

# BEYOND BORDERS

MATERIAL SUPPORT FROM ABROAD IN THE  
SCANDINAVIAN CIVIL WARS, 1130–1180



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## **ABSTRACT**

This master's thesis is an attempt to understand how the medieval sources portray political actors who went abroad in search for economic and military resources with which they could defeat their enemies at home. The thesis deals with Denmark and Norway in the twelfth century, when both of these kingdoms were caught up in internal dynastic conflict. Material support from abroad is interesting because it seems to have been a widespread and important aspect of the Scandinavian political culture which has not been subject to study before. Furthermore, investigating support from abroad makes it necessary to look at medieval politics in a way that is not constrained by modern national boundaries, as so much of the previous research has been. This transnational perspective has garnered two crucial findings:

First, foreign military and economic aid in the Scandinavian civil wars was intimately connected with domestic aristocratic alliances. Political actors went abroad for help when they had lost their local high-status allies, and they were only able to return if they could win them back. Support from abroad could help convince the local aristocracy that a king or magnate was worth supporting.

Second, this thesis has shown that it was the personal and political interest of the foreign potentate giving aid, not social bonds between giver and recipient, which determined whether a political actor would receive foreign support. Thus, in order to receive economic and military resources from abroad, Scandinavian kings and magnates had to ensure that potential foreign donors shared their political interests.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CS = Chronica Slavorum

DD = Diplomatarium Danicum

Fsk = Fagrskinna

GD = Gesta Danorum

Hkr = Heimskringla

HkrMs = Magnússona Saga

HkrMB = Magnús Saga Blinda Ok Haralds Gilla

HkrIngi = Haraldssona Saga

HkrHh = Hákonar Saga Herðibreiðs

HkrME = Magnúss Saga Erlingssonar

KS = Knýtlinge saga

Msk = Morkinskinna

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# INTRODUCTION

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On 10<sup>th</sup> August in the year 1134, we read in the kings' sagas that the Norwegian king Harald Gille was soundly defeated in battle by his long-time rival and co-ruler King Magnus Sigurdsson. After his defeat, Harald fled to Denmark, where he according to both Norwegian and Danish sources received considerable material aid from King Erik Emune, in the form of either economic or military resources. With the support from Denmark, Harald was able to make a fierce comeback in his war against Magnus, and not long after Harald's return to Norway, Magnus had been defeated, blinded and castrated.

To turn the tide in a struggle for the Norwegian throne, Harald Gille sought help from outside of Norway. To achieve success in an internal political conflict he sought help externally. This investigation is an attempt to study how the practice of seeking material support from abroad is presented in our medieval sources, how it functioned and influenced the politics of twelfth-century Scandinavia. To understand this practice, there are several smaller questions that needs to be addressed. First, we shall attempt to answer the question of why politicians like Harald sought help from outside their own kingdoms in the first place. We shall then look at the different kinds of social bonds that could exist between the giver and recipient of material aid. Was there a personal relationship between Harald and King Erik? If so, was this relationship significant? We will also analyse the conditions that needed to be in place for such aid to be given, and try to answer what factors needed to be present for Erik to lend resources to his Norwegian colleague. Finally, we shall try to get a sense of how effective military and economic support from abroad was as a political tool. Harald succeeded in defeating Magnus when he came back from Denmark, but how did he do it, and was he typical among the politicians who got help from foreign patrons?

It is possible to answer these questions because Harald Gille was not unique. In fact, our sources for the events of Scandinavia in the 1100s are full of references to political actors, usually kings or powerful magnates, who fled abroad in search for help when the political situation at home was not in their favour. Part of the reason for this is the period itself. In the 1130s, the sources tell us that conflicts broke out among the political elite of all the Scandinavian kingdoms, seemingly over who would be in control of royal power. In this tense political environment, seeking help from outside one's own kingdom was a widespread, sometimes even unavoidable strategy.

Despite its prevalence in the sources, however, few historians have attempted to look

closely at this practice in order to get a sense of how it functioned. Rather, this aspect of medieval politics seems to have been taken for granted, perhaps viewed as something obvious, even though the answers to the questions that arise when we look closer at the practice are anything but.

## **The project**

### **What is material support from abroad?**

For the purposes of this thesis, we shall define material support as economic or military resources given to a political actor by a patron outside his own kingdom in such a way that the political actor himself is in control of these resources.

Some aspects of this definition are worthy of note. The first is that I have chosen to analyse both economic and military types of aid. Economic aid should be understood as money or provisions, while military aid seems to have been given in the form of soldiers and ships. The reason I have chosen to discuss the two together is firstly that it is often difficult to know from the sources whether someone received one or the other. Secondly, it seems that economic aid was used primarily for acquiring greater military resources. Thus, the consequences of economic or military support were more or less the same: the political actor who fled his home in search of aid returned home in a stronger position militarily than he had been in when he left. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the definition we shall be using excludes invasions led by the foreign patrons of politicians who went abroad in search for support, of which there are some notable examples in the sources. Because the two phenomena seem so similar, both involving military resources being taken from one kingdom to another, it is necessary to justify why invasions will not be discussed in this thesis. The reason is partly limited space, but I also think it can be argued that invasions and the kind of support we shall study here are different political practices, the crucial difference being precisely who was in control of the resources. After all, it seems more pressing to explain why a potentate would give away his assets rather than keep control of them himself.

Where the giving of material aid is presented in the sources, seeking such support almost always goes hand in hand with travel abroad. With only one exception, the political actors who needed help personally sought out the foreign potentates who were able to grant it. Because the need for foreign resources followed in the wake of military or political defeat, it is natural to see the political actor journeying away from home as a kind of refugee, fleeing from difficult circumstances at home. The sources also provide us with other examples of

kings and aristocrats who became refugees by escaping from their home kingdoms, but did not receive material support in a way that is in line with our definition. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify that while this thesis deals with political actors who could be described as refugees, it does not deal with the practice of refuge in general. Neither is this really a discussion of exile, which should be understood as a kind of social exclusion, rather than the act of fleeing home by political necessity.<sup>1</sup> Instead, this is an analysis of one of the possible products of political refuge abroad, namely material aid in the form of economic or military resources.

## Scope

In other words, the definition of material support itself puts some significant limitations on the scope of this study. Additionally, we need to define our geographical and chronological constraints in order for our investigation to be practically feasible. The survey is limited to political actors originating in Scandinavia, meaning the three kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. However, the geographical area covered will be somewhat larger as the Scandinavians seeking support travelled all over Northern Europe. The choice of Scandinavia as a starting point has to do with the fact that this began as a study of the Scandinavian civil wars, and these wars define our spatial limitations.

No matter how much we want to study the whole of Scandinavia, however, the sources makes this difficult to execute. Danish political history during the internal conflicts is recounted in several independent narrative sources, and in the case of Norway, we can lean on the Old Norse kings' sagas, which are numerous even though they are not independent of each other. For Sweden, on the other hand, sources for the political developments of the twelfth century are as good as non-existent, and we depend on infrequent references to Sweden made in the Norwegian and Danish sources. Because of this lack of sources, the political actors we shall discuss here will largely be Danish and Norwegian, but we will of course analyse the instances where the sources do in-fact portray Swedish involvement in the practice of seeking material support abroad.

As for our chronological framework, we will look at how the sources portray the period ranging from about 1130 to circa 1180. The justification for the choice of starting-date

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<sup>1</sup> For more on exile see Laura Napran and Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, eds., *Exile in the Middle Ages: selected proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8-11 July 2002* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2004).

is quite simple: in both Denmark and Norway the struggles for the throne has traditionally been thought to break out at about this time. In Norway, they begun with the death of King Sigurd Jorsalfar in 1130, and in Denmark they started with the murder of the powerful magnate and royal descendant Knud Lavard in 1131. The choice to cut off the period at about 1180 is not as straightforward as determining a starting point. While the civil wars came to an end in Denmark in 1157, they are generally thought to have continued in Norway, with some periods of peace, until 1240.<sup>2</sup> So why end in 1180? Again, the reason is primarily a lack of space, as it has not proved possible to treat the Norwegian conflict in its entirety within the confines of this thesis. The choice cut off around 1180 has some logic to it however. In Denmark Valdemar the Great, the king who put an end to the period of internal struggles, died in 1182. As for Norway, two of our most important sources, the kings' sagas *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, end their narration with the battle of Re in 1177. The events that followed 1177 can be said to belong to a separate chapter of the Norwegian civil wars; a chapter recorded in *Sverris saga*, one of the earliest Norwegian royal biographies, and dominated by that saga's protagonist, Sverre Sigurdsson. Considering that there is a kind of breakoff point in both Danish and Norwegian history at around the year 1180, I think we are justified in setting it as the chronological end point of this study.

## **Terminology**

While we shall be careful in straying away from technical terminology, there are some words whose use we have to address and justify, not least because their meaning is problematic in a medieval context. This is going to be an analysis of political interaction across borders in the Middle Ages, which is difficult to talk about because so much of the language we use to describe such matters is coloured by modernity. It is controversial to describe medieval kingdoms as “nations”,<sup>3</sup> and yet it is almost impossible to talk about political interaction between kingdoms without using words like “international” or “transnational”. Even the word “state” is problematic because it carries modern connotations to centralized bureaucracies and monopoly of violence that do not necessarily apply to medieval polities.<sup>4</sup>

To get away from these problems, the English medievalist Susan Reynolds proposed

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Sawyer, "Scandinavia in the Eleventh and Tenth Centuries," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 4: c. 1024-c. 1198, Part 2*, ed. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Sverre Bagge, *Cross & Scepter: The Rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms from the Vikings to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 169-73.

<sup>4</sup> Bagge, *Cross & Scepter*, 2.

that instead of words like “nation” or “state”, we should use the word “kingdom” (or an equivalent), and instead of the adjective “national” we should use “regnal”.<sup>5</sup> I shall follow Reynolds in her first suggestion, and substitute “kingdom” for more anachronistic words, but I will not abstain from using “international” and “transnational”. The reason is simply that I find the word “regnal” to be rather unintuitive, and making compounds out of it only makes it more so. When using words like “transnational”, however, it should be clear that I do not mean it to denote the kinds of relationships that exist between modern nation states. Rather, the terms should be understood as ideal types, models that help us understand how interactions between different political entities could occur.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Danish king Knud Magnussen’s network of personal relationships was transnational because it included the rulers of both the Polish and Swedish kingdoms.

Two words we shall also be using a lot to describe these matters are “external” and “internal”. “External” will be used in the sense that something concerns more than one kingdom or polity, while the “internal” concerns only one. Thus, “external politics” takes place between kings and magnates of different kingdoms, while “internal politics” goes on inside one particular kingdoms. More importantly, this study will take an external perspective on the Scandinavian civil wars, meaning that we shall investigate the struggles without being bound to the confines of one kingdom or another.

The term “civil wars” is also potentially problematic, because it, like “nation” or “state”, has modern connotations that do not necessarily apply when we are using it in a medieval context. Today, most historians agree that the internal conflicts of twelfth-century Denmark, Sweden and Norway were not conflicts between different ethnic, religious or ideological groups within a nation-state, which is the image that is often conjured up when the term “civil war” is used.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the Scandinavian civil wars during the 1100s should be understood as competition for power, influence and material resources within the political elite. In order to avoid a term with so many modern undertones, I shall try to avoid using it, opting instead for “internal conflicts”, or an equivalent. It will not be possible to avoid the word completely, however, and when the term is used it is because it is well established in the historiographical tradition, not because it is entirely historically appropriate.

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 254.

<sup>6</sup> Knut Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var: En innføring i historiefaget*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999), 147-48.

<sup>7</sup> Birgit Sawyer, "The 'Civil Wars' revisited," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 82, no. 1 (2003): 69. Sverre Bagge, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 65, no. 2 (1986): 147.

It has proven difficult to find a good principle by which to decide what language to use for the personal names of the many political actors involved in our analysis. Not all have well-established English names, and while it would be possible to use the original languages of the sources, one of our most important sources for Danish events, Saxo Grammaticus, does not use nicknames or patronymics, making it difficult to separate the many people with the same given names from one another. I have therefore chosen to use the established Norwegian names for Norwegian political actors, the Danish names for the Danish actors, and so on. As for place-names, I shall keep to their modern English variations as far as possible. Where it is not I shall revert to the local term.

## Historiography

### Background

As far as I am aware, the practice of seeking material support from abroad during the Scandinavian internal struggles has not been studied before. Modern historians writing about the conflicts may mention that so-and-so received resources in Denmark or Germany, but they have exhibited little interest in analysing how the practice actually functioned. It is symptomatic that in the fourth volume of the 1993 edition of *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, Ole Fenger mentions that the Danish pretender Knud Magnussen received support from the German archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen, but does not explore why.<sup>8</sup> The same can be said of Knut Helle, who in his contribution to the 1995 *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie* writes that King Magnus Erlingsson could go to Denmark for aid during his fight against Sverre Sigurdsson, but Helle is as silent as Fenger on the question of what made this arrangement possible.<sup>9</sup> This is also true for his influential book *Norge blir en stat: 1130-1319*, where we read that a number of Norwegian pretenders sought aid in Denmark, but the question of why a Danish king would grant such support is largely left unanswered.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most illustrative example comes from Sverre Bagge's book *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, where he writes about Magnus Erlingsson that: "Sverris saga repeatedly states that Magnus received ships and men in Denmark without giving any information of

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<sup>8</sup> Ole Fenger, *"Kirker rejses alle vegne": 1050-1250*, ed. Olaf Olsen, vol. 4, Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie (København: Gyldendals Bogklubber, 1993), 136.

<sup>9</sup> Knut Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt: 1130-1350*, ed. Knut Helle, et al., vol. 3, Aschehougs norgeshistorie (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1995), 63.

<sup>10</sup> Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat: 1130-1319* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 42-45, 53-57.



how it happened or the Danish king's motives in giving this support.”<sup>11</sup> Like his fellow historians, Bagge does not attempt to answer these questions in any detail, which is why this study is so important.

In sum, there is really no pre-existing historiography that deals directly with the question of how material support from abroad played a role in the Scandinavian internal conflicts of the twelfth century. This does not mean, of course, that nothing has been written that is relevant to our analysis, far from it. Theories and views that fall somewhat on the outside of our topic are nonetheless necessary to understand and contextualize our own conclusions. In the following, we shall therefore first look at how the scholarship dealing with the conflicts within Norway and Denmark separately can help us understand how the two kingdoms interacted. We shall then move on to consider historians who have tried to look at the civil wars from an external perspective, considering more than one kingdom at a time.

### **The Norwegian perspective**

For a long time, Norwegian medieval society was interpreted institutionally, and the conflicts depicted in the sagas were often seen as being fought between the crown and the aristocracy who was resisting the expansion of the king's power. An alternative, but equally institutional interpretation was offered by Halvdan Koht who saw the crown and aristocracy as having a shared interest in exploiting the population at large.<sup>12</sup> This general understanding naturally shaped the views on the twelfth- and thirteenth-century civil wars as well, which were interpreted as expressions of ideological, institutional or regional conflict, fought between forces of centralization and decentralization, crown and magnates or crown and church.<sup>13</sup>

The break from this tradition is especially associated with the historian Sverre Bagge. In 1991, the book *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* was published, in which he attempted to dismantle the idea that the conflicts in the sagas were presented as conflicts between institutions like crown and aristocracy. The society presented in *Heimskringla*, argues Bagge, is one in which individuals fight for their own self-interest, not to forward the aims and ideology of one institution or another.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Norwegian royal saint Olav Haraldsson, for example “does not fight for the monarchy, he fights for his own

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<sup>11</sup> Sverre Bagge, *From Viking stronghold to Christian kingdom: state formation in Norway, c. 900-1350* (København: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 50.

<sup>12</sup> Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 64-65.

<sup>13</sup> Helle, *Norge blir en stat*, 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 90, 96.

personal interest”.<sup>15</sup>

Five years earlier, Bagge had written the article “Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen”. There he had interpreted the conflicts in Norway after 1130 in much the same way; namely as “conflicts between aristocratic factions, organized in a rather ad hoc way, over individual or group advantages: income, political influence or, in the kings’ case, monarchy itself.”<sup>16</sup>

Like many of the historians of his generation, Bagge is sceptical towards the attributing great political significance to the bond of kinship. The reason for this was that kinship was bilateral, meaning that a person was related to both his mother and father’s side of the family. The consequence of such a system was that kin groups were often very large, and that conflict broke out between relatives more often than between different families. Thus, Bagge emphasises the great variety of personal relationships that played a role in the political culture of the Middle Ages. Kinship along with other bonds like marital relations, friendship and lordship, was the basis for the aristocratic factions Bagge sees as the players in the Norwegian internal conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

According to Bagge, patron-client relations and gift giving made these factions socially cohesive. These practices have also been stressed in Bagge’s later work,<sup>18</sup> as well as by other influential historians. Perhaps the most important of these is Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, who has written extensively on these subjects. Although writing on an earlier period, he has argued that patron-client relations were an essential aspect of Norse society, and has defined them as socially asymmetrical relationships in which both parts had something to gain. The patron received the loyalty and respect of his client in return for providing him with protection and support.<sup>19</sup> The Icelandic historian has also stressed the importance of gift giving as a practice that maintained social relations between the powerful and their supporters.<sup>20</sup>

Bagge’s views on the political culture of Norway around the time of the internal struggles also shapes the way he understands the outbreak of the conflict. The great expense required of a magnate to maintain his network of clients and thus his positions of power,

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<sup>15</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 85.

<sup>16</sup> Bagge, “Borgerkrig og statsutvikling,” 196.

<sup>17</sup> Bagge, “Borgerkrig og statsutvikling,” 151.

<sup>18</sup> Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet: vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden* (Oslo: Pax, 2008), 24.

<sup>20</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Den vennlige vikingen: vennskapets makt i Norge og på Island 900-1300* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2010), 21-41; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet*, 87-90. See also: Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and power in the Icelandic commonwealth*, vol. 12, The Viking collection (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999).

Bagge argues, lead to a lack of resources within the Norwegian aristocracy, which in turn led to the outbreak of the civil wars. The critical situation in the 1100s was brought about by two factors. One was the end of the Viking expeditions, which stopped sometime in eleventh century, and put an end to the steady flow of booty coming to the country from abroad. The other factor was the expansion of the church, which through considerable royal donations could lay claim to more and more of Norwegian land, thus making it unavailable to the lay aristocracy.<sup>21</sup> “The result”, writes Bagge, “was that the conflicts which under normal circumstances could lead to sporadic fighting between the members of the group [the political elite], now lead to lengthy and bloody war.”<sup>22</sup>

Sverre Bagge’s conclusions have been criticised by the Norwegian historian Hans Jacob Orning. By pointing to parallels elsewhere in Europe, he questions Bagge’s reasons for assuming that the transition away from pillaging abroad and towards more internal powerbases based on extracting resources from peasants would mean that the aristocracy was in a weaker economic position than before. Further, Orning does not accept the notion that the lay magnates lost access to land when it was donated to the church. Rather, he points to recent research that has shown how aristocrats often built their own churches, and in doing so retained control over church land.<sup>23</sup>

Orning’s alternative to Bagge’s view on the causes for the outbreak of the conflicts is to emphasise impulses that acted on the kingdom from outside. First, the Gregorian reform programme, which found its way to Norway with the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53. This ideology is significant, according to Orning, because of the church’s alliance to the magnate and de-facto ruler Erling Skakke. Both Bagge and Orning ascribe a lot of significance to Erling’s role in the civil wars as an especially effective and ruthless politician who escalated the internal conflicts into full-scale war after 1160 by routinely killing his enemies instead of entering into any sort of compromises with them. The church, claims Orning, could have given Erling ideological legitimacy for acting in such a way, grounded in the Christian dichotomy between good and evil. Second, Orning stresses the importance of Erling’s alliance to the rejuvenated Danish Kingdom under Valdemar I. With Valdemar’s backing, Erling could act as ruthlessly as he wanted, because his enemies could

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<sup>21</sup> Bagge, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling," 156-65.

<sup>22</sup> Bagge, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling," 165. "Resultatet ble at de konflikter som under normale omstendigheter kunne lede til sporadiske kamper mellom gruppens medlemmer, nå førte til langvarig og blodig krig."

<sup>23</sup> Hans Jacob Orning, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen - en revurdering," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 93, no. 2 (2014): 195-99.

not appeal to Denmark for political and material support.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Hans Jacob Orning's disagreement with Bagge over the factors governing the outbreak and escalation of conflict, however, the two do not seem to disagree on the more basic question of how the political culture of the civil wars should be understood. Much like Bagge, Orning seems to see the political scene in medieval Norway as characterised by individual actors competing for power and influence, but at the same time bound together by social bonds as well as shared customs and values. With reference to *Morkinskinna*, Orning even argues that the society depicted in this important work is similar to the one Bagge found in his influential study *Society and Politics*.<sup>25</sup> A society in which "nothing succeeds like success."<sup>26</sup>

Sverre Bagge, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Hans Jacob Orning are all inspired by the turn in medieval studies happening at the beginning of the 1980s, which took its inspiration from anthropology and started with scholars like William Ian Miller and Jesse Byock researching medieval Iceland. As we already have hinted at, scholarship with such an anthropological basis sees medieval society as being held together by personal relationships, and as a place in which the weak had to seek the protection of the strong because there was no developed state that could effectively uphold laws and sentences.<sup>27</sup> This approach will provide a theoretical basis for how we understand the historical context of the political actors who sought material resources from abroad in the Scandinavian internal conflicts of the twelfth century.

### **The Danish perspective**

The institutional approach to medieval history was not unique to Norway. Following the influential work of the historians Curt and Lauritz Weibull, who were writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Danish medievalists also imagined the society they were studying as being caught in a conflict between the dominating institutions of the crown and the church. The Weibull-brothers and their supporters held that a brutally authoritarian royal institution

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<sup>24</sup> Orning, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen - en revurdering," 211-14. In a recent reply to Orning, Bagge moderates his earlier position, and admits that there is a lack of conclusive evidence for a resource crisis within the Norwegian aristocracy. He also cedes that both Denmark and church ideology could have helped intensify the conflicts, but holds that unclear rules of royal succession is a sufficient explanation for why the wars broke out. See: Sverre Bagge, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling. Svar til Hans Jacob Orning," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 94, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>25</sup> Orning, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen - en revurdering," 206.

<sup>26</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 96.

<sup>27</sup> Sverre Bagge, "'När sägen och dikt sopats bort...' Den weibullske kildekritikk etter 100 år," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 93, no. 4 (2014): 592.

stood opposed to the peaceful church, which in turn was allied to the equally peaceful rural population.<sup>28</sup>

The Weibulls' theory was seriously challenged in 1982 by Carsten Breengaard in his doctoral dissertation *Muren om Israels hus: regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170*, where he argues that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the church was not in opposition to the crown as much as dependent on it due to its weak position. Contrary to many of the historians at the time, Breengaard claimed that bishops were not politically strong enough to choose whether they should side with this or that royal pretender. Rather, they were at the mercy of whatever lay lord held the military power in their diocese.<sup>29</sup> Although it is clearly hard-hitting, Breengaard's critique of the Weibulls does not question their underlying assumption, namely that the politics of medieval Scandinavia was in essence institutional. Nonetheless, his political analyses are highly interesting, and we shall consult them throughout this study.

The break from this institutional approach to Danish medieval history can be said to have come considerably later than in Norway. Perhaps the most important work came in 2000, when the Swedish historian Lars Hermanson's argued in his doctoral dissertation *Släkt, vänner och makt: en studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark* that we should not see the Danish medieval society as caught in a conflict between institutions, but rather between groups of individuals, fighting for their own self-interest.<sup>30</sup>

Hermanson was inspired by among others the German historian Gerd Althoff, who has studied the importance of social networks of kin, friends and vassals on German medieval politics.<sup>31</sup> Such networks were according to Hermanson also among the most important political resources for the Danish political elite, as networks of friends or relatives could help resolve conflicts, in addition to being applied offensively, and he stresses the importance of friends and kinsmen as military resources.<sup>32</sup>

Like Bagge, Hermanson argues that members of a biological family group could not count on the loyalty of one another. In order to create politically effective alliances, then,

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<sup>28</sup> Bagge, "När sägen och dikt sopats bort..." Den weibullske kildekritikk etter 100 år," 572. For more on the Weibulls and their impact see Anders Leegaard Knudsen, "Saxo-forskning gennem 800 år," in *Saxo og hans samtid*, ed. Per Andersen and Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Carsten Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170* (København: Gads Forlag, 1982), 220.

<sup>30</sup> Lars Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt: en studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2000), 178-79.

<sup>31</sup> See: Gerd Althoff, *Family, friends and followers: political and social bonds in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 179-80.

bonds of kinship were strengthened by what Hermanson calls bonds of constructed kinship, such as marriage, fostering and god parentage.<sup>33</sup> These social relations were not exactly carved in stone either. Hermanson calls them “practical alliances”,<sup>34</sup> made for political gain and thus susceptible to being broken when political circumstances changed. Thus, the picture Hermanson paints of the twelfth-century civil wars in Denmark is one where changing aristocratic factions held together by bonds of constructed kinship and driven by their own interests compete with each other for material and political resources.

This emphasis on social networks rather than institutions in turn shapes his understanding of the struggles that broke out in Denmark after the murder of the influential political player Knud Lavard. Hermanson sees the underlying reason for conflict as struggle over material and political resources between groups within the political elite, brought about by the vague inheritance rules of the bilateral system of kinship.<sup>35</sup> Unlike Bagge and Orning writing on Norway, Hermanson does not seek any deeper, structural explanation for the outbreak of the Danish civil wars.

In this thesis, we shall take an external perspective on Scandinavia in the 1100s, and it will not be possible to form a completely independent theory of how the internal politics of the civil wars functioned. We therefore have to look to those scholars that provide such coherent theories about how we should understand Scandinavian political practice, and scholars like Hermanson, Bagge, Orning, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson with their focus on social bonds and personal relationships, do precisely that. That does not mean that we are going to adopt their views uncritically, and at the conclusion of our analysis we shall try to get a sense of how the internal perspectives on Scandinavian politics holds up in light of our findings when studying Scandinavia as a whole.

