects truth or how the author wanted to see it is a valid question. It should also be considered how many scholars believe King Erik's surname Jedvardsson indicates an English origin. If so it would make it far more likely that he saw himself as a crusader and not a viking.⁴³

Nothing much can be deduced from putting King Erik's expedition in its contemporary context as there are simply too many ambiguities. At the least though, when the campaign is seen against its contemporary backdrop it seems unreasonable to assume it was launched purely in continuation of the viking raids now that the currents of crusading ideology had entered the Baltic scene.

Conclusion

Kustavi Grotenfelt does not have a strong basis for believing King Erik's campaign was a crusade. He is liable to be exaggerating the extent to which Sweden had become a Christian kingdom in the continental mould by the 1150s. Although his claim that the campaign was spurred on by the Church does make the idea of a crusade more likely, this claim is based on what the legends tell us, and seeing as they were written by men of the Church in the later 13th century we have reason to doubt.

Sven Tunberg on the other hand is probably correct when he says King Erik's *Vita* is a synthesis of fact, fiction and hagiographic clichés. A campaign to convert pagans can hardly be said to be a hagiographic cliché and to claim it is pure fiction would seem like hypercriticism, leaving us with fact, at least at the core. To claim it was a crusade however requires more than the motive of conversion evident in the legends and the Papal letters of 1165 and 1216.

⁴² Lindkvist 2006: 30

⁴³ Ibid. 31

Eric Christiansen must be said to be too dismissive. King Erik's campaign might have been more in continuity with viking raids than crusades, as Christiansen writes, but we have also seen there how there are good reasons to modify this idea. Christiansen is completely at odds with Erik Anthoni, who believes King Erik's campaign was instrumental in establishing Christianity on Finland, something Christiansen rather attests to the Danish crusades of 1191 and 1202. Seeing as the source material suggests both the Swedes and the Danes had some part in this, then this might also be what we should believe rather than dismiss one alternative entirely in favour of the other.

We have to agree with Lindkvist that it is impossible to establish with any certainty whether or not this was more of a viking raid than a crusade. On the one hand Sweden in 1150 was not yet an integrated part of Christendom and old traditions are unlikely to have been much eroded by the recent influences from the continent, meaning that any campaign to Finland would necessarily be seen in continuance of earlier viking raids. On the other hand we have to account for the impact of the continental influences as well, which undeniably were increasingly felt in Sweden at this time. If we in addition consider how crusading ideology entered the Baltic in full force with the *Divina Dispensatio* of 1147 and the Danish crusade against the Wends the same year, we could speculate that King Erik had these developments in mind as he set out. At the least it seems unreasonable to assume the campaign was entirely unaffected by the changing ideological climate both at home and in the Baltic, occurring in isolation from its contemporary context. What we are given a glimpse of in the legends of King Erik and Bishop Henry might therefore have been a campaign that was partly a continuance of the viking raids but also to some extent influenced by crusading ideology, in a time when Sweden was in a transitional phase between its pagan past and its Christian future.

We may conclude then that even if King Erik's campaign does not fit the bill when confronted with our definition of a crusade, it is still not unlikely that crusading ideology was at least one motive amongst others in the minds of the participants.

The Political Impact of Crusading Ideology

It seems beyond reasonable doubt that King Erik did in fact lead a campaign to Finland and that conversion was one of its motives, and while the influence of crusading ideology is hard to measure it is likely to have been present. We may then attempt to discuss the potential political implications of King Erik leading a successful crusade, as some scholars have done.

Kustavi Grotenfelt for example argues an alluring case when he disputes the dating of the campaign and claims Erik went to Finland before, not after, he became king, concluding that King Erik in fact gained his kingship as a result of the glory he won for his deeds in Finland and that this was the first step towards a united Christian monarchy in Sweden.⁴⁴ Sven Tunberg however is more inclined to believe King Erik acquired his position as king through marriage with Kristina, who descended from old royalty,⁴⁵ and Thomas Lindkvist agrees with him.⁴⁶ Interestingly Tunberg believes the Sverker dynasty resented the success of King Eric in the Baltic, as their own exertions in this area had come to nothing.⁴⁷

Another source of dispute has been the extent of any eventual Swedish territorial acquisitions following the campaign. The possibility that King Erik could have taken advantage of his victory and established some sort of permanent political influence seems to have been universally dismissed. Christiansen does not believe any Swedish king held sway in Finland before 1200⁴⁸ and even Grotenfelt believes King Erik's campaign won a foothold for the Catholic Church only and not for the Swedish king, pointing out how all taxes from Finland went to the Church up until the rule of Earl Birger Magnusson a hundred years later.⁴⁹ Erik Anthoni echoes this view.⁵⁰

King Erik's Honour Capital

The glory won by King Erik on his Finnish campaign is attested on three instances in the primary source material. One is in King Erik's *Vita*, another is in Bishop Henrik's and finally there is one in the Papal letter of 1216. In the former two the Finland parts are both concluded with the line "...ad Sueciam cum gloriosa victoria remeavit" – "to Sweden with glorious victory returned".⁵¹ Evidently the author(s) of these saints' lives was/were convinced that King Erik was much praised on his return to Sweden, although being far removed in time from these events. Closer to King Erik's days but still quite distant is the letter from the Pope to the Swedish court of 1216, where reference is made to the present king's "glorious forebears" and the land they took from the pagans, which can only mean Finland.

These three references alone make for an alluring case if we combine them with Grotenfelt's theory that the campaign took place prior to Erik's enthroning, making a

⁴⁴ Grotenfelt 1920: 120 – 125

⁴⁵ Tunberg 1941: 265

⁴⁶ Lindkvist 2006: 31

⁴⁷ Tunberg 1941: 275

⁴⁸ Christiansen 1997: 115

⁴⁹ Grotenfelt 1920: 118

⁵⁰ Anthoni 1955: 158

⁵¹ Schmid 1954: XII & Heikkilä 2005: 402

profound political impact more likely. The problem lies in the weakness of Grotenfelt's case. As his basis for disputing the established chronology Grotenfelt makes use of the history works of Ericus Olai and Johannes Magnus, who were writing in the late 15th and early 16th century. In his *Chronica regni Gothorum* Ericus Olai tells us how Bishop Henry arrived in Sweden in 1150 at the time when King Erik became King. Grotenfelt adds this up with what Johannes Magnus tells us in his *Historia de omnibus gothorum sueonumque regibus*, namely that the alleged crusade took place in the same year; 1150. He also mentions the Swedish historian Johannes Messenius, working in the early 17th century, who believed the campaign took place in 1152. Grotenfelt argues in favour of an earlier dating by pointing out it would bring the campaign closer in time to Bernard of Clairvaux preaching the Second Crusade and the crusade against the Wends in 1147,⁵² but why we should put more faith in these sources than the more contemporary ones (or the absence of more contemporary ones) never becomes entirely clear. Grotenfelt himself believes these accounts are based on medieval Church traditions. At the least, he claims, the Finland campaign must be dated prior to the murdering of King Sverker in 1155, after which King Erik would not have had the time to embark on such a venture. Grotenfelt finally suggests that Erik might have started out as King of Uppland, but only after having returned from his glorious crusade did he enjoy the necessary prestige to bypass King Sverker's legitimate heir and make himself king of all Sweden.⁵³

Needless to say the complete lack of any support for this case in the primary source material is enough to undermine it and as such it does not provide us with a basis for arguing anything. Tunberg goes as far as suggesting that perhaps Erik was never even recognised as king, as neither Snorri Sturluson nor Saxo Grammaticus mentions him. Surely they would have if he was considered a glorious crusader king?

There is however a letter from the Pope to King Erik's son King Knut I Eriksson from 1172, which might be giving us an indication as to the prestige of King Erik's name. In this letter the Pope writes he is horrified *to have been told* the Swedes worship as a saint a man who was killed when drunk and bids them cease this worship immediately.⁵⁴ Scholars have believed this drunkard to be none other than King Erik himself, who seems to be the only candidate for a Swedish saint in this period, and so does Sven Tunberg, who believes this is the result of an attempt at blackening the name of King Erik by the Sverker dynasty and Denmark. The Sverkers, he speculates, envied the success of King Erik's Finnish campaign because their

⁵² Grotenfelt 1920: 120 – 122

⁵³ Ibid. 122 – 125

⁵⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Personnamn=Alexander%20III&-max=10&-recid=32864&-find=>

own campaigns in the Baltic had been failures, and saw it as necessary to diminish the glory of King Erik so that he would not erode the legitimacy of the Sverker dynasty.⁵⁵ If this is a correct appraisal of the letter then it would imply that the Sverkers saw the prestige of King Erik following the Finland campaign as something so threatening it was worth involving the Pope, possibly even lying to him, in order to diminish it. Unsurprisingly the prestige of King Erik post-mortem must therefore have derived mainly from his recognition as a saint, seeing as this is what his enemies sought to undermine, and what qualified him for sainthood prior to his death, judging by the *Vita*, was his wise rule and his campaign to Finland, although it is the latter that is given the most room in the legend.

King Erik and the Papacy

Besides winning personal glory King Erik might have been motivated by a desire to improve his relations with the Pope when he conceived of his expedition. Tunberg mentions how Erik and Sverker could be considered to represent two different Church policies; the former the established proprietary one, where the Church is both owned and controlled by the secular power, while the latter represented the *libertas ecclesiae* where the Church is independent of the state and only obedient to the Pope.⁵⁶ Possibly then, King Erik had in mind a desire to strengthen his ties with the Papacy when he launched his campaign, which could explain why he brought with him Bishop Henrik to set up a church organisation in Finland⁵⁷ that brought no local influence for the Swedish crown according to Christiansen⁵⁸ and no income except for the Church until Earl Birger's rule according to Grotenfelt.⁵⁹ And even if this was not a part of King Erik's plan acting in extension of the *Divina Dispensatio* of 1147 must still have been a praiseworthy act in itself in the eyes of the Pope.

Crusading for Plunder

Assuming abstract rewards like glory and improved relations with the Church could not alone have provided sufficient motivation for King Erik, and if territorial conquest was neither a motive nor a result of the campaign, we are left with plunder as the only likely material incentive – especially if we presume that the campaign was at least partly a continuation of the viking raids. Gold, silver and other valuables plundered abroad could be used to

⁵⁵ Tunberg 1941: 275

⁵⁶ Ibid. 261

⁵⁷ Heikkilä 2005: 406: "Cum vero edificacioni et confirmacioni Finlandensis ecclesie prudenter et fideliter insudaret..."

⁵⁸ Christiansen 1997: 114

⁵⁹ Grotenfelt 1920: 118

strengthen one's position at home by exploiting the mechanisms of the Scandinavian gift-exchange economy to gain allies and military power with which to overcome political opponents. This was a much-used strategy judging by the Old Norse saga material, where we find numerous examples of men who rose to prominence in such a way. In the saga of the contemporary King Sverre for instance, we can read how King Sverre's brother Eirik asks Sverre to be raised in rank and be given a part of the kingdom, when the king refuses however Eirik's money soon runs out and he organises a raid to Estonia. We are then told they won much loot⁶⁰ – evidently this was a viable way of securing the means necessary to maintain one's position and influence. Possibly this was part of King Erik's calculations in the 1150s as well; by carrying out a successful raid to Finland he could return a far wealthier man than he was and use it to strengthen his position as king politically and militarily. Alternatively, if we follow Grotenfelt's theory that King Erik did not become king until after the campaign, we can safely assume that the loot won contributed to his eventual rise to kingship.

It could of course be debated just how much plunder there was to be had in Finland in the form of transportable wealth; while Estonia was a key location in the Baltic trading network of the Hansa no part of Finland was of comparable commercial importance at this point.

Crusading for Territorial Conquest

Eric Christiansen claims there is no clear evidence a Swedish king ruled any part of Finland before 1200⁶¹ and modern Finnish historiography does not oppose him in this. The historian Erik Hornborg does not believe King Erik's campaign led to any permanent territorial conquest or military presence for the Swedish state, as verification he uses the letter where the Pope complains about how the Finns persecute the Christians when not under threat of force; evidently the Swedish military presence was either weak or non-existent.⁶² Further Lena Törnblom points to the 13th century as the period where Sweden first secured a hold on the Finnish lands; only now was the Swedish kingdom sufficiently consolidated and militarily powerful to expand eastwards, and the fortresses Åbo and Tavastehus have both been dated to this period.⁶³

The only evidence for Swedish presence in Finland prior to 1200 are the hagiographic legends of King Erik and Bishop Henrik, which tell us they carried out a campaign of conversion to Finland in the 1150s, and the Pope's letter of 1216 to the Swedish court, where

⁶⁰ Koht 1995: 134

⁶¹ Christiansen 1997: 115

⁶² Hornborg 1964: 26 – 28

⁶³ Törnblom 1992: 297 – 298

he refers to a land taken from the pagans by the Swedish king's "glorious forebears".⁶⁴ Neither of the legends make any reference to territorial conquest; they simply state that King Erik returned to Sweden with glorious victory while Bishop Henrik remained in Finland and built a church organisation with prudence and fidelity.⁶⁵ The manner of Bishop Henrik's death is telling of the situation in Finland following King Erik's campaign; we are told Bishop Henrik was killed by a murderer whom he sought to punish according to the discipline of the Church.⁶⁶ In other words Bishop Henrik tried to have a criminal convicted according to Church law, but lacked the power to enforce his verdict when the defendant went against the bishop's ruling. This fits nicely with Hornborg's assessment of the Swedish military presence at the time. When the Pope wrote to the Archbishop of Uppsala in 1237 to say he was sad to hear how the Tavastians persecute Christians and to encourage a crusade against them⁶⁷ it is therefore reasonable to assume that this planned crusade was put in the hands of the Swedes not because Finland was ruled from Sweden but because the Christian community in question was established by the "glorious forebears" of the Swedish king in the 1150s. So, we could say there is a distinct possibility that following the campaign of King Erik Finland was at least on a purely formal level considered to be the precinct of the Swedes. If we also consider how the Church in Sweden was still proprietary at this point it would make any church organisation established by the Swedish king formally his dominion, even if he was unable to enforce his rule there or exploit the revenue. This seems to be the furthest possible reach of the Swedish king's authority in Finland before Birger Magnusson's campaign.

Conclusion

Again Kustavi Grotenfelt presents an interesting yet farfetched theory when he tries to dispute the traditional chronology of King Erik's reign; it might very well have been that his enthronement was a result of a successful crusade but the highly uncontemporary history works Grotenfelt builds this theory on cannot be preferred at the expense of the earlier source material. Sven Tunberg and Thomas Lindkvist are probably correct to claim King Erik gained his crown primarily through marriage. The view that no Swedish king ruled any part of Finland before 1200 also seems to be valid, although modifications can and have been suggested.

⁶⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Personnamn=Innocentius%20III&-max=10&-recid=32991&-find=>

⁶⁵ Schmid 1954: XII & Heikkilä 2005: 406

⁶⁶ Heikkilä 2005: 406

⁶⁷ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1237&-max=10&-recid=33154&-find=>

Separating the motives from the consequences of a potential crusade to Finland is difficult; little can be said about the former whereas the latter will remain ambiguous due to the scarcity of sources. The problem can be approached tentatively however by simply extrapolating the motives from the apparent consequences.

We can conclude with the following assessment; King Erik did lead a campaign to Finland; the campaign was almost certainly in continuity with the eastern ventures of the Viking Age but also likely to have been under the influence of the new ideological currents both in the eastern Baltic and in Sweden, although to an uncertain extent. The prestige and possibly plunder he won on this campaign helped him strengthen his position as a king whose legitimacy so far derived from his marriage only, the campaign may also have improved his relationship with the Pope. After his murder at the hands of a Danish pretender he was by some considered a saint, according to his legend mainly due to his fight for the faith in Finland, and as a saint he posed such a political threat to the Sverker dynasty that they attempted to undermine his saintliness through the Pope. Any territorial acquisitions in Finland as a result of the campaign passed directly to the Church and the Swedish king had at best a formal sovereignty over these lands, with no possibilities of imposing his rule or exploiting resources. Even so King Erik's victory in Sweden might have established a Swedish precedence in Finland and thus prepared the ground for the later invasions.

Chapter 3: The Second Swedish Crusade

In 1237 a Papal bull reached the Archbishop of Uppsala urging the Swedes to launch a crusade against the pagan Tavastians, as they had rejected the Christian faith. Those who took the cross would receive the same indulgences as those who fought in the Holy Land.⁶⁸ This initiated what 19th century tradition established as the second Swedish crusade, where the nobleman Birger Magnusson (1210 – 1266) led the King's army to Finland, defeated and converted the Tavastians, and with the construction of the fortress Tavastehus consolidated the Swedish position for centuries to come.

Source Criticism

As *Erikskrönikan* is the only primary source that allows us to reconstruct the events of Birger's crusade, one is faced with the question of how much a rhymed chronicle written in the 1320s can tell us about events 80 years previously.

The text has been dated to the 1320s and ascribed to a politically astute writer well versed in the chablons of the *chansons de geste*, who shared the world view of the knightly aristocracy, its values and ideals. We are in all likelihood dealing with a secular nobleman attached to the regency of Mats Kettilmundsson during King Magnus Ericsson's infancy; Mats Kettilmundsson himself has been suggested.⁶⁹ The authorship is however left to pure guesswork.

Unfortunately, the main purpose of *Erikskrönikan* is not to give us a rendition of crusading ideology in 13th century Sweden, the author has a different agenda entirely. Most explicitly he tries to establish legitimacy for the crowning of Magnus Ericsson, which was no given. His enthronement was a result of an aristocratic rebellion following the incarceration of Sweden's two most prominent noblemen, the dukes Valdemar and Eric, the latter Magnus' father. The revolt was led by Mats Kettilmundsson and ended with the execution of both the King and his heir, followed by the nobles' acclaiming Magnus Ericsson as the next king with Mats as regent. So, not only was the reigning king and his legitimate heir ousted and executed, the system of kingship was also altered from hereditary to electoral. *Erikskrönikan* paints these controversial acts in colours of praise.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1237&-max=10&-recid=33154&-find=>

⁶⁹ Jansson 1987: 19

⁷⁰ Ibid. 11 – 12

The chronicle also aims to glorify the Swedish secular aristocracy. The idea of chivalry was at this point still young in Sweden, and through relating the deeds of the Swedish knights in a rhymed chronicle written according to the genre conventions of the *chansons de gestes* the secular aristocracy must have been hoping to give a favourable comparison to the more established chivalry on the continent. As such it was written both by and for the knightly caste, and as such the text is also inclined to exaggerate the importance of their acts, ignoring or relegating the parts played by other branches of society, like the Church or the peasantry, whose influence is hard to trace in *Erikskrönikan*. In addition to this the *chansons de gestes* are by their nature superficial; we are told how people dress, dance, fight and feast, but little of the political and ideological context of events. For this we are often forced to read between the lines.⁷¹

With this in mind we may endeavour to extract information from *Erikskrönikan* about crusades and crusading ideology in 13th century Sweden. However, to do so we first need to deal with three rather fundamental issues concerning Birger Magnusson's campaign on which the scholars have been divided.