### **The external perspective**

The reason why this analysis is novel is not only that it deals with a particular subject that has not been dealt with before, but also that it will attempt to study the struggles in Scandinavia after 1130 in a way that is not confined to only one kingdom. That this should be in any way original is peculiar. One would think it follows from the emphasis on social networks that we have seen among the historians cited above that it would be artificial to study kingdoms independently when personal relationships transcended the borders of kingdoms. With its

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<sup>33</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 182. “praktiska allianser”

<sup>35</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 176, 210.

external perspective, then, this study will attempt to take seriously the implications of a personal, network-oriented approach to medieval politics.

Even if they are rare, there are some examples of scholars taking a regional perspective on the Scandinavian civil wars. Perhaps the most prominent is Birgit Sawyer and her paper “The ‘Civil Wars’ revisited”. Here, she argues that the political conflicts that broke out all over Scandinavia after about 1130 must be considered interconnected events, bound together by the extensive social networks of the twelfth-century elites.<sup>36</sup> Sawyer’s article is enlightening, because it attempts to break with the tradition of the “national” histories, which have been restricted by the boundaries of the modern Scandinavian nation states in their studies of the Middle Ages. “In the eleventh and twelfth centuries,” she writes, “Scandinavians were not caught in the ‘strait-jackets’ of their kingdoms”.<sup>37</sup> Thus, “in none of the kingdoms were the wars only internal; the fighting groups included people from other kingdoms.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, it seems as if Sawyer raises many points that will be essential to the investigation we are about to embark on.

The problem with her article is that even when she laments the fact that so little effort has been put into understanding the civil wars as integrated events, she does very little to remedy the situation. Sawyer points out that the members of the Scandinavian political elite were connected by marriage and kinship, but beyond that, her analysis is not very interesting. We read that “Loyalties cut across the borders of the kingdoms, and rivals for power could count on support from different groups in neighbouring countries”, but like so much of Sawyer’s paper, this raises more questions than it answers. How could rivals for power count on support from neighbouring countries? Were the loyalties that cut across borders enough to ensure support from abroad? If not, what did the neighbours lending their aid stand to gain? These are of course questions we shall become very familiar with over the course of the following inquiry, but Sawyer does little to help us answer them. In the end, her article is a kind of outline. It raises very interesting questions, but they have sadly been left unanswered in the years following their publication. It will be up to us, then, to carry on where Sawyer left off.

In a short subsection of his book *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, Sverre Bagge provides some additional regional perspective on the conflicts of the twelfth century. He disagrees with Sawyer on whether we should consider the struggle internal or not,

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<sup>36</sup> Sawyer, "The 'Civil Wars' revisited."

<sup>37</sup> Sawyer, "The 'Civil Wars' revisited," 72.

<sup>38</sup> Sawyer, "The 'Civil Wars' revisited," 70.

noting, “there is little to suggest that the struggles had a general inter-Nordic character with factions based in several countries fighting for power all over the area.”<sup>39</sup> While Bagge’s observations are probably correct, his criteria for considering the Scandinavian civil wars “inter-Nordic” seem too harsh. I think there is little doubt that the transnational nature of the elite’s social bonds means we should study the conflicts from a regional perspective, even if they were not regional in the absolutely strictest sense.

In addition to Sawyer and Bagge, we might look to the general histories of Danish and Norwegian foreign policy, as these by definition has to be externally oriented. While their accounts of the struggles of the twelfth century are frustratingly brief, they do provide us with some information.

Narve Bjørgo, writing about Norwegian foreign policy between 800 and 1536, makes almost no mention of the personal networks and obligations that are seen as important by historians like Bagge, Hermanson, Orning and Sawyer. He does note that in the 1100s, conflicts broke out in the three kingdoms more or less at the same time, and he briefly notes the series of dynastic marriages between the Scandinavian royal houses, but unlike Sawyer, he draws no connection between these phenomena, and he does not seem to attribute any political significance to personal bonds between agents.<sup>40</sup> Instead, Bjørgo’s narrative of Scandinavia in the 1100s is one dominated by Danish interests, with the Danish kingdom expanding in the Baltic and exercising its considerable influence over its neighbours Norway and Sweden.

Esben Albrechtsen’s account of Danish foreign affairs in the Middle Ages, on the other hand, is more concerned with personal social relations. Granted, Albrechtsen concedes that bonds like marriage were established for reasons of self-interest, but he also seems to see these social connections as politically binding, thus attributing to them much greater importance than Bjørgo who almost does not mention them at all. “Traditionally,” writes Albrechtsen, “the members of the [Danish] royal house had been in kin and in-law relations to the Norwegian and Swedish royal houses and thereby established rights and obligations, which involved these countries”.<sup>41</sup> In this case then, networks between political actors in

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<sup>39</sup> Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Narve Bjørgo, “800-1536. Makt - og avmakt,” in *Selvstendighet og union - Fra middelalderen til 1905*, ed. Narve Bjørgo, Rian Øystein, and Alf Kaartvedt, Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 42.

<sup>41</sup> Esben Albrechtsen, “Konger og Krige, 700-1523,” in *Dansk udenrigspolitik historie*, ed. Carsten Due-Nielsen, Ole Feldbæk, and Nikolaj Petersen (København: Danmarks Nationalleksikon, 2001), 83. “Traditionelt havde kongehusets medlemmer stået i slægts- og svogerskabsforbindelse med de norske og svenske kongehuse og derved etableret rettigheder og forpligtelser, der involverede landene”



different kingdoms is seen as a basis for support from abroad. “Did one fail in the struggle for power,” Albrechtsen continues, “the royal estate of a kinsman in the neighbouring country was a natural place of refuge”.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Bjørge and Albrechtsen provide us with quite different accounts on how we should understand the external dimension of the Scandinavian internal conflicts. On the one hand, we have cold-hearted *realpolitik*, on the other strong social obligations binding the actions of political actors. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the following analysis will reveal that the truth lies somewhere in-between.

The historian who has arguably been closest to discussing the topic of material support from abroad is Erik Opsahl. In *Norsk innvandringshistorie*, chronicling the history of Norwegian immigration, he considers aristocrats from Denmark and Sweden who sought refuge in Norway when the political conditions in their homelands had forced them to flee. Opsahl argues that it was in the interest of the Norwegian king to welcome such refugees, as they enhanced his political influence outside his own kingdom by expanding his social network.<sup>43</sup> Opsahl is primarily concerned with the thirteenth century, however, and he does not deal with the question of whether it was in the kings’ interests to support foreign refugees with military and economic resources in addition to harbouring them. Thus, while we should take his observations into account, they do not deal directly with the subject matter or period we shall explore here.

Finally, when considering how historians have viewed the external political conditions of medieval Scandinavia it is necessary to return to Sverre Bagge, and mention his thoughts on how *Heimskringla* portrays what we might call foreign policy. In *Society and Politics* he writes that: “‘national’ conflicts are not depicted in a way that is fundamentally different from internal ones,”<sup>44</sup> meaning that both external and internal conflicts are inherently personal, only the former are personal conflicts between kings. This point is also found in a short article by Lars Hermanson, where he writes about Saxo’s portrayal of the Baltic, and concludes: “it is not possible to draw a sharp dividing line between national foreign policy and domestic political affairs.”<sup>45</sup> At the conclusion of this thesis we shall see if this is true, by comparing

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<sup>42</sup> Albrechtsen, "Konger og Krige, 700-1523," 83. "Gik det galt i kampen om magten, var slægtninges kongsgård i nabolandet et naturligt tilflugtssted."

<sup>43</sup> Erik Opsahl, "Del I. 900-1537," in *I Kongenes Tid, 900-1814*, ed. Erik Opsahl and Sølvi Sogner, Norsk Innvandringshistorie (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2003), 93.

<sup>44</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 105.

<sup>45</sup> Lars Hermanson, "Saxo and the Baltic. Danish Baltic-sea Policies at the End of King Niels’ Reign, 1128-1134. Foreign Policy or Domestic Affairs?," in *Saxo and the Baltic Region: a symposium*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2004), 107.

our findings when studying external politics to the observations of scholars who worked mainly on internal political conditions.

In sum, we have seen that historical scholarship taking an external perspective on the Scandinavian civil wars is rare, and because of this often unsatisfactory. It is my hope that the investigation we are about to embark on will go some way towards adding both weight and nuance to the external perspective on the twelfth-century internal struggles, as well as medieval politics in general.

## The sources

### Background

The sources that might help us illuminate the political practices of Scandinavia in the 1100s are not numerous. Most of the information that is available to us comes from four narrative sources. That is, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, Helmold of Bosau's *Chronica Slavorum*, Snorre Sturlason's *Heimskringla*, and *Morkinskinna*, written by an unknown author. In this section, we shall briefly get to know these sources. Their subject matter, dates of composition, and, where it is possible, their authors.

*Gesta Danorum*, written by one Saxo Grammaticus, is our main source for the history of Denmark during the 1100s. The chronicle was written under the patronage of Archbishop Absalon of Lund, and the author most likely began his work sometime prior to 1190 and finished in the first decades of the thirteenth century. *Gesta Danorum* is primarily a history of Denmark, the title meaning something like "the deeds of the Danes". It covers a vast timespan, beginning in prehistory and ending in 1185. Saxo Grammaticus belonged to an aristocratic Danish family, and his relatives had been in the military service of the king. Saxo himself was most likely an ecclesiastic, employed as a canon at the cathedral church of Lund, where his patron Archbishop Absalon had his seat.<sup>46</sup> The parts of Saxo's history that are of relevance to us are probably based on the oral testimony of Absalon and the people who were close to him, meaning that Saxo had access to some of the most important players in Danish politics in the latter stages of the civil wars.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to Saxo, the German chronicler and priest Helmold of Bosau supplies some valuable perspective on Danish history. Written somewhere around the year 1170, *Chronica*

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<sup>46</sup> Karsten Friis-Jensen, "Was Saxo Grammaticus a Canon of Lund?," *Cahiers de l'Institut du moyen-âge grec et latin* 59 (1989).

<sup>47</sup> Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, *Da Tidernes Herre var nær: Studier i Saxos historiesyn* (København: Den danske historiske forening, 1987), 63.

*Slavorum*, or the chronicle of the Slavs, is a history of the people living around the Baltic Sea.<sup>48</sup> Of greatest interest to Helmold is the conversion of the Slavic peoples, which according to his translator Francis Joseph Tschan “determined his entire outlook”.<sup>49</sup> One of the main sources for *Chronica Slavorum* was the earlier German historian Adam of Bremen, but for the period that interests us there are no known written predecessors for Helmold’s work,<sup>50</sup> and according to Tschan, most of his information must have come from oral testimony or the authors own knowledge.<sup>51</sup> Even though his primary interest is missionary activity, Helmold more often than not strays into the realm of politics, and because the Danes were a vital part of the Baltic political environment, he writes a quite extensive account of the Danish internal struggles of the mid twelfth century. As Lone Liljefalk and Stefan Pajung has pointed out in a recent article, Helmold’s chronicle is interesting because it was written independently of both *Gesta Danorum* and the other literature springing out of the court of King Valdemar I.<sup>52</sup> This outsider’s view on Denmark makes Helmold an invaluable source for a study of civil war’s external dimension.

Moving on to our saga sources, *Morkinskinna* is generally thought to be one of the earliest kings’ sagas. The saga was most likely composed somewhere between 1217 and 1222, and in their year 2000 translation of the work, Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade argue convincingly that it that was probably composed at the monastery of Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörðr in the north of Iceland.<sup>53</sup> We shall use *Morkinskinna* primarily as a source to the life and career of Sigurd Slembedjagn, the adventurer and pretender fighting for the Norwegian throne in the 1130s. The reason we will not be using it more is that the saga sadly lacks several sections dealing with the conflict between the kings Harald Gille and Magnus Blinde, and it stops in 1157, that is before the Norwegian magnate Erling Skakke received material support from Denmark. As most of the examples of refuge we shall be analysing are concentrated in these two periods, *Morkinskinna* is of limited value. For discussing Sigurd Slembe, however, it is vital, as it recounts his career in much more detail than any other source. The account of Sigurd’s life was most likely taken directly or in large parts from a

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<sup>48</sup> Francis Joseph Tschan, "Introduction," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935).

<sup>49</sup> Tschan, "Introduction," 28.

<sup>50</sup> Lone Liljefalk and Stefan Pajung, "Hemolds Slaverkrønike som kilde til Danmarks, Vendens og Nordtysklands historie," (*Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift* 113, no. 1 (2014): 2.

<sup>51</sup> Tschan, "Introduction." 26

<sup>52</sup> Liljefalk and Pajung, "Hemolds Slaverkrønike som kilde til Danmarks, Vendens og Nordtysklands historie," 34.

<sup>53</sup> Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, "Introduction," in *Morkinskinna: the earliest Icelandic chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*, ed. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 66-71.

now lost hagiographical book about Sigurd called *Hryggjarstykki*, written by Eiríkr Oddsson,<sup>54</sup> although it is also possible that *Morkinskinna* was more of a unitary work.<sup>55</sup> Whether or not the saga should be considered a compilation of earlier written work, what is clear is that *Hryggjarstykki* was one of the author's most important sources for the period we will be using the text for.<sup>56</sup>

Both *Morkinskinna* and *Hryggjarstykki* were among the sources of the Icelandic chieftain and writer Snorre Sturlason when he composed his history of the Norwegian kings, known to us as *Heimskringla*.<sup>57</sup> It is generally thought that Snorre composed his saga in the ten-year period following 1220, when he came back from a visit to Norway.<sup>58</sup> In addition to *Morkinskinna* and *Hryggjarstykki*, Snorre used a number of other written sources, many of which are now lost. He was perhaps first and foremost an editor, treating his sources much more ruthlessly than his fellow saga authors did. In the words of literary historian Diana Whaley: "usually (...) source-material is altered in some major way – streamlined, re-ordered or totally recast."<sup>59</sup> *Heimskringla*, then, is clearly Snorre's saga. Its structure is his structure, and we should therefore expect that the impression of political practice given by that structure to be shaped by Snorre's authorship. When discussing the parts of Norwegian history where *Morkinskinna* is lacking, *Heimskringla* will serve as our main source. I have chosen to do so despite the fact that there is a somewhat earlier kings' saga, known as *Fagrskinna*, because Snorre's work is very often more detailed than its predecessor and therefore more useful as a basis for political analysis. *Fagrskinna* will rather serve as a source for additional information, where such information is available.

As I do not master either Latin or Old Norse, it has been necessary to rely on translations of these sources. We will be using Eric Christiansen's 1982 English translation of *Gesta Danorum*, Francis Joseph Tschann's 1935 translation of *Chronica Slavorum*, Lee M. Hollander's 1964 translation of *Heimskringla*, and Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade's year 2000 translation of *Morkinskinna*. In some instances, it has been necessary to use the sources in their original languages, and references to the editions I have used can be found in the bibliography.

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<sup>54</sup> Andersson and Gade, "Introduction," 14-15.

<sup>55</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, "Royal Biographies," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 402.

<sup>56</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, "Royal Biographies," 389.

<sup>57</sup> Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla An Introduction* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1991), 65.

<sup>58</sup> Randi Wærdahl, "Snorre Sturlason," in *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, ed. Jon Gunnar Arntzen (Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla An Introduction*, 64.

As is the case with *Fagrskinna*, there are other sources that provide small bits and pieces of evidence that come in addition to the narrative of our four main sources. These are *Orkneyinga saga*, *Knýtlinge saga*, *Sverris saga*, the chronicle of Roskilde, the law of the Frostating, as well as some letters sent by Danish kings to their German colleague. I will not go into these sources in as much detail here, but suffice it to say that they are all written sometime in the late twelfth to mid thirteenth centuries, and to varying extents touch on the events of the Scandinavian civil wars. I have chosen not to use Sven Aggesen's *Brevis Historia Regum Dacie*, which was written sometime prior to *Gesta Danorum*, because I have not found any relevant information in this short history that is not also present in Saxo's much more elaborate chronicle.

We have seen that the sources we have available to understand the political practice of seeking material support abroad were either written considerably later than 1180, or they originated quite some distance away from the events they are describing. Using them is therefore associated with considerable problems, and in the following, we shall outline and attempt to address these.

### **The problem of factual accuracy**

The first problem we have to deal with is whether the information presented in the sources is factual. In other words, when Snorre claims in *Heimskringla* that Harald Gille fled to Denmark after he lost a battle against Magnus Blinde in 1134, is that information accurate? Did Harald actually do what Snorre says he did?

Whether we think the information presented by the sources is factual or not depends in large part on how we think their authors obtained the information they present as correct. We have seen that most of our main sources were based in large parts on oral accounts, which means that the question of their factual trustworthiness is essentially a question of how trustworthy their oral sources were.

If we were to use the sagas and chronicles in order to discuss the early Middle Ages this would present us with a major problem, as the likelihood that accurate oral transmissions would survive hundreds of years is at best debatable. While our sources are on the whole written some decades after the events they are describing, we will be considering the parts of the account that were chronologically closest to the time of the authors. This should mean that the oral testimonies these parts are resting on, while not necessarily trustworthy, are more reliable than what is true for the earlier periods.

Granted, the earliest period of the Scandinavian internal conflicts in the 1130s predates

the writing of our available kings' sagas by almost a century, but we have to keep in mind that *Hryggjarstykki*, the kings' sagas now lost source for this period, was written considerably earlier. It may even have been written as early as the 1150s,<sup>60</sup> which means that *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*'s connection to the earliest period we will be using them for is much stronger than what it may seem like at first sight. This relative temporal proximity has led many modern historians to put more trust in the sagas' depictions of the latter half of the twelfth century.<sup>61</sup> Saxo began writing before 1200, meaning that he was working considerably closer to the events he was describing than his Icelandic counterparts. Furthermore, Saxo had the added benefit of living at the same time as some of the main actors of his story, as well as actually being in contact with them. Helmold, writing in the 1170s, is the main source of ours who lived and worked closest to the events to we will discuss. In their recent article about him, Stefan Pajung and Lone Liljefalk argue that Helmold's information about political concerns should be considered relatively trustworthy, as it is usually not in conflict with other contemporary evidence, where such exists.<sup>62</sup>

Even if they do not deal with the distant past, however, we should not overemphasize the trustworthiness of the sagas and chronicles. The sources available to their authors were, in the words of Diana Whaley writing about Snorre, "by modern standards hopelessly inadequate."<sup>63</sup>

### **The problem of moral and political outlook**

How reliable these narratives are as factual accounts is also shaped by their political biases. Hagiographical reverence for a king or political sympathies for this or that faction of the civil wars might easily skew the presentation of events so as to paint the right people in the best possible light. Thus, we have to be aware of these preferences in order to know how to counter them.

Following the doctoral dissertation of Curt Weibull in 1915, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* was for a long time perceived to be royalist propaganda, a tool meant to legitimize the power of the crown under King Valdemar I and his successors. Such an interpretation is of course very much in line with the institutional view on medieval society and sources held by the likes of Weibull and his brother, and their great influence meant that Saxo's chronicle was for a

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<sup>60</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla An Introduction*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt: 1130-1350*, 3, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Liljefalk and Pajung, "Hemolds Slaverkrønike som kilde til Danmarks, Vends og Nordtysklands historie," 34.

<sup>63</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla An Introduction*, 119.

long time scorned as a source to the events Danish history.<sup>64</sup> Later historians like Niels Skyum-Nielsen have softened the Weibulls' hard-line approach and been more prone to trust Saxo's account. Even so, it should not surprise us that Saxo had certain factional sympathies, and that his history is marked by these. Above, we noted that he was close to important political figures like Absalon, and when using Saxo as a historical source, this can be a curse as well as a blessing. Thus, Saxo's account of the events of the civil wars is clearly marked by his view that Valdemar is the rightful ruler, and as the patron of *Gesta Danorum*, Archbishop Absalon plays a great and important role in the shaping of Danish history.

Just as important when using Saxo as a source to the events of the Scandinavian region as a whole is his view of foreigners. Historian Ole Fenger holds that in *Gesta Danorum*, as well as other Danish medieval sources, the Germans are seen as an "other",<sup>65</sup> and Anders Leegaard Knudsen has likewise argued that one of the main themes of the chronicle is the independence and equality of Denmark vis-à-vis the German Empire.<sup>66</sup> Ólafía Einarsdóttir has on the other hand claimed that Norwegians are Saxo's real enemies.<sup>67</sup> Whoever is correct, it is clear that we have to keep in mind that *Gesta Danorum* is a national history, and that this shapes how Saxo portrays the events, and perhaps also the political practices, going on outside of Denmark.

Moving on to Helmold, the moral and political outlook of *Chronica Slavorum* was determined by Helmold's principal interest, namely the missionary activity in the Baltic region and the conversion of the Slavic peoples. Thus, secular as well as ecclesiastical princes are judged by Helmold based on whether they enhanced or slowed the process of conversion. The missionary bishop Vizelin of Oldenburg was Helmold's great hero and his chronicle is in part a hagiographical account of the bishop's life.<sup>68</sup> Magnates like Duke Heinrich of Saxony and Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen, on the other hand, were seen as hindering Vizelin's work and therefore received harsh criticism.<sup>69</sup> This is relevant because both Heinrich and Hartwig would play important roles as supporters of Danish political actors who went abroad in search of material aid.

According to Helmold's translator Francis Joseph Tschan, the German chronicler's

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<sup>64</sup> Knudsen, "Saxo-forskning gennem 800 år," 27.

<sup>65</sup> Fenger, "Kirker rejses alle vegne": 1050-1250, 4, 359.

<sup>66</sup> Anders Leegaard Knudsen, "Absalon and the Holy Roman Empire," in *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen and Inge Skovgaard-Petersen (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Ólafía Einarsdóttir, "Absalon and the Norwegian Civil War," in *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen and Inge Skovgaard-Petersen (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2000), 54.

<sup>68</sup> Liljefalk and Pajung, "Hemolds Slaverkrønike som kilde til Danmarks, Vends og Nordtysklands historie," 5.

<sup>69</sup> Tschan, "Introduction." 29-30

views on Denmark were somewhat varied. The Danes were “good fighters, but unfortunately were often afflicted with tyrannical rulers and with numerous civil wars.”<sup>70</sup> As for their kings, they are seen as “dilatatory and dissolute, always drunk between their rounds of feasting.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, Helmold seems to have some of the same judgemental approach to foreigners as Saxo.

According to Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, *Morkinskinna* takes sides in the Norwegian civil war, clearly favouring the faction of King Inge Krokrygg and Erling Skakke.<sup>72</sup> Despite this, the author chose to incorporate Eiríkr Oddson’s *Hryggjarstykki* into his saga, a narrative that was unashamedly in favour of the pretender Sigurd Slembedjagn, who fought against King Inge’s father. Thus, it seems like the moral and political outlook that should concern us when we read *Morkinskinna* is not that of the author himself, but rather that of Eiríkr Oddson.

Our main problem concerning the moral and political outlook of *Hryggjarstykki* is its hagiographical portrayal of its main hero, Sigurd Slembe. Literary historian Bjarni Guðnason believes that the tradition of promoting of Sigurd’s saintly qualities might have originated in Denmark. As we shall see in the coming analysis, Sigurd established political connections to the Danish kings, and Bjarni Guðnason therefore thinks that these kings might have had an interest in encouraging a hagiographical narrative. Eiríkr Oddson himself could have come into contact with this tradition through a provost at the St Mary’s church in Ålborg, where the sagas tell us that Sigurd was buried.<sup>73</sup>

In the paper “The Politics of Snorri Sturluson”, Theodore Andersson argues that Snorre did not adopt the political stance of the author of *Morkinskinna*, even though he got much of his information from him. The composer of *Morkinskinna* wrote in a historical context of Norwegian expansionism, especially directed towards Iceland, and this spilled over into the text, which has little love for the kings who pursued an active foreign policy.<sup>74</sup> Snorre edited out some of the staunchest Icelandic “anti-imperialism” from *Morkinskinna* when he incorporated it into his own saga. While clearly not glorifying them, Snorre is much more accepting towards the “foreign adventurer” kings like Harald Hardråde or Sigurd Jorsalfar.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Tschan, "Introduction." 31

<sup>71</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 279, ch. 109.

<sup>72</sup> Andersson and Gade, "Introduction," 71.

<sup>73</sup> Andersson and Gade, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>74</sup> Theodor M. Andersson, "The Politics of Snorri Sturluson," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93, no. 1 (1994): 56-58.

<sup>75</sup> Andersson, "The Politics of Snorri Sturluson," 58-71.



This seems consistent with Bagge's theories about Snorre's moral and political values, as presented in *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Here, he argues that the view of kingship Snorre promotes is primarily pragmatic. A good king in *Heimskringla* is therefore not necessarily a peaceful lawmaker, but a successful ruler able to achieve his political goals whatever they may be. To succeed in achieving these goals everything is permitted as long as it fulfils its intended aim. As a king, writes Bagge, "you can do anything, if you can only get away with it."<sup>76</sup>

Bagge's views on Snorre have been contested by Birgit Sawyer, who has claimed that *Heimskringla* is more of an ideological polemic than Bagge seems to acknowledge. *Heimskringla*, she argues, could have been a critique of the ideology we find in works like *Konungs skuggsjá*, which said that a king had his authority from God. Snorre, on the other hand, saw royal authority as springing out of the consent of the people, and his history was a conscious attempt at promoting this view.<sup>77</sup> I think these concerns have been more than adequately addressed by Bagge in his responses to Sawyer. Here, he has said that while Snorre clearly takes ideological stands on certain issues, this does not mean that he is being consciously polemicist. The problem for Sawyer, writes Bagge, is that she has no criteria for separating between conflicts that are just conflicts, and conflicts that are indicative of some larger constitutional or ideological struggle.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Bagge does not rule out that Snorre had political or moral sympathies. Perhaps the most important of these in this context is his views on foreigners and external politics. On the one hand, external conflicts are presented as essentially similar to internal ones, namely as struggles between individuals fighting for their own interests. On the other hand, Bagge thinks that Snorre's descriptions of conflicts between kings are uncharacteristically simplistic, marked by a tendency to portray Norwegian kings as heroes and their neighbours as villains.<sup>79</sup> This is certainly something we shall have to keep in mind when using *Heimskringla* as a source for how material resources might have entered into the Norwegian internal conflicts from abroad.

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<sup>76</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 56-58. See also: Sverre Bagge, "Fortelling, makt og politikk hos Saxo og Snorre," in *Saxo og Snorre*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, and Else Mundal (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> Birgit Sawyer, "Samhallsbeskrivningen i Heimskringla," (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 72, no. 2 (1993): 234-35. See also: Birgit Sawyer, "Sverre Bagge om "wie es eigentlich gewesen": Snorres skildring av Olav Haraldsson och hans samtid," (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 82, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>78</sup> Sverre Bagge, "Snorre og "Wie Es Eigentlich Gewesen": Svar til Birgit Sawyer," (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 82, no. 3 (2003); Sverre Bagge, "Samfunnsbeskrivelsen i Heimskringla. Svar til Birgit Sawyer," (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 73, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>79</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 104-05.

After having surveyed our sources' political biases, it again seems obvious that these qualities should make us hesitant about trusting any claims to factual accuracy. It should be beyond doubt that Saxo's ethnocentrism and Snorre's pragmatism shaped these two authors' respective historical narratives. The question, then, is whether this needs to concern us at all. I would argue that it does not. In his book *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, concerning the feuding society of medieval Iceland, legal historian William Ian Miller notes: "Fictionalizing dialogue, fictionalizing events, inventing characters and their psychologies might unnerve the political historian, but they need not upset the social historian at all."<sup>80</sup> This is not a work of social history, but it is an attempt at cultural history of politics, and as such, Miller's remark might also apply to what I am trying to do in this thesis. It is not of great importance that Snorre, Saxo and Helmold portray real, factually accurate events. What is important is that they portray a real political culture, and represent the seeking of material aid abroad as a real political practice within it. We should expect the culture they portray to be that of their own time, largely meaning the beginning of the thirteenth century. However, Sverre Bagge has argued that *Heimskringla* most likely represents late twelfth century Norwegian society as well,<sup>81</sup> and it would be surprising if that did not also hold true for our earlier sources.

A much greater challenge would be if the moral and political outlooks of the sources shaped not only how they presented historical facts, but also their portrayals of political practice. However, I do not think this is a major problem. For the authors of our sources, the 1130s were not some distant, mythical past, but rather a period that might have been remembered by the grandparents of the saga and chronicle audiences. The later parts of the period we shall be analysing would have been even better remembered. It would therefore be highly peculiar if the authors of works like *Chronica Slavorum* and *Heimskringla*, works that were arguably written as histories, actively chose to alter the portrayal of political practice in order to serve some ideological purpose. Facts were undoubtedly changed, but fundamental modifications to the underlying social culture of the societies the sagas were describing seems very unlikely.

### **The problem of literary conventions**

Having settled the problem of how moral and political outlooks might have altered the description of political culture, we must now turn to the many literary topoi that can be found

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<sup>80</sup> William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, law and society in Saga Iceland* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 46.

<sup>81</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 237.

in our sources. It is easy to imagine that instead of depicting an actual historical social culture, the sources are instead keeping to their literary conventions. It is therefore possible that the impression that we get from the portrayals of material support in these chronicles and sagas are not that of an actual political practice at all, but rather of a trope. In the words of Lars Hermanson, “how can we decide what we should interpret as literary construction, theory, or ideology – and what was well-established practice?”<sup>82</sup>

To be able to decide we have to be aware of the tropes our sources employ. Both chronicles like *Chronica Slavorum* and *Gesta Danorum*, as well as sagas like *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*, naturally contain a multitude of such tropes. Saxo with his silver-age Latin draws parallels between Christian, Roman and Danish history, and Helmold adopts the style of his source Adam of Bremen.<sup>83</sup> Here, I want to focus on the two topoi I think are most important when want to use our sources to understand political practice. They are presented by Margaret Clunies Ross in *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse Icelandic Saga*, but although she writes about sagas, her points are just as relevant for the other types of sources we use.

Ross’s first observation is that kings’ sagas are biographical and linear. They generally follow the life of a king from start to finish.<sup>84</sup> This is important because a biographical narrative, perhaps especially a royal one, will naturally emphasise one person’s role in historical events. The saga writer might for example ascribe to a king actions that were done by some aristocrat, or downplay the importance of social or political forces that were outside of the king’s control. This is a problem when studying refuge because it is easy to get the impression that seeking material support abroad was an exclusively royal endeavour. The examples of magnates doing so are few and far between, let alone people further down the social ladder. To conclude from this that magnates did not go into refuge abroad would most likely be a mistake, and so we see that the nature of the kings’ sagas as royal biographies obscure the medieval political culture by showing us only *royal* political practice. The same kind of biographical focus can be found in *Gesta Danorum*, with his staunch support for Valdemar and Absalon, as well as in *Chronica Slavorum* with its reverence for Vizelin and those who supported him. This problem does not mean that our sources are useless, but it does

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<sup>82</sup> Lars Hermanson, "How to legitimate rebellion and condemn usurpation of the crown: Discourses of fidelity and treason in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus," in *Disputing strategies in medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Kim Esmark, et al. (Boston: Brill, 2013), 110.

<sup>83</sup> Knudsen, "Saxo-forskning gennem 800 år," 30-31; Tschan, "Introduction," 33-36.

<sup>84</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge introduction to The Old Norse Icelandic saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133.

mean that using them demands of us that we are aware of how their literary qualities and sympathies shape their depictions of the past.

The second vital trope mentioned by Ross is the sources' disproportional pre-occupation with conflict. Although it falls somewhat outside of our period, the most telling example of this is the Norwegian king Olav Kyrre, who ruled for 26 years and yet the account of his reign amounts to no more than 4 pages in Lee M. Hollander's translation of *Heimskringla* because it was thought to be so peaceful. The study of aid from abroad is in a sense also a study of conflict, and so we must be wary of seeing the descriptions of the giving and receiving resources as necessarily representative of actual practice. The sources are much more likely to report discord than agreement, so when they tell us of the violent defeats leading to a king having to seek support abroad, or turbulent relations between host and guest, it is not by any means guaranteed that they are recording representative political practice.

In sum, then, literary tropes undoubtedly obscure our view of the political practice of giving and receiving material support by emphasising certain aspects of twelfth-century politics while ignoring or downplaying others. This does not make the chronicles and sagas useless as sources, however. Rather, we can overcome the problem by acknowledging it. Recognizing, for example, that kings are probably overrepresented as historical actors and that the narrative accounts are prone to focus on conflict. Thus, only by taking the sources' literary natures into account can we make reasonable assumptions about the real political culture they almost certainly describe. Furthermore, we are lucky to have sources stemming from different traditions and written independently of one another. This means that we in many instances are able to balance sources with different literary conventions against each other, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the political practice wherein kings and magnates sought material aid from outside their own kingdoms.

In conclusion, there are a number of methodological problems that arise when we want to understand political practice in twelfth-century Scandinavia. All the sources available to us are factually inaccurate, politically biased and coloured by literary conventions. We are able to surmount these problems for three reasons. First, we use the sagas and chronicles as sources for political practice, not factual information. Second, we use the parts of the narratives that are closest to the time when the sources were written, which means that depictions of social reality has generally not been sacrificed for the sake of scoring moral and political points. Third, knowing the sources' literary genres and styles, as well as using sources from different traditions, makes it possible to counter the necessarily literary nature of sagas and chronicles.

# CHAPTER 1

## WHY SEEK MATERIAL SUPPORT ABROAD?

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This chapter sets out to answer how the need for military or economic support from abroad arose. What were the circumstances that made it necessary for political actors to leave their home countries in order to seek new resources from the outside? It may seem obvious that war gave rise to a need for outside help, but the conditions which led Scandinavian kings and aristocrats to neighbouring potentates in search for help were complicated, and we have to take this complexity into account when we are analysing the political practice.

### Loosing battles

Reading the sources, there is a clear sense that a widespread reason for a political actor choosing to leave his native political environment and go in search of economic or military support abroad was that he had lost an important battle. In this thesis, we shall be analysing nine different political actors, each of whom received foreign material support in one form or another. Of these nine men, the sources explicitly tell us that three went abroad for help due to losses sustained on the battlefield, and it can be reasonably inferred that the same can be said for a fourth refugee. This does not mean, of course, that these men's respective attempts at procuring resources from abroad necessarily came about as the sagas and chronicles claim. What it does mean is that the sources clearly portray military defeat as a cause of seeking support from abroad, and it seems likely that this is a reliable representation of mid twelfth-century Scandinavian political culture.

The refugees who are explicitly said to flee in search for help abroad were the Danish kings Erik Emune and Knud Magnussen, as well as the Norwegian king Harald Gille. All these men were important players in the conflicts raging in Denmark and Norway in the 1100s, each of them fighting to obtain or maintain their claims to royal power, and each of them were soundly defeated in important battles as part of their efforts. According to Saxo, Erik Emune lost a battle against his rival King Niels on Zealand in 1133,<sup>85</sup> and Knud Magnussen was beaten decisively at the battle of Viborg by King Sven in 1151.<sup>86</sup> Here, I first

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<sup>85</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, "Gesta Danorum," in *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia Books X-XVI*, ed. Eric Christiansen (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981), 13.11.1.

<sup>86</sup> *GD*, 14.4.4-9.

want to explore the importance of battles as catalysts of foreign refuge in more detail by using the example King Harald Gille.

## Harald Gille

Harald Gille is described in in *Heimskringla* as “an affable man, merry and gay, not haughty; and (...) generous”.<sup>87</sup> Having arrived in Norway during the 1120s, he claimed to be the son of Magnus Berrføtt and therefore the brother of the reigning King Sigurd Jorsalfar. Harald made an oath to King Sigurd not to claim the kingdom while either the king or his son Magnus was alive.<sup>88</sup> This oath was quickly forgotten when Sigurd passed away in 1130. It was not long before Harald was elected king, claiming that his earlier promises were made under duress and therefore invalid.<sup>89</sup>

Conflict did not ensue between the two kings immediately, however. Magnus initially had fewer supporters than Harald, and so had to settle for a compromise wherein the two shared the kingdom. The peace was not to last. During the spring of 1134, after three years of co-rule, Magnus gathered support in order to overthrow Harald, whom he claimed had renounced the kingship when he swore the oath to Magnus’s father. Snorre writes that: “King Magnús got the consent of many chieftains to this plan”,<sup>90</sup> thus turning the problematic political situation that had forced him to share the kingship with Harald in the first place. The two kings met in battle at Färlev in Båhuslen on 10th August of the same year. The fighting did not go well for Harald. His army was routed, “he and all his troops fled, and many of them had fallen.”<sup>91</sup> Among the fallen, according to Snorre, were Harald’s brother Kristrød, one of his magnate allies (*lendr maðr*) and sixty of his other followers.

After this defeat, we read that Harald fled immediately to King Erik Emune in Denmark, wanting to “secure his support”.<sup>92</sup> We see, then, that the saga establishes a direct causal relation between Harald’s defeat in the battle of Färlev and his journey to Denmark in search for new resources. This connection is typical, and we also find it in Saxo’s accounts of Erik Emune and Knud Magnussen’s quests for foreign support. Furthermore, it makes sense, as losing a battle meant losing vital resources.

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<sup>87</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of Magnús the Blind and Harald Gilli " in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of the Sons of Magnús," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 26.

<sup>89</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 1.

<sup>90</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 2.

<sup>91</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 3.

<sup>92</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 1.

One important aspect of such a loss was of course military. When we read in the saga that many of Harald's men fell, we are in effect reading that Harald lost a considerable part of his military power, and thereby his means to keep fighting Magnus. After the battle of 1134, it was clear that if Harald wanted to defeat his rival he would have to replenish his military resources by finding reinforcements. To reach this goal Harald sought help from King Erik of Denmark. This is made quite explicit in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, where we read that the reason for Harald's arrival in Denmark was that he needed assistance.<sup>93</sup> Thus, the relationship between battles and material support from abroad is obvious. If an unfortunate battle deprived a political actor of military means, whether men or ships, and there was an opportunity to replenish these resources abroad, seeking out such an opportunity was a natural choice.

The consequences of a battle were not only military, but also political. It is therefore significant that in his account of Harald's battle against Magnus, Snorre emphasises the deaths of the king's aristocratic allies. Part of the reason for this is of course that medieval Scandinavia was a highly hierarchical society, more concerned with the achievements of those considered of high birth than of ordinary fighting men. However, an important reason for the emphasis must also have been that Harald's ability to exert political power in Norway and be a realistic candidate for the throne depended on his high-status allies. As argued by among others Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, government of medieval Norway rested on the consensus of local aristocrats,<sup>94</sup> so a fallen magnate was not only a military loss, but also a political one. This was also the reason why the killing of friends in the political network of a king or magnate was a powerful and decisive strategy during the Scandinavian internal struggles, according to the Swedish historian Lars Hermanson.<sup>95</sup>

### **Erling Skakke**

One aspect of loss in battle that is not touched upon by the example of Harald Gille is that of how the death of the king himself might bring about a need for refuge and support from abroad. The most prominent example of this being King Inge Krokrygg's death in a battle against Håkon Herdebrei in 1161. With the king dead, the faction of magnates surrounding Inge had lost its figurehead, and there were no obvious candidates to take Inge's place.

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<sup>93</sup> *GD*, 14.1.5.

<sup>94</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet: vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden* (Oslo: Pax, 2008), 87-90.

<sup>95</sup> Lars Hermanson, *Bärande band: vänskap, kärlek och brödraskap i det medeltida Nordeuropa, ca. 1000-1200* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2009), 219.

Unwilling to support Håkon Herdebrei's bid for power, the magnates decided to find a man of royal blood among their own ranks.<sup>96</sup> According to Snorre, a man named Erling Skakke now took centre stage as the leading man of Inge's party. Initially, Erling had not been considered among the top tier of the Kings followers, as he had been overshadowed by his older brother, Ogmund Denge.<sup>97</sup> However, following Ogmund's death, a spectacular crusade to the Holy Land, and most importantly a marriage to Kristin, the daughter of King Sigurd Jorsalfar, Erling became one of Inge's most important supporters.<sup>98</sup> When the king's right hand man Gregorius Dagsson fell sometime prior to Inge's death in 1161, Erling was there to take his place.<sup>99</sup>

We read that the magnates voiced their support for Erling's young son Magnus during a meeting where a new king was to be chosen.<sup>100</sup> This was untraditional, as Magnus had his royal claim through his mother, and being the son of a king had always been the prerequisite for a claim to kingship.<sup>101</sup> Even so, Magnus was elected, making Erling the de facto leader of what had been Inge Krokrygg's faction. He immediately made sure that oaths were sworn to Magnus, and not long after the boy was hailed as king on the thing.<sup>102</sup> If Snorre is to be believed it was immediately after this, in 1161, that Erling fled to Denmark, but the saga author is frustratingly cryptic in his description of this development. We get our crucial information about Erling's journey from Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, where we read that when Erling arrived in Denmark he "received handsome wages in his exile, and the most ample supply of provisions".<sup>103</sup> The crucial word here is "exile" (*exilii*), which suggests that Erling had fled Norway, that he was a refugee. Furthermore, and as will be discussed in more detail below, we see from Saxo's passage that he received material aid in the form of economic funding. Our question, then, is how Inge's death is connected to Erling's need for such foreign support.

The answer can be found in *Heimskringla*'s<sup>104</sup> description of the political conditions in

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<sup>96</sup> Snorre Sturlason, "The Saga of Magnús Erlingsson," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Snorre Sturlason, "The Saga of the Sons of Harald," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 21.

<sup>98</sup> *HmkIngi*, ch. 17.

<sup>99</sup> Snorre Sturlason, "The Saga of Håkon the Broadshouldered," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 14.

<sup>100</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 130.

<sup>102</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 1.

<sup>103</sup> *GD*, 14.29.12.

<sup>104</sup> A similar account is missing from *Fagrskinna*.



Norway following Inge's death, where we read that after he had won the battle, Håkon Herdebrei "subjected all the country to his rule, putting his men into all districts and likewise the towns."<sup>105</sup> If we take this passage into consideration, it seems clear that according to Snorre, Erling's need for outside aid came about because Håkon had taken control of the country and blocked off Erling's access to the domestic resources needed to wage war. Håkon's rise to power is presented as the direct product of Inge's death on the battlefield, which I think justifies the view that the cause of Erling's need for support from Denmark was a concrete military defeat. However, it was a different kind of military defeat than the one we saw when discussing Harald Gille, as Erling was not personally defeated. Thus, we see how battles could bring about a need for support from abroad in multiple ways.

*Heimskringla's* account of the background for Erling's refuge in Denmark also differs in another significant way from both the story of Harald Gille and from those of several other refugees who will be examined when we look at the political conditions that could bring about a need for outside aid. That is, Erling is presented as having been able to retain control over Inge's aristocratic network of alliances, as demonstrated by the meeting in which the late king's friends and followers are said to have "agreed (...) that they should keep together".<sup>106</sup> This may seem significant, but could also be exaggerated. It would be very unlikely that Håkon Herdebrei could in fact gain control over the whole of Norway as the saga claims, without also having considerable bonds to the magnates. The account of Inge's battle against Håkon also mentions that some of his most important followers fell with him,<sup>107</sup> so it would probably have been an amputated gathering that met to elect Magnus Erlingsson king. Even though Erling clearly seems to have been able to keep some of Inge's faction together, thus ensuring aristocratic support for his son's kingship, many high-status allies must have been lost to him. Most notably in the battle where King Inge fell, but it is by no means impossible that many changed sides and joined Håkon.

In sum, then, defeat in battle represented a loss of resources, both military and political. It was not necessarily the case, of course, that losses sustained on the battlefield led to a search for material support abroad, and there are more examples of king's and magnates losing battles and not going into exile than of the opposite. That having been said, we get a clear impression from the sources that there were instances in which the available resources of a political actor were so damaged by defeat in battle that he was not able to keep fighting his

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<sup>105</sup> *HmkHh*, ch. 19.

<sup>106</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 1.

<sup>107</sup> *HmkHh*, ch. 18.

enemy. In these cases, the alternative seems to have been refuge abroad with a host from whom it could be possible to procure economic or military aid.

## **Political circumstances**

We have seen that three out of six refugees who went abroad in search of material support did so after being defeated in battle by their rivals. The remaining six did so not because of one decisive event, but rather as a result of what we might broadly call adverse political circumstances. The process through which such circumstances might come about is a complicated one, and we should not expect that it is the same for all the political actors we will be examining through out this thesis. It will therefore be necessary to examine different accounts of search for support abroad, to see how they differ and how they might be similar. Unfortunately, our sources do not necessarily give us much of basis for analysis, as they are often frustratingly brief in their descriptions of how foreign resources might have entered into the Scandinavian internal conflicts. We shall therefore start out by looking at one of the few examples that is relatively detailed, and then see how this might help us understand and illuminate the practice as a whole.

### **Sven Grathe**

The example in question is Saxo's account of the political career of King Sven of Denmark, who was one of the three most important players in the internal conflict that began in 1146 when King Erik Lam decided to abdicate the throne in favour of a monastic life.<sup>108</sup> Erik's departure left Denmark in a state of uncertainty. He had no living heirs, and Saxo writes that "the people's choice of king was divided."<sup>109</sup> Unsurprisingly, the result was a period of conflict among claimants to the throne.

The main players in the conflicts opening phase were Knud, the son of the late Magnus Nielssøn and grandson of King Niels, and Sven, son of King Erik Emune. According to Saxo, Knud was elected king in the province of Jutland, while Sven attained the same position in Zealand and garnered additional support in Scania.<sup>110</sup> Hostilities ensued, and Sven seems to have had the upper hand in the conflict, probably because he controlled the considerable resources of both Zealand and Scania. Sven's faction was also joined by

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<sup>108</sup> Stefan Pajung, "Erik Lam ca. 1100-1147," in *Danmarkshistorien.dk*, ed. Anne Sørensen (Aarhus Universitet: Institut for Kultur og Samfund, 2012); *GD*, 14.2.15.

<sup>109</sup> *GD*, 14.3.1.

<sup>110</sup> *GD*, 14.3.1.

Valdemar, son of the murdered magnate and duke of Schleswig Knud Lavard. Valdemar's support, we read, "wins over many to Sven."<sup>111</sup> Swedish historian Lars Hermanson has also stressed the importance of Sven's social resources, his network of alliances to Danish magnates, which we read in *Gesta Danorum* was much more considerable than what can be said for his rival Knud.<sup>112</sup>

The initial phase of the conflict between Knud and Sven is not of interest to this thesis. Saxo writes of several battles and encounters, but none of them led to any recorded attempts at procuring material resources abroad. This changed when Knud was thoroughly defeated by Sven in a battle near Viborg on Jutland in 1151.<sup>113</sup> Knud's forces were great, writes Saxo, but he made the mistake of having his cavalry fight on foot, which cost him the victory.<sup>114</sup> After this defeat Knud went into refuge abroad, seeking support from numerous Northern European potentates and providing us with many interesting examples of how support from abroad might have functioned, all of which will be thoroughly discussed in coming chapters.

Knud was able to return to Denmark after the German king Friedrich Barbarossa negotiated a settlement between the two claimants at the diet of Merseburg, which took place in early 1152. According to this agreement, Knud would recognize Sven as the sole king of Denmark in return for receiving land, and Sven would in turn recognize Friedrich as his overlord, while Valdemar would get control over his father's duchy in Schleswig. The diet of Merseburg is difficult to get a firm grip on, complicated as it is by the many and interconnected actors involved, and the differing biases of the German and Danish sources recounting the event.<sup>115</sup> What seems clear is that following Knud's return to Denmark as brought about by the diet, everything started to take a turn for the worse for King Sven.

In his doctoral dissertation *Släkt, vänner och makt*, Lars Hermanson analyses Sven's fall from power in a way that helps us understand how his need for foreign resources came about. The primary reason for Sven's fall, according to Hermanson, was the breakup of his network of alliances. This happened firstly because the king was unable to reward his followers due to a lack of military success. Sven had had many military victories early in his career when he was fighting and consistently defeating his rival Knud in battle after battle.

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<sup>111</sup> *GD*, 14.4.1.

<sup>112</sup> Lars Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt: en studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2000), 212-13.

<sup>113</sup> Stefan Pajung, "Borgerkrigen 1146-1157," in *Danmarkshistorien.dk*, ed. Anne Sørensen (Aarhus Universitet: Institut for Kultur og Samfund, 2012); Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 210.

<sup>114</sup> *GD*, 14.4.4.

<sup>115</sup> *GD*, 14.8.1-3; Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), ch. 73; Otto of Freising, "Gesta Frederici," in *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, ed. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 118.

However, when he proved unable to stop an attack from the Wends, meaning the Slavs living on the southern shore of the Baltic and carrying out raids into Denmark, Sven could no longer depend on his previous history of victories to ensure his reputation as a competent war leader. The king then attempted to carry out an invasion of Sweden, which Hermanson sees as an attempt to add to his reputation and ensure booty for his followers. This becomes very clear in a passage of *Gesta Danorum* in which Saxo claims that Sven distributed land in Sweden among his men before he had in fact conquered the country.<sup>116</sup> When the Swedish invasion eventually failed spectacularly, and Sven had no spoils to distribute, it naturally only added to his problems, pushing him further towards his eventual need for foreign support.

Hermanson argues that the second reason for the breakup of Sven's network of alliances was that Sven was not only unable to reward his followers, but also unwilling to. Sven supposedly elevated men of low social standing to high position so that they would owe their place to the king, rather than rewarding those of his supporters who were of high birth.<sup>117</sup> This threatened the aristocracy and drove them from Sven's camp and over to his rival Knud where their prospects looked better. One of the men who switched sides was the duke of Schleswig and future king, Valdemar.<sup>118</sup> "A few influential and powerful men's switch to the opponent's side", writes Hermanson, "had started a domino-effect in which Sven lost most of his men."<sup>119</sup>

In sum, Sven became in need of outside aid because he lost his political resources in Denmark. They were lost due to a combination of Sven's inability and unwillingness to reward his aristocratic supporters. Such supporters were, as we saw when discussing defeat in battle, a crucial part of the twelfth-century Scandinavian kings' ability to rule effectively. Without political resources, Sven found it futile to continue his fight against Knud and Valdemar, and had to run away from Denmark.

Sven is not necessarily representative as a refugee in search of material support. He did not seek it immediately, instead staying with his father-in-law Konrad of Meissen for three years, seemingly without doing anything to facilitate a return to Denmark.<sup>120</sup> In 1157, he then went to Duke Heinrich of Saxony, where he was not given funding or reinforcements, but rather an invasion of Denmark led by the duke himself, and such an invasion does not fall

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<sup>116</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 215; *GD*, 14.11.3.

<sup>117</sup> A practice which might have been inspired by the German *minesteriales*.

<sup>118</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 219.

<sup>119</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 223. "Några få inflytelserika makthavares övergång till motståndarsidan hade inneburit en dominoeffekt där Svend förlorade merparten av sitt manskap."

<sup>120</sup> *GD*, 14.17.1.

under the definition of material support as it was outlined in our introduction. The Saxon invasion turned out to be a failure, but Sven did not give in. He returned to Denmark for a second time the same year, this time without Heinrich, but with the military aid of a group of Wends who stood under Heinrich's lordship.

How, then, does Sven Grathe's experiences help us understand the more general political process of how a king or magnate might be forced to find material support abroad? What seems clear from the analysis of Sven's downfall is that the need for military and economic aid from a patron abroad arises out of a lack of resources. More specifically, a lack of the resources that were required to rule and wage war. Furthermore, we have seen these could be easily lost, not only on the battlefield as we witnessed above, but also through bad political decisions and equally bad luck, thus bringing about the necessity for support from the outside. The most important point, however, is that as in our discussion of battles, Saxo's account of Sven's downfall emphasises the importance of social and political resources in the form of alliances to magnates and aristocrats. We get the clear impression that not only the king's ability to rule, but also his ability to fight back against his enemies was dependent upon these alliances. Sven was trapped in a kind of vicious circle. His unwillingness and inability to reward his followers led to a breakdown of his alliances, which in turn damaged his ability to govern and thus sustain his army. Without an effective army, it was all the more difficult for him to retain his alliances.