The Dating of the Second Swedish Crusade

One of these disputes concerns when in fact the alleged crusade took place. A commonly accepted date is now 1239, but if we follow the chronology of the chronicle itself it should be dated 1249. After the passage celebrating Birger's success in Finland, the first sentence goes like this:

“Erik konung doo hemma mädhen.”⁷²

The word ”mädhen” indicates that this occurred *meanwhile* the Swedes were campaigning in Finland, and as King Eric XI is known to have died in 1250 the expedition must necessarily be dated within close proximity of his death. The next passage, where Birger's son is crowned in his absence,⁷³ also makes sense within this context considering his very recent success in Finland. The only real stumbling block here is the Novgorod Chronicle, which tells us how a Swedish army invaded Novgorod territory in 1240 and was repelled by Alexander Nevsky at

⁷¹ Ibid. 15 – 16

⁷² Ibid. 32

⁷³ Ibid.

the battle of Neva, an event not related by *Erikskrönikan* even though it is probable that we are dealing with the same expedition.⁷⁴

Regardless, the date of the campaign was generally accepted as 1249 until Jarl Gallén in 1946 dismissed it in favour of dating it to 1239. Gallén makes his case by pointing to the *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, a near contemporary and in Gallén's opinion more reliable source, which tells us how Birger Magnusson in 1249 was in Norway to meet with the Norwegian king. Not only that, but we are also told of an internal political crisis in Sweden at the time. These two factors make a military venture in 1249 seem improbable. In addition to this Gallén's dating would explain why there was a Swedish military presence in Russia in 1240, and considering how the Papal bull was issued in 1237 it does point in favour of the 1239 dating. Gallén argues that Birger would not have achieved such a strong position in the 1240s had it not been for his earlier military successes. The fact that the Russian incident of 1240 is not mentioned in any Swedish source can be easily explained as the battle ended in victory for Alexander Nevsky and Novgorod.⁷⁵ John Lind, being an expert on the Russian material, supports Gallén's dating,⁷⁶ and so does Gisela Nordstrandh.

Nordstrandh makes an interesting case by drawing attention to the dangers of using texts in the genre of *chansons de gestes* as sources. These texts, she argues, should not be used as a basis of establishing chronology due to their primarily lyrical function. Their literary aim is to tell a story in a manner which is poetic and aural, the composition of rhymes taking precedence over the actual timeline of the events related.⁷⁷ Thus the seemingly conflicting chronology of events in *Erikskrönikan* may perhaps be dismissed as mere artistic license?

Eric Christiansen on the other hand is somewhat original as he claims there were in fact *two* expeditions: the first being the one which hit the Russians in 1240 and the second being *Erikskrönikan*'s campaign of 1249.⁷⁸

Even with the available source material exhausted it still seems as if our information is far too ambiguous to allow any definitive conclusion to the problem of dating Birger's campaign. The case the scholars have made in favour of 1239 seems probable enough when considering the Papal bull of 1237 and the battle with the Russians in 1240, yet it involves either disregarding the chronology of our main source, *Erikskrönikan*, or accepting Nordstrandh's theory that the text itself disregards chronology. The fact that the Papal bull arrived in 1237

⁷⁴ Michell & Forbes: 84 – 85

⁷⁵ Gallén 1946: 95, 98

⁷⁶ Lind 1991: 284 – 285 (1)

⁷⁷ Nordstrandh 1990: 16

⁷⁸ Christiansen 1997: 117

does not necessitate an immediate response in the form of a crusade, it could just as well have been put off to the late 1240s, even though Gallén would say it was less convenient at that point. As for the battle of Neva, it can be argued that even though Novgorod did beat off a Swedish attack in 1240, this force need not have been Birger's at all – it is not as if individual raiding parties were a rare occurrence on the Baltic Sea in this period.

It is of course more tempting to weave everything the sources tell us into the historical tapestry rather than to accept a story full of holes, but unless we are careful this might lead us to force the construction of a historical narrative that is coherent yet false. Particularly in a case as ambiguous as this one it is safer to accept both 1239 and 1249 as possible datings before analysing further, though the former seems more likely.

The Role of Birger Magnusson

Another controversy concerns whether or not Birger Magnusson even led this campaign at all. The argument against Birger's leadership is that he was not yet earl in 1239 and thus there was no reason why he should be chosen as leader over the present earl, Ulf Fase.⁷⁹ On closer inspection however it becomes obvious there were several good reasons why Birger and not Ulf should be in command. First of all, no custom or law dictated that the earl enjoyed the prerogative of leading the *leidangr* when the king could not.⁸⁰ On the contrary, two of the Swedish law texts in use at the time mention a dignitary by the title of *forman* as one who would lead the *leidangr* in the king's stead,⁸¹ and this fits exactly with how *Erikskrönikan* describes Birger's ensign of command:

“Swa bödh han them til hedith land
ok satte thz sinom maghe i hand
at han skulle wara theran forman”⁸²

”Sinom maghe” means “his brother-in-law”, Birger Magnusson, and this brings us to my next point. Birger had married the King's sister, which alone would have been enough to elicit prestigious offices, but this may be only part of the reason why Birger was preferred as *forman* over Earl Ulf Fase. Let us consider Ulf Fase's political position. The reign of King Eric XI had at one point been interrupted by a revolt which led to his dethroning and

⁷⁹ Ibid. 31. Assumes the campaign took place in 1239.

⁸⁰ Lind 1991: 280 – 281 (1)

⁸¹ Nordstrandh 1990: 18. The law texts are *Upplandslagen* and *Södermannalagen*.

⁸² Jansson 1987: 30

temporary banishment. Before he reclaimed his crown, the Swedish realm was ruled by an aristocratic coalition led by one Knut Holmgersson. Ulf Fase was among those who brought this about and he gained his earldom through the *coup d'état*.⁸³ Now, why he kept his title of earl after King Eric regained the throne may be explained as some sort of compromise between the King and the aristocracy, and why Ulf Fase did not lead the crusade despite being earl may therefore be explained by how he could not be trusted and, one might claim, by how the King had no interest in providing him with a path to glory.

Was it a Crusade?

If we are to examine the political causes and consequences of crusading ideology in connection with Birger Magnusson's conquest of Tavastia we need to discuss whether or not this campaign was seen as a crusade at all. The problem we face is threefold: Was it considered as a crusade by the author of *Erikskrönikan* in 1320s? Was it seen in the same light 80 years earlier, by Birger and his contemporaries? And lastly, can it be considered a crusade according to my definition?

Erikskrönikan's Account of Birger Magnusson's Campaign

First addressing the former problem we may reach two entirely different conclusions depending on how we choose to interpret *Erikskrönikan*'s wording. Eric Christiansen does not believe there is any basis for claiming that the chronicle portrays Birger's expedition as a crusade, as it never once explicitly uses the word "crusade" or suggests that the participants expected a remission of sins.⁸⁴ Thomas Lindkvist echoes Christiansen and claims the portrayal of the so-called crusades in *Erikskrönikan* shows few signs indicating they might have been motivated by crusading ideology.⁸⁵ In the other end of the spectrum we find Gisela Nordstrandh, who not only believes that crusading ideology comes through clearly in the description of Birger's campaign, but also claims this passage was deliberately written with an analogy between Birger's and St. Eric's Finnish ventures in mind, thus portraying Birger as an ideal warrior of the faith on par with Sweden's proto-crusader St. Eric himself.⁸⁶ John Lind agrees with Nordstrandh, he believes the analogy was intended to strengthen the legitimacy of Birger's dynasty by establishing continuity with St. Eric.⁸⁷ Thomas Lindkvist on

⁸³ Harrison 2002 (2): 117

⁸⁴ Christiansen 1997: 117

⁸⁵ Lindkvist 1996: 171

⁸⁶ Nordstrandh 1990: 29 – 30

⁸⁷ Lind 1991: 293 (1)

the other hand does not acknowledge any explicit parallels between the two, suggesting that the similarities may just as well be the result of a general medieval mode of storytelling.⁸⁸

So, does the author of *Erikskrönikan* portray it as a crusade or not? Let us have a look at the source itself. It begins with King Eric XI's summons to war:

”Tha loth konung Erik ower alt sith rike
bade riddare ok riddare like
swa ok bönder ok tjänistomen,
- swa som herra plägha oc än
at sighia sinom mannom til,
taghar han eth örlogh driwa wil –
swa bödh han them til hedith land”⁸⁹

The King does not bid them to go to Finland, Tavastia or any other name of the region, but to a “pagan land”. Next follows descriptions of practical preparations and partings accompanied by much grief, although:

“Tho gladdos the at Gudz hedher
skulle meras aff then färd.”⁹⁰

They were nonetheless pleased with the fact that this expedition would increase the glory of God. Did all campaigns do this? It is also interesting to note that from here on the chronicler no longer speaks of knights, peasants or servants, but simply refers to the Swedes as “the crisno” as opposed to “the hedno”. We are entering a world of black and white where internal divisions fade.⁹¹

The story moves quickly on to where the Swedish army arrives in Finland and encounters the pagans. We are told how the Christians are eager to test their swords on the Tavastians, and the following battle ends with how “the hedno tappado, the crisne vunno.” Then follows the passage on how the pagans are offered the choice between baptism and death:

“Hwo them wille til handa gaa

⁸⁸ Lindkvist 1996: 17

⁸⁹ Jansson 1987: 30

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Christiansen 1997: 117

ok cristin warda ok doop untfa,
honom lotho the gotz ok liiff
ok friid at liffwa alt uten kiiff.
Hwilkin heden ey ville swa,
honom lotho the dödin owerjaa.”⁹²

Erikskrönikan is explicit with the conversion motive. Further we are told that:

“The satto thet land med crisna men,
som iak vänter at thet star oc än.”⁹³

Not only were the Tavastians forcibly converted, their land was also settled with Christians. One can assume that this was done to both secure new lands for the aristocracy and to speed up the Christianisation process by integrating Tavastia as a part of Christendom as fast as possible. The Church did not hesitate from goading the secular powers to interfere on their behalf if the words of God alone could not penetrate the hearts of the pagans, and for this purpose crusading ideology was an excellent tool. Vice versa the secular powers could make use of the Church to legitimise their own ambitions in the east with crusading ideology.

The author continues with the construction of “Taffwesta borg”, which consolidated the Swedish position, and ends this part of the chronicle with how the land was Christianised and how the Russians lost whatever influence they had held in the area:

“Thet samma land thet vart alt cristith
- jak tror at rytzakonungen mistit.”⁹⁴

Now, the juxtaposition of “crisno” and “hedno” along with how the pagans are forcibly baptised and how the “Russian king” loses influence, suggests the author considered this to be a fight for the faith, for the conversion of pagans and the expansion of Christendom.

As Christiansen pointed out however there is no mention of a remission of sins and as such the campaign as it is portrayed here does not comply with my definition, unless we add the Papal bull of 1237 to the narrative.

⁹² Jansson 1987: 31

⁹³ Jansson 1987: 32

⁹⁴ Ibid. 32

Comparison with the Passage on Junker Karl

A bit further on in *Erikskrönikan* it is interesting to examine the character Junker Karl, a knight who flees the oppressive regime of Earl Birger and joins the Teutonic Order or “Gudz riddare” as the chronicle refers to them. This part of the story may not have any direct relevance to Birger’s campaign, but indirectly it might have some bearing on the problem at hand, as it constitutes the passage of the chronicle where crusading ideology seems to figure most prominently.

Karl, to prove his mettle to the other knights of the Order, solemnly proclaims his willingness to fight the pagan Lithaunians. His rhetoric is in perfect accordance with crusading ideology:

“Min hielm, min brynia ok min plata
skal warda aff hednom mannom stöt.
Giter iak mina synder ther med böt,
tha er mit liiff ther til ospart.
Gud ma ok vilia iak giter mik wart.
Skal iak oc döö, er mik thet skapat,
tha faar iak himmerike, iak hawer ey tapat.”⁹⁵

Karl fights the pagans for a remission of sins and a place in Heaven, and he does not survive:

“Then daghen stridde han til han doo.
Nu er han i himmerike, thet er min tro.”⁹⁶

When word of this reached Earl Birger we are told he regretted his hostile relationship with Karl.⁹⁷

We may ask then what the passage on Karl’s *martyrium* at the hands of the Lithuanians can tell us about the passage relating Birger’s conquest of Tavastia? Since the author is explicit in portraying Junker Karl’s battles against the pagans in light of crusading ideology, maybe we must also assume that he saw Birger’s battles against pagans in the same light, even if he is less explicit with the latter? Or perhaps the fact that the author uses crusading ideology far

⁹⁵ Ibid. 36 – 37

⁹⁶ Ibid. 38

⁹⁷ Ibid.

more explicitly with Karl than with Birger should rather tell us that he did not view Birger's campaign in a crusading context at all? Another possibility is that seeing as Birger's battle with the Tavastians ended in victory while Karl's battle with the Lithaunians ended in defeat, it may have been more opportune to emphasise the heavenly rewards of the latter and the worldly rewards of the former, so as to make them both seem as victories of the faith regardless of outcome.

Lastly, assuming Birger's campaign was in fact a crusade, the author may have had his own agenda for not elaborating too much on it. Birger had, after his ascension to earl and regent, ruthlessly suppressed the secular aristocracy in the name of the king. Twice the knights of the realm had risen against him and twice they had been defeated in battle, the second defeat followed by mass-executions that the author of *Erikskrönikan* condemns.⁹⁸ Junker Karl on the other hand was very much a man of the secular aristocracy. He even participated in the aforementioned rebellion and his martyrdom in battle against the Lithuanians would probably not have occurred had not Birger banished him from Sweden in the first place. Even if Birger did in fact lead a crusade the author may not have felt inclined to praise him for it, nor might his audience have appreciated it if he did.

The Contemporary Campaign

Moving on to the issue of whether or not Birger Magnusson's Finnish campaign was seen as a crusade by its contemporaries we must rely on the only contemporary written sources; the aforementioned Papal bull of 1237, and the Russian material which informs us a Swedish army was routed by Alexander Nevsky at the battle of Neva in 1240. Granted, even if we had not *Erikskrönikan*'s account of Birger's campaign, these two sources alone would have made the case that a Swedish army was active on Tavastian and Novgorod territory in the late 1230s. But the fact that the Swedes launched a campaign directed at the Tavastians and possibly Novgorod is not what is disputed here; it is whether or not this was an exponent of crusading ideology.

To argue against the proposition that Birger led a crusade is problematic without first explaining how the Papal bull of 1237, which explicitly encouraged a crusade against the Tavastians, had no connection with the campaign against the Tavastians 2 or 12 years later. It is necessary to either dismiss the notion of crusading ideology being present in the passage of *Erikskrönikan* covering the events of the campaign, which is the problem we have just

⁹⁸ Ibid. 35

discussed, or to say that even though crusading ideology is evident in how the campaign is related this was an anachronism by an author who wrote in a different ideological context from that of the 1230s.

The question of anachronism is decisive; were chivalric concepts like crusading as firmly ingrained in the Swedish mentality of the 1240s as that of the 1320s, or did the chronicler simply impose his present on the past? Sven Bertil Jansson makes an interesting observation, noting how the chronicle berates King Eric XI Ericsson, whose epithet “the lisp and lame” derives from this source, for not being able to participate in the knightly tournaments due to his physical condition. Jansson claims this is an anachronism, as there is nothing to suggest that knightly tournaments took place in Sweden at this time.⁹⁹ Fagerland, who gives the impression of having researched the introduction of chivalry in Sweden, claims the political and economical preconditions necessary for the development of a knightly caste in the continental mould were not present until the late 13th century. He believes the chronicle is an expression of the “new” aristocracy.¹⁰⁰ So, if the tournament is an anachronism, then what of the crusade?

“Erik konungr var nokot swa läsper vid,
haltan thet war ok hans sidh.
Han storkte gerna skäl ok rāth
ok älskade gerna sin eghin āt.
Han hiolt husāra ok ādela sidh,
ok bondom gaff han godhan friid.
A alwora kunda han sik wel forsta,
med *torney* kunne han ey mykit umga.”¹⁰¹

As we can see, the chronicler paints a picture of the ideal king who is noble and cares for his people while at the same time the chronicler makes light of his physical disabilities which unables the king from participating in the “torney”. Using this to establish anachronism is however problematic, as it first of all presupposes that the world of chivalry had in fact not yet been adopted by the Swedish aristocracy in the 1230s, a theory that rests solely on Fagerland’s conjectural “political and economic preconditions” not yet providing a basis for a

⁹⁹ Ibid. 184

¹⁰⁰ Fagerland 1995: 8

¹⁰¹ Jansson 1987: 29

knightly caste. Can an economic situation truly stall ideological currents from reaching a country? That sounds like the topic of a thesis of its own; suffice to say it seems entirely possible that the Swedish secular aristocracy, even if their place in society may have differed politically and economically from that of their peers on the continent, may still have seen themselves as men of chivalry.

The use of the word “torney” indicates the author had in mind the knightly jousts, which may or may not have taken place in Sweden at this time, depending on how Europeanised we are willing to consider the country at this point. The author might be imposing a term from his own time on an earlier form of staged combat, just as he might be imposing crusading ideology on a campaign launched in continuity with Viking raids rather than holy war. Yet there is nothing impossible about knightly jousts taking place in King Eric XI’s time; they are recorded in Norway for the first time during King Sverri’s reign by the saga which was written during his lifetime, a few decades previous to King Eric’s reign.¹⁰²

At this point Norwegians had organised what seemingly was two crusades to the Holy Land; the crusade of King Sigurd I Magnusson in 1107¹⁰³ and the crusade of Erling Ormsson and Earl Ragnvald of the Orkneys in the 1150s.¹⁰⁴ The Danes too were active crusaders in the Baltic long before the 1230s. Their conquest of Pomerania from the 1140s onward seems to have been motivated or at least justified by crusading ideology.¹⁰⁵ Other possible Danish crusades were launched to Finland in 1191 and 1202, to Estonia in 1194 and 1197, to Saaremaa\Ösel in 1206 and Prussia in 1210. In 1219 they subjugated Estonia and by the 1220s the participants in these Baltic campaigns were signed with the cross, referred to as *crucesignati* and given full Papal indulgence,¹⁰⁶ much like the Swedes were in the Papal bull of 1237.

Now, if Norway held jousting tournaments and had launched two crusades by 1200, if Denmark was even more Europeanised and carried out numerous crusades in the Baltic at this time, and considering the fact that a Papal bull reached Sweden in 1237 which explicitly urged on a crusade, the idea that Sweden launched a crusade to Tavastia in the 1230s or 40s is entirely plausible and does not seem to warrant an accusation of anachronism. If Sweden was in fact still alien to concepts like crusades and tourneys by the mid 1200s then it must have been an exceptionally backwards and archaic society, even by Scandinavian standards. And if

¹⁰² Neergaard 2001: 83 – 84

¹⁰³ Riley-Smith 2001: 90

¹⁰⁴ Pálsson & Edwards 1981: 155 – 182

¹⁰⁵ Christiansen 1997: 375

¹⁰⁶ Riley-Smith 2001: 131 – 132

it was not alien to the concept then that makes it more likely the 1239/1249 campaign was at least partly motivated by the crusading bull.