### **Other examples**

These patterns repeats themselves in other examples of political actors who went abroad in search for material support. The two Norwegian pretenders Sigurd Slembedjagn and Magnus Blinde's need for aid from Denmark, for example, arguably came about because Sigurd was not part of the established political elite of Norway. He had spent much of his time travelling both in Europe and in the Holy Land, and thus he was an outsider, with few of the social connections necessary to win or maintain kingship. Magnus, as the son of the revered Sigurd Jorsalfar, did have such connection, and we read in *Morkinskinna* that Sigurd when he allied himself to Magnus "expected this move would increase his following, and that proved to be the case."<sup>121</sup> Magnus managed to lose what must have been a considerable part of these allies in the battle of Minne in 1137, however, where six named aristocrats, as well as "a great part

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<sup>121</sup> "Morkinskinna," in *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*, ed. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 87.

of King Magnús's retinue<sup>122</sup> was slain. Again, we see how the common factor leading to a search for support from abroad, whether it came about through a battle or some other circumstance, was the lack of an aristocratic social network.

The leader of the Birchleg faction Øystein Møyla, who fled to Earl Birger Brosa in Götaland in search for aid in 1170, provides an example from the later part of our period.<sup>123</sup> Øystein did not seek help because he had estranged his high-status allies, but rather because he did not have any such allies in the first place. The reason for this was the very strong political position of Øystein's enemy Erling Skakke, whom we met above when discussing King Inge Krokrygg's defeat in battle. By 1170, Erling had defeated and killed many of his most important enemies domestically, and was the de-facto ruler of Norway through his son, the child king Magnus Erlingsson. He had also established an alliance between his own family and that of the powerful Danish king Valdemar, following a period of conflict between the two kingdoms. Erling's position of strength created a situation in which it was very difficult for pretenders who wanted to claim the throne to find the necessary support and resources to do so inside Norway. Furthermore, the alliance with Valdemar had cut off Denmark as a source for support, thus pushing men like Øystein Møyla to Sweden when they were in need of help.

In the case of Erling however, it has to be said that limited access to domestic resources and social connections was not the only reason for why his enemies sought help abroad. According to the sagas, Erling exhibited an almost unprecedented brutality against his enemies, creating a situation where those who rebelled against his rule could not expect either mercy or reconciliation.<sup>124</sup> In this political environment, refuge with and help from foreign rulers would have been one of few options open to Erling's enemies. The anonymous author of *Fagrskinna* even notes: "His practice with his enemies was to drive all men of importance into exile."<sup>125</sup>

Having thus considered how both decisive battles and political conditions and processes might have brought about a need for material support from abroad, we are able to draw some conclusions about the causes of this political practice.

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<sup>122</sup> *Msk*, ch. 87.

<sup>123</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 36.

<sup>124</sup> Hans Jacob Orning, "Conflict and social (dis)order in Norway, c. 1030-1160," in *Disputing strategies in medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Kim Esmark and Hans Jacob Orning (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>125</sup> "Fagrskinna," in *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Alison Finlay (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ch. 108.

## Why seek material support abroad? – Conclusions

In this chapter, we have come to the somewhat self-evident conclusion that the need to seek material resources abroad came about due to a lack of such resources at home. We have seen that a lack of resources might arise out of a variety of different circumstances, whether a devastating battle in which many men were lost or bad political decisions that estranged a political actor from his most important allies.

What we have also found, which I would argue is not self-evident, but rather highly significant for how we understand the meaning and importance of seeking aid abroad, is what it meant to lose resources. The conflicts from which the need for foreign support arose were without exception military conflicts, and it was therefore a lack of military resources, or access to them, which attracted Scandinavian political actors to patrons abroad. Material aid meant military aid, and even when we can assume with a reasonable amount of certainty that someone received primarily financial funding, this appears to have been spent in order to procure ships and men that could wage war. In the instances where defeat in battle led to petitions for material aid in neighbouring countries, the connection between cause and effect seems very direct. The connection is not as direct as it seems, however. Why could not the king who had lost his army get reinforcements at home? Furthermore, if support from abroad was primarily about military support, how do we explain the cases where political actors flee and seek help not because they have lost a battle, but because of adverse political circumstances in their home countries?

The answer to these questions lie in the importance of a strong, aristocratic network of alliances, which historians like Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Lars Hermanson have argued was crucial if a king wanted to rule effectively. We saw that the sources often emphasise the deaths of the high-status allies of kings on the battlefield, and that they could easily switch sides if they did not see it in their own best interests to support one king over another. Social networks of magnates, then, explain both why kings who lost a battle did not always reinforce their armies in their own countries, and how a political process could deprive a king of military strength. If a sufficient amount of a king's high-status allies died in a battle, or switched sides because of it, he was rendered unable to rule, and thus unable to reinforce at home. If a king lacked the necessary generosity, his allies might abandon him, taking with them his ability to fight his often numerous enemies. In situations like these, refuge with a patron abroad who could grant valuable military or economic support seems to have been a well-established political practice.

This leaves us with an important problem. If the main cause of the practice of seeking material aid from abroad was a breakdown of one's social network, how could the support from a foreign host rectify this situation? How could money, men or ships given by one king to another lead to the establishment of new aristocratic alliances? These are questions I shall return to in the last chapter of this thesis, where I argue that the main purpose of getting support from abroad was not to use these resources to conquer one's home kingdom by force, but rather to attract followers. First, however, we need to understand the relationship between those giving material aid and those receiving it. What connection existed between them, and how important were they?

## CHAPTER 2

### SOCIAL BONDS

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Earlier, we saw that much of the recent scholarship done on medieval Scandinavian politics and political culture has emphasised the importance of personal relationships between individuals. Historians like Gerd Althoff, Sverre Bagge, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Lars Hermanson have all argued that in a society with little to no institutional basis for power, alliances based on social bonds had great political significance.

Exchanges of material aid between potentates of different kingdoms must be considered a fundamentally political phenomenon, and it therefore makes sense to ask what role personal relationships played when a political actor sought resources abroad. Were personal connections between giver and recipient a prerequisite for the military and economic support to be exchanged? Were obligations to social bonds an important reason for why a foreign potentate might choose to support a Scandinavian refugee with resources? In answering these questions, I shall take a page out of Gerd Althoff's book *Family, Friends and Followers*, and discuss the social bonds of kinship, friendship and lordship separately, so as to get a sense of whether different social bonds impacted the giving material support in different ways. The bond between in-laws will also be analysed in a separate section. At the conclusion of the following discussion, we shall hopefully have a clearer sense of how social bonds governed the political practice of seeking material support abroad during the Scandinavian internal conflicts of the twelfth century.



## **Kinship**

I shall begin my survey of social bonds with kinship. Partly because it has been argued by scholars like Gerd Althoff that this was the most important social bond in medieval Europe,<sup>126</sup> but also because kinship is the social relation between giver and recipient that figures most frequently in the examples from the sources where political actors went abroad in search for material aid. Four out of the nine political actors we examine were somehow related to the foreign potentates from whom they attempted to procure resources.

My examination of kinship and material support will consist in large parts of an in-depth look at the Norwegian magnate Erling Skakke, as his relationship to the Danish king Valdemar is recounted in some detail in both the sagas and the Danish chronicle *Gesta Danorum*. It is therefore possible to compare and contrast accounts from two different source traditions, an opportunity that should make it possible to use Erling as a case study through which we can illuminate the relationship between kinship and material aid more generally. The Danish rebels and royal descendants Knud and Karl Karlsen were also successful in obtaining material resources from a relative, but sadly the sources treat them with such brevity that it is impossible to discuss them in any detail. Erling Skakke, then, will be our most important gateway into the relationship between material aid and kinship. Additionally, we shall touch on the notorious exile and claimant to the Danish throne Knud Magnussen, who I will argue attempted to procure economic and military resources from his kinsmen, but failed. Even though he did not receive any, Knud's experiences have interesting consequences for our view on the relationship between kinship and material aid.

### **Erling Skakke**

In the preceding chapter where we discussed how a need for resources from abroad might come about, we saw how Erling Skakke after the death of King Inge Krokrygg gathered the late king's faction around himself and got his young son elected king. We saw how it was necessary for Erling to seek aid abroad because many of Inge's supporters had died in battle, and his enemy and rival Håkon Herdebrei had gained control over much of Norway. In this difficult situation, Erling found it necessary to seek help outside of his own country. We read in *Heimskringla* that: "Erling Skakki prepared for his expedition by mustering ships, and took along with him King Magnús and all those retainers [of Inge] who were there (...) They sailed

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<sup>126</sup> Gerd Althoff, *Family, friends and followers: political and social bonds in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

south to Denmark and sought out King Valdamar”.<sup>127</sup>

An important reason for why Erling chose to seek aid with Valdemar was probably the strong political position the Danish kingdom found itself in after 1157. In the first volume of *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, the Norwegian historian Narve Bjørge introduces a concept he calls “the Danish sphere of power”.<sup>128</sup> That is, a state of Scandinavian politics during the middle ages in which Denmark was the strongest power and able to impose its will over Norway and Sweden using divide-and-conquer tactics. Bjørge writes that this Danish dominance did not come to an end until the reign of Valdemar II, which is outside the chronological scope of this thesis. Denmark’s relative strength, he continues, was a product of its stability after Valdemar I’s ascent to royal power ended the internal struggles in 1157, as well as growing dominance in the Baltic Sea.<sup>129</sup> Aid from Denmark, then, promised to be a potentially decisive force in the chaotic Norwegian internal conflict, and this could have attracted Erling.

While Erling’s actions can be explained in part by the state of Scandinavian politics in 1161, the sources are quite clear in what they perceive to be the main reason for his journey to Denmark. Both Saxo and Snorre emphasise that Erling’s wife Kristin, and thereby also his son King Magnus, had a bond of kinship to the Danish king. In *Heimskringla* we read that: “King Valdamar was a close kin of King Magnús”,<sup>130</sup> and Saxo similarly notes that Magnus was “a kinsman of Waldemarum by his mother’s family”.<sup>131</sup>

The attentive reader will of course notice that Erling himself was not related to the Danish monarch; his relation to Valdemar was rather by marriage. However, we should keep in mind that Erling’s political actions are taken on behalf of his young son Magnus, and therefore I think it makes sense to consider the bond between Magnus and Valdemar as the operative one. This view seems to be shared by the sources, which are careful to emphasise the familial relationship between the kings Valdemar and Magnus. I therefore think we are justified in treating the bond between the Danish ruler and his guest as one of kinship.

Kinship was, as I touched on above, a fundamental social bond during the middle ages, and closely associated with support in conflicts. The German historian Gerd Althoff

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<sup>127</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of Magnús Erlingsson," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Narve Bjørge, "800-1536. Makt - og avmakt," in *Selvstendighet og union - Fra middelalderen til 1905*, ed. Narve Bjørge, Rian Øystein, and Alf Kaartvedt, *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 43. "det danske kraftfeltet"

<sup>129</sup> Bjørge, "800-1536. Makt - og avmakt," 42-43.

<sup>130</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, "Gesta Danorum," in *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia Books X-XVI*, ed. Eric Christiansen (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981), 14.29.12.

writes in *Family, Friends and Followers* that the kin was: “characterized by the mutual obligations owed by all family members to help and support each other in every area of life”.<sup>132</sup> We must be careful not to oversimplify a complex culture, and Althoff is also careful to note that the degree to which kinship had any binding political significance could vary greatly. As we saw in our introduction, this has been noted by many other modern historians as well. In the case of Denmark, Lars Hermanson has studied the reigns of the kings Niels and Valdemar and concluded that a biological relation did not necessarily entail any binding loyalty,<sup>133</sup> while Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has come to similar conclusions in his studies of Norway.<sup>134</sup> The reason for this highly conditional relationship between kinship and support had to do with the bilateral nature of the Scandinavian kin-groups, where one was related to both the father and the mother’s side of the family. The large number of relatives that often followed from such a system, coupled with the likely possibility of conflicts arising between family members, meant that support from kin in conflicts was not a given. Even if it was not the case that Erling could entirely count on Valdemar’s support however, his son’s kinship relation to the Danish king must have played a part in his reasoning.

Judging by our sources, there is little doubt that Erling received some kind of aid in Denmark. Snorre claims that Erling entered into an agreement with the Danish king in which the latter received “all of Vík up to Rýgjarbit”,<sup>135</sup> meaning the region around the Oslo fjord, in return for “all the support from Denmark which he [King Magnus] would need to take and to maintain possession of Norway”.<sup>136</sup> *Fagrskinna* agrees that there was such an agreement and adds that Valdemar would get the “tributes and taxes”<sup>137</sup> of the region. Snorre concludes: “This agreement was confirmed by oaths and special covenants.”<sup>138</sup>

There are two problems in Snorre’s description when we are trying to understand the nature of the aid Erling received. First, we do not know if Erling actually got any help as Snorre only tells us of this agreement. In the following passages of his saga, in which he recounts what happened when Erling returned to Norway, Danish support, military, economic or otherwise, is not mentioned. Further, if Erling did receive support we do not know what

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<sup>132</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 41.

<sup>133</sup> Lars Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt: en studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2000), 181.

<sup>134</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet: vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden* (Oslo: Pax, 2008), 212.

<sup>135</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 2.

<sup>136</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 2.

<sup>137</sup> “Fagrskinna,” in *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Alison Finlay (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ch. 108.

<sup>138</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 2.

kind. Despite his brevity, though, Snorre does give us some hints that may help us solve these problems.

In 1164, King Valdemar was informed that Magnus and Erling had been successful in gaining control of Norway. The King of Denmark then sent a letter to Erling, reminding him of the agreement they had reached three years earlier.<sup>139</sup> Now that Erling had established control of Norway, we read that Valdemar wanted Viken. This clearly suggests that according to Snorre, Valdemar had supported Erling with material resources. “Now that I have upheld my part of the bargain” his letter seems to be saying, “it is time you upheld yours.”

As for what kind of support Erling received, Snorre is even more reserved. In the section describing the deal between the king and the chieftain, it is noted that Valdemar were to help King Magnus “from Denmark”.<sup>140</sup> This is not very informative, but it does rule out the possibility of a Danish invasion led by the king. We do get some additional information in *Fagrskinna*, which states that Valdemar was to let Erling “have a safe haven in Denmark for his army.”<sup>141</sup> This implies that the king gave Erling protection in his kingdom, but we cannot conclude with any certainty that Erling was aided economically or militarily.

Unlike the kings’ sagas, Saxo claims quite explicitly that Erling received material support. He writes that the Norwegian chieftain “received handsome wages in his exile, and the most ample supply of provisions.”<sup>142</sup> According to Saxo, then, the Danish support for Erling was mainly economic. This is also compatible with Snorre’s claim that Valdemar would lend support from Denmark, and it is not in conflict with the piece of information we got from *Fagrskinna*. Thus, it is perhaps safe to conclude that Erling is likely to have received economic aid of some sort from Valdemar when he visited in 1161.

### **Valdemar’s considerations**

We now have to turn to the most important question for this analysis of the relationship between kinship and material aid. That is, how important was the familial bond between Valdemar and Magnus for the economic support given by the Danish king? This question is complex because the kings’ sagas and Saxo’s chronicle seem to answer it in radically different ways, and our choice of which version we find most credible could be decisive for our understanding of the role and importance of kinship to the political practice we are

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<sup>139</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 23.

<sup>140</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 2.

<sup>141</sup> *Fsk*, ch. 108.

<sup>142</sup> *GD*, 14.29.12.

studying.

Saxo, unlike *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, does not mention a deal between Valdemar and Erling, and the aid that the former gives the latter seems to come with no expectation of reciprocity. Nowhere does Valdemar demand anything in return for his generosity. In Saxo's telling of the events it is therefore difficult to see what Valdemar stands to gain from his actions, and that might be the point, as he is clearly one of the heroes in *Gesta Danorum*. According to Saxo, Valdemar does not help Erling out of self-interest, but rather out of a sense of duty. He safeguards and supports Erling and Magnus because as Magnus's close relative and as a virtuous king, that is the right thing to do. If we chose to follow Saxo in this rendition of events, it seems as if the bond of kinship and the obligations that followed it was the deciding factor in King Valdemar's decision to lend economic support to Erling and his faction.

The kings' sagas *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* are very different, as in their case it is obvious what Valdemar stands to gain, namely the region of Norway called Viken, as per the agreement with Erling. In this respect, *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* present us with a quite different view from Saxo's on how the relationship between support and kinship functioned in medieval Scandinavia. It would appear that according to the sagas, material support for a refugee was not given out of a sense of duty to kin. It was rather given with the expectation of receiving something in return. It was given out of self-interest, with an expectation of reciprocity. Valdemar sending a letter to remind Erling of their bargain once Norway had been conquered further underlines this point. The Danish king wanted what he was owed.

This dichotomy between Saxo's emphasis on selflessness and the saga's on self-interest is complicated by what happened later. According to Snorre and the author of *Fagrskinna*, Erling refused to honour his deal with the Danish king, prompting Valdemar to invade Viken during the spring of 1165.<sup>143</sup> Snorre tells us that the king "proceeded peaceably and quietly",<sup>144</sup> but despite this the Danish invaders were allegedly met with hostility by the Norwegian population. Snorre paints a surprisingly sympathetic image of Valdemar during this invasion: faced with such opposition he chose to return home.<sup>145</sup>

Like Snorre, Saxo tells of an invasion of Viken by Valdemar, but since his version of events does not include an agreement like the one found in the sagas, the background for Valdemar's expedition to Norway is quite different. In contrast to the description of how

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<sup>143</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 27; *Fsk*, ch. 113-114.

<sup>144</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 27.

<sup>145</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 27.

Erling was first received in Denmark, it does not portray the Danish king very favourably. According to Saxo, the followers of a man named Markus visited King Valdemar. Markus was a recently deceased royal pretender who, like so many others, had been defeated and killed by Erling Skakke. After Markus had been defeated, his men sought refuge with the Swedish king Karl. Of Karl Saxo tells us that: "some degree of kinship seemed to connect him with the kings of Norway",<sup>146</sup> and the late Markus's followers wanted the king to lead them in an invasion of Norway. They received many promises, but little tangible action and soon realized that if they wanted control of Norway they would have to seek help with another king. This insight led them to Valdemar who was more positively inclined towards a military expedition in Norway. After having sent a letter examining the local attitudes towards such a campaign, an event that is also recorded in *Heimskringla*,<sup>147</sup> Valdemar set his plans into action. Unsurprisingly, Saxo writes that the king received a cordial welcome from the Norwegians, at least until he reached Tønsberg, which was unwilling to submit. The Danish king was equally unwilling to burn the town due to its churches, and consequently he ran out of supplies and had to call off the invasion.<sup>148</sup>

The reason why these events complicate the rather simple picture of duty in Saxo and self-interest in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* can be found if we examine the sources' differing value systems. In our introduction we saw Sverre Bagge argue that Snorre does not differentiate between moral and pragmatic actions in his writing, meaning that he: "Instead of using abstract virtues as a starting point, describes (...) actions that give honour and recognition and leads to success, as opposed to actions that do not".<sup>149</sup> Erling Skakke exemplifies this point perfectly. He was willing to give up part of Norway in exchange for the support he needed to achieve his goals, and for this Snorre does not condemn him. Erling reached his goal of controlling Norway, he achieved success and so the morality of the means by which he did so is not important to Snorre.

Saxo's values are according to Bagge quite different from Snorre's pragmatism. Saxo is characterized by "black and white thinking",<sup>150</sup> and history writing is for Saxo a moral endeavour that is meant to underline and emphasise the difference between virtue and vice.

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<sup>146</sup> *GD*, 14.29.14.

<sup>147</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 27.

<sup>148</sup> *GD*, 14.29.15-18.

<sup>149</sup> Sverre Bagge, "Fortelling, makt og politikk hos Saxo og Snorre," in *Saxo og Snorre*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, and Else Mundal (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2010), 181. "I stedet for å ta utgangspunkt i abstrakte dyder, beskriver (...) handlinger som gir ære og anseelse og leder til suksess, motsatt handlinger som ikke gjør det."

<sup>150</sup> Bagge, "Fortelling, makt og politikk hos Saxo og Snorre," 180. "svart/hvitt-tenkning"

Such an ideology is clearly visible in the beginning of Saxo's description of the relationship between Erling and Valdemar. The king, being one of the heroes of Saxo's story, is generous and hospitable, giving the Norwegian chieftain refuge and economic support seemingly without consideration of what he would gain in return.

What is so interesting about Saxo is that as opposed to Snorre, his values do not seem to be consistent. This inconsistency becomes apparent when we consider Valdemar's later deals with the faction of Markus. Valdemar's invasion of Norway at the head of a band of Erling's enemies is clearly at odds with the virtuous picture of Valdemar that Saxo is attempting to paint. Here we have the Danish king, the man who had helped Erling on his way to power, not only supporting the enemies of his kinsman, but also actively invading his territory. How are we to make sense of this? In fact, such a discrepancy of values and actions might be very helpful in discerning how Saxo portrays Valdemar's true motivations.

Valdemar might have supported the faction of the late Markus because his relationship with Erling was ultimately of little importance to him. If we choose such an interpretation, the Danish king would not really have betrayed Erling because there was nothing to betray, there was no lasting relationship between them. This conclusion might seem problematic because it ignores the bond of kinship between Valdemar and King Magnus. However, it does not have to be, as it is in line with the theories of the historians we referred to above, who argued that kinship was of little political significance due to its bilateral nature. If kinship was unimportant to Valdemar, it also helps explain his dealings with Markus's faction. In their case, there was no bond of kinship between giver and recipient of aid, and Saxo does not even try to hide the fact that the invasion was an attempt by Valdemar to conquer Norway. He writes that had the invasion been successful it would have "united the Norwegian to the Danish kingdom".<sup>151</sup> What we are left with then is a king who acts out of political self-interest, and not obligations to the bond of kinship, when deciding whether to grant material support to political actors from abroad.

Another possible explanation for why Valdemar supported Markus's party right after he had given aid to Erling might be that Erling had disappointed the Danish monarch in some way. Valdemar might have invaded because he had expected that in supporting Erling and Magnus, he would achieve something, and he had not gotten what he wanted. Maybe he wanted Viken, maybe certain favours, maybe nominal lordship over Norway. We can only speculate.

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<sup>151</sup> *GD*, 14.29.17.

Which of these two interpretations is closest to the truth is ultimately of little importance. What is important and very interesting is that in Saxo's narrative, there is a great contrast between the supposedly generous and hospitable Valdemar who helps Erling, and the Valdemar who uses political refugees as a means to advance his own political aims, as he does in his dealings with the Markus faction. This contrast makes it appropriate to question whether generosity had any real part in Valdemar's considerations at all, leading to the conclusion that the Valdemar who seemed to have no regard for reciprocity when he housed and supported Erling is more a product of Saxo's brevity or political sympathy than of historical reality. The view that Valdemar gave economic support to Erling because of his obligations to the bond of kinship to Erling's son is therefore clearly unsustainable.

What, then, has our case study of Erling Skakke and Valdemar the Great of Denmark taught us about the importance of kinship for the practice of giving material support? It seems we have ample reasons to believe that it was primarily self-interest and not obligations to a social bond that made the Danish king support Erling Skakke economically. Two of our sources, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* are explicit about this, while Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* is more implicit, but no less clear. All of the sources that tell of Valdemar and Erling's alliance, then, postulate political self-interest and not obligation to the bond of kinship as the giver's primary motivation for lending material support to the refugee. This, in turn, suggests that kinship might not have been all that important as a reason for supporting refugees materially, a conclusion that is also in line with Althoff, Hermanson and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's claims that kinship was not crucial as a basis for political action during the Middle Ages.

### **Knud Magnussen**

Another argument for seeing kinship as less politically significant to foreign material support is provided by the story of Knud Magnussen's attempt to seek refuge and aid from his relatives in Poland, an example that is only recounted in *Gesta Danorum*. We saw in the previous chapter that Knud was one of the players in the internal struggle that broke out in Denmark after the abdication of King Erik Lam in 1146, and that Knud battled another pretender named Sven Grathe for the right to be king. After a few years of fighting back and forth, Knud was decisively defeated at the battle of Viborg in Jutland, usually dated to 1151.<sup>152</sup>

We have seen how such a considerable military defeat could force a political actor to

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<sup>152</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 210; Hal Koch, *Kongemagt og kirke: 1060-1241*, ed. John Danstrup and Hal Koch, vol. 3, *Danmarks historie* (København: Politiken, 1963), 199.



seek help from abroad, and Knud is an obvious example of this. First, we read that Knud sought refuge in Sweden. Sverker, the king, had married Knud's mother after the death of his father Magnus Nielssøn, and Sverker was therefore Knud's stepfather. This relation was established by marriage so we shall come back to it in the following analysis of in-laws. Suffice it to say that he turned out to be an unpopular refugee to such an extent that we read he had to sell all the land he owned in Sweden in order to get enough food, thus implying that King Sverker was not even willing to feed him.<sup>153</sup>

Knud now allegedly bought a ship and provisions and went to Poland where he sought support from the family of his mother, who belonged to the ruling Piast dynasty.<sup>154</sup> But like in Sweden, he was not greeted in the way he had hoped. Saxo writes of the Poles that "they thought he was after a share of the kingdom, by right of his mother and although they admitted him to go other places would not allow him into fortified towns".<sup>155</sup> It is difficult to know what this meant in detail, but Knud's relatives seem to accept that he used Poland as a safe haven, a place where he could hide from his enemies in Denmark. What they were not comfortable with was to let him into their centres of power, namely their castles. The reason seems to have been that this would have presented Knud with an opportunity to establish his own independent powerbase, based on descent from his mother. This seems somewhat paranoid, but makes sense if the importance of castles to medieval European politics is taken into consideration.<sup>156</sup> From this reluctance of the Poles to let Knud into their castles I think we can also safely assume that they did not grant him any military or economic support, which would have increased his political resources in a way that would have threatened their own.

That Knud was after such material aid, both from his Swedish and Polish relatives, is clear if we consider what happened after he left Poland. Knud first sought help from Heinrich der Löwe, the duke of Saxony, and when this attempt was not successful, he turned to the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, named Hartwig. Both Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and Helmold of Bosau's *Chronica Slavorum* claims that the archbishop was the first of Knud's many patrons who was willing to lend him material resources. We shall discuss Knud's relationship to Hartwig in more detail in a later chapter exploring the reasons for why a potentate might

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<sup>153</sup> *GD*, 14.5.2.

<sup>154</sup> John Lind, "De russiske ægteskaber. Dynasti- og alliancepolitik i 1130ernes danske borgerkrig," (*Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift* 92, no. 2 (1992). For more on the political history of Poland in this period, see: Jerzy Wyrozumski, "Poland in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 4: c. 1024-c. 1198, Part 2*, ed. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>155</sup> *GD*, 14.5.3.

<sup>156</sup> Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 65-70.

choose to give economic and military aid. What is interesting here are the words Saxo uses recounting how Knud received his support. He writes of Knud that “at last he borrowed the wherewithal to fight a war”.<sup>157</sup> The use of the words “at last” (*tandem*) communicates that acquiring the means to wage war was Knud’s goal throughout his series of unsuccessful petitions to foreign potentates. He wanted material support from abroad with which he could continue his struggle for the Danish throne. In other words, Saxo is saying that Knud left both Sweden and Poland because he did not receive the economic or military help he needed.

So what does Knud’s attempt to get aid from Poland tell us about the relationship between kinship and material support? Saxo presents us with a situation where not only does Knud’s kinship not help him procure material support from his Polish relatives; it even works to his disadvantage! Knud’s familial relation to the Polish ducal family clearly grants him the option to go to Poland, but it is also the reason employed by Knud’s relatives to keep him at a distance. It is precisely because of his lineage, his potential claims to inheritance, that he is seen as a threat to the powerbase of the Polish rulers. What this might tell us is that when the patron’s familial obligations to a potential recipient of material support came into conflict with his (perceived) political interest the latter triumphed. Like in the case of Erling and Valdemar, kinship does not seem to have helped Knud procure material aid.

It is also especially interesting that in the relevant passage in *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo not only sees political considerations as being more important than social obligations, but he also explicitly condemns this. Knud was badly treated by his Polish relatives, we read, despite the fact that Knud was a man “to whom they owe charity as a kinsman.”<sup>158</sup> This statement gives us an interesting impression of the practice of giving support to relatives by juxtaposing normative views and political reality. Saxo describes with great clarity how he perceives that things should be, but in doing so he only emphasises how social obligations were subordinated to considerations of interests.

It could conceivably be argued that because these episodes are only recounted in *Gesta Danorum* and because Knud would become an in-law and ally of Saxo’s hero Valdemar Knudsen, that the story of his stays in Sweden and Poland are constructed by Saxo. The Danish chronicler might be attempting to underplay Knud’s alliance with the hated Germans by stressing the point that prior to doing so he had exhausted all of his alternatives.<sup>159</sup> If this is the case, it would seem as if Saxo perceives material aid from abroad to be more legitimate if

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<sup>157</sup> *GD*, 14.5.4.

<sup>158</sup> *GD*, 14.5.3.

<sup>159</sup> I am very grateful to Helle Vogt for bringing this interpretation to my attention.

it came from kinsmen or in-laws rather than Germans, which is an interesting point in itself. However, it seems unlikely that the chronicler would simply fabricate events that were so close to his own time. That Knud's Swedish and Polish adventures are not recorded in *Chronica Slavorum* must simply be down to the fact they were not relevant to Helmold's Baltic area of interest, which the Danish king's dealings with Archbishop Hartwig definitely were. Nevertheless, what is most interesting in Saxo's account of Knud's trip to Poland is not whether it was factual, but that he presents us with a situation where a bond of kinship actively sabotages a political actor's chance of receiving foreign material aid. This, in combination with how *Gesta Danorum* tells of King Valdemar's disloyal treatment of his kinsman Magnus Erlingsson, would indicate that Saxo does not view the bond of kinship as strong enough to ensure a political actor material support from another country.

## **Conclusion**

It seems clear that according to our sources' accounts of both Knud and Erling's exiles, kinship itself was not enough to procure military or economic support from a host abroad. Valdemar's support for Erling was in his own political interest, and Knud's relatives were not willing to support him, while Archbishop Hartwig, to whom Knud was not related, was willing to grant aid.

So what should we make of the relationship between material support and kinship? Should we conclude that kinship was of no importance to refugees who needed economic or military resources from abroad? That might be too hasty. Knud Magnussen's exile in Poland and especially Erling Skakke's in Denmark demonstrate how bonds of kinship created opportunities for political actors who needed help from abroad to enhance, secure or restore their positions at home. Seeking help from relatives seems to have been the first impulse of both Knud and Erling.

This having been said, the main discovery of the analysis above has been that kinship to some king or magnate abroad was not enough to secure material support from him. All of our sources dealing with the relationship between Erling Skakke and King Valdemar show that the Danish ruler's support for Erling was grounded in an expectation of reciprocity. In the case of Knud Magnussen's exile in Poland, this is made even clearer. Knud was not able to get the material support of his relatives because as their relative and a potential heir he was a threat to their political interests.

In conclusion, kinship could open doors for a refugee in twelfth-century Scandinavia,

but it could also close them. Once the door was open, however, kinship was not sufficient to procure the material support a political actor might need. Such support was contingent on the political interests of the host.

## **In-laws**

I have chosen to discuss in-laws as a social relation separate from kinship. The bond between in-laws was in a sense a constructed kinship, and so it might have made more sense to discuss the givers and recipients of aid who were bound together by marriage under the previous heading. However, I do think that the nature of the relations between in-laws, the constructed character of the bond, makes it worthwhile to analyse on its own. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has written that “in some situations the in-laws could be even more important than kinsmen”<sup>160</sup> as a support group for the chieftains of Commonwealth Iceland. The same could be said of twelfth-century Scandinavian political actors, as marriage alliances might have been entered into for the explicit purpose of gaining foreign material aid. The same cannot be said of kinship, which makes marital relations interesting as a separate entity. The distinction between kindred and in-laws was also so ingrained in Norse culture that the two concepts were referred to by very distinctive words. *Frændi* meant kindred, but specifically kindred not related by marriage. Such relatives, or in-laws, were rather denoted by the term *mágr*.<sup>161</sup>

We have two examples in the sources of political actors who received material support from patrons with whom they had a marital relation. One of them was the Danish king Erik Emune, about whom we know the most, and who will serve as our main object of analysis. The second is the Norwegian pretender Øystein Møyla, about whom we do not know as much, though his story might be more typical than Erik’s. Our third example is again the Danish king Knud Magnussen, who sought aid from the man who had married his mother, but was not successful in obtaining his support. Because no aid was actually given, the account of Knud in the sources might be able to illuminate in an interesting way how a marital relationship could impact the giving of material resources. Knud’s enemy Sven Grathe’s refuge with his father-in-law Konrad Margrave of Meissen will not be discussed here, because the sources gives no indication that Konrad gave his son in-law any kind of military or economic resources.

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<sup>160</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and power in the Icelandic commonwealth*, vol. 12, The Viking collection (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999), 147.

<sup>161</sup> *An Icelandic-English dictionary*, ed. Richard Cleasby, William A. Craigie, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

## Erik Emune

Erik Emune entered the political scene in Denmark after the murder of Knud Lavard, which ignited the Danish internal struggles lasting from 1131 to 1134. Knud had been one of the most important magnates in Denmark, and his death at the hands of the King Niels's son Magnus sparked a violent conflict between the king and a group of powerful aristocrats. Among them was Erik Emune, son of King Erik Ejegod and half-brother of Knud Lavard.<sup>162</sup> Saxo tells us that Erik was furious and craved vengeance for the murder of his relative.<sup>163</sup>

The rebels decided that if they were to fight a king they would need a king of their own, and the title was given to Erik. After he had been elected, Erik turned his attention to fighting Niels and Magnus, and he quickly raised an army and marched towards Jutland. According to Saxo, his military fortunes were soon spoiled by bishop Thore of Ribe, who spied for King Niels and thus led Erik's army to its defeat.

Following Niels's victory, Erik supposedly wrote a letter to the German king Lothar, in which he asked him to come to Denmark with an army to avenge the murder of Knud Lavard, who in addition to being an important Danish magnate had also been a vassal of the German king. Lothar came, but things did not turn out as Erik had hoped. Apparently more interested in increasing his own political influence than vengeance, Lothar kept his army outside of Denmark in return for an oath of allegiance from Knud's murderer Magnus Nielsson.<sup>164</sup>

After Erik's attempt to win Denmark by appealing to the German king had failed, Saxo tells us that he was "in 'the deepest bitterness of mind'".<sup>165</sup> His fortunes improved when he was approached by representatives of King Magnus Sigurdsson of Norway, who we met in the previous chapter when we considered his struggle against the pretender Harald Gille. That conflict had not yet broken out when King Magnus sent his envoys to Denmark with a request to marry Erik's niece Kirsten, daughter of the late Knud Lavard. Erik agreed, and even chose to marry King Magnus's stepmother Malmfrid himself, thus strengthening his connections in Norway. The passage in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* explaining Erik's motives for agreeing to these unions is enlightening. We read that Erik gave the delegation a warm welcome because he had hopes of "gaining further support from it, and of recruiting his neighbour's help

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<sup>162</sup> Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt*, 99.

<sup>163</sup> *GD*, 13.7.4.

<sup>164</sup> *GD*, 13.8.5-6.

<sup>165</sup> *GD*, 13.8.6.

through family ties.”<sup>166</sup>

In other words, Saxo draws a direct connection between a marriage alliance and hope for foreign aid. Erik married off his niece precisely because of the military resources King Magnus would be able to provide him. Erik was still in a difficult political position and had not given up hope that support from outside could enhance his standing in Denmark. When he was not able to get it from Germany he had to look elsewhere, and the Norwegian connection must have suited him perfectly. It is worth noting that Snorre also mentions that King Magnus was married to Knud Lavard’s daughter, but he does not go into any detail as to how this marriage alliance was established.<sup>167</sup>

These alliances would become very significant when Erik later had to flee Denmark for Norway, but this did not happen immediately. For after having concluded his agreements with the king of Norway, Erik’s fortunes allegedly took a turn for the better. He won a naval engagement against Magnus Nielssøn and attempted an invasion of Jutland, but this last effort turned out to be unsuccessful. Even though Saxo does not mention it explicitly, it is reasonable to speculate that Erik’s Norwegian allies aided him in these endeavours.

Erik Emune’s fortunes were not to last. *Gesta Danorum* says that during the spring of 1133 King Niels decided to invade Zealand, which was the centre of Erik’s power. After fighting Niels in what Saxo describes as a bloody battle, Erik lost again. Taking advantage of his alliance with King Magnus Blinde, he then fled to Norway together with his wife and illegitimate son. Saxo writes ominously that Erik was first met with “the most generous hospitality, and soon afterwards with treachery and falsehood”.<sup>168</sup> The source of this deceitfulness, we read, was the Danish king Niels, who convinced King Magnus to murder his guest. Saxo does not go into detail as to what the Norwegian ruler got out of this agreement, but states only that Magnus would kill Erik for an agreed upon compensation. Erik got word of the conspiracy from his niece the queen, and managed to escape to Lolland by getting the king and all his men very drunk.<sup>169</sup>

This event is presented somewhat differently in the so-called *Chronicon Roskildense*, the first part of which was written before 1143 according to its translator Jørgen Olrik.<sup>170</sup> The

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<sup>166</sup> *GD*, 13.8.7.

<sup>167</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of Magnús the Blind and Harald Gilli " in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 1.

<sup>168</sup> *GD*, 13.11.1.

<sup>169</sup> *GD*, 13.11.4.

<sup>170</sup> Jørgen Olrik, "Indledning," in *Den ældste Danmarkskrønike: (Roskildekrøniken)* (København: Selskabet til Historiske Kildeskrifters Oversættelse 1898). The reason for this being that Olaf, the son of Harald Kesje, is described as still alive in the chronicle, and Olaf died in 1143. For more on the chronicle, see: Michael H. Gelting, "Da Eskil ville være ærkebiskop af Roskilde: Roskildekrøniken, Liber Daticus og det danske ærkesteds

anonymous author of the chronicle does not write that a promise of reward from King Niels of Denmark led to Magnus's betrayal. Rather, Magnus took advantage of the power he held as a host to confiscate all of Erik's possessions. Magnus, we read, "ordered his men to hold him [Erik] in chains".<sup>171</sup> With the addition of a remark about Erik feigning illness, the chronicle's following description of Erik's escape is the same as in *Gesta Danorum*. In both sources, then, it is the lures of material gain that makes Magnus Blinde betray his guest.

Whether these events actually took place or not is a matter of some uncertainty. Erik Emune's asylum in Norway is not mentioned in the kings' sagas, but this might be down to the fact that these sources are seldom interested in events that do not affect the domestic political situation in Norway directly, which Erik's exile arguably does not. Additionally, the fact that *Chronicon Roskildense*, written merely ten years after the events supposedly took place, attests to Erik's stay in Norway is a strong argument for claiming that the kings' sagas have omitted this event.

The question is what Erik's refuge in Norway, and the material support he presumably received from King Magnus, can tell us about how marital relations impacted the giving of economic and military aid. We have seen that the alliance between Erik and Magnus was established with the express purpose, at least on Erik's part, of procuring him military support from Norway. Was this strategy successful? If it was, was it successful because of the obligations entailed in the bond between in-laws, or rather because Magnus Blinde, like Valdemar, got something in return for the resources he gave?

The sources do not make these questions easy to answer. We are never told explicitly whether Erik actually received any reinforcements from Norway, making it difficult to uncover the obligations or motivations that might lie behind Magnus's possible material support for Erik. However, Saxo's remark that Erik had intentions of: "recruiting his neighbour's help through family ties"<sup>172</sup> clearly suggests that the chronicler sees a direct causal connection between the establishment of a marital bond and military support. We might take this to mean that in-laws, unlike kindred, helped each other materially in times of crisis without thought of political self-interest. This seems all the more likely because we do not get any indication of what Magnus got out of his relationship with Erik. There is not the

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ophævelse 1133-1138," in *Ett Annat 1100-Tal - Individ, kollektiv och kulturella mönster i medeltidens Danmark*, ed. Peter Carelli, Lars Hermanson, and Hanne Sanders (Göteborg: Makadam Förlag, 2004).

<sup>171</sup> "Chronicon Roskildense," in *Den ældste Danmarkskrønike: (Roskildekrøniken)*, ed. Jørgen Olrik (København: Selskabet til Historiske Kildeskrifters Oversættelse 1898). "befalede sine mænd at holde ham i lænker"

<sup>172</sup> *GD*, 13.8.7.

same sense of a trade-off as in the relationship between King Valdemar and Erling Skakke.

Such a conclusion is nonetheless problematic because it does not take into account the turbulent relationship between Magnus and Erik during the latter's exile in Norway. We might not have a direct reference to what King Magnus might have gotten in return for any military resources he provided for Erik, but we definitely do not get the sense that Magnus respected any obligations we might have towards his in-laws. Magnus is presented by a near contemporary source as being willing to imprison or possibly kill his guest for profit, which should tell us that a marital bond probably did not mean much to him. It therefore seems unlikely that he would have given Erik any material support without an expectation of getting something in return.

However, it is not necessarily the case that this tells us anything about in-laws and material support in general. It is far from self-evident that the story of Magnus's betrayal of Erik is a typical case. Our understanding could also be skewed by the sources, especially the Danish chronicles, which depict Magnus's character particularly bleakly and thus distorts our sense of how a relationship between in-laws giving material support to each other could function. Furthermore, we saw in the introduction how medieval narrative accounts greatly emphasise conflict, which should likewise make us careful about using the relationship between Erik and Magnus as a reliable case study. Unfortunately, in addition to being a problematic example, the case of Erik's refuge in and military support from Norway is also one of only two examples of material support being exchanged between in-laws, and it is by far the most elaborate one.

### **Øystein Møyla**

The other example of material aid being exchanged between in-laws concerns the Norwegian pretender and grandson of Harald Gille, Øystein Møyla, who was the nominal leader of the rebel faction called the Birchlegs. Øystein and his men sought refuge and support from Earl Birger Brosa in Götaland in the latter half of the 1170s. A possible explanation for this was that the Swedish earl was married to Brigida who was the daughter of Øystein's grandfather Harald Gille. The authors of the sagas are careful to emphasise this marital bond, so it seems clear that they see it as an important prerequisite for the support given by Earl Birger.<sup>173</sup> Concerning the patronage given, we read in *Fagrskinna* that Øystein received “great support

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<sup>173</sup> *Fsk*, ch. 130; *HmkME*, ch. 36.



(...) in the form both of troops and of gifts of money”,<sup>174</sup> so Birger seems to have been quite generous with his resources.

This is more or less all the relevant information we get from the sagas concerning the nature of the relationship between Øystein and Birger. This example is different from that of Erik and Magnus because the marital relation between Øystein and Birger was not established as a political alliance in the same way. More similar to what we saw in the case of Erling and Valdemar, the relation is there already and Øystein was able to take advantage of it. The example of Øystein Møyla indicates that a marriage alliance like the one Birger had with Brigida could attract foreign refugees in search for military and economic support.

On the surface, it seems like money and troops is given by Birger out of generosity, not self-interest, but that might be an impression we get because of the brevity of the account. In a following chapter dealing with the interests of the potentates who gave material support, I shall argue that Birger funded the Birchlegs not out of altruism, but rather because he was politically pressured by a recent alliance between the Danish and Norwegian ruling houses. If that is true, it means that Birger’s generosity cannot be seen as the expression of a relationship between in-laws alone. Furthermore, Snorre also notes that Birger and Brigida offered their friendship to the Birchlegs.<sup>175</sup> We might see this as an attempt by the earl and his wife to establish a more durable alliance with the Norwegians rebels. This, in turn, could imply that the bond between in-laws (and kindred, if we consider Brigida) needed to be supplemented with a bond of friendship if it was to serve as a basis for a durable political alliance. The sense we get of in-laws in this example, then, is that as with kindred, they could seek refuge with one another, but when material support was involved the social relation in itself was not enough to produce action.

### **Knud Magnussen**

When discussing kinship and Knud Magnussen’s attempt to procure material aid from his relatives in Poland, we mentioned that prior to coming there Knud had gone to Sweden. He did so because King Sverker was married to his mother and therefore Knud’s stepfather. Further, we saw that the stay in Sweden did not go well and Knud left the country shortly after he had arrived. As Knud’s relation to King Sverker was one established by marriage, I want to analyse it here, and see if the relationship between Knud and his Swedish in-laws can

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<sup>174</sup> *Fsk*, ch. 130.

<sup>175</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 36.

tell us anything about how marital relations influenced the giving of military and economic support more generally.

Knud did not actually receive any material aid from Sweden. However, we saw above that Saxo's use of the words "at last" (*tandem*) when Knud received such aid from the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, which clearly suggests that this was his goal all along. Thus, I think it is justified to discuss Knud, as it is not necessary for a political actor to be successful in his attempt to acquire aid in order for his actions to cast light on the political practice itself.

As when considering Knud's refuge in Poland, Saxo is more or less our only source, and the Danish chronicler is not detailed in his description of Knud's stay in Sweden, or of why it came to an end. We have some additional information from *Knýtlinge saga*, which, although it was written considerably later than *Gesta Danorum*, might provide us with useful information.

If we want to use Saxo's narrative as a way of understanding the impact of marital relations on material support we have to take as our starting point that Knud's refuge in Sweden ended badly. At first, we read, the Danish royal claimant was welcomed by his stepfather, but was after a while "considered a burden", leading to Knud having to "put up for sale the estates he possessed there in order to buy food".<sup>176</sup> This seems like a rather spectacular breakdown of relations, as we get the impression Sverker was not even willing to supply his stepson with food, much less with money or soldiers. Our aim must be to understand why Knud was viewed as a problem, that is, why he did not receive any support, in order to get a sense of what role the bond of marriage between Sverker and Knud's mother played in this decision.

Here, Saxo does not give us much to go on. His explanation is simply to point to the national character of the Swedes, and he notes that "no nation is readier to receive exiles, or less reluctant to turn them out".<sup>177</sup> This seems like a blatant example of national bias and we cannot accept it as a satisfactory explanation. However, we are given some information from *Gesta Danorum* that can help us. We are told that Knud had land in Sweden he was forced to sell. If Saxo is correct about this, it is difficult to say what the magnitude of Knud's possessions prior to him getting rid of them might have been, but it is not unlikely that they could have been considerable. Knud's father, Magnus Nielsson, had, in addition to being heir

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<sup>176</sup> *GD*, 14.5.2.

<sup>177</sup> *GD*, 14.5.2.

to the Danish throne, been elected king of Västgötaland in the 1120s,<sup>178</sup> which could have meant that Knud through his father had an economic powerbase of some importance in Sweden. This, in turn, could have felt threatening to King Sverker, making him hostile towards Knud to such a degree that the Danish king would eventually have to leave the country.

The problem with this interpretation is that it is difficult to see how Knud could have had control over considerable resources in Sweden if it was so easy for Sverker to drive him out. If Knud was a powerful figure in Sweden, why did he not resist? Thus, Knud was either not as strong as his father's title would suggest, or Sverker was not hostile towards his stepson. The first option is arguably most likely, both due to Knud's later attempts to procure aid from abroad, and because Sverker's antagonism towards the Danish pretender is actually recorded in *Gesta Danorum*, unlike the inference that Knud's powerbase in Sweden might have been considerable. Thus, we need an alternative explanation for Knud and Sverker's fallout.

One is offered in *Knýtlinge saga*, which leaves out the notion of Knud having land in Sweden altogether, and instead claims that Sverker offered him such possessions to live off of in return for Knud's rights to the Danish throne. The author tells us that the young Danish king summarily refused the offer,<sup>179</sup> which fits nicely with the image of Knud we get from Saxo. He does not seem to have been interested in protection or settling down. He wanted resources with which he could continue his fight against King Sven in Denmark. There is good reason to be sceptical about the account in *Knýtlinge saga*, however, as it was written so much later than Saxo's chronicle. Even so, it is worth noting that in this source as well, Sverker does not lend any support to Knud, despite a marital relation.

I think the most likely explanation for Knud's unsuccessful attempt to procure aid from Sweden can be found in his lineage. Magnus Nielsen, Knud's father, was the son of Margareta Fredkulla, who in turn was the daughter of King Inge Stenkilsson, who ruled in Sweden at the end of the eleventh century. Knud was therefore directly descended from a Swedish king, though only through a female line. It would therefore not have been unreasonable if King Sverker was sceptical about supporting a man who could conceivably threaten his hold on the Swedish throne. In other words, the situation was very similar to the

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<sup>178</sup> Steffen Lind Christensen, "Magnus Nielsen ca. 1106-1134," in *Danmarkshistorien.dk*, ed. Anne Sørensen (Aarhus Universitet: Institut for Kultur og Samfund, 2012).

<sup>179</sup> "Knýtlinge Saga: Knud den Store, Knud den Hellige og deres mænd, deres slægt," (København: Gads Forlag, 1977), 142.

one Knud would later face in Poland. Because of his high birth, Knud had a claim to inheritance that made him dangerous and therefore unlikely of receiving any material aid.

What, then, have we learned about marital relations and their bearings on the practice of giving material support? Unlike what could be said when we considered Knud stay with his relatives in Poland, it was not the case that Knud was not supported because of his social relation to his host. The operative bond between Sverker and Knud was one of marriage, this made explicit in *Knýtlinge saga*, which describes Sverker as Knud's *mág*.<sup>180</sup> It was not this marital connection, but rather Knud's decent from Inge Stenkilsson, which made it unlikely that he would receive any material support. What we can say is that neither *Gesta Danorum* nor *Knýtlinge saga* seems to portray social obligations between stepfather and stepson as strong enough to outweigh the political interests of the patron asked to lend military or economic aid. Sverker most likely perceived Knud as a threat, and if there existed any expectation that he should support the Danish king with resources because of the bond between them, these are not presented by the sources as having been decisive.

## Conclusion

It has proven difficult to understand how marital relations impacted the material support from abroad in the Scandinavian internal conflicts of the twelfth century. The main reason for this is that our most prominent example of a refugee who most likely received material aid from an in-law is almost certainly not a representative one. Despite this problem, I think the case of Erik Emune and Magnus Blinde does give us some interesting information. Most importantly, it connects marital relations directly with the giving of military support by showing that such relations could have been entered into with the purpose of getting reinforcements from abroad. However, we have also seen in the example of Øystein Møyla that giving material aid between in-laws might also be based on a pre-existing bond, of which a political actor in need might be able to take advantage. Lastly, we looked at a somewhat different kind of bond, namely that between stepfather and stepson, and here as well, we saw how marriage created potential alliances.

Concerning the question of whether it was social obligations or the political interests of that was the most important governing factor in the giving of material aid to in-laws, our sources again suggest that interests triumphed. The example of Erik and Magnus, though it is

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<sup>180</sup> "Knýtlinge saga," in *Íslensk Fornrit XXXV*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1982), ch. 108.

probably atypical, shows how the obligations to an in-law could be ignored, and in the case of Øystein Møyla, I think we have good reason to conclude that Birger Brosa's funding of the Birchlegs was in his own political interest. In the case of Knud, it was clear that his social relation to Sverker was not enough to trump the political threat Knud represented. What we have uncovered from these examples is a view on in-laws and material support that is quite similar to the one on kindred. That is, marital relation could be important as a way of establishing the connection between giver and recipient, but the interests of the giver were ultimately more important than any social obligations when it came to the question of whether or not he would supply military or economic aid.

The political interests of the king or aristocrat granting aid might also be implied in the marital relation itself. Marriage among the medieval aristocracy was of course not only a religious, social and economic institution, but also a political one,<sup>181</sup> as the alliance between Erik and Magnus clearly exemplifies. Thus, we must assume that when the marital relation between the two was established, this was in Magnus's, as well as Erik's political interest. Even if we do not know what Magnus Blinde got out of his possible military support for Erik, then, his political interest had most likely already been served by his marriage to Knud Lavard's daughter Kirsten. In other words, when marriage alliances were established with the intention of ensuring refuge and material support for one of the parts in the alliance, the interests of the other part, the one who would act as host and supporter, had almost certainly been taken into account more or less by default.

## Friendship

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has argued that friendship was the most important social relationship of medieval Norway and Iceland.<sup>182</sup> Bearing this in mind, we have surprisingly few examples of friendship being presented as the operative social bond when a Scandinavian political actor went abroad in search for material aid. Our sources provide only one clear case from the relevant period, which is the relationship between the King Harald Gille of Norway and King Erik Emune of Denmark. The reason for this scarcity might be that friendship often supplemented other social bonds like kinship,<sup>183</sup> as we saw in the example of Øystein Møyla and Birger Brosa, and it could be that our sources are on the whole more interested in

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<sup>181</sup> Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar: Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120-1400* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2001), 60.