Conclusion

The old dating of 1249 for Birger Magnusson's campaign seems less credible than 1239, as convincingly argued by Jarl Gallén and Gisela Nordstrandh. The expedition was clearly aimed at the conquest of Tavastia, meaning it must be connected with the crusading bull of 1237, which together with the evident motive of spreading the faith and the contemporary context makes the presence of crusading ideology as a motive or at least a legitimisation more likely than not.

The Political Impact of Crusading Ideology

The Finnish historian Seppo Suvanto asserts in his article "Birger jarls livsverk" of 1967 that the Papacy considered Finland to be Sweden's own crusading province and that Birger Magnusson's "so-called" crusade changed Tavastia for all posterity by incorporating it administratively in the Swedish realm.¹⁰⁷ Both Gallén and Nordstrandh agree Birger could have built his strong political position at least partly on prestige won as a crusader.¹⁰⁸

John Lind is a more recent scholar who has focused on how crusading ideology in Sweden affected its relationship with Novgorod. In the article "Early Russian-Swedish rivalry – the battle on the Neva in 1240 and Birger Magnusson's Second Crusade to Tavastia" he argues that Birger Magnusson's campaign was the first confrontation of a centuries long conflict between Swedes and Russians over control with the Baltic trade. He too believes there are signs Birger harvested enough glory on this expedition to have considered himself a candidate for the throne on his return.¹⁰⁹

Territorial Conquest

Territorial conquest with all its economic benefits might be seen as one of the more pragmatic movers behind this expedition.¹¹⁰ *Erikskrönikan*, as quoted earlier, makes an explicit point of how with the conquest of Tavastia and the building of Tavastehus the Russians "lost" that land.¹¹¹ We do not know precisely what kind of influence the "Russian king" of Novgorod

¹⁰⁷ Suvanto 1967: 226 – 227, 235

¹⁰⁸ Gallén 1946: 98 & Nordstrandh 1990: 29 – 31

¹⁰⁹ Lind 1991: 269, 294 (1)

¹¹⁰ Lindkvist 2001: 130

¹¹¹ Jansson 1987: 31 – 32

enjoyed in this region prior to Birger's campaign, but in any case it was diminished afterwards.¹¹²

To gain a deeper understanding of what was at stake here it may serve us well to consider how the prime mover behind Russo-Swedish antagonism throughout the Middle Ages and beyond seems to have been the struggle for control with trade and commerce in the Baltic Sea. In this regard a hold on the river Neva, which connects Lake Ladoga with the Baltic Sea, was especially important to secure. Seen in this context the Russian account of a Swedish army by the river Neva in 1240 makes perfect sense, as an extension of Birger's Finnish campaign and perhaps the earliest collision between the mercantile interests of Novgorod and the newly emerged kingdom of Sweden as suggested by Lind.¹¹³ Possibly it might in turn explain why crusading ideology in Sweden henceforth appears to have been more intertwined with political interests in the Baltic than anything else.¹¹⁴

The Political Career of Birger Magnusson

To investigate how crusading ideology could impact the career of an individual actor on the political stage we can examine the career of the man who led it, Birger Magnusson, rather than that of the King who died soon after its completion. Accepting the campaign was a crusade, that Birger led it and that it took place in 1239, we may try to assess his achievement in light of his status as a crusader:

In 1247 Birger defeats an aristocratic coalition once again threatening the King. On the King's death in 1250 Birger's own son Valdemar is raised to the throne, and Birger receives the title of earl (a sort of steward of the realm second only to the king). This sparks off another aristocratic revolt in 1251 which is brutally crushed by Birger.¹¹⁵ Afterwards word arrives from the Pope urging all Swedish bishops to support the Earl in establishing internal stability, effectively ending all active opposition to Valdemar's enthronement.¹¹⁶ Valdemar however is still a minor and Birger emerges as the *de facto* ruler of Sweden, which he remains till his death in 1266. During the course of his regency Birger manages to strengthen the somewhat ambiguous *princeps inter pares* position of the king by ruthlessly suppressing the landed aristocracy, he furthers the *libertas ecclesia*, establishes a universal set of laws for the realm, discards the antiquated military organisation of the *leidangr* in favour of a feudal

¹¹² Christiansen 1997: 119

¹¹³ Lind 1991: 269 (1)

¹¹⁴ Christiansen 1997: 178 – 180

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 34 – 36

¹¹⁶ Harrison 2002 (2): 197

system along continental lines, incorporates the Finnish territories administratively into the Swedish realm and founds Stockholm as a defence against pagan pirates from the east as well as a new royal seat.¹¹⁷

It is striking how Birger Magnusson goes from being “merely” one Swedish nobleman among many to becoming the undisputedly most powerful man perhaps in the history of the kingdom. In a time when the absolute power of the king did not exist even in theory and his influence largely depended on the support of his peers, Birger was able to exert influence to the extent that he could introduce wide-scale societal reforms while crushing all opposition with brute force. It is tempting for some no doubt to explain this previously unheard of influence based on his son’s throne alone, but power is one thing, legitimacy another. Kings had come and gone, usually in violent ways such as with King Eric XI, telling us that the legitimacy on which their power rested was constantly held in doubt, challenged and often undermined. The position of the kings was therefore anything but unassailable, on the contrary it seems to have been far too fragile for them to risk unpopularity by forcing reforms on society on the same scale as Birger did.¹¹⁸ So, from where did he derive this unprecedented legitimacy? His position as earl in the sense of being the king’s right-hand man was nothing new in Birger’s day, yet there is little to suggest that his predecessors enjoyed any comparable influence by far. Granted, their sons were not kings, but then one could ask why Valdemar was enthroned in the first place – it must have been obvious to all concerned that this would make Birger regent.¹¹⁹ Even before Valdemar’s enthronement then, Birger must have held an esteemed place in Swedish politics.

To explain Birger’s political career it may be more fertile to consider the impact of abstract sizes such as honour and prestige, instead of anachronistically putting undue emphasis on the influence of formalised and institutionalised power. Medieval Sweden was an honour-based society, honour constituting what Pierre Bourdieu has defined as *symbolical capital*. If one projects this unto the political career of Birger the Earl, could it be reasonable to argue that Birger derived his unprecedented influence at least partly from his symbolical capital, his honour, which in turn he derived from his reputation as a successful crusader?

Crusading undisputedly carried with it great prestige in high medieval Europe, presenting not only a chivalric ideal but also a guaranteed remission of sins for anyone willing to martyr their lives for Christendom – it could be argued it was the most honourable act conceivable in

¹¹⁷ Suvanto 1967: 222, 224

¹¹⁸ For the development of kingship in Sweden see Rosen 1978

¹¹⁹ Harrison 2002 (2): 195

the period.¹²⁰ It is hardly controversial then to suggest that the symbolical capital gained while crusading easily translated into political influence, and I am not the first to suggest this in the case of Birger Magnusson. His career seems to have skyrocketed with the accomplishment of the second Swedish crusade.

As early as 1946 Jarl Gallén argued that Birger's position as the strongest man in the realm was due to his success as a crusader in Finland.¹²¹ Later, in 1995, Tor Einar Fagerland dealt exclusively with the idea of honour capital as seen in *Erikskrönikan*. He claims that politics in this period revolved around individuals and their symbolical capital rather than ideologies, their accumulation of land and power being a direct result of their personal prestige. The honour capital however, Fagerland says, could only be acquired through esteemed actions. Crusading was just such an action, and Birger may have been aware of this as he took it upon himself to lead the crusade.¹²² In the chronicle at least it is explicitly stated he did to increase his honour:

“Hans magher [Birger] took ther gerna widher,
han ville ok gerna vitha hans heder.”¹²³

Fagerland also claims honour capital was hereditary and could be passed on to the next generation, in this case Birger's enthroned son Valdemar.¹²⁴

There is however one significant problem with this assessment of Birger Magnusson's political career; it is speculation and conjecture, and even if it is believable speculation and conjecture it is not possible to verify it by invoking *Erikskrönikan*. Granted, the chronicle does relate the actions of Birger during his earldom, as well as how he achieved his position, but only superficially; political implications remain elusive and whatever impact crusading ideology might have had is left unanswered. If Birger was indeed surrounded by the glorious aura of a warrior of the faith the chronicler does little to convey it. When looking at the passages following Birger's alleged crusade the chronicler seems largely critical of Birger. On Birger's return from Finland, when he learns of his eldest son's enthronement, he is not thrilled as one might expect but upset that it was not himself who was elected:

¹²⁰ Riley-Smith 2001: xxviii – xxiv

¹²¹ Gallén 1946: 98

¹²² Fagerland 1995: 30, 33

¹²³ Jansson 1987: 30

¹²⁴ Ibid. 20

“Then tiid Birge jerl kom hem,
tha wart han vreder summum them,
ther hans son haffde til konung takit,
ok sagde: ‘Hwi er ekki heller jakit?’”¹²⁵

Birger only agrees to the election when he is threatened with someone else entirely being installed on the throne.¹²⁶

Next, after a passage on Birger’s sons, begins another on one Earl Folke, who is introduced with words of praise unheard of in connection with Birger:

“Folke jerl war en erliken man,
rikesins forman tha war han.
Han war swa höwelik dugande oc wiis,
swa at alle men gaffwo honom priis,
thet han var en erligh herra.”¹²⁷

In the eyes of the author of *Erikskrönikan*, this man seems to possess a greater honour capital than Birger. Junker Karl, who we have previously dealt with, was a relative of Earl Folke, and next follows how he opposes Earl Birger:

“Een aff them heet junker Karl.
Han satte sik amoth Birge järl.”¹²⁸

When Birger tries to banish Karl an aristocratic revolt ensues, which is defeated by Birger. Then, in violation of a truce in which Birger and Bishop Kol offers peace to the defeated noblemen if they lay down their arms:

“Ther loth then jerlin hoffwod aff slaa.
Junker Karl war ekki thär.
Ther varo tha yffrid marge när.
Tha gik folkunga ät

¹²⁵ Ibid. 32

¹²⁶ Ibid. 33

¹²⁷ Ibid. 35

¹²⁸ Ibid.

wald ower ok mykin oreth.

[...]

Sidhan thorde engen amot jerlin standa”¹²⁹

And since then no one dared to stand against the Earl. The Birger Magnusson which comes through in the text is not a praiseworthy man; he is portrayed as an unscrupulous tyrant. The honour capital is rather assigned to men like Earl Folke and Junker Karl, of whom the latter as we have seen is explicitly panegyricised in the rhetoric of crusading ideology. Why is there no similar passage praising Birger’s achievements in Finland? Even if we suppose Birger’s campaign was not a crusade, it seems odd that a failed battle versus the Lithuanians should warrant more prestige than a successful campaign which secured Tavastia for the Swedish kingdom and the Catholic Church. There seems to be only two possible explanations; either the *martyrium* was held in higher regard than victory, or the chronicler simply refused to give Birger due credit for the reasons discusses earlier. The latter is perhaps more likely; considering Birger’s many achievements both as general and regent it is strange how there is only one line in the text in which the chronicler commends Birger, and it is in connection with his building of Stockholm as a defence against Baltic piracy, not the conquest and Christianisation of Tavastia:

“Slikan wanda lägde han,

Birge jerl, then wise man.

Han loot Stockholms stad at byggja

med dighirt with oc mykin hyggja

eth fagert hus ok en godhan stadh

alla leedh swa giort som han badh.

Thet er laas fore then sio,

swa at karela göra them enga oroo.”¹³⁰

Now, it is no small matter to use a text which is hostile to a person as a source to this person’s symbolical capital. The fact that Birger’s son was the nobles’ first choice for king when Eric XI died makes it plausible that Birger and his dynasty gained much bargaining power with his success in Finland and it is plausible that this is what in turn made him

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 44

powerful enough to carry through with his hardliner politics of centralisation and reform as well as the founding of Stockholm. These pieces all fit and it makes perfect sense; but it cannot be verified by using *Erikskrönikan*, a source which tells us nothing explicit about how Birger's campaign impacted his standing and in addition is critical of the man.

Conclusion

There seems to be no reason to dispute Seppo Suvanto's claim that the "so-called crusade" altered Tavastia for all posterity by incorporating it administratively in the Swedish realm. Given Birger's success there seems to be no reason to disagree with Nordstrandh and Gallén either, in that Birger built the strong position he later acquired on the prestige he won. John Lind's suggestion that Birger may have felt so elevated on his return he deserved the throne when the king died does not quite hold up when faced with Gallén's dating of the campaign, seeing as the king did not die until 1250 – nearly ten years after Birger got back from Finland. Lind is probably correct however in claiming the battle of Neva we hear of in Russian sources between a Swedish *knyaz* with a bishop and Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod in 1240 occurred in extension of the 1239 campaign, being the first confrontation of the centuries long struggle between Swedes and Russians over control with the resources of the Baltic.

With far greater certainty than with King Erik IX's campaign we may conclude that Birger Magnusson's expedition to Tavastia was a crusade and that crusading ideology provided legitimisation and possibly a motive as well. In the primary source material the explicit motives are conversion of pagans, winning glory, territorial conquest and honouring God. The implicit motives are the remission of sins, given how the 1237 crusading indulgence must be connected with the campaign, and possibly control with trade if we are to believe Lind's take on it. It is interesting to juxtapose these motives with that of Birger's contemporary Junker Karl, who was exiled by Birger and joined a knightly order to fight the pagan Lithuanians. In Junker Karl's case the explicit motives are the remission of sins and the defence of Christendom. This could be an indication that while crusading ideology to Birger was mainly about legitimising his conquest of Tavastia and harvesting honour capital, to Junker Karl it was mainly about the spiritual aspects, though it should be kept in mind the author of *Erikskrönikan* is critical of Birger.

In any case the political consequences of Birger's campaign were expansion of the Swedish state, possibly at the expense of Novgorod, and a strengthened political position for Birger, which may have contributed to the choice of his son as king, after which Birger remained as *de facto* ruler well into his son's maturity and centralised the rule of Sweden in his own

person. Possibly it also brought with it wealth through plunder and/or the increased control with the transportable wealth of the Baltic.

Chapter 4: The Third Swedish Crusade

As tradition goes the third Swedish crusade was launched in 1293 and aimed at Karelia in present day eastern Finland. The crusade, led by Tyrgils Knutsson, marshal and regent for King Birger Magnusson, succeeded in conquering Karelia for the Swedish kingdom and the Catholic Church. This position was then fortified with the building of the fortress Viborg and the capture of the strong point Kexholm by the lake of Ladoga, not far from Novgorod. When the Russians suddenly retaliated most of the Swedes were already homeward bound and Kexholm was lost almost as soon as it had been taken. The Marshal answered with another campaign launched in 1300 which invaded Novgorod territory and raised there the fortress Landskrona. Again the Russians were quick to strike back and once the main Swedish army returned home the fortress was taken after a lengthy siege.¹³¹ At this point Sweden was convulsed by civil war and little attention was paid to eastern affairs until Magnus Eriksson's reign.

Was it a Crusade?

Thomas Lindkvist believes all Swedish "crusades" until those of Magnus Eriksson are anachronisms that must be seen as viking expeditions under somewhat different auspices. He points to how the preserved last wills of Swedish aristocrats in the 1280s all mention crusading vows in connection with the Holy Land and the enemies of the Teutonic Order, never Finland,¹³² and how Papal encouragement was lacking.¹³³ Lindkvist acknowledges how tendencies of crusading ideology are to some extent present in *Erikskrönikan*'s account of the campaign, but dismisses these tendencies as the creations of a writer who sought to legitimise territorial control in the 1320s¹³⁴ and argues that the campaigns described in the chronicle show few signs of being motivated by a desire to spread the faith.¹³⁵ Lindkvist concludes that "no Swedish kings participated in a crusade in the Levant and the Swedish contributions there were insignificant."¹³⁶ Eric Christiansen points out how the chronicle not once uses the word for crusade and gives no indication the knights expected a remission of sins.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Jansson 1987: 72 – 87

¹³² Lindkvist 2001: 129

¹³³ Lindkvist 1996: 27

¹³⁴ Lindkvist 2001: 124

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 119

¹³⁷ Christiansen 1997: 117

Evidence of Papal Involvement

The campaign of 1293 is not as easily connected to a Papal bull as the one in 1239/49, but we do have a letter dated to 1274 from the Pope to the Archbishop of Uppsala where the Pope explicitly demands a crusade is preached against the Karelians, who according to King Valdemar disturb the peace of the kingdom. The Pope also states that the participants can expect the same indulgences as those who go to fight in the Holy Land.¹³⁸

The campaign of 1293 can easily be seen as a somewhat delayed response to this concession. Granted, the letter arrived in the reign of King Valdemar and not that of Marshal Tyrgils Knutsson and King Birger, but seeing as a campaign was launched precisely at Karelia it would not have been difficult to use the letter of 1274 to proclaim it a crusade. If the letter was not used in this way then Lindkvist is right; the Marshal acted without Papal acknowledgement, and was thus not a crusade according to our definition. However, the fact is that Valdemar *requested* a crusading bull from the Pope, and got it:

“Bulla sine Pontificis nomine directa Electo Vpsalensi, qua indicitur, instante Valdemaro Svetiæ Rege, predicatio Crucis in paganos, aliosque Christi inimicos, quique cædibus atque incendiis Regnum vastabant, ac Ceriali vulgariter appellabantur.”¹³⁹

This indicates there was a latent desire for a crusade to Karelia, which makes sense considering the Karelian pirate raids around Mälaren,¹⁴⁰ and now the Swedish kingdom knew the Papacy was supportive of such a venture. When Tyrgils Knutsson launched his campaign against the Karelians in 1293 he therefore stood to gain everything from making the most of the old Papal bull. Seeing as it conceded full indulgences to a crusade which never materialised neither in King Valdemar’s nor in the following King Magnus’ reign Tyrgils might even have been under some pressure to make sure a crusade finally got underway.

The subsequent campaign of 1300 must according to *Erikskrönikan* be seen as a response to the Russian retaliation following the construction of Kexholm at the end of the first campaign,¹⁴¹ which makes it a difficult case. Formally the indulgences were restricted to fighting the Karelians, but this war led to another with the Russians, and one wonders if the participants had a formalistic enough grasp of theology to draw an ideological line between

¹³⁸ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1274&-max=10&-recid=33574&-find=>

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Jansson 1987: 43 – 44

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 73

the battles with the Karelians and those with the Russians. The chronicler, while he separates “karela” from “rytza”, persists with portraying the conflict as one between “the crisno” and “the hedno” even when the Swedes are fighting the Russians.¹⁴² If this is any indication, then we can assume the Swedes considered the 1300 campaign as a natural continuance of the expedition in 1293, even though the Pope’s indulgences did not really extend to a crusade against the Russians.

The Motive of Conversion

In *Erikskrönikan*’s passage relating the 1293 campaign, the author tells us explicitly how following its success there were more people who believed in God:

“Sidhan foro the til hedna landa
ok lösto skadha ok mykin wanda
- the hedne men gingo them alt affnär –
thet war thera mesta ärende ther,
ok bygde eth hus a then ända,
ther cristin land ather wända
ok hedhin land taka widher.
Ther er nu swa goder frider,
mere liise ok mere roo
ok flere the ther a Gudh troo.”¹⁴³

Even if the campaign was not initially motivated by a desire to spread the faith, as Lindkvist argues, it was nevertheless one of its consequences if we are to believe *Erikskrönikan*. The chronicler only mentions it in this one line however, which leads us to believe that it was not an aspect of the campaign he found it worthwhile to elaborate upon – a brief mention was sufficient. Perhaps the chronicler’s secular perspective caused him to put less emphasis on spiritual matters to give room for tales of valour, and thus give us the impression that the motive of conversion was less prominent than it actually was.

If we look at a letter issued by King Birger in 1295, the King declares to the Hansa that it is now safe for them trade with Novgorod, as the pagan Karelians have been converted to the

¹⁴² Ibid. 72 – 74, 76 – 88

¹⁴³ Ibid. 72 – 73

Christian faith and the castle Viborg built to the honour of the Holy Virgin.¹⁴⁴ So, on one hand *Erikskrönikan* does not seem overly concerned with the conversion of the Karelians, yet on the other it was apparently important enough to be included in a public declaration from the King to the Hansa.

Lindkvist may be going a bit far when he says *Erikskrönikan* does not mention an explicit conversion motive at all, even if it is given little attention by the author, and in light of King Birger's declaration one can hardly use the chronicle as a basis for arguing that conversion was not a motive in the 1293 campaign. As for the campaign in 1300, neither *Erikskrönikan* nor any letters mention conversion in connection with it. This allows us to assume that since the campaign was a retaliatory strike against the Russians for capturing Kexholm, it did not elicit any motive of conversion.

The Remission of Sins

The Pope's letter of 1274 offers full crusading indulgences for all those willing to take the cross and go to Karelia. *Erikskrönikan*'s account of the campaigns in 1293 and 1300 however does not state that any knights expected a remission of sins for their efforts,¹⁴⁵ unlike in the passage relating Junker Karl's battle with the Lithuanians where Karl himself declares he fights to make up for his sins and win Paradise.¹⁴⁶ Still, there is one ambiguous passage which might be interpreted as saying the knights who died defending Kexholm did so believing their sins had been annulled:

“Sigge Loke bleff ther dødth.
Gud giffwe hans siel himmerikis ööd
ok hwar then cristin man ther doo
fore Gudz skuld ok the helghe troo.”¹⁴⁷

It does say Sigge Loke and his knights died for the sake of God and the holy faith, but the expression “Gud giffwe” is a conjunctive and thus holds an element of doubt. It could be translated as “may God”, which is how a hope or a wish is phrased, indicating it was not entirely certain that these men would reach Heaven, a certainty which should perhaps have

¹⁴⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1295&-max=10&-recid=34289&-find=>

¹⁴⁵ Jansson 1987: 72 – 74, 76 – 88

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 36 – 38

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 74

been present if the knights had been granted crusading indulgences. But maybe this is interpreting too much into the chronicler's choice of words, which was restricted by lyrical conventions and maybe also by religious humility. To write that someone would without a doubt reach Heaven might not have been appropriate; the chronicler would be placing himself on level with God, deciding who went to Heaven and not. In fact we find this same uncertainty in how Junker Karl's death is related, despite Karl's explicit expectation of a remission of sins:

“Then daghen stridde han til han doo.
Nu er han i himmerike, thet er min tro.”¹⁴⁸

The chronicler *believes* Karl is in Heaven; salvation was never a given, even in the case of a member of the Teutonic Order who died fighting the pagan Lithuanians. But regardless of what *Erikskrönikan* says or does not say there is still the obvious connection between the campaign and the crusading bull of 1274.

The Problem of Anachronism in Erikskrönikan

The accusation of anachronism on the author's part is harder to answer, as well as to make, since we have no sure way of testing it. Such a claim can only be made or criticised on the basis of conjecture. Lindkvist concludes that “no Swedish kings participated in a crusade in the Levant and the Swedish contributions there were insignificant”.¹⁴⁹ Fair enough, but from Lindkvist's point of view that would mean there were no Swedish crusaders in Finland and hardly any in the Levant, leaving us with a 13th century Catholic kingdom which hardly took part in crusading at all, unlike the rest of contemporary Christendom. It would be more reasonable to argue that just as the absence of evidence for Swedish crusaders in the Holy Land is unlikely to indicate that no Swedes ever took the cross and went to the Levant, the absence of preserved crusading vows in connection with Finland cannot prove that no crusading whatsoever took place there either. As we have seen the chronicle and the letters together suggest crusading ideology provided legitimisation and maybe even a motive.

The danger of anachronism can also be assumed to be much less in the case of the expeditions in 1293 and 1300 than with Birger Magnusson's campaign in 1239/1249, as most of those who took part in Tyrgils Knutsson's campaigns would still have been alive in the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 38

¹⁴⁹ Lindkvist 1996: 119

1320s. Many among the intended audience must even have been knights who personally took part, and these men would have been most surprised to hear an account of their exploits which did not fit with reality.

Conclusion

As we have seen the claim that these campaigns were not seen in a crusading context is problematic. Eric Christiansen is right when he points out how *Erikskrönikan* not once uses the word “crusade”, or any equivalent term for that matter, but when he claims the chronicle gives no indication the participants expected a remission of sins he is on less solid ground. The chronicler explicitly states he wishes Sigge Loke and his men a place in Heaven, as they died for God and the holy faith. This is a clear indication that at least in the eyes of the author and his audience, their acts qualified for salvation – and rightly so if we factor in the crusading bull of 1274.

Thomas Lindkvist on the other hand does acknowledge the presence of crusading ideology in the text, but he dismisses them as anachronisms and points to how the campaigns do not seem motivated by a desire to spread the faith, how the late 13th century aristocratic wills all mention crusading in connection with the Holy Land and never Finland, as well as an alleged lack of Papal encouragement. Again we may dismiss the latter; the 1274 bull irrefutably granted full crusading indulgences for an expedition against the Karelians, making it, on a formal level at least, equal to a crusade to the Holy Land. The claim that it was not motivated by a desire to spread the faith is not irrefutable either. Granted, *Erikskrönikan* does not dwell on this and mentions conversion only with a single line following the success of the 1293 campaign, but when we in addition read King Birger’s letter to the Hansa that the Baltic is now safe for trade because of the building of Viborg and the conversion of the Karelians, then we certainly have an indication that this was an important aspect of the campaign.

The Political Impact of Crusading Ideology

Thomas Lindkvist is convinced that crusading ideology in Sweden was primarily a tool with which the Swedes furthered their agenda on the other side of the Baltic Sea,¹⁵⁰ and Eric Christiansen seems to be of the same opinion.¹⁵¹ It is of course uncontroversial to state that any crusading endeavour in the Baltic would have been tied to various agendas beyond the purely spiritual ones, but the more specific secular motives behind and consequences of the

¹⁵⁰ Lindkvist 2001: 130

¹⁵¹ Christiansen 1997: 120 – 122

Swedish campaign to Karelia are difficult to untangle; for what were these motives? Were there more than one? And how do we connect crusading ideology to the internal and external political development? These are questions which must be answered if we are to say anything about the political impact of a third Swedish crusade.

Dichotomy between Secular and Spiritual Agendas

Several scholars have explained the incentive behind a crusade to Karelia with a dichotomy between secular and spiritual agendas.¹⁵² The Church on one hand was ever eager to spread the Catholic faith and thereby Papal influence, whereas the Swedes on the other sought to strengthen their influence in the Baltic at the expense of the Russians. Following Christiansen and Lind the conflict between Sweden and Novgorod seems to have revolved around the tradable goods of the far north, especially furs, but also feathers, dried fish and oil extracted from seals and whales, which were in high demand further south, and which both Novgorod and Sweden derived an increasing amount of their revenue from.¹⁵³ As John Lind would have us believe, the possible Neva expedition of Birger Magnusson in 1240 was the first violent collision of Swedish and Russian mercantile interests in the Baltic, the start of a conflict which would go on for centuries.¹⁵⁴ If so, then the 1293 campaign is easily seen as the second stage of this war, and its secular and spiritual dichotomy as one of conversion and trade.

We noticed how the author of *Erikskrönikan* finishes the passage on Birger Magnusson's campaign with a humorous remark on how "rytzakonungen" has lost influence in the region. In analogy with this he gives a similar remark in the passage on Tyrgils' campaign, following the construction of Viborg.

"...swa at the haffwa ther nu mine wald
rytsa än the haffdo föör
utan finna skadha för sin dör."¹⁵⁵

There was, according to *Erikskrönikan*, a common motive of restricting Russian influence behind both campaigns, so it is reasonable to view them both within the context of the struggle for control with the Baltic trade. If we view them as being fuelled by crusading

¹⁵² Lindkvist 1996: 171

¹⁵³ Christiansen 1997: 177 – 178

¹⁵⁴ Lind 1991: 269 (1)

¹⁵⁵ Jansson 1987: 72 – 73

ideology as well, we could argue that the Swedes exploited crusading ideology to strengthen the legitimacy of this control.

It fits nicely that in 1295 King Birger made a declaration to the German Hansa that it was now safe to trade as he had converted the pagan Karelians and built Viborg to the glory of God and the Virgin Mary.¹⁵⁶ Birger attempted to ascertain his position as protector of the Baltic trade, in other words his right to tax it. Interestingly enough the King brings up the conversion of the Karelians in the same declaration, emphasising the spiritual aspect of the conquest as well, perhaps hoping the campaign will be acknowledged as a rightful crusade against the enemies of Christendom and not just a greedy pounce on the merchants.¹⁵⁷

It might of course be argued our scenario stands or falls on our willingness to read a large amount of conjecture into the few lines telling us the Russians lost influence in the region following the campaign and the construction of Viborg. The passage does not even necessarily refer to trade; it is just as likely to indicate a loss of plain political clout. However, no one would make war over political influence in a region unless there was something to be gained from it. We simply cannot expect a source like *Erikskrönikan* to be explicit about these things; the author was no doubt aware that a rhymed chronicle about knights who fought and died for the fur trade would have made for an unedifying tale – far better to be explicit with the motive of conversion. Far better, perhaps, to omit any motives that would speak against this being a holy war.

In the same context we may also contemplate the relevance of the *Vita et Miracula Sancti Eriki Regis Sueciae*. The hagiographic legend which is our only source to the reign of King Eric IX is believed to have been first written down in the later 13th century, just as the Swedes were conquering and converting the Karelians.¹⁵⁸ The wider context of the legend is discussed elsewhere in this thesis; suffice to say it credits St. Eric with a campaign to Finland, where he gives the Finns the choice between conversion and death. The Finns resist but are defeated in the subsequent battle and forcibly converted.¹⁵⁹

It should make us suspicious that such a legend, about a king who leads an expedition to Finland and converts pagans, is all of a sudden written down nearly 150 years after his death. It is tempting to say that it was just another part of an elaborate Swedish propaganda program,

¹⁵⁶ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfild=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1295&-max=10&-recid=34289&-find=>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Lindkvist 2006: 34 – 35

¹⁵⁹ Schmid 1954: XII

an ideological arsenal, aimed at furthering their rights in the Baltic,¹⁶⁰ a program which can also be glanced in *Erikskrönikan* and King Birger's declaration to the Hansa. By writing St. Eric's *vitae* they might have hoped to establish precedence for Swedish sovereignty in Finland,¹⁶¹ making it clear that Finland was, in Seppo Suvanto's words, Sweden's own crusading province.¹⁶² If the alleged crusade of 1293 was in fact modelled on the description of Birger's campaign of 1239/1249, which seems likely when considering the similarities in content and structure,¹⁶³ and Birger's campaign in turn was modelled after St. Eric's expedition,¹⁶⁴ then what we are perhaps seeing is an attempt at portraying all three invasions as a string of victories in a war for the faith, while other motives of less pious nature are kept lidded.

We can then speculate if holy war may have been the ideological weapon which gave the Swedes the upper hand in the conflict; enabling them to steal both Tavastia and Karelia from Novgorod's sphere of influence and to penetrate the territory of Novgorod itself, threatening it with the construction of fortresses like Kexholm and Landskrona.¹⁶⁵ The Russians might have lacked a comparably powerful ideological weapon with which to procure men, resources and internal unity – they had to wait until the invading armies had returned home before they could strike back with success. The fortresses Kexholm and Landskrona were both taken after the main Swedish force had withdrawn.¹⁶⁶

A secondary motive for the Swedes could have been to strike back against the Karelians for their piratical incursions around Lake Mälaren a few decades past.¹⁶⁷ The Church, whose men also experienced the depredations of the Karelians first hand, may have realised this and issued the bull of 1274 to encourage a campaign which, they hoped, answered the Swedish kingdom's desire for revenge. Indeed, one should not underestimate the possibility that there might have been discontent simmering beneath the surface of Swedish society in the years following the Karelian raids, a sense of having been attacked by a pagan enemy who now relished in his spoils with impunity. Perhaps a strike at the Karelians was long overdue in 1293 and absolutely necessary, lest the royal power should lose all credibility. *Erikskrönikan* however gives no indications that the 1293 campaign was motivated by revenge, with the possible exception of one ambiguous turn of phrase:

¹⁶⁰ Lindkvist 2006: 34 – 35

¹⁶¹ Christiansen 1997: 121 – 122

¹⁶² Suvanto 1967: 226 – 227

¹⁶³ Jansson 1987: 30 – 32 compared with 72

¹⁶⁴ Nordstrandh 1990: 28 & Lind 1990: 293

¹⁶⁵ Jansson 1987: 73 (Kexholm) & 77 (Landskrona)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 74 – 74, 83 – 88

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 43 – 44

“Thet hus [Viborg] er hedna manna atherhald”¹⁶⁸

Viborg keeps the pagan men back – perhaps from raiding the Swedish coast? There is also the Papal bull of 1274, where the Pope explicitly states how King Valdemar had written to him of how the Karelians disturbed the peace of the kingdom,¹⁶⁹ making it the official pretext for the crusading indulgences.

To draw any conclusion as to which motive emerges as the primary one is difficult, as our sources are discrepant. When reading *Erikskrönikan* the most explicit incentive behind the campaigns seems to have been expansion at the expense of the pagans; the passages of the chronicle mainly tell us of struggles between the “crisno” and “hedno” with some remarks on conversion and how the Russians lost influence.¹⁷⁰ King Birger’s letter to the Hansa of 1295 however, emphasises the conversion of the Karelians, while the aforementioned Papal bull of 1274 was written in response to a letter from King Valdemar where he complained about the depredations of the Karelians. The prevalent and explicit motives are thus expansion, conversion of pagans and defence of the state, while the obvious implicit motive is control with trade.

A Crusade against Christians?

It might be worthwhile to further examine the significance of the polarisation in the chronicle between the “crisno” and the “hedno”, the Christians and the pagans. Curiously the denomination “hedno” is used indiscriminately to dehumanise both Karelians and Russians, even though Novgorod had been Orthodox Christian for centuries. The Karelians make for a more dubious case; according to the Russian primary source material they were all converted following a mission undertaken by Prince Yaroslav of Novgorod in 1227,¹⁷¹ but it is hard to say how deeply this conversion penetrated. In any case the author of *Erikskrönikan* makes no mention of the Eastern Church, of schismatics or heretics; they are all categorised as pagans.¹⁷² Could this have been done to justify the campaign as an unambiguous crusade, despite its targets being at least partly Christian?

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 72

¹⁶⁹ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1274&-max=10&-recid=33574&-find=>

¹⁷⁰ Jansson 1987: 72 – 74, 76 – 88

¹⁷¹ Christiansen 1997: 116

¹⁷² Jansson 1987: 72 – 74, 76 – 88

Crusades directed at heretics were an iffy matter even in the Middle Ages; the Fourth Crusade which sacked Constantinople in 1204 was initially condemned by Pope Innocent III for being an attack on fellow Christians,¹⁷³ yet a few years later he initiated the Albigensian Crusade which dealt brutally with heretic Christians in southern France.¹⁷⁴ Apparently there was some doubt as to when crusades against heretics could be justified,¹⁷⁵ while crusades aimed at reclaiming the Holy Land from the Muslims were closer to being morally unambiguous. Pope Innocent IV (1243 – 1254) for instance, stressed that the Pope was the sole earthly authority who could sanction crusades by granting indulgences, and “the Holy Land, consecrated by the presence and suffering of Christ and once part of the Roman empire, was rightfully Christian and the occupation of it by the Muslims was an offence in itself for which the Pope, as vicar of Christ and heir of the Roman emperors, could order retribution.”¹⁷⁶

The Swedes however were not fighting in the Holy Land, but for the conquest of Karelia and in extension also against Christian Novgorod. The actions of the Swedes, consciously or not, were perhaps more in the mould of the crusading theology of Innocent IV’s pupil Henry of Sagusio,¹⁷⁷ who believed any refusal to recognise the Pope’s authority was reason enough for a crusade, and that any war fought by Christians against unbelievers was justified by the faith of the Christians alone.¹⁷⁸

A letter from Pope Nicholas IV arrived in Sweden in 1291 on the occasion of the fall of Acre, Christendom’s last bastion in the Holy Land. The letter urges the Swedes to participate in a crusade organised by King Edward I of England, due to set forth in 1293, which would enjoy full crusading indulgences.¹⁷⁹ The Swedes certainly launch an expedition in 1293, but to Karelia instead of the Holy Land. Now, whereas they had ample justification in the Papal bull of 1274, which had not yet been taken advantage of, the chronicler might still have felt the need to emphasise how the Karelian campaign was a holy war entirely on par with King Edward’s crusade; that it was a war between “crisno” and “hedno”, “fore Gudz skuld ok the helghe troo” and for “hedna manna atherhald”, although being at least partly a war with Christians.

¹⁷³ Riley-Smith 2001: 127, 130

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 136

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 39

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 152

¹⁷⁷ Often called “Hostiensis”

¹⁷⁸ Riley-Smith 2001: 152

¹⁷⁹ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Brevnummer=1525&-max=10&-recid=34165&-find=>

Despite the 1291 bull and numerous other appeals from the Papacy there is as mentioned not one piece of written evidence for Swedish crusaders in the Holy Land, while there are a great deal of preserved testaments from noblemen who promise donations to the Church as a compensation for unfulfilled crusading vows in connection with the Holy Land.¹⁸⁰ One is to believe it was especially problematic for the Swedes to travel to the Holy Land, and far more convenient as well as opportune to direct their energies towards the pagans and schismatics of the east. That way the Swedish kingdom not only found a nearby outlet for crusading, but also a chance to kill two flies with one stone and win rewards beyond the purely spiritual ones. This might be the reason why the Swedes in 1293 acted on the Papal bull of 1274 rather than the one of 1291, and the chronicler's job would have been to make it clear that the Swedish knights did not do this out of any lack of zeal. They too fought against the enemies of Christendom ("the hedno"), but on a different frontier.