<sup>182</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet*, 78. See also: Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Den vennlige vikingen: vennskapets makt i Norge og på Island 900-1300* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2010), 147.

<sup>183</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 63.

reporting on bonds of kinship. The establishing of supplementing bonds of friendship would perhaps also suggest that friendship was perceived to be a stronger social bond than kinship or marital relations, at least when it came to foreign relations. That we do have an example where there was primarily a bond of friendship between the giver and recipient of aid should give us the opportunity to investigate whether this was in-fact the case.

Before we begin this analysis, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the term “friendship” in this context, as the word has many modern connotations that do not necessarily apply when we are studying the Middle Ages. The German historian Gerd Althoff points out that medieval friendship could have a political dimension and be used both as a way of establishing alliances, and as a basis for political action.<sup>184</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has stressed this same point.<sup>185</sup> Thus, it is important to keep in mind that when considering friendship, we are not analysing a private relation between two people based on mutual respect and love, at least not necessarily. Rather, we must see it as an essentially political relationship, and we shall see that the bond between the kings Erik and Harald was probably both an alliance and a basis for political action. The question, then, is how this related to material support.

### **Harald Gille and Erik Emune**

In the first chapter discussing the causes of political actors seeking refuge and support abroad, we saw how Harald Gille, after arriving in Norway from Ireland in the 1120s, claiming the throne and ruling together with Sigurd Jorsalfar’s son Magnus Blinde for four years, had been decisively defeated at the battle of Färlev in 1134. With his followers routed or killed, he was left without a powerbase and without political resources in Norway. His solution was typical; Harald sought refuge with King Erik Emune in Denmark.

When investigating this episode we are lucky that Saxo joins in the sagas’ narratives of Harald’s stay in Denmark, and we therefore have two independent source traditions on which to base our analysis. It is also interesting that our Norse and Danish sources differ considerably in their portrayals, which in turn may present fruitful opportunities for inquiry.

Both Saxo and the saga authors seem to think that it was the need for military support and reinforcements that made Harald seek out Erik. Saxo writes that the Norwegian king “arrived in Denmark to get assistance from king Ericus”,<sup>186</sup> and *Heimskringla* similarly notes

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<sup>184</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 67-90.

<sup>185</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet*, 78.

<sup>186</sup> *GD*, 14.1.5.

that Harald sought out King Erik “in order to secure his support.”<sup>187</sup>

So what kind of material support did Harald receive from King Erik? Snorre’s description is in fact one of few examples from the sagas in which this question is answered in some detail. Generally, the sources give little to no information about what kind of aid was given by one political actor to another, and the small hints we get usually amount to reserved comments about the aid being economic or military in some way or another. When writing of Harald Gille, however, Snorre tells us that King Erik “assigned the province of Halland to Harald for revenue and visitation”.<sup>188</sup> This passage might say something crucial about how economic aid actually functioned. In their book *The Danish Resources c. 1000-1550*, historians Nils Hybel and Bjørn Poulsen attempt to establish the degree to which resources were transferred from the Danish population to the elite. Their conclusion might help us to understand what kind of revenues Harald Gille could count on from the province of Halland. If Hybel and Poulsen are right, Harald would not have had any significant income from either royal lands or taxes. Rather the province would mostly have provided him with provisions, in addition to rights to labour and military service.<sup>189</sup>

It is quite possible that handing over control of a province like Halland was an established way in which foreign lords ensured financial support for refugees they harboured. The money necessary to support a refugee had to come from somewhere, and it must have made sense to let the person seeking support collect the resources he needed himself, from a geographical area assigned by the host. In this way, it was possible to lend economic support without having liquid assets at the ready. On the other hand, it could be that the distinctive nature of the example of Erik and Harald makes the sagas record it in such great detail. If that is true, it is of course of limited value for illuminating the practice of material support from abroad as a whole. It is also possible that it is not an accident that the example of Harald and Erik is both the only one in which friendship is the prime social bond, and the only one in which giving of material support figures in exactly this way. The scarcity of similar remarks elsewhere in the sources makes these questions difficult to answer, and we are left to speculate.

Snorre writes that when Harald went to his newly acquired province of Halland “many joined him there”.<sup>190</sup> This could be reflecting the royal right to military service we examined

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<sup>187</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 3.

<sup>188</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 3.

<sup>189</sup> Nils Hybel and Bjørn Poulsen, *The Danish Resources c. 1000-1550: Growth and Recession* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 300-4.

<sup>190</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 3.

above, but it could also be that Harald was joined by soldiers coming from Norway, which is the interpretation favoured by the Norwegian historian Knut Helle.<sup>191</sup> If Helle is correct, it would mean that Harald did not receive Danish recruits, but that does not mean that the support Harald received from Denmark was insignificant. Rather, the economic resources Harald got his hands on when he was given control of Halland must have been an important explanation for why Norwegians flocked to the Danish province in order to join him. Thus, Snorre and the anonymous author of *Fagrskinna* paint an interesting picture of how material support could be given. A patron could give a recipient of aid permission to use his domain as coffer and possibly even recruiting ground.

If Saxo is to be believed, Erik's support for Harald was somewhat postponed by an attack on Denmark by the Wends, during which Erik was not willing or able to supply Harald with reinforcements. The Wends were Slavs living along the southern shore of the Baltic, who during the first half of the twelfth century seem to have been raiding Denmark quite extensively. The Wendish threat to Erik's kingdom eventually passed, and Saxo writes that "when King Ericus had settled the affairs of Denmark and things were peaceful once more, he took up the troubles of his friend [Harald]".<sup>192</sup> The support we are told Harald now received seems more than generous. First Erik in person helped pillage the town of Oslo, which we are told was loyal to Magnus, and a year later, when Harald supposedly came asking for help again, he is said to have been given the whole of the Danish fleet to command.<sup>193</sup> This last remark seems somewhat exaggerated, and it could be Saxo overcompensating for King Erik's initial lack of support for Harald.

We have seen that Saxo and the sagas disagree on how Harald received aid, and on what kind of aid he received. The latter emphasise economic aid, claiming that Harald was given control over the province of Halland, and that he recruited soldiers there. Saxo writes that Harald had to wait for his aid due to a Wendish attack on Denmark, and that the aid he finally received was primarily in the form of ships. What they do not disagree on are the consequences. Both write that Harald defeated his enemy Magnus,<sup>194</sup> and it makes sense to ascribe his victory to the aid he had received in Denmark.

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<sup>191</sup> Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat: 1130-1319* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 42.

<sup>192</sup> *GD*, 14.1.8.

<sup>193</sup> *GD*, 14.1.8.

<sup>194</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 3; *GD*, 14.1.8.



## Why did Erik Emune support Harald?

Having established that Harald received material support, and how he did so, we must move on to address our most central question. That is, why did Erik Emune give aid, and what role did the friendship between the two play in his decision?

The sources do not seem to agree on this. In *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, we read that Harald was welcomed by Erik because “they had sworn brotherhood to one another.”<sup>195</sup> What does this mean? In *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson writes that brotherhood established through oaths was a kind of friendship.<sup>196</sup> This connection is explored in more detail in Lars Hermanson’s book *Bärande band*, where the Swedish historian discusses how the establishment of bonds of friendship had a ritual aspect, which often involved the swearing of an oath.<sup>197</sup> Hermanson characterises bonds of sworn brotherhood, often between groups of people, as fundamentally reciprocal bonds, where the brothers were expected to help each other in all aspects of life. “In practice”, he writes, “all the brothers were to be each other’s equals, irrespective of kin or status.”<sup>198</sup> These groups of sworn brothers or guilds differ from the relationship between Erik and Harald in that we do not get the impression that they are part of a larger group. Nonetheless, it is useful to try and see the bond between the two in the light of how people at the time understood and practiced brotherhood, and we must ask ourselves whether this principle of reciprocity and equality applied to the kings Harald and Erik.

The best way to understand the bond between the two kings might be to see it as a kind of military brotherhood, which was a relationship between men fighting together, literally as brothers in arms. Military brotherhood played a very important role during the Danish crusades in the Baltic in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries,<sup>199</sup> and we have seen that exchanges of military support were crucial to the relationship between Harald and Erik. As such, it makes a lot of sense to view their alleged brotherhood as a military one. Harald’s later military activities against the Wends in Denmark, which in some sense can be seen as similar to the crusades in the Baltic, and which shall be discussed in more detail

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<sup>195</sup> The Norse word used in *Heimskringla* is “brœðralag”, while *Fagrskinna* uses “eiðbræðr”. Snorre Sturlason, “Magnúss Saga Blinda Ok Haralds Gilla,” in *Íslenzk Fornrit XXVIII*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1979), ch. 3; “Fagrskinna - Nóregs Konunga Tal,” in *Íslenzk Fornrit XXIX*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1984), ch. 94.

<sup>196</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and power*, 12, 126.

<sup>197</sup> Lars Hermanson, *Bärande band: vänskap, kärlek och brödraskap i det medeltida Nordeuropa, ca. 1000-1200* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2009), 118.

<sup>198</sup> Hermanson, *Bärande band*, 203. “I praktiken skulle samtliga bröder vara varandras likar oberoande av släktstillhörighet eller status.”

<sup>199</sup> Hermanson, *Bärande band*, 213.

below, makes such a bond even more likely.

If Snorre and the author of *Fagrskinna* are correct in their descriptions, how and when did Harald and Erik enter into an oath of brotherhood? The Norwegian nineteenth-century historian P. A. Munch claimed that the only opportunity for the two kings to establish such a bond was during King Erik's unfortunate exile in Norway.<sup>200</sup> While it is easy to conceive of other opportunities not recorded in the sources, it also seems reasonable to conclude that Munch may be right in his assumption. Erik's refuge in Norway happened before the battle of Fodevig in 1134, and therefore also before conflict broke out between Harald Gille and Magnus Blinde during that same year, so it is far from unlikely that Erik could have come into contact with Harald during his turbulent stay in Norway.

Unlike the sagas, Saxo speaks of a more general kind of friendship, as a passage in *Gesta Danorum* describes Harald as Erik's "friend" (*amicus*).<sup>201</sup> However, taking the ritual aspect of friendships and its close links to constructed brotherhood into account, it is a possibility that when Snorre describes an oath of brotherhood and Saxo describes Harald as Erik's friend, they are in fact writing of the same social bond. A different and arguably more likely interpretation is that the sources are telling of two different kinds of friendship, and that the different choices of words reflect different practices, also when it comes to the giving of material support.

If it was in fact true that a bond of sworn brotherhood was a strong one, we should perhaps expect that Erik's own political interests were less important in his choice to support Harald materially than the obligations he felt to him as a brother-in-arms. At least we would think that the bond implied a sense of mutual support, so that if Erik aided Harald it was expected that Harald would return the favour if Erik was in need. Thus, Erik would not need a separate political motive to support Harald with money and men. In the case of the sagas, which speak explicitly of an oath of brotherhood, this actually seems to be the case. In *Gesta Danorum*, however, which speaks of friendship and not brotherhood, we get a different impression.

Saxo does not seem to think that a social relation between the two kings figured into Erik's considerations at all. Erik's motive for supporting Harald materially is clearly seen as a need for vengeance against Magnus Blinde for the episode we came across when discussing in-laws above, where Magnus had imprisoned or attempted to murder Erik while he was

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<sup>200</sup> P. A. Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie*, vol. 2 (Christiania: Chr. Tønsbergs Forlag, 1855), 726.

<sup>201</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, "Gesta Danorum," in *Gesta Danorum Danmarkshistorien Bog 11-16*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen (København: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Gads Forlag, 2005), 14.1.8.

under his protection. Saxo writes of the Danish king that he “received the supplicant for the sake of his rival’s broken marriage, and decided to help him, delighted that he had brought him a plausible excuse for a war.”<sup>202</sup> The reason for the warm welcome is not friendship but spite against Magnus. Saxo emphasises Magnus’s marriage because the Norwegian king had suspected his Danish wife Kirsten of being complicit in Erik’s escape from Norway, which, if the Danish chronicler is to be believed, was true. Due to this suspicion, Magnus had sent his wife back to Denmark. Snorre also records that Magnus sent his wife back to Denmark, but as the author does not mention that King Erik was a refugee in Norway, the failed assassination attempt is not used as Magnus’s justification. Rather, Snorre ascribes the break up to the fact that the Norwegian king “did not take to her”,<sup>203</sup> meaning his wife. It is quite remarkable that the act Erik finds it necessary to avenge is not the attempt on his own life, but rather the fact that Magnus has broken the marriage alliance entered into earlier, which says something about the gravity of the humiliation involved.

The fact that Erik Emune is said to lend aid primarily in order to exact revenge for a broken marriage contract is a clear indication that Saxo thinks Erik’s main motive for lending Harald military aid was his wish to get back at Magnus Blinde. We could see this as an expression of *Gesta Danorum*’s antagonism towards Erik, whose son Sven Grathe would betray Saxo’s great hero, King Valdemar. To some extent, this might be true, but it does not change that in the one instance where Saxo mentions a bond of friendship between two political actors exchanging material resources, he is careful to emphasise the personal and political interests of the giver. This, in turn, we could take to mean that Saxo paints a picture of the relationship between friendship and giving of material support in which it was necessary for giver and recipient to share political interests. At the very least, it is not unthinkable for the Danish chronicler that political interest might serve as the main motive for helping a friend.

The impression we get in the sagas is quite different. Firstly, and most importantly, because we do not get the sense that King Erik had any political interest in helping Harald by giving him control over the province of Halland. Of course, this does not mean that he did not. I think the account in the near-contemporary chronicle of Roskilde is a convincing argument for believing that Erik Emune was betrayed by his host Magnus Blinde while he was a refugee in Norway, and so it seems likely that he would want revenge of some kind. That the sagas do not go into this at all might be down to brevity, especially in the case of

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<sup>202</sup> *GD*, 14.1.5.

<sup>203</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 1.

*Fagrskinna*, as well as a general lack of interest in Danish affairs. However, we might also interpret the sagas' portrayal of Erik's seeming altruism as an expression of the difference between the institutions of sworn brotherhood and friendship. The writers of the sagas might not address Erik's own motive for wanting to support Harald because this was seen as unimportant when an oath of sworn brotherhood was involved. Self-interest, it would seem, was not an issue when sworn brothers sought material support from one another.

On the other hand, we do also get a clear sense of reciprocity in the relationship between Erik and Harald as it is portrayed in the sagas. After he had won control of Norway, *Heimskringla* recounts that Harald fought two battles in Denmark, one at Hven and one at Læsø.<sup>204</sup> The details surrounding these battles are somewhat obscure, but *Fagrskinna* claims that the one at Hven was fought against "some Vikings",<sup>205</sup> most likely meaning Wends. Thus, when we read that Harald fought battles in Denmark, and we can assume with some certainty that these were fought against an enemy of the Danish kings, it is safe to conclude that the Norwegian king lent Erik Emune some kind of military support.

One way to understand this would be to view it as a kind of contractual obligation. Harald lent his forces to Erik in return for the material support he received when he was a refugee, in the same way as Erling Skakke was expected to give Valdemar Viken once he had gained control over Norway. If we interpret the battles of Hven and Læsø in this way, we get the sense that obligations to a sworn brother played little part in Erik Emune's decision to give Harald money or men. Rather, it was the expectation that Harald would fulfil his contractual obligation, and thus act in Erik's political interest, which ensured him support.

Due to the strong association between sworn brotherhood and military bands, as shown by among others Lars Hermanson, I think such an interpretation of the events presented by the sagas might be a mistake. Instead of seeing the relationship between the kings Harald and Erik as a contractual one, in which Harald has to return the favour of military support, we should instead view reciprocity as inherent to the bond of sworn brotherhood. Thus, Harald fighting against the Wends in Denmark is not the repayment of a debt, but rather a social obligation to a sworn brother. Erik's material support for Harald can of course be viewed in the same way. Alternatively, we could see Harald's battles as a response to the Wendish attacks that had supposedly been carried out on the Norwegian town of Konghelle,<sup>206</sup> in which case the kings' sagas gives no indication that Harald paid Erik back

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<sup>204</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 12.

<sup>205</sup> *Fsk*, ch. 96.

<sup>206</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 10-11.

at all.

Thus, the sagas' portrayal of the relationship between Erik and Harald tells us something interesting about friendship and the giving of material support. In the case of a bond of sworn brotherhood, which must be considered a kind of friendship, social obligation might have been more important than the political interests of the person giving aid. That seems to set brotherhood apart from the other social bonds discussed in this chapter.

This does not mean, of course, that Erik's political interests were unimportant to him, or that it was not in his interest to support Harald materially. As we have seen, the sagas are likely leaving out Erik's opportunity for vengeance against Magnus Blinde. However, what this thesis is attempting to study is the practice of refuge as it is portrayed in mostly narrative sources, and it seems clear that the sagas portray the practice of giving material support to sworn brothers as more of an obligation than a political investment. The bond of brotherhood was probably such an investment in itself, as it was a kind of alliance which ensured support in conflicts, including support from abroad, as demonstrated by the political careers of Erik and Harald. With the alliance of brotherhood followed obligations that according to the sagas seem to have been taken quite seriously, including an obligation to lend both economic and military aid.

Even though it is primarily concerned with the later medieval period, Elisabeth A. R. Brown's article "Ritual Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe" could help us explain and contextualize this conclusion. Brown sees the cohesion of a bond of sworn brotherhood as contingent upon the circumstances under which it was entered into. Often, she writes, brotherhood was used as a way of settling conflicts between enemies. In such circumstances, the bond does not seem to have been particularly strong and often proved unable to prevent further bloodshed.<sup>207</sup> This is in some sense the opposite of what the example of Harald and Erik suggests. The two Scandinavian kings seem to have both got along and supported each other. Harald and Erik appear to exemplify a different kind of context for sworn brotherhood.

"[P]acts of brotherhood contracted by men who already felt esteem, amity and amour for each other, who trusted each other and needed the support the other offered, who entered into the relationship willingly and unconstrainedly", writes Brown, "were far more likely to endure".<sup>208</sup> We cannot know what Harald and Erik felt for each other, but we might speculate

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<sup>207</sup> Elisabeth A. R. Brown, "Ritual Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 52 (1997): 373-74. For more on the importance of oaths in medieval communities, see: Fredric M. Chyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2001), 178-99.

<sup>208</sup> Brown, "Ritual Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe," 374.

that if they came into contact during Erik's exile in Norway it is possible that they established an emotional bond, as well as a social and political one. What I think we can say with more certainty is that Harald and Erik needed each other's support. Harald Gille needed help to fight off rivals to the Norwegian throne, and Erik Emune had his own problems, in the form of his nephews who wanted the throne, as well as the Wends. Thus, I think we can explain the strength of the bond Harald and Erik, as it is portrayed in the sagas, as a product of a mutual need of political support as well as possibly an emotional connection.

## Conclusion

Our discussion of friendship as a regulating factor in the practice of obtaining military and economic support abroad has been limited by there being only one relevant example in all of our sources that both includes the giving of material aid and a bond of friendship between giver and recipient.

We have seen that our understanding of the relationship between Erik and Harald is contingent upon what sources we choose to emphasise. Saxo portrays the relationship as a nonspecific friendship, explicitly using the word "friend" (*amicus*). Equally explicitly stated in *Gesta Danorum* is Erik Emune's motive for supporting King Harald, namely a desire for revenge against Harald's rival Magnus Blinde who had humiliated Erik. In Saxo's account of friendship, then, the social obligations entailed by that bond clearly seem less important than King Erik's personal interest.

The sagas, on the other hand, do not speak of friendship but rather a bond of sworn brotherhood (*bræðralag/eiðbræðr*) between the two kings. Interestingly, this difference in the description of a social bond seems to be reflected in the description of practice. Where Saxo stresses Erik's personal motives as the most important reason for why he supported Harald materially, the writers of the sagas emphasise the obligations of the oath of brotherhood. Any concern in the sagas for concrete political interests cannot be detected. I have therefore argued that sworn brotherhood might have been a strong enough social bond in itself to ensure a political actor material support abroad. That having been said, drawing such a general conclusion is problematic, as we are at the mercy of the limited number of useful examples, and friendship was clearly a complex social concept, with a variety of political implications.

Finally, we should note that our sources in their portrayals of friendship seem to have switched positions from our analysis of kinship. Saxo would not speak of Valdemar's motives for supporting Erling, but is happy to speak of the political considerations that lay behind Erik's support for Harald. If we go to the kings' sagas, it is the other way around. That our

sources are so inconsistent in how they portray the relationship between social bonds and personal interests certainly indicates complexity, but as I shall argue in the conclusion to this chapter, we also get the sense that the importance of social bonds to material support from abroad could and did vary greatly.

## Lordship

The German medievalist Gerd Althoff provides an interesting angle for approaching the question of how lordship influenced the practice of giving military and economic resources across borders. In his book *Family, Friends and Followers*, he writes that lordship can be separated into two categories: lordship over the free and over the legally unfree.<sup>209</sup> The category that interests us here is the first one, as we are dealing with bonds of lordship between people who were kings and aristocrats. “This bond”, writes Althoff, “was based not on command and obedience, but on mutual faith between vassal and lord.”<sup>210</sup> From this mutual faith followed a series of obligations. The vassal was obliged to swear an oath to his lord, promising his loyalty, and he had to offer both his advice and support.<sup>211</sup> The lord on his part was equally expected to display a series of virtues, among them generosity, which is perhaps the one that is most interesting to us. Althoff observes that: “the ruler was expected to provide greater rewards and perform greater services for his dependants than they were expected to do for him.”<sup>212</sup> This was the expectation. Reality could be something else entirely, and in this analysis, we shall keep these expectations in mind and try to uncover whether they did in fact influence and regulate the giving of military and economic aid.

When analysing vertical social bonds we are not as starved of cases to study as we were in the discussion of friendship above. First, we shall briefly look at an episode recounted in Helmold’s *Chronica Slavorum*, where the Danish king and notorious refugee Knud Magnussen appear to use his status as a king to garner the support of Count Adolf of Holstein. Whether this example involves material aid or not is somewhat uncertain, however, as Helmold’s Latin is somewhat convoluted. Our most clear-cut example also comes from Knud’s career. While he was in exile in Germany, we know that he wrote a letter to the king, Konrad III, in which he asked for material support. We will analyse this letter, as well as look at a corresponding letter sent to Konrad by Knud’s rival Sven Grathe. King Sven is also

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<sup>209</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 103.

<sup>210</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 103.

<sup>211</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 103-05.

<sup>212</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 106-07.

involved in a second example concerning lordship, as he is supposed to have received some military resources from a group of Wends, apparently courtesy of Heinrich der Löwe's lordship over them. Further, I shall argue that even though a bond between lord and vassal is not explicitly mentioned when the Norwegian pretender Sigurd Slembedjajn received ships and men from the Danish king Erik Lam in 1139, such a bond does seem to have existed.

Finally, lordship entered into the relationship between King Valdemar and Erling Skakke. The conflict between the two ended in 1170, when Erling accepted the Danish king's overlordship over Viken and became his earl there. I think this agreement was important to Erling because it ensured him the possibility of Danish material support if he needed it, and the alliance with Denmark would be of great benefit when Erling's son Magnus needed reinforcements in his fight against the pretender Sverre. This struggle falls outside of the chronological scope of this thesis however, and as the relationship between Erling and Valdemar was discussed in such detail in the section dealing with kinship, it will not be subject to the same in-depth analysis here. Rather, we shall return to it in the conclusion to see how the relationship between Erling and Valdemar fits into what we have learned about lordship from the other examples. The sheer number of them suggests that lordship played an important role in the relationship between exiles and the hosts granting them material aid.

### **Knud Magnussen and Adolf of Holstein**

In *Chronica Slavorum*, Helmold of Bosau gives a short presentation of the actors and the cause of the Danish internal struggle of 1146-1156. He mentions Knud, Sven and Valdemar, their lineages and claims to the throne. He writes of the murder of King Erik Emune, but seems to think that Erik Lam, who succeeded his murdered uncle, was a guardian ruling Denmark while the three claimants were young, rather than a king in his own right. Before Erik Lam died, writes Helmold, he "appointed Svein to the kingship and bade Waldemar and Cnut be satisfied with their paternal inheritance".<sup>213</sup> Knud could not accept this. He rebelled and Valdemar soon joined him. Helmold goes on to ask ominously, "who does not know of the carnage wrought in that war?"<sup>214</sup>

Helmold's inaccuracies when writing of Danish affairs is clearly down to his mainly German and Slavic area of interest.<sup>215</sup> These interests reveal themselves in the following

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<sup>213</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), ch. 67.

<sup>214</sup> *CS*, ch. 67.

<sup>215</sup> Francis Joseph Tschan, "Introduction," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 28.



passages concerning the Danish conflict. “Each of the kings then endeavored to draw to himself our count,” writes Helmold, “and they sent messengers with gifts, presenting many and promising greater ones.”<sup>216</sup> The count in question was Adolf II, who between 1126 and 1164 ruled the county of Holstein, bordering the Kingdom of Denmark.<sup>217</sup>

Saxo does not mention any overtures by the Danish pretenders towards the German count, which could lead us to question whether the event ever occurred. Helmold wrote his chronicle considerably earlier than Saxo, however, and it should not surprise us if political actors vying for kingship would want to ally with a neighbouring magnate. Furthermore, with three pretenders seeking the same alliance there must have been competition, which Helmold’s remarks about gifts and promises indicate.

The winner in the competition between the Danish royal claimants was supposedly Knud Magnussen. In Francis Joseph Tschan’s 1935 translation of the chronicle, we read that, “The count was pleased with Cnut, and after they had held conference Cnut did him homage.”<sup>218</sup> Here we are presented with a candidate for the Danish throne, a man who has been elected king, recognizing a German count as his overlord. Considering how much controversy surrounded the question of whether the King of Denmark should pay homage to the Emperor or not,<sup>219</sup> this seems absurd. This unlikely portrayal of events is probably caused by a mistranslation of the passage by Tschan. The original Latin passage reads: “Complacuitque comiti ad Kanutum, habitoque colloquio fecit ei hominium”,<sup>220</sup> and a Danish translation claims that Count Adolph did homage to Knud, which seems much more plausible.<sup>221</sup> What we see here, then, is a bond of lordship being used to establish a political alliance between Knud and the German count. The relationship is initiated with gift-giving, echoing Althoff’s emphasis on the lord’s generosity, and concluded with an oath of homage.