Another possibility, which by no means excludes the previous one, is that the chronicler deliberately grouped the pagan Karelians and Christian Russians as "hedno" to make the struggle with both opponents appear as a part of the same, Papally indulged, campaign. The 1274 Papal bull promised full indulgences for a campaign against the "the pagans called Karelians", but says nothing of any indulgences for fighting the Russians, while in *Erikskrönikan* the invasion of Novgorod's territory is presented as a perfectly natural continuance following the defeat of the Karelians. It might very well have been that a conflict with the Russians was unavoidable, seeing as they too had a stake in Karelia, but at the same time the Swedes stood to gain politically from expanding the Pope's crusading indulgences to also cover a campaign against Novgorod. The chronicler at least did not differentiate between the battles with the Karelians and Russians.

Crusading Glory and Political Influence

If we look for individuals who stood to gain from being seen in connection with a crusade, those who stand out in the source material are the Marshal Tyrgils Knutsson and Mats Kettilmundsson, knight and later regent of the kingdom. *Erikskrönikan* portrays them as the most honourable of men who were involved with the Karelian campaigns and held great political influence at some point. Could these aspects of their characters be connected? Did they derive their honour capital, and in extension their position, from glory won not merely as warriors but as crusaders?

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.statensarkiv.se/default.aspx?id=2453&refid=4045> : Letters number 1336, 1292, 1238, 1840, 2169 as well as letter number 1302 from 1285, in which King Magnus III does the same.

The Marshal Tyrgils Knutsson was regent and *de facto* ruler of the Swedish realm from 1290 to 1302 as well as the man behind the eastern ventures. He became the most powerful man in the realm when given the regency by the dying King Magnus, and since we are told he was given custody of the King's lands he might very well have become the wealthiest too.¹⁸¹ To exercise power from this newly acquired position Tyrgils needed legitimacy; we recall Earl Birger's turbulent regency where a rebellious aristocracy needed to be cowed with violence.¹⁸² Tyrgils had nothing to gain from such a scenario repeating itself and must have been eager to win popular recognition. One way of doing this was, perhaps, to embark on a crusade. Considering *Erikskrönikan*'s laments over the incursions of Karelian pirates during Earl Birger's days and the Papal bull of 1274 which encouraged a crusade to Karelia, such a campaign might have been a long overdue affair by the 1290s – possibly it presented Tyrgils with a venue for increasing his standing which he could just not afford to ignore.

Seeing as Tyrgils' was ruler of the Sweden it is reasonable to assume his stake in a crusade would have been greater than anyone else's; an eventual success or failure would impact his standing the most. Whether the result was a success or a failure can of course be debated; certainly, Karelia was conquered, the Karelians allegedly converted and Viborg built as a defence against the pagans,¹⁸³ but beyond this the Swedes did not gain any ground on Novgorod. *Erikskrönikan* gives the impression it was at least a partial victory, stained with the loss of the two fortresses established on Novgorod territory; Kexholm and Landskrona. These setbacks do not seem to have impacted the Marshal's reputation however, as the chronicler leaves little doubt Tyrgils' was considered to be a prestigious figure indeed.¹⁸⁴ It speaks in his favour that he was able to extend the duration his regency beyond King Birger's maturity and stay in power at the expense of the King.¹⁸⁵ This had some precedence in Earl Birger, another strong man who was also able to rule as regent despite the King being of age, and who also seems to have led a partially successful crusade to the east.

However, before we can discuss the nature of Tyrgil Knutsson's source of symbolical capital it is necessary to question just how much we know about his involvement with the campaigns of 1293 and 1300. Because, unlike with the knights of the Uppland, there is not a single line in *Erikskrönikan* which attests to Tyrgils' personal prowess at arms; in fact we are

¹⁸¹ Jansson 1987: 69 – 70

¹⁸² Ibid. 35

¹⁸³ Ibid. 72 – 73

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 70, 84, 87, 111

¹⁸⁵ Fagerland 1995: 22

barely told anything at all about what the Marshal himself did during the battles in the east.
What we are told is this:

“Tha wart herra Tyrghils Knutzson wäldogh,
en witer man ok samhäldogh.

[Here we skip the long passage detailing the celebration of Tyrgil’s ascent to the regency]

“Sidhan foro the til hedna landa
ok lösto skadha ok mykin wanda
- the hedne men gingo them alt affnär –
thet war thera mesta ärende ther,
ok bygde eth hus a then ända,
ther cristin land ather wända
ok hedhin land taka widher.
Ther er nu swa goder frider,
mere liise ok mere roo
ok flere the ther a Gudh troo.
Thet hus er hedna manna atherhald,
swa at the haffwa ther nu minne wald
rytsa än the haffdo föör
utan finna skadha för sin dör.
The lotho thet hus alt mura aff steen.
Ok sidhan foro herrana ather hem
Ok satto ther en foghota then[...]”¹⁸⁶

“And then the lords went home”, presumably this included Tyrgils, meaning he did not participate in the subsequent taking of Kexholm, which must have been carried out by the “foghota” left behind to carry on with the campaign. If we also look at the passage on the campaign of 1300:

“Om pingisdagha ther epter wara
tha wille marskalk Törgils fara.
Aff konungsins vegna hafde han räth

¹⁸⁶ Jansson 1987: 72 – 73

then vänaste skiphär man hawer set
 ok ville the hedno ey lenger skona,
 foro tha ok bygdo Landzkrona
 med XI hundradha före men
 - thet forma wel konungen aff Sverige än!”¹⁸⁷

Now, on the one hand, these passages say nothing of any brave deeds by Tyrgils, but he is the leader of the expedition, and is here specifically praised for fighting the pagans, spreading the faith, building fortresses as a defence against the pagans and Russians, and lessening Russian influence in the region. The only thing that prevents us from claiming he is here praised as a crusader and not merely as a warrior is the lack of the remission of sins as an explicit motive, as in the passage on Junker Karl. It cannot be denied however that the bull of 1274 granted full crusading indulgences for just the sort of campaign Tyrgils led to Karelia in 1293, so it is reasonable to assume that even though *Erikskrönikan* does not say so Tyrgils might have been fighting the Karelians partly for the sake of being absolved.

If we accept this then it can be claimed the Marshal derived his apparently immense honour capital from his role as a crusader to a greater extent than from his role as a warrior, landowner or ruler, and that this in turn legitimised the unexpected length of his regency. With the possible exception of the general peace and prosperity attributed to Tyrgils’ rule,¹⁸⁸ *Erikskrönikan* does not provide us with any other sufficient explanation for the surprising strength of his position.

Mats Kettilmundsson was a knight who took part in the 1300 campaign and later led the rebellion which toppled King Birger and installed Magnus Ericsson on the throne, Mats placing himself as regent. Mats is also the one credited with commissioning *Erikskrönikan*, even writing it.¹⁸⁹ When reading one must therefore keep in mind that the chronicle is Mats’ own propaganda text, written on behalf of his regency, and as such there is no surprise to find the chronicle makes a hero of him. The biased nature of the source is problematic if we mean to examine why Mats was considered to be an honourable man, to be critical one could say his idealised image in the chronicle is simply due to his own influence on the text.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 76 – 77

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 70

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 19

Unfortunately the alternative source material is too meagre to enable us to circumvent *Erikskrönikan*.

We first meet Mats in the passages relating Tyrgils' campaign east of 1300, when he shows up to relieve the Swedes who are under siege in Landskrona by the Russians. Mats and his men beat the Russians back, but he does not stop there; Mats rides up to the Russian army with an interpreter to challenge their best man to a duel, and we are told not a single Russian dared to stand against him even though Mats waited until nightfall for a challenger to appear. When he arrives back in the Swedish camp Mats is praised for his courage. Finally we are told how Mats and his men, on their way home, raided pagan villages along the Finnish coast.¹⁹⁰ After this we do not hear of Mats again until he is listed amongst the knights who revolted when King Birger threw the Dukes Eric and Valdemar in his dungeon, then we read how Mats emerged as the leader of the insurgence and led it to triumph.¹⁹¹

It is interesting to note how Mats is explicitly said to have been a squire ("drotzet Matius var tha swen")¹⁹² when we meet him on campaign in 1300, then when we next see his name listed with the rebellious knights opposing King Birger he is no longer "swen" but "herra Matius".¹⁹³ It might be hard to establish a connection between his position in 1319 and a campaign in 1300 when we know so little of what he did in the meantime, but in a letter from 1306 he is already referred to as "domini Mathei".¹⁹⁴ This indicates Mats acquired his spurs for the renown he won with his exploits in the east, and *Erikskrönikan* does not provide any other explanation for why Mats was later chosen to be leader of the aristocratic coalition. That he is later made "Capitaneus" of Finland might be another indication of the impression these exploits made.¹⁹⁵

Whether Mats' battles with the Russians were seen in a crusading context is of course another matter. Like Tyrgils Mats is never said to have expected a remission of sins for his actions, but unlike Tyrgils he is never mentioned in connection with conversion either or with fighting the Karelians, and strictly speaking they were the only targets legitimised by the Pope's indulgences of 1274 – by the time Mats entered the scene the Karelians were pacified and the war revolved around defending Landskrona from the Russians. Mats' motives seem to

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 79 – 82

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 161, 170 – 180

¹⁹² Ibid. 81

¹⁹³ Ibid. 161

¹⁹⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Personnamn=mats%20kettilmundsson&-max=10&-recid=34773&-find=>

¹⁹⁵ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Personnamn=mats%20kettilmundsson&-max=10&-recid=35952&-find=>

have been adventure (“vil Gud oss ewintyr giffwa...”) ¹⁹⁶ and glory (for example after the duel challenge it is said; “han wart wel untfangen tha han kom ther. Jak loffwar then hæladh for sin könheet...”). ¹⁹⁷ Mats’ enemies are often referred to as “hedno”, but that is the extent of his passages’ ideological content, wholly insufficient for it to be reasonable to conclude that Mats is celebrated as a crusader and not just a warrior of great prowess. If the author of *Erikskrönikan* indeed wished to give his audience the impression that Mats was a crusader, it is hard to explain why he does not praise him in a similar manner as Junker Karl.

Conclusion

The case of the Third Swedish Crusade is less ambiguous than that of the second; the chronology is uncomplicated, there are no conflicting sources and the course of events is related in far more detail than Birger Magnusson’s campaign. As we have seen *Erikskrönikan* in combination with the cited letters give the impression it was a Papally indulged war to defend Christendom and spread the faith, and can as such be considered a crusade according to my definition. The explicit motive of reducing Russian influence in the area should be seen as a part of the struggle between Sweden and Novgorod over control with the Sub-Arctic produce trade. While it is hard to say whether the Papal indulgences were stretched to cover this part of the campaign as well, if *Erikskrönikan* is anything to go by the Swedes themselves did at least not differentiate much between the Russians and Karelians.

Crusading ideology appears to have been a political instrument for the Swedish kingdom in the late 13th century. It provided legitimisation for the conquest of Karelia, possibly for the subsequent offensive against Novgorod as well, and the Russians’ lack of a comparably powerful ideological weapon might be why the Swedes were able to draw both Tavastia and Karelia out of their sphere of influence, and threaten the existence of Novgorod itself by constructing fortresses to control the Neva estuary. Whether it provided a motive for all or some is harder to say.

There are also indications that crusading ideology affected internal political developments by elevating those who were seen in connection with it. The author *Erikskrönikan* seems to consider the Marshal Tyrgils Knutsson as one of the most honourable men in Sweden, and apart from him being credited with converting Karelians and fighting Russians the source material does not provide us with many other sufficient reasons for the prestige Tyrgils’

¹⁹⁶ Jansson 1987: 81

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 82

enjoyed, or why he was able to continue as regent against the will of King Birger even when the latter had reached maturity.

The connection between Mats Kettilmundsson's rise to prominence in the aristocratic rebellion of 1319 and his part in the campaign of 1300 is more problematic. Just as with Tyrgils the source material does not allow for many other explanations than that he grew from the renown he won in the east, but whether this was the renown of a crusader or simply that of a warrior of great prowess is harder to say, as unlike Tyrgils Mats is never mentioned in connection with any ideologically infused actions, beyond fighting the "hedno".

Chapter 5: The Crusade of Magnus Eriksson

In 1348 another Swedish army embarked on a campaign eastwards, this time led by King Magnus Eriksson of Norway and Sweden. Initially successful, it captured the walled city Orekhov by the Neva, and once again the Swedes controlled the all-important estuary. However, just as with Kexholm and Landskrona, once the main Swedish army was homewards bound the Russians struck back in full force and Orekhov was recaptured after a lengthy siege. King Magnus then laid plans for a second expedition which seems to never have materialised, and in the following years everything went wrong; King Magnus rule met with more and more popular resentment; the Pope excommunicated him for failing to initiate the second campaign against Novgorod; he lost the Norwegian crown and subsequently the Swedish one as well. His remaining life Magnus Eriksson spent in relative obscurity in Norway, until he died in a sailing accident in 1374.¹⁹⁸

The Sources

In addition to a number of letters our main sources are Birgitta's *Uppenbarelser*, the Novgorod Chronicle and the much later *Förbindelsedikt*.

Birgitta's *Uppenbarelser* constitute a vast literary corpus¹⁹⁹ where Birgitta compiled her revelations. The main agenda that emerges in these is the spiritual elevation of the king and the knightly aristocracy, but it falls beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse nature and purpose of the entire work, so we will restrict ourselves to the chapters relevant to King Magnus and his eastern campaign. For King Magnus' part the revelations provided a sort of king's mirror handed down to Birgitta from Christ himself, which takes the form of a ten-step program for an aspiring *rex iustus*, one step involving war on the pagans. She also gives him specific instructions on how such a campaign should be organised in order to be pleasing to God and, as a result, successful. Later on when King Magnus' efforts in the east came to nothing she wrote the longest chapter of her revelations in which she absolves herself from blame by claiming King Magnus did not follow her instructions in the first place.²⁰⁰

Our next source, the Novgorod Chronicle, consists of a compilation of several lesser Russian chronicles written by and for the Archbishopric of Novgorod between 1016 and 1471.²⁰¹ The chronicler gives a relatively elaborate account of King Magnus' attack,

¹⁹⁸ Harrison 2005: 476 – 486

¹⁹⁹ Used here is the Old Swedish edition, by some held to be a translation of a Latin original, published in 14 volumes by G. E. Klemming between 1857 and 1884.

²⁰⁰ Klemming 1861: 303 – 306, 397 – 417

²⁰¹ Shakhmatov 1914: XXXVII-XLI. Used here is an English translation of the Russian original.

suggesting it was seen as a matter of some importance by the Archbishopric. The Novgorod Chronicle is an interesting source as it is our only contemporary narrative of the campaign itself as well as entirely independent from the Swedish source material.

Our third source is another rhymed chronicle in the vein of *Erikskrönikan* which is commonly referred to as *Förbindelsedikten*. It covers Swedish history between 1319 and 1389 but the dating of the chronicle has been set as late as 1452 by G. E. Klemming. Its purpose, it has been believed, was to fill the chronological gap between *Erikskrönikan* and *Karlskrönikan*, the latter covering the period 1389 to 1452.²⁰² This is however disputed; in 1972 Conny Blom argued that *Förbindelsedikten* was composed after *Erikskrönikan* but before *Karlskrönikan* and that the chronicle's hostility towards King Magnus could not possibly stem from Karl Knutsson's court.²⁰³ Yngvar Andersson on the other hand argued that the text fits perfectly with the emerging nationalistic and xenophobic tendencies of Karl Knutsson's circles and that *Förbindelsedikten* could not have assumed its present form prior to the rebellion of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson in 1434.²⁰⁴ In any case the chronicle provides an account of King Magnus' campaign in seventy lines that is near identical in content to Birgitta's revelations. The source's reliance on Birgitta, its heavily tendentious nature and its removal in time from the events covered means that it should only be treated with some scepticism; therefore its use here will be secondary to that of the remaining source material.²⁰⁵

Was it a Crusade?

In the case of Magnus Eriksson's campaign of 1348 it is entirely uncontroversial to consider it a crusade. According to Dick Harrison there can from 1340 onwards no longer be any doubt that the Swedish eastern ventures were motivated by crusading ideology.²⁰⁶ Thomas Lindkvist believes King Magnus truly wished to live up to the crusader ideal,²⁰⁷ while John Lind suggests King Magnus originally conceived of a regular campaign but proclaimed it as a crusade after being influenced by the alleged prophetess Saint Birgitta.²⁰⁸ Michael Nordberg, who has written a biography of King Magnus, points out how the king at the least portrays the campaign as a crusade in his Papal correspondence, and holds there is reason to believe he did

²⁰² Blom 1972: 2

²⁰³ Ibid. 200

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 196. Engelbrektsson was at the front of a Swedish aristocratic movement against Eric of Pomerania, first king of the Kalmar Union, whose rule replaced Swedish castellans with Danes, Germans and even Italians.

²⁰⁵ Lindkvist 1996: 20

²⁰⁶ Harrison 2005: 465

²⁰⁷ Lind 1991: 106 (2)

²⁰⁸ Nordberg 1995: 101

the same when dealing with his Scandinavian subjects.²⁰⁹ However, despite this general consensus in favour of a crusade it might still be worthwhile to examine the source material and see if the campaign truly fits with our definition of a crusade, because it enables us to establish what kind of basis we have for evaluating the political impact of crusading ideology in this period.

The Problematic Papal Involvement

There are several existing Papal letters that can be connected to Magnus Eriksson's reign and Baltic crusading. In one of them, from 1326, the Pope John XXII orders two of his legates to grant King Magnus half of the six years worth of tithe they have collected, to aid him in his struggle against the Karelians and Russians, whose ravages and incursions King Magnus had complained about.²¹⁰ In another letter from the same year, the Pope grants further financial aid to the king, again to help him in his struggle against the ravaging Karelians and Russians, but this time it is explicitly said the Pope learned of this from special messengers (in plural) sent to him by King Magnus.²¹¹ In neither of the letters is it said the participants in an eventual campaign could expect the same indulgences as those who fight in the Holy Land, unlike in the proper crusading bulls of 1237 and 1274. Strictly speaking the letters of 1326 can therefore not by themselves be seen as granting anything but financial aid for a war in the east, not necessarily a crusade.

In fact King Magnus seems to have received no crusading bull until 1351, when all of a sudden an unprecedented wealth of Papal encouragements for a campaign against Novgorod arrives. In one letter the Pope bids the higher clergy of the Baltic seas discourage any trade with Novgorod involving weapons, horses, ships and other militarily useful merchandise.²¹² In another he grants King Magnus half of all forthcoming tithe collected in his realm for the next four years, intended for a crusade against the Russians.²¹³ In yet another letter he bids the Teutonic Order support King Magnus,²¹⁴ and most importantly the Pope issues a letter where

²¹⁰ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1326&-max=10&-recid=36052&-find=>

²¹¹ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1326&-max=10&-recid=36053&-find=>

²¹² <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1351&-max=10&-recid=38763&-find=>

²¹³ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1351&-max=10&-recid=38765&-find=>

²¹⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1351&-max=10&-recid=38747&-find=>

he bids the Scandinavian clergy preach a crusade against the Russians, promising the same indulgences to the participants as if they went to the Holy Land.²¹⁵

That King Magnus' planned second campaign against the Russians had Papal backing is obviously beyond any dispute, but whether he had the Pope's support for the first is not, leaving us in a curious situation where the first Swedish campaign to be unambiguously accepted by the scholars as a crusade is also the first potential crusade since St. Eric's which it is impossible to connect to a crusading bull with any certainty. In light of the remaining source material, which we will soon attend to, it may be unreasonable to argue on this basis that Magnus Eriksson's campaign of 1348 was not a crusade, yet it is problematic when our definition of a crusade demands Papal involvement. There are two possible solutions to this problem, neither of which excludes the other.

The first solution lies with the Icelandic Annals. Here we can read that prior to the 1348 campaign King Magnus had difficulties with convincing his Norwegian vassals to participate. The Norwegians did not wish to fight in another king's realm, but changed their mind when the king secured support from the Pope to convert people in Russia.²¹⁶ In light of this we are forced to accept there was in fact a Papal bull behind the expedition of 1348, which is now lost.

Another possible solution lies with Saint Birgitta (1303 – 1373). Birgitta was the daughter of Birger Petersson, lawspeaker and governor of Uppland, and was as such a woman of both wealth and family in 14th century Sweden. When her husband died in 1344 she gave away all her possessions to lead a pious life, and not long afterwards Birgitta started writing down her famous revelations. The earliest revelations were written down in 1345, but allegedly Birgitta experienced these from an early age, having had visions of Jesus on the cross and been in communication with the saints Dionysius and Botvid. In any case she was commanded to enter a monastery in one of her revelations, and soon she was also officially recognised by the Catholic Church as a prophetess, which strengthened her in the belief that Jesus spoke through her. By 1348 Birgitta was the foremost religious authority in Sweden.²¹⁷

The third step of Birgitta's ten-step *rex iustus* program says the king should send his servants and soldiers to the land of pagan men and places where the Christian faith and the

²¹⁵ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1351&-max=10&-recid=38762&-find=>

²¹⁶ Storm 1977: 223: "Magnus kongr hafði uti leidangr ok bioz til Ruciam. Var þat fyrir ij sakir at hann uilldi afr uinna unndir Suiariki þann stóran stad er unndan hafði gengid ok meðr þui at Norges menn uilldu eigi sækia með hernati i annars kongs ríki leitadi kongrinn fulltings herra pafans ok het at kristna fólk i Rucia ef hann feingi styrk til."

²¹⁷ Wessen 1968: 118 – 120

love of God have to be increased.²¹⁸ It can certainly be interpreted as an encouragement for a crusade, and Elias Wessen, who has examined the relationship between King Magnus and Saint Birgitta, believes this particular revelation should be dated prior to the will King Magnus and Queen Blanka made in 1346, where King Magnus proclaims he intends to go on a “reysu” against “gups owinum”,²¹⁹ a journey against God’s enemies – perhaps a direct response to Birgitta’s revelation. If so it does not seem unreasonable to assume that if King Magnus’ campaign was not only recognised by but also spurred on by Birgitta, who had been officially recognised by the Church as a spokeswoman of Christ, then a Papal bull might have been considered to be superfluous.

We can combine both Birgitta’s encouragement with the Papal bull mentioned in the Icelandic Annals and reconstruct the course of events this way: after having been influenced by Birgitta, spokeswoman of Christ and greatest religious authority in Sweden, King Magnus wished to launch a crusade to the east. To do this he had to draw on the manpower and resources of both Norway and Sweden, but the Norwegians were unconvinced and the king was forced to appeal to the Pope for a formal crusading bull, with which he could finally secure the grudging support of the Norwegians.

The Motive of Conversion

That conversion was a motive behind the 1348 campaign is suggested by the wording of the Papal bull we know from the Icelandic Annals (“at kristna folkl i Rucia”) and Birgitta’s ten-step *rex iustus* program (“cristin tro ok gudz kärlek matte ökias”). We have also seen how conversion seems to have been a motive behind the earlier Swedish invasions of Finnish and Russian lands. What was different in 1348 however is how this motive appears to have been more important than ever, to the point that it overrode fundamental practical concerns.

When we read Birgitta’s revelations we come across the chapter where we are told King Magnus asks her for advice on how to organise a campaign against the pagans in the east in a way that will secure God’s favour.²²⁰ Birgitta then provides the king with an elaborate crusading program, instructing him among other things that those who go to the pagan men’s land should first offer them peace, faith and salvation. Should the pagans refuse this offer they must be killed, for the longer someone lives in sin the more torment their souls will face in the

²¹⁸ Ibid: 304: ”Thridhia är at han sände sina thiänara ok solderara til the hedhna manna land ok stadha hwar cristin tro ok gudz kärlek matte ökias.”

²¹⁹ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Datering=1346&-max=10&-recid=37943&-find=>

²²⁰ Klemming 1861: 397

afterlife.²²¹ Birgitta also instructs King Magnus to bring with him clerics who lead pious and pure lives, as well as other men of the same sort who have forsaken the world, to tutor the people and challenge those among the pagans who praise and preach their faith.²²²

It is then illuminating to juxtapose these parts of Birgitta's revelations with how the Novgorod Chronicle relates the events of Magnus Eriksson's campaign. The chronicler tells us the following:

“Magnush, King of the *Svei*, sent to the men of Novgorod saying: ‘Send your philosophers to a conference, and I will send my own philosophers, that they may discuss about faith; they will ascertain whose faith is the better; if your faith is the better, then I will go into your faith, but if our faith is the better, you will go into our faith, and we shall all be as one man. But if you do not agree to uniformity, then I will come against you with all my forces.’”²²³

The Russians were unwilling to dispute with King Magnus over faith and replied that if he wished to discuss theology he should instead seek the Patriarch in Constantinople, but they were willing to discuss whatever other grievances were between them. The king however would not yield in his purpose:

“...Kuzma Tverdislav with others went to Magnush; and Magnush replied to Kuzma: ‘I have no grievance whatever against you’; but he said thus: ‘Adopt my faith, or I will march against you with my whole force’; and he dismissed Kuzma and the others. On their return to Orekhovets they all shut themselves in the town, and Magnush came up against the town with his whole force, and began baptizing the Izhera people into his own faith, and let loose his troops among those who refused baptism.”²²⁴

The congruence between the Russian and Swedish source material verifies how Magnus did in fact try to follow Birgitta's instructions regarding conversion, something which should

²²¹ Ibid. 398: ”Thy hulke som gaa til hedhna manna land biudhin thom först fridh oc tro ok frälse. Ok um hedhningane vilia ey vidhir taka ok lydha thera raadhom oc manilsom tha är rätuisonna brändaghi ok hämd jdhnde mot thom ok stridh är thom buidhande oc Jak gudh som är siälfwir kärlekin skal atirgiälla thusanda fald lön allom thom som döo for min kärlek. Ok ämuäl siälue hedhningane skulu koma til mindre pino än the komin um the längir lifdho oc doin j fridhi thy at lifdhin the längir tha syndadhin the meer.”

²²² Ibid. 407: ”Taki ämuäl konungin mz sik the klärka som pröuadhe äru j godho lifwirne. Ok renliues män aff flerom liuärnom hulke som sannelica haua owirgifit oc af sakt världinna thy at mange finnas j bland hedhningana hulke som prisa oc predica sina tro ok villo ok thy är thom sniällelica suarande. Klärkane skulu ämuäl lära folkit ok mana at the skulin ey koma j ban for giri älla dö for motkorran ok oatirhalloght liuärne.”

²²³ Michell & Forbes: 141. The edition used here is their English translation of the Russian text.

²²⁴ Michell & Forbes: 141 – 142

perhaps come as no surprise if King Magnus had faith in her as a prophetess, and given Birgitta's religious authority and official recognition by the Church there is no reason why he should not have.

John Lind believes King Magnus willingly forsook the element of surprise when he called for a theological conference prior to his attack.²²⁵ It is of course difficult to verify as the source material is not detailed enough to establish whether or not the people of Novgorod already knew the Swedes were on their way, but if Lind is correct then it would mean that conversion as a motive was so important as to override even the concern for basic military tactics, endangering the success of the whole campaign. This was an unprecedented manoeuvre, with the unlikely exception of King Erik IX's campaign.

Due to its heavily tendentious nature *Förbindelsedikten* is generally considered to be of little value as a source. Even so it might be worthwhile to examine what it has to tell us about conversion during King Magnus' 1348 campaign, seeing as our source material is as meagre as it is. It does not tell us much, and we are mainly told how Magnus did not follow Birgitta's instructions properly and was not thorough enough in his conversion work. According to the chronicle King Magnus was fooled by the Russians' pledges of loyalty and let them buy themselves free after they had been converted and shaved, ignoring the Virgin Mary's (Birgitta's) advice and following instead that of the Germans. The Russians then betray their oaths and counterattack with an army of Lithuanians and Tartars; we are told their beards had grown back, which seems to be a way of telling us they had reverted to their original state.²²⁶

²²⁵ John Lind 1991: 103 – 104, 112 – 114 (2)

²²⁶ Klemming 1867: 176 – 177:

“Jomfru maria radh konungen försmadde
ok giorde som the tyska radde
the rydza loffuade honom silff ok gull
ok suoro honom vara hull
ok crisna tro tagha sik ppa
ok fly ath alth landet skulde göra saa
han loth them raka skegh ok döpa
ok frya sidhan fara ok köpa
men rytza skulle fara ok venda thera landh
alth til crisna ok konungens hand
Tha rytza komma j thera behaldh
sankade the sa storan saaldh
aff rytza lättoga ok tartar
ok bestallade konungen ther han var

No matter how unreliable this source is, fact is that a hundred years after his campaign King Magnus was among other things criticised for failing to convert the pagans properly. This might be telling us something about how important the motive of conversion was, and if nothing else at least it strengthens what the other sources have already told us.

The Remission of Sins

The motive of penance, of winning a remission of sins in return for commitment to the holy war, has so far proven to be the most elusive in our sources. Now the situation is slightly better, although every time the motive is explicitly mentioned it is in connection to Birgitta's crusading instructions. In addition we do have the crusading bull of 1351, but it only applies to a campaign which seems to never have materialised, while the bull mentioned in the Icelandic Annals prior to the 1348 campaign is only said to encourage spreading the faith. The bull itself might of course have contained crusading indulgences but this is impossible to establish.

Let us then return to Birgitta's revelations, where she in the fourth book criticises knights who would rather die for secular glory than Heaven. The ones who give their blood for Christ rather than the Devil shall have an eternal reward in Heaven, she writes.²²⁷ Curiously Birgitta claims the knights of the past were more ready to die for the faith than the present ones, but it is difficult to say whether this has any basis in truth or if Birgitta was just prone to think, like people often are, that everything was better in the "good old days". King Magnus too is admonished that he should fight the pagans for the love of God and the health of the soul,²²⁸ while later on Birgitta speaks of how a king who seeks his soul's benefit should go against the pagans.²²⁹

Then when Orekhov was lost and the campaign turned out to have been fruitless Birgitta explains the failure with how King Magnus did not follow her advice to the letter. She

ok lotho honom se j allo thy

ath skeggen vare vext ather aa ny"

²²⁷ Klemming 1860: 76: "Ok the riddara hulka som forðhom baaro vapn varo redhobone at gifua liuit for rätuisonna ok utgiuta sit blodh for the hálgho tro främiande vidhirthortftogha til rätuiso oc nidhirthrykkiandeonda. Utan hör nw huru franvände the ära nw visselica thom thäkkis meer at döo j stridh for högfärdh oc giri oc afwnd äptir dyäfulzlicom äggilsom än lifwa äptir minom budhordhom til at faa äüärdhelica glädh. Thy allom thöm som döo j tholkom vilia skal gifwas lön aff rätuisona dom thz är at dyäflane skulu giuas there siälom til löna j therä äüärdhelica samföghilse. Än the som thiäna mik ägha at hua lön mz himerikis härskapi for uten ända."

²²⁸ Klemming 1861: 397: "Thy radhir iak honum tw thing först at han hui got hiärta oc quämelikin licamma, hui got hiärta swa at ängin vari annor hans akt at stridha ok utgaa mot hedhningomen utan for gudz kärlek ok siäla helso..."

²²⁹ Ibid. 406: "...thän konungir som aktir ok letar siäla nytto og gagn ther vil gaa mot hedhningom..."

laments in resignation how she gave the king the mercy of her wise counsel, or more precisely the Virgin Mary gave it through her, so that he could glorify God and benefit his soul.²³⁰

Förbindelsedikten also has an interesting passage, where Birgitta is said to have told King Magnus he would “win the Holy Sepulchre” if he followed her advice.²³¹ What exactly is meant by this is hard to say, but seeing as there was no Holy Sepulchre in the Baltic it has to refer to some sort of reward on the spiritual plane.

Regardless, what emerges clearly is that from Birgitta’s point of view the remission of sins was an important motive behind the campaign in 1348, one which King Magnus failed to comply with. However the fact that our only sources for this motive is Birgitta’s own revelations and her alleged quote in *Förbindelsedikten* should give cause for at least a little scepticism. Birgitta was an ideological mouthpiece, and as such she may have inflated the 1348 campaign with ideological content beyond what its largely secular participants would have recognised. It could therefore be said the author of *Erikskrönikan* is more credible when he speaks of spiritual motives, since unlike Birgitta it is not his primary agenda to emphasise those. On the other hand it could be argued that Birgitta’s popular recognition was so great that even the rank and file had her exact words about heavenly rewards in mind as they embarked from Sweden. Elias Wessen at least believes Birgitta’s revelations were widely proclaimed across the realm to garner support for King Magnus’ campaign.²³² Even so the question which must remain unanswered is whether or not Birgitta truly took it upon herself to act as an alternative source of indulgence, or if what she says merely reflects the general Christian idea that pious deeds will be rewarded in the afterlife.

Were There One or Two Campaigns?

In the introduction it was said King Magnus’ second campaign never materialised. This is because there is no mention of the campaign in Birgitta’s revelations, *Förbindelsedikten* or the preserved letter correspondence. The Novgorod Chronicle tells us how the men of Novgorod raided the landscape surrounding Viborg in 1350 and defeated a Swedish force which sallied from the town, but there is no hint of any Swedish offensive beyond this²³³ –

²³⁰ Ibid. 415: ”...thessa nadh forskylladhe jak konungenom at han skulle göra gudhi hedhir, ok gagn sina siäl.”

²³¹ Klemming 1867: 176:

“...hon loffuade honom meer ath thz sinne
ath han skulde then helga graff winne...”

²³² Wessen 1968: 125

²³³ Michell & Forbes: 143 – 144

curious indeed considering the disproportionate amount of attention the invasion in 1348 got. Dick Harrison understandably concludes that this campaign never took place.²³⁴

The only source that speaks to the contrary is a later Russian document, dated to around 1400,²³⁵ known as “The Testament of King Magnus”. According to this document King Magnus did indeed launch a second campaign against Novgorod, but it came to nothing as his ships were struck by a storm and sank with all his men. Magnus survived and made it to the Russian shore. Much humbled he realised his misfortune was a punishment from God for being so arrogant as to believe he could attack the Russians. The king then converted to the Greek-Orthodox faith, entered a monastery and lived the rest of his life as the monk Grigorij. The testament itself was allegedly written by Magnus himself as he was lying on his deathbed, to warn the Swedes against ever attacking the Russian land again.²³⁶

Needless to say we should be extremely careful when using this work of fiction to reconstruct actual events; it might very well be a worthless source. Eric Christiansen does not dismiss the source entirely however; he suggests that King Magnus was unable to gather enough men for a second invasion and attempted instead to interrupt Novgorod’s trade through piracy, and that the testament thus contains a grain of truth. Christiansen also points to a reference in the Icelandic Annals,²³⁷ however, the annals he is referring to do unlike other Icelandic annals not mention the 1348 campaign and since they in addition claim Magnus “vann stora borg”²³⁸ it might be the annalist in this case simply misplaced the king’s first expedition. It is certainly hard to explain what “stora borg” refers to if not Orekhov – there is no evidence at all that the alleged second campaign ever captured a fortress. Dick Harrison also suggests the forged testament might be giving us a glimpse of actual piratical activities organised by King Magnus in 1350 – 1351, and sees the subsequent correspondence activity of the king, through which he acquires the Papal bull of 1351, the financial concessions from the Church, the support of the Teutonic Order and Papal backing for the trade blockade of Novgorod, in extension of this.²³⁹

Piracy or not, nothing resembling an actual military campaign is likely to have taken place; much less what we could call a crusade. In 1355 the Papal Curia demanded the return of the tithe money King Magnus was granted a share of in 1351, and in 1358 the king was

²³⁴ Harrison 2005: 485

²³⁵ Lind 1991: 114 (2)

²³⁶ Used here is a Danish translation of the document in Lind 1991: 123 – 124

²³⁷ Christiansen 1997: 194 – 195

²³⁸ Storm 1977: 276. This reference is in the Lögmanns-annáll and dated 1351.

²³⁹ Harrison 2003: 483

excommunicated for failing to do so.²⁴⁰ This means the Papacy did not think Magnus had spent the money on the crusade he received indulgences for in 1351 and thus we may conclude there was no second expedition.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of a Papal bull for King Magnus' campaign of 1348 it seems beyond reasonable doubt that the venture was steeped in crusading ideology and the king's ambitions seem to have been just as spiritual as they were political. In terms of indulgences there was the Papal bull of 1348 which is only preserved in the Icelandic Annals, in addition to the support of a religious authority such as Birgitta. As for the alleged second campaign it is doubtful if it ever came close to being realised and at most it extended to piracy in the Baltic, but even this is not credible as it is based on the fictional Testament of King Magnus.

Dick Harrison is indeed right when he says there can from 1340 on no longer be any doubt as to whether crusading ideology was behind Sweden's aggressive eastern policy, and Thomas Lindkvist is probably right too, at least to a certain extent, in claiming Magnus Eriksson truly wished to live up to a crusader ideal. John Lind's suggestion that the king only declared the campaign a crusade after being influenced by Birgitta can however not be tested and Magnus might just as well have conceived of this on his own. Michael Nordberg points out how King Magnus speaks of the campaign as a crusade in his Papal correspondence and holds it likely that he therefore did the same with his Scandinavian subjects. Indeed, it is hard to see why he should not have. If Birgitta's revelations were read out to the people and the king secured a Papal bull to get the support of the Norwegians, then this campaign certainly would have been considered a crusade across the realm, which might in turn explain some of the developments from there on.