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<sup>216</sup> CS, ch. 67.

<sup>217</sup> Tschan, "Introduction," 10.

<sup>218</sup> CS, ch. 67.

<sup>219</sup> Anders Leegaard Knudsen, "Absalon and the Holy Roman Empire," in *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen and Inge Skovgaard-Petersen (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2000); Ole Fenger, "*Kirker rejstes alle vegne*": 1050-1250, ed. Olaf Olsen, vol. 4, Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie (København: Gyldendals Bogklubber, 1993).

<sup>220</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *Helmoldi Presbyteri Bozoviensis Chronica Slavorum*, ed. Iohannem M. Lappenberg and Bernhardus Schmeidler (Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1909), ch. 67.

<sup>221</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *Præsten Helmolds Slavekrønike*, ed. P. Kierkegaard (København: Karl Schønbergs forlag, 1881), ch. 67. An alternative theory, presented by Wojtek Jezierski (email to author, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2014), is that Tschan read "hommagium" in place of "hominium". Thus, instead of Knud paying homage to Adolf, Helmold is saying that the count supported the Danish claimant with his men. With such an interpretation, it would be absolutely clear that Knud received military aid from Adolf, but the connection to lordship would be lost. I have chosen to depend on the interpretation expressed in Kierkegaard’s translation, as this seems to be most widely accepted.

We cannot know for sure whether Adolf gave Knud any economic or military aid. On the one hand it seems unlikely, bearing in mind Althoff's claims that a lord was expected to be more generous than his vassal. Nonetheless, Adolf clearly did spend his resources on Knud, as we are told later in Helmold's chronicle that the two men were allies in the war against King Sven. In a battle outside of Schleswig, for example, Adolf is said to have come to Knud's aid with four thousand men under his command.<sup>222</sup> What the relationship between the king and the count shows us is that lordship could serve as the basis for a political alliance, in which it was likely that material support was exchanged. What is also clear, however, is that for the bond of lordship to be established, Knud had to make Adolf personally invested in his own cause, and the king did this by rewarding his future vassal with generous gifts.

### **Knud, Sven and Konrad III**

If Helmold is right in claiming that Sven and Knud vied for Count Adolf's support, it must have been sometime after this that they both sent letters to the German king Konrad III, asking for his help. These letters are interesting, not only because of their content, but also because they have not left any mark in the narrative sources. Our only knowledge of them comes from the letters themselves. We know that both letters were written in 1151, and it is likely that Sven's was dispatched as a response to the one sent by Knud.<sup>223</sup>

The year 1151 was a hectic one for Knud Magnussen. He had lost the battle of Viborg, and the defeat had forced him into exile where he spent most of his time going from host to host in search of someone who could grant him the military and economic means he needed to go back to Denmark and defeat his rival Sven. In our discussion of kinsmen and in-laws, we saw how Knud first sought help from his relatives in both Sweden and Poland, in both cases without success. He then went to Saxony where he after a failed attempt at the court of Duke Heinrich succeeded in convincing the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen of supplying him with an invasion force. Knud seems to have been a rather incompetent military commander, and after his attempted invasion failed, he fled back to Saxony.<sup>224</sup>

It was most likely during this second stay in Germany that Knud wrote his letter to King Konrad III. In it, Knud describes himself as king of the Danes and addresses Konrad as

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<sup>222</sup> *CS*, ch. 67.

<sup>223</sup> Carsten Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170* (København: Gads Forlag, 1982), 249.

<sup>224</sup> *GD*, 14.5.5-10.

emperor (*Ramonorum imperatori augusto*) and king of kings (*rex regum*), which clearly suggests that Knud is deliberately putting himself in the junior position of a vertical relationship. This sense is further emphasised by the description of the German king as a just father (*pater iusticie*), while the Danish exile calls himself a child. Knud then appeals to the German ruler's sense of morality, by writing that he has been robbed of his kingdom and his patrimony. Because of this, he continues, he has sought refuge in the Roman Empire, in hope that he will find counsel and support (*consilium et auxilium*) there. Knud then asks Konrad to help him by lending his "sharp sword" (*gladii uestri seueritate*), so that the Danish king can win back what has so unfairly been taken from him. This passage suggests that we are dealing with an example involving material support, but it is also possible that Knud is petitioning Konrad to invade Denmark, as the words used are quite vague. The words "consilium et auxilium" must be considered a literary convention of this kind of letter, but in combination with the reference to Konrad's sword, it seems to suggest that Knud wants military support of some kind. King Knud writes to Konrad that he should give this aid for the sake of his own honour (*uestro honore*), but in the last sentence of his letter he offers further motivation, when he says that like a son he will always obey the German king's instruction (*precepta*).<sup>225</sup>

To sum up Knud's letter to King Konrad, the Danish king is clearly painting himself as inferior to the German ruler, by addressing him by the titles of emperor and king of kings and by describing him as a father. The purpose of this is clearly to ensure Konrad's military support in the ongoing struggle for the Danish throne. In return for this support, Knud is willing to promise his future loyalty, apparently sacrificing what we might call the independence of the Danish kingdom.

It is important to understand that Knud's willingness to make such a sacrifice had some precedence. In the 1130s, King Erik Emune had according to Saxo invited the then reigning German king Lothar III to Denmark, hoping that he would side with Erik in the conflict that arose following the murder of Knud Lavard. Things had not gone according to plan, and Lothar had ended up supporting Erik's enemies in return for an oath of loyalty.<sup>226</sup> Thus, we see that in Denmark, with a powerful neighbour wanting to establish its dominance, subservience and vassalage could be offered in return for material support.

Thus, it is clear that we are dealing with a situation that is opposite to the one we

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<sup>225</sup> "Diplomatarium Danicum, Række 1, Bind 2," ed. Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab (København: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 1938-), nr. 104; "Danmarks Riges Breve: 1. Række, 1. og 2. Bind, 789-1169," ed. C. A. Christensen, Gustav Hermansen, and Herulf Nielsen (København: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 1975).

<sup>226</sup> *GD*, 13.8.5-6.

discussed above, where Knud had established himself as overlord. Here, we see Knud offering his vassalage, offering the establishment of a bond of lordship, in return for military support. This way of obtaining aid from abroad might have been quite widespread, as we see it repeated in other examples, and I think there are two complimentary ways of understanding it. First, by acknowledging him as overlord, the recipient of aid is increasing the giver's appearance of power, which was of great importance in medieval political culture.<sup>227</sup> Secondly, we must see the offer to subject to a host abroad as a promise of support in the future. When Knud is offering Konrad his loyalty in return for military support, he is not only offering symbolic dominance over a Danish king, but also the political support of the Danish kingdom. Thus, we should see the bond of lordship as a kind of alliance, a bond of mutual support similar to the bond of sworn brotherhood explored above. In sum, Knud's letter is in effect saying that if the German king is willing to supply Knud with the military resources he needs, he will soon have a dependent on the Danish throne, with all the symbolic and political implications that would entail.

King Sven also sent a letter to Konrad in 1151, which is similar to Knud's in that Sven implied the same kind of vertical relation, by describing himself as son and Konrad as father. Like Knud, he also asked for the German king's support.<sup>228</sup> It is also quite different, however, because Sven, according to the Danish historian Carsten Breengaard, appealed to the time when he had been part of King Konrad's retinue, thus emphasising that there was a pre-existing social bond between them, a bond between lord and vassal. While Knud had to promise his future loyalty as a vassal, Sven could play on a previous relationship. Furthermore, Sven's letter stands apart from Knud's because the aim of the former was not to ensure that King Konrad intervened on Sven's side, but to ensure that he did not intervene at all. Breengaard therefore sees Sven's letter as a response to Knud's plea for military aid.<sup>229</sup>

This is interesting because we here have two separate political actors appealing to the same patron abroad asking for support, and both doing so by appealing to a bond of lordship. One to a pre-existing bond and the other making promises for the future. The outcome should therefore tell us a lot about lordship and material support from abroad. Was the existing bond between Sven and Konrad strong enough as to deny Knud support from the king? Alternatively, were the promises of loyalty and subordination enough to gain Knud military aid? They do not seem to have been, as it looks like Sven won the contest for King Konrad's

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<sup>227</sup> Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 137.

<sup>228</sup> DD 1.2, nr. 103; "Danmarks Riges Breve 1.1-2," nr. 103.

<sup>229</sup> Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 249.

favour. No sources speak of a German invasion of Denmark led by the king, or of military aid given to Knud. Sven achieved his goal, Konrad remained inactive, and the episode did not leave a mark in the narrative sources.

This example, then, seems to support the position that simply the promise of subordination and vassalage was not enough to gain military or economic support. At least not in the cases where one's rival already had an established social relation to the patron the exile was trying to court, which is not very surprising.

### **Sven in Wendland**

I shall now go on to discuss an example involving lordship and material aid that is minor, but still worth exploring. As the previous discussion indicates, King Sven was for a long time the leading candidate for the Danish throne in the conflicts that broke out after Erik Lam's abdication in 1146. Starting in 1152, however, he began to lose his considerable powerbase, and in 1154 he had to go into exile in order to avoid defeat at the hands of his enemies. In 1156, he allied with the duke of Saxony Heinrich der Löwe and orchestrated an invasion of Denmark. For a series of reasons that will not be discussed here, the attempted invasion failed and Sven had to go back into refuge in Germany.

“Not content with having begged assistance from the Saxons once,” writes Saxo scornfully after the recounting of Sven's failed attempt at regaining power in Denmark with the help of Duke Heinrich. He continues: “Sveno goes running to Henricus a second time, to get himself brought back to his own country by the Slavs under the duke's authority.”<sup>230</sup> Sven was successful in this endeavour and was according to *Gesta Danorum* shipped over to Fyn. Here we get a hint that the Wends' support for Sven might have been more comprehensive than just transport, for he promised those who joined him “peace and protection from the Slavs”.<sup>231</sup> In other words, it seems that the Wends at least to some degree did as Sven told them. The German chronicler Helmold of Bosau offers additional perspective on the incident. He gives no indication that the Wends fought for Sven, but he does write that he received “a few ships”<sup>232</sup> from the prince of the Obotrites, which in the context of twelfth-century Scandinavia must be considered military aid.

What is of interest here is the influence the duke of Saxony seems to exert over the Wends. In *Gesta Danorum* it is to Heinrich, not the Wendish princes themselves, that Sven

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<sup>230</sup> *GD*, 14.17.8.

<sup>231</sup> *GD*, 219.

<sup>232</sup> *CS*, ch. 85.

goes in order to gain Wendish support. In Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum*, the duke "ordered the Slavs in Oldenburg and in the land of the Abodrites to help Svein."<sup>233</sup> Here we are faced with a sort of indirect relationship between giver and recipient of aid. Sven's relationship does not seem to be to the Slavic princes at all, but rather to Duke Heinrich, who in turn had a bond of lordship to the Wends.

Though we cannot know for sure, it seems somewhat unlikely that Heinrich's control over his Wendish vassals were as strong as is indicated by Saxo and Helmold. Perhaps the duke was able to command the Slavs because the favour he was asking them was relatively small. It is also possible that Sven had to take the interests of the Wends themselves into consideration. We get some indication of this in the somewhat later source *Knytlinge saga*, which claims that Sven's transport to Fyn was not free, but that he had to pay for it.<sup>234</sup>

First and foremost, this example reveals some of the variety that could be found in the relationship between lordship and the giving of material support, as it is presented in the narrative sources. Sven is presented as to some extent being able to take advantage of the bond of lordship that seems to have existed between Duke Heinrich and the Wends. Unlike Knud, he did not promise vassalage to get hold of reinforcements. This suggests that lordship might not only have been a bargaining chip in the games between refugees and foreign magnates, but also a pre-existing social bond that political actors in need of support were able to use to their advantage.

### **Sigurd Slembedjagn: vassal of Erik Lam?**

Lordship is not explicitly mentioned in the sources dealing with Sigurd Slembedjagn's attempt to procure material support from the Danish king Erik Lam. We can therefore not say with certainty that the bond between Sigurd and Erik was between lord and vassal. However, I do think that Sigurd's behaviour, as portrayed in our most important source *Morkinskinna*, suggest a subordination to the Danish ruler. I would argue that Sigurd, like Knud Magnussen and Erling Skakke uses vassalage to encourage a more powerful ruler to support him with material resources.

Sigurd, like Harald Gille, claimed to be the son of the Norwegian king Magnus Berrføtt. He is said to have come to Norway in 1136, after a long period of travel in places

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<sup>233</sup> CS, ch. 85.

<sup>234</sup> *Knytlinge saga*, 147.

like Denmark, Orkney, Scotland, Saxony and even the Holy land.<sup>235</sup> Sigurd's relationship to Harald Gille was sour from the outset. The king tried to have his competitor drowned, and when the attempt was not successful Sigurd fled to Denmark. There he allegedly gave "proof of his ancestry"<sup>236</sup> with five bishops, but he could not have received much in the way of material support, for we read in *Morkinskinna* that he came back to Norway in secret and was kept hidden by some of his friends. Soon, Sigurd was able to avenge the attempt on his life when he had Harald murdered on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1136.<sup>237</sup>

This did not earn Sigurd many supporters, however. *Morkinskinna* tells that "almost everyone"<sup>238</sup> chose to support Harald Gille's sons Inge Krokrygg and Sigurd Haraldsson, who were only children at the time, over Sigurd Slembe. In an attempt to mend his considerable political misfortunes, Sigurd went to Trondheim around Christmas 1136 and joined up with the blind and castrated Magnus Sigurdsson, who had been confined to a monastery after his defeat at the hands of King Harald Gille. We are told that Sigurd "expected this move would increase his following, and that proved to be the case."<sup>239</sup>

At this point, we are told that Sigurd Slembe went west and the sagas shift their attention to the events surrounding Magnus. He allegedly convinced both the earl of Götaland Karl Sunesson and the Danish king to invade Norway by telling them it would be easy, and that they would not meet with any resistance.<sup>240</sup> That did not turn out to be true. The Danish invasion is described in *Morkinskinna* as a disaster, and the Danish ruler thought Magnus had lied about how ripe Norway was for the taking, and "said that he would never again be such a friend to them."<sup>241</sup>

Sigurd Slembe returned to Norway from the Western Isles after Magnus's attempts to involve Denmark in the Norwegian conflict had failed. *Morkinskinna* claims simply that

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<sup>235</sup> "Morkinskinna," in *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*, ed. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 84;

"Orkneyinga saga," in *Orkneyinga saga: the history of the Earls of Orkney* (London: Penguin, 1981), 98-99.

<sup>236</sup> *Msk*, ch. 86.

<sup>237</sup> *Msk*, ch. 86.

<sup>238</sup> *Msk*, ch. 86.

<sup>239</sup> *Msk*, ch. 87.

<sup>240</sup> The Danish king Magnus convinced to invade could have been either Erik Emune or Erik Lam. This uncertainty arises because if the chronology presented in the sagas is correct, Magnus must have arrived in Denmark in mid- to late-autumn of 1137. Erik Emune was supposedly murdered on 18<sup>th</sup> September of the same year. As Erik and Magnus had experienced a spectacular fall-out when Magnus had attempted to murder the Danish ruler during his exile in Norway, it is probably safe to assume that Erik would have been unwilling help his Norwegian colleague. The Norwegian historian P. A. Munch saw this as evidence that Erik Emune and his sworn brother Harald Gille had fallen out (Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie*, 2, 784), but it seems much more likely that Erik Emune was already dead when Magnus came to Denmark. For more, see: Stefan Pajung, "Erik Emune ca. 1090-1137," in *Danmarkshistorien.dk*, ed. Anne Sørensen (Aarhus Universitet: Institut for Kultur og Samfund, 2012).

<sup>241</sup> *Msk*, ch. 87.

Sigurd “came to Denmark”,<sup>242</sup> while *Heimskringla* goes into more detail. Snorre writes that Sigurd first “came east across the sea to Norway”,<sup>243</sup> but when he learned of Magnus’s political failures he realized that Norway would not be hospitable to him and went to Denmark.

Sigurd’s actions once he arrived there are very interesting. He did not behave as a passive refugee simply seeking out the king and petitioning him for support, which seems to have been quite a common practice. Such a course of action was most likely not open to him, as the failed invasion of Norway had made the Danish king hostile to the cause of Magnus and Sigurd. Rather than asking for aid and refuge, which he probably would not get, Sigurd seems to have taken a more proactive approach, and *Morkinskinna* tells that he “fought two battles, one (...) against the Wends”.<sup>244</sup> The Wends were, as we have seen before, a hereditary enemy of Denmark and the Danish monarchy, and it seems as if Sigurd was trying to curry favour with the Danish king by fighting his enemies, favour which would undoubtedly improve Sigurd’s chances of important Danish support in Norway.

After a brief visit to Germany, the author of *Morkinskinna* goes on to write that Sigurd went to Sweden before coming back to Denmark not long after. We should probably understand these travels as an attempt by Sigurd to build alliances outside of Denmark as well, but the author of the saga chose to emphasise Denmark, as this was where he was ultimately successful. When he came back to Denmark, we read that Sigurd “was befriended by many chieftains, and the king himself”.<sup>245</sup> Thus, it seems as if Sigurd’s strategy of courting the Danes with military favours had paid off with an improved relation to the king and his magnates. Sigurd would continue following this strategy by fighting more battles against the enemies of the Danish ruler, both against the Wends and against a man called Oluf,<sup>246</sup> who was the son of Erik Emune’s brother Harald Kesja, and thus a threat to Erik’s royal line.

At this point, we have to address the question of what kind of social relation existed between Sigurd and King Erik. *Morkinskinna* claims that Sigurd befriended the king, and it is not unlikely that Sigurd was trying to establish a relation to Erik Lam that was similar to the one that had existed between Erik Emune and Harald Gille, by making the king politically and militarily indebted to him. Thus, it is possible to argue that Sigurd Slembe should be

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<sup>242</sup> *Msk*, ch. 89.

<sup>243</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of the Sons of Harald," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 5.

<sup>244</sup> *Msk*, ch. 89.

<sup>245</sup> *Msk*, ch. 89.

<sup>246</sup> *Msk*, ch. 89.



discussed under the heading of friendship, and not that of lordship. The strongest argument for this is that our most important source to Sigurd's life uses the word "befriended" (*gørþi ser [...] at vinum*)<sup>247</sup> to describe the bond that was established between him and King Erik of Denmark.

However, even though the word used is one reflecting friendship, I think Sigurd's behaviour suggests a much more unequal relationship. Specifically, Sigurd's repeated military favours to the king, seemingly without involving any kind of reciprocity makes it tempting to speculate that Sigurd was in fact in Erik Lam's service. I think this point is strengthened when we consider that Sigurd was a man who in a sense was divorced from the Norwegian political establishment. He had spent many of his earlier years travelling Europe and the East, and we have seen how he was repeatedly unable to establish alliances and garner support inside Norway. For such a man it must have made sense to serve a foreign lord, especially as he had done so before, both on the Orkneys and in Scotland.

That the sources do not speak of Erik Lam as Sigurd's lord is not necessarily surprising. According to translators and editors Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade the great detail with which *Morkinskinna* recounts the story of Sigurd is not original to this saga, but was rather taken directly or in large parts from a book called *Hryggjarstykki*, written by Eiríkr Oddsson.<sup>248</sup> Literary historian Bjarni Guðnason thinks that *Hryggjarstykki* was primarily focused on Sigurd and provided a hagiographic account of his life, which the author of *Morkinskinna* adopted.<sup>249</sup> Considering such a hagiographic emphasis, it would be understandable if the author Eiríkr Oddsson wanted to downplay any subordination to a different king.

In the subsequent sections of the sources, we hear of several expeditions to Norway initiated by Sigurd Slembe and Magnus Blinde.<sup>250</sup> None of them seems to have been very successful however, and more importantly, none seem to have included aid from Denmark. Sigurd's considerable attempts at healing the relationship between the Danish king and his own faction had not been enough. During the autumn of 1139, however, we finally get clear indications in the sources that Sigurd and Magnus got their military support from the Danish ruler. *Morkinskinna* records that they came north with thirty ships, and that "Their troops

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<sup>247</sup> "Morkinskinna," in *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 1932), 420.

<sup>248</sup> Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, "Introduction," in *Morkinskinna: the earliest Icelandic chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*, ed. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>249</sup> Andersson and Gade, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>250</sup> *Msk*, ch. 89-90.

were both Danish and Norwegian”.<sup>251</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> November, Sigurd Slembe and Magnus Blinde met the forces of the child kings Inge Krokrygg and Sigurd Munn. The Danish troops, whom we have been given the impression that Sigurd Slembe worked so hard to obtain, proved far from decisive. “In the very first clash” writes the author of *Morkinskinna* “the Danes withdrew with eighteen ships and returned home”.<sup>252</sup> Thus, the battle went disastrously for Sigurd and Magnus. After the Danes had left with the majority of the fleet, the remaining ships were boarded and cleared. Magnus was allegedly killed during the battle together with most of the fighting men, and Sigurd was captured when he tried to flee, eventually leading to his execution by torture.<sup>253</sup>

If it is correct as I have argued above, that the Danish king’s relationship to Sigurd Slembe can be interpreted as one of lordship, the practice it portrays is similar to the one expressed in Knud Magnussen’s letter to Konrad III of Germany. Sigurd seems to have used a bond of lordship to gain the trust of Erik Lam, and to make it worthwhile for Erik to support him. Where Sigurd differs from Knud is that Sigurd instead of promising future loyalty fought actively for the interests of the Danish king. Fighting multiple battles for him would presumably increase the chances that King Erik would support Sigurd with money and men, and in the end, Sigurd was indeed successful in winning support, unlike Knud.

## Conclusion

The relationship between lordship and the giving of material support functioned in a few different ways. Most importantly, our sources portray lordship, or the promise of it, as being used actively by political actors as a means to gain resources from powerful rulers abroad. Men like Knud Magnussen and Sigurd Slembedjagn promised their loyalty and services to rulers like Konrad of Germany or Erik of Denmark in return for material aid, or at least the possibility of it. Such a strategy makes sense when we bear in mind how Gerd Althoff has argued that a lord was expected to be generous. Establishing a bond of lordship to a foreign ruler must have made it possible to take advantage of these expectations.

This was also the strategy employed by Erling Skakke in the example analysed in the previous chapter. If the sagas are to be believed, Erling first promised King Valdemar lordship over Viken in return for economic support. When Erling was unwilling later on to conform to the terms of the agreement, a long conflict with the Danish monarch ensued. The

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<sup>251</sup> *Msk*, ch. 92.

<sup>252</sup> *Msk*, ch. 92.

<sup>253</sup> *Msk*, ch. 92.

conflict was resolved in 1170, and again Erling used lordship as political tool. Erling granted Valdemar control over Viken, but the king agreed to let Erling rule the region as his earl.<sup>254</sup> This subordination to Valdemar ensured Erling, and especially his son Magnus, the possibility of going to Denmark for military reinforcements when the need arose. A possibility that proved vitally important in the wars between King Magnus Erlingsson and Sverre.<sup>255</sup>

Sven Grathe's support from the Wends at the behest of Heinrich of Saxony has provided a different example of how lordship could play a role when material resources were given across frontiers. Here, we saw how a potentate's bond of lordship to a third party could impact how military aid was given. A different perspective was also provided by the relationship between Knud Magnussen and count Adolf of Holstein, where we saw how lordship could establish a political alliance which could in turn serve as a foundation for the exchange of material resources. Most of our examples, however, have shown how the offer of subordination to foreign rulers could be used as a political tool by political actors who needed help from abroad, as offers of symbolic subordination and promises of political services in the future made it more likely that a neighbouring potentate would offer valuable aid.

## **Social bonds – Conclusions**

Because of the great emphasis laid on personal relationship in the recent scholarship on medieval Scandinavia, we have in this chapter tried to understand how social bonds between individuals among the Scandinavian political elite influenced the practice wherein rulers and potentates gave material support in the form of economic funding or military reinforcements to petitioners coming from abroad. We have examined four kinds of relations: kinship, in-laws, friendship and lordship.

In our analysis of kinship, we found that this bond was an important facilitator of refuge and material support. This was perhaps best exemplified by Knud Magnussen, who had a long history of seeking help from a variety of foreign patrons, but when he went into exile, his first impulse seems to have been to seek support from his relatives. However, leaning on the work of historians like Gerd Althoff, Lars Hermanson and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, we also found that kinship was clearly not sufficiently important to ensure material support. Political interests, not obligations to family, made Valdemar fund Erling's war in Norway, and the case of Knud Magnussen's journey to Poland showed how kinship and the claims to inheritance

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<sup>254</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 30; *GD*, 14.41.3.

<sup>255</sup> See: Karl Jónsson, "Sverris saga," in *Sverrisaga : the Saga of King Sverri of Norway*, ed. J. Sephton (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1994), ch. 48 and 78.

that followed it could make a political actor seeking aid seem more like a threat than an ally.

In the case of relations between in-laws, our most important observation was that these bonds differ somewhat from kinship in that they could be constructed, and we saw Erik Emune actively use marriage to gain military support from his in-law King Magnus of Norway.

On the matter of friendship, our most thought-provoking conclusion concerned friendships of a very specific kind. We found that our saga sources portray the relationship between the kings Harald Gille and Erik Emune as sworn brotherhood (*bræðralag*), and we saw this bond function as a kind of military alliance. As such, the sagas portray it as politically demanding, with the social obligations following an oath of brotherhood being seen more important than the personal interests. This would be in line with Lars Hermanson's theories regarding sworn brotherhood, and it makes this relationship unique among the social bonds we have studied in this chapter. Saxo does not mention brotherhood, but takes a more general approach and writes that Harald was Erik's friend (*amicus*), and consequently *Gesta Danorum* puts more emphasis on the self-interest of the political actors than on social obligations.