The Political Impact of Crusading Ideology

The campaign of King Magnus against Novgorod in 1348 at first glance seems like a mere continuation of an eastern policy dating back to Birger Magnusson's days, but there are also marked differences. King Magnus made an unprecedented move when he as the first step in his war with Novgorod invited the Russians to a theological conference and possibly even sacrificed the element of surprise for this purpose. Evidently the king was following the instructions he had received from Birgitta, who preached crusading ideology in its purest form

²⁴⁰ Harrison 2005: 486

and had even been recognised by the Church as a prophetess. Some see her as Sweden's own Bernard of Clairvaux.²⁴¹ Is it possible that due to Birgitta's influence the war in the east was to a greater extent than before seen as an arena for religious idealism? And Magnus Eriksson, who prior to the campaign in 1348 was a prestigious Scandinavian ruler, but who after its failure was excommunicated, condemned by Birgitta and ousted from both his thrones; could his fall from grace have been due to his shortcomings as a crusader? As for Birgitta herself, what was her stake in the eastern venture?

Religious Idealism or Political Calculation

We have seen how the spiritual motives behind the campaigns of Birger Magnusson and Tyrgils Knutsson are debatable. These motives are certainly mentioned in *Erikskrönikan*, but very briefly; we hear of conversions and the fight for the faith in but a few isolated lines, and unless you count the passage on Junker Karl the remission of sins is only mentioned in the Papal bulls of 1237 and 1274. This allows for two possible explanations; either reality has been distorted by a chronicler who preferred to emphasise secular glory and deliberately diminished the religious aspects of these campaigns, or the religious motives were in fact of second importance, artificially imposed on wars that were entirely secular beneath a fashionable shell of recently imported legitimising ideology. Judging by *Erikskrönikan* it is hard to imagine Birger Magnusson or Tyrgils Knutsson sacrificing a tactical advantage to invite their enemy to a theological conference, which is exactly what King Magnus seems to have done. Why?

The scholars appear universally baffled by the Novgorod Chronicle's story of how King Magnus chose to open his campaign against the Russians. Thomas Lindkvist for example believes there was a divergence between the secular and spiritual agendas, and the fact that Magnus was willing to lose the element of surprise in order to follow Birgitta's crusading program proves he was set on living up to the crusader ideal.²⁴² At the same time Lindkvist maintains the king was still acting in accordance with the old Swedish eastern policy.²⁴³ Eric Christiansen on the other hand is unwilling to accept King Magnus as possessing a single shred of religious idealism. In spite of encouragements from the Pope and Birgitta, Christiansen claims, the king acted out of political calculation and not religious fervour. He points to how King Magnus attacked Novgorod at an extremely opportune moment (it was

²⁴¹ Ibid. 471

²⁴² Lindkvist 1996: 21

²⁴³ Lindkvist 2001: 126

having trouble with internal fractioning) and how he only declared the campaign a crusade when the Norwegians proved unwilling to participate. Christiansen is even sceptical of the king's request for a theological debate with the Russians. According to him the only reason why Magnus acted in accordance with Birgitta's crusading program was to publicly demonstrate how he was in fact fighting a holy war, to increase his chances of having the campaign authorised by a Papal bull later on. Either that or the Russians simply misinterpreted the king's message.²⁴⁴ John Lind's approach to the problem is more questioning; he ponders why King Magnus on the one hand was willing to give up the element of surprise to act in accordance with Birgitta's crusading program, but on the other hand chose to direct the campaign against Novgorod instead of the many still pagan peoples close by.²⁴⁵ Lastly Elias Wessen is convinced the worldly motives were the main ones; he believes King Magnus was aiming to control the Neva to tax the flow of trade there and thus pay for the purchase of Scania, which had put Sweden in grave debt, and that crusading ideology only entered the picture when Birgitta wanted to make it a crusade against the Karelians.²⁴⁶

King Magnus's seemingly contradictory behaviour during the campaign points in the direction of Birgitta's influence and in particular that of her crusading program, which has to be the source of the king's request for a theological debate with the Russians. Let us therefore have a closer look at her writings.

In her revelations Birgitta explicitly criticises those knights who would rather die for secular glory than follow the words of Christ.²⁴⁷ Later on she repeats herself, lamenting how many knights would rather give their blood for their personal glory and the praise of men than Christ.²⁴⁸ Even though Birgitta does not specify what exactly these knights do that is contrary to their religious virtue, it is evident she perceives a conflict between the secular and spiritual ambitions of the knightly aristocracy. Thus when Birgitta instructs King Magnus on how to conduct himself on a crusade, she tells him to make sure he has a good heart so that there can

²⁴⁴ Christiansen 1997: 191 – 192

²⁴⁵ Lind 1991: 105 (2)

²⁴⁶ Wessen 1968: 122

²⁴⁷ Klemming 1860: 76: "Utan hör nw huru franvände the ära nw visselica thom thäkkis meer at döo j stridh for högfärdh oc giri oc afwnd äptir dyäfulzlicom äggilsom än lifwa äptir minom budhordhom til at faa äuärdhelica glädhi."

²⁴⁸ Klemming 1861: 387: "The forsmä mik ok utälta mik aff allom hugh ok vilia, ok lata sit köt sarghas for rosn ok manna loff ok utgiuta sit blodh for sina giris skuld gerna dö the for värlzlik ok diäfulzlik ok fafäng ordh."

be no doubt he goes against the pagans for love of God and the health of the soul.²⁴⁹ In other words Birgitta wanted to make sure King Magnus had spiritual motives for what he did.

But then, when the king's plans come to nothing and the Pope excommunicates him, Birgitta has a change of heart – one of the longest chapters of her revelations is dedicated to condemning Magnus for his iniquity. It is interesting to examine just what aspects of the king's shortcomings Birgitta chose to emphasise.

Starting with the chapter's title it tells us how God's mother punishes the king of Sweden for not following the advice of God and spiritual men, and instead abandoned the campaign according to the advice of worldly men, compromising both his soul and his realm.²⁵⁰ The main emphasis in the following text is on how Magnus failed to spread the faith; the Devil intervened through the advice of worldly men who made the king conclude his campaign before having properly converted the pagans.²⁵¹ These men were more focused on temporal rewards than helping their souls, she tells us, and led the king to put faith in strength of numbers rather than the help of his creator.²⁵² Prior to the campaign Birgitta had explicitly admonished King Magnus against this and advised him to only bring with him a small army consisting of carefully selected men of pure spirit who should be no less good men than the ones who went with Moses.²⁵³ Finally we hear how the campaign came to an in Birgitta's eyes premature end, brought on by the Devil, and a very interesting note is made to how King Magnus returned to his land without any "fruits" and had to "force" the common people instead, presumably for money.²⁵⁴

We find the same criticism of King Magnus when we read *Förbindelsedikten*. Here too it is emphasised how he failed to convert the pagans properly; we recall the passage on how they were captured, shaved and baptised by King Magnus, but were then allowed to buy their freedom and later returned with their beards full grown once more. More interesting however

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 397: "...hau got hiärta swa at ängin vari annor hans akt at stridha ok utgaa mot hedhningomen uten for gudz kärlek ok siäla helso..."

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 411: "Huru gudz modhir sighir aff sine fulstopa nadh ok hon straffar em swerikis konung oskynioghnan aat gudz nadhom hulkin som ey viliande lydha gudz radhom oc andelica manna radhom gik bort mote guz vilia fran hedhna manna örlöghi som han hafde byriat ok thz giordhe han mz värlzlica manna radhom sik siäluom til större blygdh oc sino rike til storan skadha."

²⁵¹ Ibid. 415: "Thridhjatih radhir jak honum j hugh koma huru han var utualdir at föra hälgha cristna tro til hednonna än han ville. Än hör nu huat thänne konungir gör."

²⁵² Ibid. 416: "Litin tima ther äptir gingo diäfwlsins andbudh til then konung ther varo fulle mz ondom hiärta ok ilzsko fullom anda hulke som meer trösto a manna händir än sins skapara hiälp. Ok thera giri var merä til värlzlica ägho än til at hiälpa siälomen."

²⁵³ Ibid. 409: "Ok mange fara mz honum hulke gudhi skulu vara ey mindra ginuärdhoghe än the som utgingo mz moysi."

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 416: "Tholik thing framgingo aff diäfwlsins suiklicom äggilsom, thy at konungin forsmadhe gudz vina raadh ok lydde värlzlica vina raadhe ey aktande gudz styrke ok ey thänkiande min raadh. Ok han kom atir hem til sit land utan nakra frukt ok thwingadhe sins rikis almogha."

is how the king's failure to bring back material rewards is elaborated upon, as it strengthens the idea that the "fruits" Birgitta was speaking of were in fact worldly riches.²⁵⁵ If we are to trust *Förbindelsedikten* on this despite its xenophobic agenda then it is reasonable to assume King Magnus' was forced to tax his people when the campaign turned out to be a deficit undertaking. If he had been successful he would have been able to tax the trade on the Neva instead, and thus pay for both the campaign and Scania. This perhaps is what Birgitta was criticising King Magnus for failing to achieve when she mentions the lack of "fruits" and how he had to "force" the common people.

What emerges from Birgitta's revelations and the *Förbindelsedikten* is not a divergence between secular and spiritual agendas. King Magnus is not considered less pious for using Birgitta, the Church and crusading ideology as tools to legitimise worldly agendas; he is rather criticised for not doing this more successfully and to a greater extent. There is nothing in the source material to suggest that King Magnus' choice of directing the expedition against Novgorod to establish control over the river Neva collided with any religious considerations, to the contrary he is criticised for concluding the campaign too early, not just because he failed to spread the faith but also because he did not win any material gains. Birgitta actually mentions this, a worldly loss, as a reason why King Magnus should have followed her instructions.

If we then return to our initial problem; the question of why King Magnus would sacrifice a tactical advantage to follow Birgitta's unrealistic crusading program, we can attempt to answer it as well as criticise some of the claims made by the scholars.

Eric Christiansen claims that if King Magnus used spiritual motives to legitimise worldly ambitions these spiritual aspects must necessarily have been purely instrumental to him, making the theological conference nothing but a shrewd manoeuvre to legitimise his actions. This could be pushing pragmatic speculation unreasonably far though. Seeing as King Magnus had the backing of Birgitta and possibly the Pope it is hard to believe he was willing

²⁵⁵ Klemming 1867: 177:
 "...thy han lydde ey jomfru maria rade
 ther för fik han ey hennes nadhe
 utlenninga twingade honom margfall
 fför han fik betaladh thera saall
 han sette them mangh landh j panth
 ok twngade almogen sa för santh
 ath tolga skatta aldre offuer them gik
 utlenske men alth thz solleth fik."

to put the campaign in jeopardy by giving up the element of surprise to stage a theological debate for no other reason than additional legitimising. Judging by the source material King Magnus had already legitimised his campaign sufficiently at this point and from a pragmatic perspective he did not stand to gain anything from inviting the Russians to a conference if he was going to attack them anyhow. If so his motive for doing so must have been ideological.

Assuming this is the correct approach then we can attempt to answer our question; King Magnus chose to direct his campaign against Novgorod and the Neva because he stood to gain more from it politically and economically than if he had directed it against pagan tribes, but he was also willing to disregard tactical concerns to invite the Russians to a religious conference because he was a religious idealist.

Thomas Lindkvist assumes there was now to a greater extent a divergence rather than a dichotomy between the secular and spiritual agendas; pointing to how King Magnus did in fact try to live up to Birgitta's crusading ideal even when it collided with tactical concerns. This is probably a correct assessment but only to a certain extent, as the perceived discrepancy we see in the source material only extends to the organisation of the campaign, not its aims.

Michael Nordberg on the other hand maintains that although the purposes of King Magnus were dual, the worldly motive was the *main* one. This is might very well be, but a problematic case even so, because when we read the source material the religious motives are emphasised, but when we analyse them we find they legitimise a political agenda that is blatant and an obvious continuation of the old Swedish eastern policy.

Now the pieces have perhaps fallen into place. King Magnus, whose use of crusading ideology was aimed at strengthening the Swedish state by gaining control of the long-coveted Neva estuary, also believed in the spiritual content of his campaign and did not just use crusading ideology as a legitimising instrument when it was opportune. Judging by the source material this seems to be the most reasonable explanation why he invited the Russians to a theological debate before attacking them. It is interesting to speculate whether or not Birger Magnusson and Tyrgils Knutsson perceived their campaigns similarly, or if they were more pragmatic than King Magnus; at least there is nothing in the source material to suggest they ever put their political ambitions at risk for the sake of fulfilling a religious ideal. If we then look for a reason why religious idealism should have been stronger in King Magnus' time Birgitta's influence provides a plausible answer. As we have seen however, King Magnus did not follow Birgitta's crusading program entirely; one of the things he is criticised for is

relying on a large army instead of trusting in God. At some point a compromise had to be made with reality, it would seem.

The Fall of Magnus Eriksson

King Magnus Eriksson's efforts in the Baltic proved to be futile. Following this fiasco everything seemed to go wrong for him; he was excommunicated, condemned by Birgitta and lost his throne. Is it possible that just as Birger Magnusson and Tyrgils Knutsson could have built their position at least partly on the prestige won as successful crusaders, King Magnus lost his elevated position due to the shame of having failed as a crusader? There is no shortage of alternative causes; the Black Death, excommunication, Birgitta's condemnation, financial troubles, increased taxes and Magnus' favouritism all added to his rapidly declining popularity in the 1350s, most or all of which can be connected to the misfortune of the king's eastern ventures. What we seek to establish however, is to what extent King Magnus' shortcomings specifically as a crusader contributed to his downfall; was it a minor point of critique or a major one?

Dick Harrison sees a direct connection between the king's failed campaign and the loss of his throne; he points to how everything goes wrong for King Magnus following his excommunication by the Pope and Birgitta's condemnation, both results of his lack of progress in the east. Harrison lists the other possible reasons as well, such as financial crisis because of the purchase of Scania and the Black Death, increased taxes and fees for both peasants and the Church, and the king's favouritism in dealing with his subjects. In addition Harrison mentions how Birgitta does not condemn King Magnus solely because of his failure to follow her crusading program, but also because of his immoral sexual life.²⁵⁶ In this jungle of accusations is it possible to measure the impact of each?

Eric Christiansen too emphasises the king's failure as a crusader; according to him King Magnus felt such shame that he considered the Black Death a punishment from God for not having fulfilled the crusader ideal presented to him by Birgitta, and that this was his motivation for a second attempt in 1351, but despite the Pope's crusading bull the prospect of another campaign led by King Magnus was met with little enthusiasm.²⁵⁷ Could this mean King Magnus' prestige as a king was already lost with the fruitless expedition of 1348?

If we look at the sources we find they are universally hostile towards King Magnus and as such rife with explanations of what he did wrong. Our only unbiased sources are diplomataric,

²⁵⁶ Harrison 2005: 486

²⁵⁷ Christiansen 1997: 194 – 196

which tell us little or nothing explicitly of why the king's reign ended as awfully as it did. We have already seen how Birgitta emphasised how King Magnus did not follow her crusading program properly and how following the in Birgitta's mind inevitable fiasco the king pressured his own people for money.²⁵⁸ We have also seen how *Förbindelsedikten* criticises him for failing to convert the unbelievers; we recall the Russians who grew back their beards as soon as they were set free, and for relying on foreign mercenaries, whose pay in the end had to be extracted by force from the Swedish peasants.²⁵⁹ Interestingly however the chronicle offers an alternative reason for why King Magnus was excommunicated; allegedly the king was excommunicated for violating the *libertas ecclesiae*, not for failing to return the tithe he was granted in the bull of 1351.²⁶⁰ Possibly it refers to how the Church was taxed to lessen King Magnus' financial deficits. The chronicler could have criticised him for not being able to launch another campaign, but chose instead to emphasise how he taxed the Church. Further *Förbindelsedikten* condemns the king for his lack of sexual morals, which involved a sin against nature.²⁶¹

Both sources bring several charges against King Magnus and they both emphasise his shortcomings in leading the 1348 campaign; there is little surprise to these similarities as it is highly likely the author of *Förbindelsedikten* more or less copied his critique from what Birgitta had written a century earlier. There are some differences however; to Birgitta the king's shame mainly derived from his failure to spread the faith, to benefit his soul and how he returned to Sweden without any "fruits", which he taxed the people to compensate for. In *Förbindelsedikten* he is likewise considered shameful for not having converted the Russians properly, but here the fact that King Magnus brought with him foreign mercenaries seems to be considered the main point of critique, something we find no hint of in Birgitta, and the taxes forced on the Swedish people afterwards are claimed to be for the purpose of paying these foreigners, making it all the more intolerable. It seems safe to assume the attack on the king's sexual morals was just added for good measure.

²⁵⁸ Klemming 1861: 410 – 417

²⁵⁹ Klemming 1867: 175 – 178

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 178:

“Moth kyerkione fryhet giorde ok han
thy lyste pauen honom j ban”

²⁶¹ Ibid:

“En togh han eeth verre sinne
ok vildey blandas mz sinne forstinne
utan lyffde ver en oskeliget dywr
ok sindade moth reth nathur”

Apparently then, as we assumed to begin with, the dramatic fall of King Magnus can be traced to his failure to achieve any success as a crusader. This should come as no surprise; the king had built hype for the campaign by proclaiming Birgitta's revelations publicly and securing a Papal bull, possibly two. Then it all came to nothing; the people had to pay the bill, the Pope excommunicated Magnus and Birgitta condemned him.

It is worth noting however that none of the sources explicitly say King Magnus' political influence suffered because he failed as a crusader, if anything is implied to have caused dissent it would be the taxation of the people and the clergy, which although being a consequence of the eastern fiasco did not in themselves constitute a breach with crusading ideology, and the king's financial troubles did not even originate with the 1348 campaign but with the purchase of Scania which was done before he came to power and with the Black Death. Birgitta's accusations that King Magnus did not commit to spreading the faith or serving his soul are on the other hand entirely ideological, but it should be kept in mind that she wrote this in the late 1350s, after the Pope had already excommunicated Magnus. The question arises whether Birgitta's condemnation of the king did in fact reflect a widespread attitude that Magnus had failed as a crusader, or if she merely wrote it to distance herself from the campaign and thus avoid having her credibility as a prophetess doubted. A combination of both is perhaps most likely when we consider how King Magnus seems to have been unable to launch a second campaign in 1351 despite being granted full indulgences by the Pope. The Black Death must have played a large part in this as well, but it is still reasonable to assume that popular feeling turned against King Magnus immediately after his conduct in the 1348 campaign became known (prior to both his excommunication and Birgitta's condemnation), especially if his conduct was considered to be as deplorable as Birgitta portrays it.

Birgitta's Stake in the Campaign

The possibility that Birgitta could have sought to further her own ambitions by supporting King Magnus' eastern venture has only to a limited extent been explored by the scholars. Elias Wessen and Michael Nordberg both agree that Birgitta's sudden condemnation of the king was mainly due to her need to distance herself from the whole debacle in the east and explain why it was unsuccessful, unless she was to lose all credibility as a prophetess.²⁶² Wessen points to an additional detail of some interest; in the testament of King Magnus and

²⁶² Wessen 1968: 125 – 126 & Nordberg 1995: 106

Queen Blanka of 1346, where as we may recall the king commits to go against “gups owinum”, they also make a donation to Birgitta’s planned monastery in Vadstena.²⁶³

The fact that Birgitta received this gift from King Magnus and but a few years later started having visions at the king’s request as to how an eventual campaign to the east should be organised should arouse some suspicion. From a cynical point of view we could make the following outline of events: King Magnus desired to renew Swedish efforts to control the Neva, but lacked legitimacy and a motivating factor. He then sought out Birgitta, by now acknowledged as a mouthpiece of God by the Church, to strike a deal. They reached an agreement; Birgitta would openly support King Magnus’ campaign and lend it spiritual legitimacy, in return the king would aid her financially in building a convent in Vadstena (“sīpæn giwum wi klostrenu. þer vi oc vare ærwyngiæ skulum byggyæ, oc altzþinges fulcomæ med gupz napom i vazstenom”)²⁶⁴ and promise to conduct the campaign according to her guidelines. This is of course pure speculation, but the fact remains that King Magnus and Birgitta both got something they needed from the other.

When King Magnus’ campaigning in the east came to nothing and he was in addition excommunicated by the Pope, it put Birgitta in a difficult position; she was the one who had given the instructions for the campaign, or rather she was the alleged medium through which Jesus gave these instructions, and the Pope was the head of the organisation that validated her religious authority. As a consequence Birgitta was forced to explain how the campaign could have been a failure if indeed she gave it instructions from Christ himself, as well as why she, a prophetess, would support a king who was going to be excommunicated.

Birgitta had only two options; either she gave up on all credibility as a prophetess, or she had to put the blame somewhere else, and King Magnus was the obvious target. By portraying the king as the biblical “lost son” who strayed from the right path, Birgitta denied any responsibility by claiming it was all King Magnus’ fault as he would not listen to the advice of God and spiritual men.²⁶⁵ In the chapter condemning the king she is constantly emphasising how she considered the king her own son and gave him the best of counsel, but Magnus was disobedient and under the influence of the Devil. Birgitta speaks as if King Magnus completely disregarded her advice and only followed the counsel of worldly men.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Wessen 1968: 121

²⁶⁴ <http://62.20.57.212/ra/medeltid/FMPro?-db=hk.fp5&-format=detail.html&-lay=webb&-sortfield=brevnummer&-op=cn&Personnamn=blanka&-max=10&-recid=37943&-find=>

²⁶⁵ Klemming 1861: 410: ”...ey viliande lydha gudz radhom oc andelica manna radhom...”

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 414 – 417: “Thän konungin som jak kalladhe min son är nu vardhin olydhnonna... [...] Ok thässa nadh forskylladhe jak konungenom at han skulle göra gudhi hedhir, ok gagn sina siäl. [...] Än hör nu huat thänne konungir gör. [...] ...konungin forsmadhe gudz vina raad ok lydde värlzlica vina raadhe ey aktande gudz styrk

While it is hard to establish to what extent this was actually true, we know from the Novgorod Chronicle that Magnus in fact was willing to go quite far in following Birgitta's somewhat unrealistic crusading program, so it is reasonable to assume that Birgitta deliberately exaggerated the iniquity of the king in order to strengthen her own position. She adds that she is willing to forgive King Magnus if he repents, presumably hoping the king would do this and thus confirm her account of the campaign.

It seems Nordberg and Wessen are correct in their assessment of Birgitta; she condemned King Magnus to save her own credibility and was possibly granted financial support for her convent in Vadstena in return for lending religious legitimacy to the king's plans for an expedition against Novgorod. This would mean she had two things to gain from the campaign; her very own convent and, if King Magnus was successful, increased recognition as a prophetess. For these gains Birgitta was willing to put her spiritual integrity at stake, and when the bet proved unfortunate she had to bail herself out somehow to avoid having her position undermined. Dick Harrison sees Birgitta as Sweden's Bernard of Clairvaux,²⁶⁷ a comparison which becomes all the more true when one considers how they both were highly influential religious authorities who preached crusades that in the end achieved nothing, although Birgitta's stakes could be said to have been higher as she claimed to communicate with God directly.

Conclusion

King Magnus Eriksson continued the old Swedish policy of striving to establish control with the trade on the Neva in the name of the holy war, but the presence of a spiritual authority such as Birgitta was something new and she seems to have infused the eastern enterprise with a stronger element of religious idealism. Eric Christiansen may therefore be out on a limb when he presumes that King Magnus was nothing but a pragmatic opportunist. Although this increased religious idealism evidently caused a divergence between the secular and spiritual view (Birgitta's) on how a campaign the east should be carried out, Lindkvist's notion of a divergence does not seem to have concerned the nature of the motives behind an eventual campaign – Birgitta expected King Magnus to make war for the good of his soul as well as to return with “fruits”. King Magnus himself seems to have regarded both the conquest of Orekhov and the conversion of the Russians as equally part of his enterprise. Answering why

ok ey thánkiande min raad. [...] Swa sighir jak nu honum O min son vânt thik um til mik ok jak skal vända mik um til thik.”

²⁶⁷ Harrison 2005: 471

he would sacrifice the element of surprise to hold a theological conference with the Russians is a simple matter of pointing out how these motives worked together.

To conclude we can say that although spiritual motives were now more important than before, crusading ideology was still used to legitimise secular agendas. This worked in favour of King Magnus up until the point where the 1348 campaign proved fruitless; which may have been part of the reason why King Magnus failed to launch a second expedition despite the Papal bull of 1351. In extension of this failure Magnus was excommunicated by the Pope and condemned by Birgitta, who now sought to distance herself from the campaign in order to retain her integrity as a prophetess. All these must have been important causes behind the fall of Magnus Eriksson.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the previous chapters I have examined the political impact of crusading ideology in Sweden from the 1150s to the 1350s, having in the case of each alleged crusade attempted to determine whether the actions in question were motivated by crusading ideology and if so how and to what extent this might have affected the further political developments. In light of what I arrived at it may then be possible to reach some general conclusions concerning the relative importance of crusading ideology in Sweden, how it was used, what its political consequences were and how the situation in Sweden compares with Denmark and Norway.

The Ideological Impact of the Crusade

To establish whether or not the Swedish campaigns were in fact exponents of crusading ideology is essential if we are to say anything about its impact.

The crusade first entered the Baltic scene with the pope's *Divina Dispensatio* of 1147 where the Germans and Scandinavians were granted full crusading indulgences for fighting their pagan neighbours in the east, making a crusade in this direction the equivalent of a crusade to the Holy Land – a few years later King Erik IX launched a campaign to Finland in order to convert pagans and establish a Church organisation. If it was a response to the Papal bull then we can claim King Erik's campaign in the 1150s as the earliest recorded exponent of crusading ideology in Sweden, but it could be argued the case is too ambiguous as the only sources we have are the hagiographic legends of King Erik and Bishop Henry; written over a century later and rife with genre conventions and the political agendas of the late 13th century. In light of the circumstantial evidence however it would seem the legends contain a core of truth; an expedition did take place and it converted pagans in Finland. Given the contemporary context of the campaign it is likely it was influenced by crusading ideology.²⁶⁸

By the time of the so-called second Swedish crusade there can no longer be any doubt that crusading ideology played some part, as it must have been launched in connection with a crusading bull which reached Sweden in 1237 and granted full indulgences to all who would participate in a campaign against the Tavastians.²⁶⁹

In the same way the so-called third Swedish crusade of 1293 against the Karelians can be connected to a crusading bull of 1274 which explicitly urged such an expedition,²⁷⁰ while

²⁶⁸ See chapter 2, pages 13 – 20

²⁶⁹ See chapter 3, pages 35 – 38

²⁷⁰ See chapter 4, pages 47 – 48

Magnus Eriksson's campaign of 1348 seems to have been granted indulgences by a crusading bull that is now lost and in any case he received another one in 1351.²⁷¹

However, establishing the presence of crusading ideology is one thing, measuring its contemporary significance is another. For what did the crusade mean to the Swedes who took part in the campaigns? Was it merely an addition to a set of beliefs concerning the relationship between religion and war, or did it constitute an ideological package deal of its own? And did it in any way correspond with my definition of a crusade? These questions are of course impossible to answer without sufficient evidence, but the absence of evidence might also be telling; none of our Swedish sources ever use the word "crusade", perhaps indicating it had no meaning for them. When we attempt to show that crusading ideology influenced the campaigns it is therefore necessary to emphasise the Papal bulls with their indulgences, as this is the only place where a clearly defined idea of the crusade is used in connection with the eastern wars. One wonders then, if the Papal curia's theological concept of a crusade might have differed from whatever ideological values the Swedes operated with. An indication that the Papal indulgences did in fact matter to them is given in the Icelandic Annals, where we are told the Norwegians would not participate in King Magnus Eriksson's campaign against Novgorod before it had been authorised by a Papal bull.²⁷² But this was in the 1340s, telling us nothing about how the Swedes in earlier centuries felt, and concerning Norwegians, who might have had a different relationship with crusading ideology.

Officially many if not all of these campaigns enjoyed crusading indulgences, and from what our sources tell us there can be no doubt they were also infused with religious significance by the Swedes themselves. On the other hand there is nothing to suggest the Swedes operated with a clear concept of the crusade as an entirely new package of ideas corresponding to my definition or the theological doctrine of the Church. To them it is more likely that crusading ideology became an addition to the already established idea that religion could justify war and good deeds would be rewarded in heaven, an idea that was further embroidered upon by the advent of crusading ideology and in turn impacted the Swedish eastern policy, as wars against pagans and non-Catholics were given increased legitimacy and prestige.

Crusading Ideology as Legitimation and Motive

From the campaign of King Erik IX to those of King Magnus Eriksson we have witnessed various uses of crusading ideology over a period of some 200 years.

²⁷¹ See chapter 5, pages 67 – 69

²⁷² Ibid. 68

With some ambiguity it can be justified to describe King Erik's campaign as the first Swedish crusade, making it the first recorded exponent of crusading ideology in Swedish history. In the primary source material the explicit motives are conversion of pagans and the establishment of a Church organisation, the implicit motives are glory and possibly plunder and improving relations with the Papacy, while the seemingly absent motives are territorial conquest, unless we consider how the Swedish king was also head of the Church, and a remission of sins, unless the participants had the *Divina Dispensatio* of 1147 in mind.²⁷³

In the case of Birger Magnusson's campaign it seems even more likely crusading ideology provided legitimisation and possibly a motive as well. In the primary source material the explicit motives are conversion of pagans, winning glory, territorial conquest, honouring God and plunder. The implicit motives are the remission of sins, given how the 1237 crusading indulgence must be connected with the campaign, and possibly control with trade if we are to believe John Lind's take on it.²⁷⁴

Tyrgils Knutsson's campaign of 1293 can be connected to the Papal indulgences given in 1274 for a crusade against the Karelians, although it is doubtful whether these also covered the subsequent campaign launched against Novgorod in 1300. Crusading ideology provided a legitimisation, and maybe a motive, although it is hard to separate the two when the secular and spiritual agendas are in a state of dichotomy. The explicit motives behind Tyrgils Knutsson's campaign in the primary source material are territorial conquest, the conversion of pagans, control with trade and the protection of Christendom. The implicit motives are the winning of glory and possibly the remission of sins, if the contents of the 1274 indulgences figured in anyone's mind. In the case of Mats Kettilmundsson the winning of glory is an explicit motive.²⁷⁵

King Magnus' campaign against Novgorod in 1348 is perhaps the one where at least some scholars agree that crusading ideology provided a motive and not just a legitimisation, although it certainly provided that as well. According to my definition the campaign can be considered a crusade as long as we accept the existence of the crusading bull mentioned in the Icelandic Annals or accept Birgitta as an alternative source of indulgences through her role as Christ's mouthpiece. The explicit motives behind the expedition in the primary source material are the conversion of pagans, territorial conquest and the remission of sins – given

²⁷³ See chapter 2

²⁷⁴ See chapter 3

²⁷⁵ See chapter 4

they were motivated by Birgitta's crusading program. The implicit motives were control with trade and most likely winning prestige.²⁷⁶

What we are seeing is that these campaigns were not entirely similar and the motives behind the use of crusading ideology differed slightly. There is for example reason to believe that territorial conquest was not as important for King Erik IX, who left the conquered lands to the Church, or King Magnus, who was willing to put his campaign at risk to comply with the crusading program of Birgitta, unlike Birger Magnusson and Tyrgils Knutsson, whose eastern expeditions seem to have had specific territorial ambitions – Tavastia and Karelia – that eclipsed other considerations. It could be claimed then that the importance of the religious motives must have been greater in the campaigns of King Erik IX and King Magnus than those of Birger and Tyrgils, where religion mainly served as a legitimisation. Now, what did King Erik and King Magnus have in common? They were both kings at a time when electoral kingship was the rule; their position depended on the favourable consensus of the aristocracy and their ability to enforce a monopoly of legitimate violence was weak. Birger and Tyrgils on the other hand were not kings but royal dignitaries, and both of them acted as regents for kings who were yet too young to rule and continued to do so even when these kings reached maturity, at a time when the central authority was comparatively strong.

Obviously crusading ideology was used to generate support for the eastern policy of the Swedish state and in times when the state was strong this mainly involved legitimising conquest and control with trade. However, in times when the state was weak it may have been forced to put greater emphasis on the religious qualities of these campaigns and the representatives of the state were in turn forced to act in accordance with this – King Magnus had to procure a Papal bull for the Norwegians and put the subsequent campaign in jeopardy by acting in accordance with Birgitta's crusading program, while King Erik IX left his gains in Finland in the hands of the Church. It would seem a weak state could not bring on a war on its premises; which may be part of the explanation behind the fluctuations in religious idealism.

The Political Consequences of Crusading Ideology

In the course of my period crusading ideology had political consequences for the Swedish eastern policy and the people involved with it.

²⁷⁶ See chapter 5

In the case of King Erik IX's campaign these consequences were the establishment of a Church organisation, creating a Swedish precedence in Finland and strengthening the position of King Erik and his dynasty who may also have improved their relationship with the Papacy.²⁷⁷

The political consequences of Birger's campaign were expansion of the Swedish state and a strengthened political position for Birger, which may have contributed to the choice of his son as king, after which Birger remained as *de facto* ruler well into his son's maturity, centralising the rule of Sweden around his own person and instituting several reforms. Possibly it also brought with it increased control with the transportable wealth of the Baltic.²⁷⁸

Tyrgils Knutsson's campaigns brought further territorial conquest in Finland by incorporating parts of Karelia into the Swedish realm as well as increased control with the Baltic trade, now officially declared. Its success seemingly strengthened the position of its two most praised participants; Tyrgils Knutsson and Mats Kettilmundsson. The former was regent of Sweden during King Birger's immaturity and like Earl Birger he continued to be so even after the king was old enough to rule, in the end Tyrgils fell victim to a plot which deposed and decapitated him, possibly a sign that he had grown too powerful for his own good. There can of course be several other explanations for the relative strength of Tyrgils' position, but the most credible one offered by the source material is his conquest of Karelia. The case of Mats Kettilmundsson is more ambiguous; although there are many signs he grew in prestige and position as a result of his exploits in the east, Mats did not enter the stage until the 1300 campaign, which according to my definition might not be a crusade unless we stretch the indulgences of the 1274 bull to cover a campaign that was not aimed at the Karelians in the first place. Neither is Mats mentioned in connection with any actions that may be connected to crusading ideology.²⁷⁹

The political consequences of King Magnus Eriksson's campaign did not include any territorial gains, as Orekhov was lost shortly after King Magnus returned to Sweden. The lack of results must have weakened the king's honour capital and in extension his political position, which in turn would have contributed to his eventual fall. In this particular case the motive of winning prestige evidently backfired and the ones responsible, King Magnus and Birgitta, were not praised for their efforts but rather forced to explain themselves, something which Birgitta succeeded in by distancing herself from King Magnus and blaming him for the

²⁷⁷ See chapter 2: 20 – 26

²⁷⁸ See chapter 3: 38 – 45

²⁷⁹ See chapter 4: 52 – 64

failure. The campaign also seems to have worsened the financial situation in Sweden, as we are told how King Magnus was forced to tax the people and the Church to make up for his deficits, and to have worsened the king's relationship with the Papacy, which duly excommunicated him.²⁸⁰

As we can see the political consequences of crusading ideology were both external and internal. Externally it fuelled wars in Finland and against Novgorod, leading to an expansion of the Swedish state which was to endure for 600 years. The impact on the subsequent history of the Baltic is of course immeasurable, but just how large a part of this is to be ascribed to religious motivation must remain an open question. Internally crusading ideology seems to have had the effect of either strengthening or weakening the central authority, depending on the successfulness of those who made use of it. According to Bourdieu the centralised state is a result of an accumulation of symbolic capital,²⁸¹ and the prestige of a crusader in the middle ages must certainly be considered as a form of symbolic capital. If the men who represented the Swedish state acquired this form of capital then necessarily it would have strengthened their ability to enforce a monopoly of legitimate violence.

A Comparative Perspective at the Political Impact of Crusading Ideology in Denmark and Norway

The political impact of crusading ideology in Norway seems to strike the greatest contrast to the situation in Sweden. The Norwegian crusades did not lead to any territorial conquest and this does not seem to have been a motive, whereas in Sweden it might very well have been the most important one. Of course one might say it is of no surprise seeing as Sweden was ideally situated right next to vast pagan lands where crusading ideology could easily be used to legitimise conquest, whereas Norway was not. This might also explain why there are no records of Swedish crusaders in the Holy Land while there are several for Norwegian ones; for the Swedes it was simply too opportune to use crusading ideology to legitimise the conquest of Finland and the wars with Novgorod, whereas in Norway where there were no such venues close by the crusading movement took on a more idealistic form. The Norwegian and Swedish crusaders seem to have had other things in common however, such as the motives of glory and material gain, which translated into political influence in both countries.

In Denmark the political impact of crusading ideology seems to have fallen somewhere in between the Norwegian and Swedish extremes. While the Danes used crusading ideology like

²⁸⁰ See chapter 5: 75 – 86

²⁸¹ Bourdieu 1994: 61-65

the Swedes to legitimise conquest of pagan lands in the Baltic they were also heavily involved in the crusades to the Holy Land. As in Norway and Sweden the prestige involved with crusading could also help magnates in strengthening their political position at home, usually that of the kings, whereas in Sweden we see nobles who strengthen their position at the expense of the king.²⁸²

When looking at all three countries at once Sweden emerges as the one where crusading ideology was the most politicised, inherently connected with the conquest of Finland, the desire for control with the Baltic trade and the wars with Novgorod, while the Holy Land remained distant. In Norway crusading ideology seems to have been the least politicised and the most religiously motivated, all of the Norwegian crusades taking the form of armed pilgrimages to Jerusalem while none of them were aimed at expanding the Norwegian state. Denmark on the other hand looks like it had a greater variety of crusading, launching political crusades to conquer lands in the Baltic as well as idealistic crusades to the aid of Holy Land. Consequently the political impact of crusading ideology was greater in Denmark and Sweden than in Norway, although the glory won on these campaigns provided a common motive in all three countries and the way in which one could derive political influence from this would have been similar.

²⁸² See chapter 3: 38 – 43 & chapter 4: 56 – 61

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