Lordship differs from the other social bonds we have analysed, in that this bond was usually not a pre-existing relation one could take advantage of, but rather a bond that could be established in order to secure material aid. Political actors like Knud Magnussen, Erling Skakke and probably Sigurd Slembedjajn promised foreign patrons lordship over them in return for the resources they needed to regain their political positions at home. In these cases, the considerations of the interests of the hosts were of course absolutely central.

We can separate the impact of social bonds on material support from abroad into two categories. First, social networks stretched all across Scandinavia and Northern-Europe, and constituted *pre-existing webs*, of which political actors were able to take advantage. Pre-existing relationships across the borders of kingdoms have been an important determiner of where political actors sought aid, especially if the bond between giver and recipient was one of kinship, friendship or marriage. Second, social bonds could be *established* with the express purpose of procuring material aid from abroad. This was apparent in our investigation into marital relations, and even more so with bonds of lordship.

While social bonds were clearly important as a way of facilitating the exchange of material resources across borders, they were not enough to ensure a political actor material aid. The personal and political considerations of the potentate granting support seem to have outweighed any social obligations that might have existed between him and the recipient.

Granted, there are a number of examples in the sources of a foreign potentate giving aid to his kinsmen or in-laws, but in these instances, the sources make it very clear that it was in his own interests to do so. Thus, we have no examples in the sources of material resources being given against the best interests of a patron. Political interests, then, not obligations to social bonds, explain why material support was exchanged between political actors from different kingdoms. In the following chapter, we shall turn our attention to these interests.

## CHAPTER 3

### WHY GIVE MATERIAL SUPPORT?

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In the previous chapter, we discussed what bound refugee and host together, and whether the social interplay between the two influenced or changed the way material support was given. In the following chapter, we shall shift our attention, and look specifically at the political actors who gave aid. We shall examine their political situations, their interests and standings, and try to understand how these influenced the inclination to lend support.

We have already seen several examples of relationships between giver and recipient of aid in which a patron gave economic and military resources primarily because it was in his own interest to do so. In this chapter, we shall look closer at the political motives of the political actors giving support, and we shall try to uncover what these motives were. What reasons did kings and magnates have for supporting refugees? Were they completely different or can they all be reduced to one dominant motive? In what way did the political situation and standing of a potentate influence his ability to, and interest in, supporting a petitioner coming from abroad?

The cases we shall consider fall into three general categories. First, we have the instances where political actors took in and supported refugees because they faced some political threat, perceived or actual, which supporting a refugee's ambitions could help alleviate. If a royal refugee was successful, his supporter would have a dependant ruler on the throne of a neighbouring polity. Secondly, there are cases where support was given because of some compensation, whether political or economic. We can say that these are different from the ones involving threat because the supporter was not as dependent upon the refugee's success and hence more willing to demand compensation. We might also say that in the instances where a host supported a refugee because he wanted compensation, the element of

reciprocity is more explicitly stated in the sources. Lastly, we have examples, some of which we have already come into contact with, where it appears that giving money or reinforcements to foreign political actors was of relatively low priority. These cases are hard to detect, as they are most likely highly underreported in the sources. The reason for this being that narrative accounts have little reason to concern themselves with what did *not* happen. It is therefore of great importance to discuss the instances where we do in fact have accounts of hosts deciding not to support a refugee with material aid, as our understanding of host interests would not be complete without doing so.

## Political threat

### Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen

We shall begin our discussion by considering the case of Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen's support for the claimant to the Danish throne Knud Magnussen. As hinted at in the analysis of kinship and material support, the relationship between Hartwig and Knud is particularly interesting because as far as we are aware, there was no pre-established social bond between the two. Even so, the archbishop was willing to support Knud with resources, which makes him very interesting as an object for study when we are considering how interests governed the giving of material support. Hartwig is also interesting because Saxo, who apart from the relatively brief account by Helmold of Bosau, is the only source recounting the relationship, gives us quite extensive information about the archbishop's motive for helping the Danish king.

Knud Magnussen had fled Denmark after his defeat in the battle of Viborg in 1151, and had first sought refuge and support from his relatives in Sweden and Poland. After being unsuccessful there, Knud came to Saxony where he according to Saxo petitioned Duke Heinrich for help. When the duke was not willing to give Knud what he needed, he turned to the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, where, if *Gesta Danorum* is to be believed, "at last he borrowed the wherewithal to fight a war."<sup>256</sup> There can be little doubt that we are dealing with an instance where material support was given.

The use of the word "borrowing" (*mutuatus*)<sup>257</sup> is peculiar, however, and could be one of the few instances in the sources where we get some insight into the actual workings of

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<sup>256</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, "Gesta Danorum," in *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia Books X-XVI*, ed. Eric Christiansen (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981), 14.5.4.

<sup>257</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, "Gesta Danorum," in *Gesta Danorum Danmarkshistorien Bog 11-16*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen (København: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Gads Forlag, 2005), 14.5.4.

support from abroad. Borrowing of military or economic means from foreign magnates might have been ordinary, but we do not know that for certain because the sources are generally not interested in *how* political actors received support from abroad, but simply *that* they did so. Another possible explanation for the irregularity might be that Knud had to borrow aid from Hartwig because there was no social bond between them. In an age when personal relationships were so important as the basis of political action, perhaps the lack of a bond of kinship, friendship or similar made Hartwig doubt whether Knud would in fact further the archbishop's goals if he became king. This distrust could have led to the somewhat unusual action of Hartwig giving aid to Knud as a loan, although we have also seen that social bonds were by no means a guarantee of political loyalty.

Saxo's use of the word "borrow" might also tell us something about what kind of aid Knud received in Germany. It is of course possible that Knud was lent troops, and a later passage in *Gesta Danorum* which states that he invaded Jutland with "an army of foreigners"<sup>258</sup> supports such a conclusion. However, I think that if we keep in mind that the aid was borrowed, it makes more sense to assume that Knud received money, which is after all easier to pay back, and that he then spent this money on recruiting an army in Saxony.

So why did Archbishop Hartwig choose to support Knud, even though there was no personal bond connecting the two? What interests did Hartwig have that made it worthwhile to fund the military campaign of a Danish pretender? Here, Saxo is uncharacteristically clear. He writes that Hartwig "had long been hostile to the Danes because they were exempt from his jurisdiction."<sup>259</sup> Hamburg-Bremen had been the archbishopric with jurisdiction over Denmark, Norway and Sweden, as well as Iceland and the other Western Isles, but had lost this primacy when the archbishopric of Lund was established in 1104.<sup>260</sup> According to Saxo, Archbishop Hartwig saw in the possibility of Knud Magnussen becoming sole ruler of Denmark the potential to restore his authority in the north. To do so was, according to Danish medievalist Carsten Breengaard, of existential importance.<sup>261</sup>

Breengaard writes that the unusually large archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen had originally been established as a centre for missionary activity in the north, and had thus become more and more of an anachronism as church institutions evolved in Scandinavia in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. The anachronistic nature of Hamburg-Bremen

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<sup>258</sup> *GD*, 14.5.4.

<sup>259</sup> *GD*, 14.5.4.

<sup>260</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Kristninga i Norden 750-1200* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2003), 68-69.

<sup>261</sup> Carsten Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170* (København: Gads Forlag, 1982), 176.

made it possible for Rome to exert some influence over the archbishopric, as it was always a threat that church authority in the North could be transferred from Germany to the Scandinavian countries themselves.<sup>262</sup> This was of course what eventually happened with the establishment of the archbishopric of Lund in 1104, because the papacy, according to Breengaard, wanted to limit German influence in Scandinavia, and in practice it had proved difficult to conduct Nordic church policy through Hamburg-Bremen.<sup>263</sup> This was a major problem for the archbishops, for without control over the Scandinavian churches it was questionable whether their see had the legitimate right to be an archbishopric at all, and it was a distinct possibility that this elevated status could be taken away.<sup>264</sup>

Once Lund had been established, there were according to Breengaard only two possibilities for the German archbishops to re-establish their control in Scandinavia. Hamburg-Bremen was, and had always been, a close supporter of the emperor, so if the emperor was able to make the pope politically dependent on himself, it was conceivable that the archdiocese could experience resurgence. This was exactly what happened when King Lothar III helped Pope Innocent II defeat his rival Anacletus II after the double papal election of 1130. After this, the authority of Hamburg-Bremen over the Nordic church was briefly re-established, before being taken away again after Lothar's death, when the Pope Innocent was no longer indebted to him.<sup>265</sup> Secondly, the German emperor could increase his political influence over Denmark, which would also open the possibility for a re-establishment of the primacy of Hamburg-Bremen.<sup>266</sup> Royal pretenders like Knud attempting to curry favour with kings like Konrad III, or later Friedrich Barbarossa, made such German influence in Denmark a distinct possibility.

Saxo's description of Knud's stay in Germany suggests a third way in which the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen could increase his authority. Hartwig did not rely on the emperor gaining influence in Denmark or Rome. Rather, he struck an agreement directly with a candidate to the Danish throne, giving him support presumably in return for a promise that Knud would restore Hamburg-Bremen if he defeated Sven. The archbishop did not have to go through the intermediary of the emperor, but could gain influence in Denmark personally and

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<sup>262</sup> Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 176.

<sup>263</sup> Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 180.

<sup>264</sup> Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 176.

<sup>265</sup> Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 215, 39. See also: Michael H. Gelting, "Da Eskil ville være ærkebiskop af Roskilde: Roskildekrøniken, Liber Daticus og det danske ærkestedes ophævelse 1133-1138," in *Ett Annat 1100-Tal - Individ, kollektiv och kulturella mönster i medeltidens Danmark*, ed. Peter Carelli, Lars Hermanson, and Hanne Sanders (Göteborg: Makadam Förlag, 2004).

<sup>266</sup> Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 177-78.



directly, by supporting a Danish king's bid for the throne, and thus assure his gratitude.

Hartwig could of course not be sure whether Knud would honour his promises, and the fact that the archbishop would later support Knud's rival Sven when he was in exile and Knud ruled in Denmark suggests that Knud disappointed his German patron. However, we have to keep in mind that Knud's invasion of Denmark from Saxony failed. His return to power in Denmark came about through different means, and he therefore may not have owed Hartwig anything. Thus, the support for Sven when he had to go into refuge some years later might have been another desperate attempt at safeguarding his own position by trying to place the right man on the Danish throne.

Despite the uncertainties concerning the outcome, the archbishop had to take a chance on Knud Magnussen, as he was facing a serious threat to his own political power. To get out of this difficult situation he depended on a shift in the balance of power between the papacy, the German empire and Denmark. In an attempt to bring forth such a shift, his choice of political strategy was to support a Danish royal refugee, who, if successful, could further Hartwig's interests.

A different interpretation of the relationship between Hartwig and Knud is offered by Lone Liljefalk and Stefan Pajung. With reference to Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum*, they argue that the reason for the archbishop's support for the Danish king had to do with animosity between Hartwig and Heinrich der Löwe. The two had for a long time been in conflict over the appointment of bishops, as well over some land the duke is supposed to have confiscated from Hartwig's family. At the time of Knud's exile, King Sven was allied to Heinrich, and so the reason why Knud received aid from Hartwig was that the archbishop needed an ally in his struggle against the duke.<sup>267</sup> It is not certain what the archbishop would get out of having Knud as an ally against Heinrich. Perhaps future military aid, or perhaps a supporter on the Danish throne was leverage enough. What is clear is that like Saxo's account, this interpretation sees Hartwig as giving material aid because he was politically threatened and needed a powerful ally who owed him favours.

### **Birger Brosa**

We see this pattern repeating itself if we shift our attention to the Swedish magnate Birger Brosa, who during the latter half of the twelfth century supported several refugees, coming

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<sup>267</sup> Lone Liljefalk and Stefan Pajung, "Hemolds Slaverkrønike som kilde til Danmarks, Vendens og Nordtysklands historie," (*Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift* 113, no. 1 (2014): 26-27.

from both Norway and Denmark, with resources. His contributions were given mainly to relatively minor political actors, and the role Birger played as a patron on the periphery of Scandinavian politics is therefore easy to forget, as it does not fit into any one dominant narrative.

Birger was a central political figure in Sweden during the twelfth century. He was an important ally of the long-reigning Knut I, and Birger himself held the title of Earl of the Swedes and the Goths from 1174 until his death in 1202. The Earl was related to the Danish royal saint Knud IV through his grandfather, who according to Saxo had abducted the king's daughter.<sup>268</sup> It was this royal descent that brought to Birger's household the two Danish refugees Knud and Karl Karlsen, who were also descendants of Knud IV on their father's side. According to Saxo Grammaticus, who is our only source to these events, the brothers had been two of the most important supporters of Magnus, son of King Erik Lam, in his conspiracy to murder King Valdemar in 1176. Valdemar eventually learnt of the plot and when this became known to the conspirators they decided to flee the country. Magnus fled to Saxony and the court of Duke Heinrich, and Knud and Karl to Birger in Götaland.

After this, the brothers disappear from Saxo's narrative for a time, before they suddenly show up two years later when they invaded Halland "trying to punish their country for the exile they had earned by their own crime."<sup>269</sup> The invasion proved unsuccessful. According to Saxo, Knud and Karl had hoped that the people of Halland would come to their aid. Rather, the opposite happened and the brothers had to fight a battle against the people they had hoped would support them. In the clash, Karl fell and Knud was captured and locked up in the castle of Söborg together with his ally Magnus Eriksen, who had also been captured sometime before. Even though Saxo does not say so explicitly, I think we can safely assume that Knud and Karl's invasion came about through the support of Earl Birger Brosa, as they invaded Halland, which is right next to Götaland. In fact, Saxo emphasises that the battle that put an end to the invasion took place on the border between Halland and Götaland.<sup>270</sup>

In addition to the Danish pretenders Knud and Karl, the earl also harboured and aided the Norwegian rebel faction called the Birchlegs. We saw in our discussion of marital relations that the group was led, at least nominally, by Øystein Møyyla, a grandson of Harald Gille. Øystein and his supporters could seek refuge and aid from Birger because the Swedish earl was married to Brigida who was the daughter of King Harald, making Birger Øystein's

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<sup>268</sup> Nat. Beckman, "Birger Brosa," in *Svensk biografiskt lexikon* (Stockholm: Riksarkivet, 1924).

<sup>269</sup> *GD*, 15.2.1.

<sup>270</sup> *GD*, 15.2.1.

uncle-in-law. According to *Fagrskinna*, the earl gave the Norwegian rebels generous military and economic aid.<sup>271</sup>

So why did Birger Jarl harbour and support Danish and Norwegian refugees on the scale that he did? One answer might be that his policy was the product of his marriage. By marrying the daughter of Harald Gille, Birger had unwittingly married into a branch of the Norwegian royal family that would be pushed aside when Erling Skakke put his son on the throne after the death of Inge Krokrygg in 1161. Thus, it is not surprising that descendants of Harald Gille turned to Birger when they were in need of support against King Magnus Erlingsson and his father. This would also be in line with the conclusions from the preceding chapter, where we saw how social bonds were an important determiner of where political actors chose to seek support when they went abroad. However, we also found that social bonds in themselves generally do not explain why economic or military support was given. While there is little doubt that Birger's marriage to Brigida played an important role in bringing Norwegian petitioners for aid to Götland, we should look for a political motive for why Birger chose to spend his resources supporting them.

I think such a political motive can be found in the alliance that was established in 1170 between Erling Skakke who was the de-facto ruler of Norway, and King Valdemar of Denmark. The two had been in violent conflict prior to 1170, but that year a treaty was signed in Ringsted, which according to Snorre ensured that Erling would be "at peace with the Danish king ever after."<sup>272</sup> Denmark was now closed off to Norwegian refugees. No longer could pretenders seeking to topple the reigning regime seek aid from the Danish king, as they had so often done in the past. That did not mean that opponents of the rulers stopped seeking foreign support, but it did mean that they sought it elsewhere, most notably with Birger Brosa. I would argue that this alliance between the rulers of Denmark and Norway not only supplied the earl with a steady stream of refugees, it also put him in a very difficult position politically. Götland bordered both kingdoms and it should not surprise us if Birger felt existentially threatened by a peace between his two neighbours. Erling Skakke did after all spend much of his political career fighting and often killing the descendants of Harald Gille who was Birger's father-in-law. His support for refugees seeking to oust the rulers of both Denmark and Norway was probably an attempt to lighten this political pressure by replacing the rulers

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<sup>271</sup> "Fagrskinna," in *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Alison Finlay (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ch. 130.

<sup>272</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of Magnús Erlingsson," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).ch. 30

to the east and south with kings who were less friendly towards each other and friendlier towards himself.

## **Conclusion**

Both Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen and Birger Brosa are presented in the sources as having supported refugees with military and economic aid because they felt politically threatened. Hartwig because of the status of his archbishopric after the establishment of the independent church province of Lund in 1104, and Birger because of the alliance between Valdemar of Denmark and Erling Skakke in Norway, which left the earl surrounded by enemies.

Birger and Hartwig were therefore faced with a fundamental problem. How to alleviate a political threat when that threat originated somewhere they did not have an established powerbase? How to wield influence where they had none? Hartwig could not change Danish church-policy from Germany, and Birger was not powerful enough to challenge the alliance between Erling and Valdemar. Their solution was to turn to the practice wherein royal pretenders sought material support abroad. By spending their resources on funding claimants to the Danish and Norwegian thrones, the archbishop and the earl hoped to gain vital political capital in their neighbouring kingdoms. It seems clear, then, that being threatened by the ruling regime in a nearby kingdom could be an important reason for why a potentate might choose to support a refugee. That certainly seems to have been the case when the supplicant in question was a king.

## **Promise of compensation**

### **Count Adolf of Holstein**

In the previous chapter, we discussed material support and lordship and we saw how Helmold of Bosau portrays Knud Magnussen as establishing himself as Count Adolf II of Holstein's overlord in return for a political alliance. This alliance, we read, had been established because the Danish kings had competed for the counts favour, and "sent messengers with gifts, presenting many and promising greater ones."<sup>273</sup> Knud had been the candidate Adolf liked best.

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<sup>273</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), ch. 67.

So how should we understand the role played by Adolf's interests in his relationship to King Knud? What practice does Helmold portray? Clearly, the giving of gifts is an attempt by Knud to establish a social relation, as we have seen historians like Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Gerd Althoff stress the intimate connection between gift giving and establishment of such bonds.<sup>274</sup> However, I think we should see the Danish royal claimants approaching the count of Holstein with gifts not only as an attempt to establish a social bond, but also as an attempt to buy his support. This is clearly indicated by the competition for Adolf's favour between the two rivals, each of them promising greater gifts. Helmold seems to draw a direct connection between the gifts given by Knud and the military aid he would eventually receive from the count.

Adolf II is therefore quite different from Archbishop Hartwig and Birger Brosa as a giver of aid. Where Hartwig and Birger can be said to have been politically dependent on refugees to achieve their political goals, Adolf is courted by the Danish kings wanting his support. Where Hartwig and Knud Magnussen need each other in almost equal measure, it is clear that it is Adolf who has the upper hand in his dealing with Knud and Sven. He can decide whom to support not out of political necessity, but rather short-term economic gain. The count is clearly outside of the internal conflict in Denmark, but Helmold presents him as being such an important ally that the claimants to the throne are willing to compete for the support he is able to give. A very similar situation can be found in both Helmold's and Saxo's short but interesting descriptions of Knud Magnussen's attempt to obtain the support of Heinrich der Löwe.

### **Duke Heinrich of Saxony**

According to Saxo's account in *Gesta Danorum*, Knud Magnussen unsuccessfully approached the Duke of Saxony for support after he had been equally unsuccessful in Sweden and Poland, and right before he secured aid from the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. By analysing why Knud's overtures to Heinrich failed, we should be able to learn something about the importance of host interest, as I shall argue that a lack of adequate compensation was the prime reason why the duke of Saxony was unwilling to give aid to his Danish neighbour.

Saxo's description of Knud's attempts at allying with Heinrich is frustratingly brief.

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<sup>274</sup> Gerd Althoff, *Family, friends and followers: political and social bonds in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106-07; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Den vennlige vikingen: vennskapets makt i Norge og på Island 900-1300* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2010), 25-31.

He simply notes that Knud “was even more disappointed”<sup>275</sup> by the duke than his Polish relatives. What does Saxo mean by this? What seems clear is that Knud wanted material aid from Heinrich, as that was what he had been hoping to obtain from his relatives in Poland. It seems equally clear that his attempt turned out unsuccessful, but that is all the information we can glean from *Gesta Danorum*.

Helmold’s chronicle might be helpful in expanding the picture. Here we read that: “The princes of the Slavs (...) respected him [Duke Heinrich], but especially did the kings of the Danes who, oppressed by intestine warfare, vied in coming before him with gifts.”<sup>276</sup> Interestingly, this is similar to the case of Count Adolf; Helmold sees the Danish pretenders’ competition for Heinrich’s favour as a product of the conflict between them. They court him because of their “intestine warfare”, or in other words because they needed him as an ally. Furthermore, we see for a second time that Helmold emphasises the giving of gifts as the means by which Danish kings establish bonds to, and gain support from, German lords.

While these gifts probably had a social function, it seems clear that to gain the support of Heinrich der Löwe was a costly affair, which was probably made even costlier by Knud not being the only Danish king who wanted Heinrich on his side. We might have an explanation, then, as to why Knud was “disappointed” by the Saxon duke. It is possible that he did not have the necessary resources to compete with Sven for Heinrich’s favour. This makes sense if we consider what we know of Knud’s economic situation. He had supposedly sold his land in Sweden and bought a single ship as well as some provisions, which does not exactly give an impression of great wealth. It is not impossible that he increased his resources somewhat with the help of his Polish relatives, but the sources give us no reason to think so. Knud thus appears to have been an impoverished politician when he arrived in Saxony, with what he had to offer primarily being the possibility of future favours from the King of Denmark.

This image of Duke Heinrich as a man whose support had to be bought fits nicely into the understanding of him that we get from both the sources and the work of modern historians. In Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*, there are two separate passages, apart from the one in question, where we get the impression that an alliance with Heinrich has to be bought. The first deals with Sven offering the duke “a great deal of money” (*pecuniam ingentem*)<sup>277</sup> for his aid, the second occurs some time later and concerns King Valdemar’s attempt to secure Heinrich’s support against the Wends. Saxo writes that Valdemar “promises the satrap of

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<sup>275</sup> *GD*, 14.5.4.

<sup>276</sup> *CS*, ch. 70.

<sup>277</sup> *GD*, 14.17.1.

Saxony a great reward if he becomes his partner in a military expedition".<sup>278</sup> Similarly, the German chronicler Helmold of Bosau held a somewhat negative view of Heinrich because he, in the words of Helmold's translator Francis Joseph Tschan, "in his earlier years thought more of collecting tribute from the Slavs than making Christ known to them".<sup>279</sup> Heinrich's biographer, Karl Jordan, presents him similarly in *Henry the Lion: A Biography*. Jordan writes of the duke that, "He made use of his wealth to achieve political ends, and did his best to increase it by exacting a financial price for political or military aid".<sup>280</sup>

We might therefore have a satisfactory explanation for why Knud was unable to gain the support of the duke of Saxony. As an impoverished refugee, he simply did not have the financial muscles required to do so. From this explanation of Knud's inability to gain Heinrich's support, we are able to draw conclusions about Heinrich himself and how his interests shaped his willingness to give away military and economic resources. Heinrich seems to have been a man for whom the prospect of economic compensation was of central importance when it came to giving aid to exiles like Knud. As a supporter, Heinrich is similar to Adolf in many ways, but most importantly in that his political position allowed him to demand something in return for his much sought-after resources. Heinrich's great power and proximity to the Danish kingdom made him a coveted ally, which in turn offered him the opportunity of only supporting the royal claimant who was most to his liking, which in Heinrich's case seems to have meant the one most willing to fill the duke's coffers. Unlike Hartwig, Heinrich was also fortunate in that he was not dependent on Knud's success, which meant that he could demand concrete compensation in return for support, and not settle for a promise of future political favours.

### **Valdemar the Great**

Like Adolf of Holstein and Heinrich der Löwe, the Danish monarch Valdemar the Great also demanded compensation for supporting a refugee with material aid. Where Heinrich and Adolf's prices seem to have been economic, however, Valdemar received a political reward in return for the aid he provided the Norwegian magnate Erling Skakke.

In our analysis of kinship we saw how Erling Skakke, according to the accounts in the sagas, had to offer the Danish king control over the region of Viken around the Oslo fjord in

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<sup>278</sup> *GD*, 14.24.4.

<sup>279</sup> Francis Joseph Tschan, "Introduction," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 29.

<sup>280</sup> Karl Jordan, *Henry the Lion: a biography*, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 217.

return for material resources with which we could defeat his enemies in Norway and place his son on the throne. This agreement was to be fulfilled when Erling had defeated his enemies, but as soon as that happened, the Norwegian magnate refused to hand over control of Viken, which in turn gave rise to a conflict between the two men. After two failed Danish invasions of Norway and some Norwegian skirmishes in Denmark during the latter half of the 1160s, the struggle came to an end when a peace was negotiated, most likely in 1170. The circumstances of this treaty are recorded somewhat differently in Saxo's chronicle and the Norse sagas, although our sources generally seem to agree on the content of the agreement.

Snorre states that Erling's wife Kristin went to Denmark during the autumn of 1165 to negotiate with King Valdemar. We read that she was well received and after some cordial talks with the king, she sent word for her husband: "praying him to have a meeting with the Danish king and come to an agreement with him."<sup>281</sup> Erling came and after some initial suspicion, he reached an agreement with Valdemar. The king would receive the land he was promised in 1161, but Erling would rule it for him as his earl.<sup>282</sup> Snorre concludes his discussion of this conflict noting that Erling remained "at peace with the Danish king ever after."<sup>283</sup>

Saxo dates this settlement much later, to 1170, and he says that it took place during a great meeting in Ringsted where Valdemar's son Knud was crowned king. In Saxo's narrative, it was not Kristin, but the bishop of Oslo who initiated the negotiations, but the result was the same. Erling was sent word for and was eventually reconciled with King Valdemar. In *Gesta Danorum*, the settlement is described in more detail: Erling would become a vassal of the Danish king and contribute 60 ships to his fleets whenever needed.<sup>284</sup> The Norwegian historian Knut Helle interprets this as expressing that Erling would become Valdemar's earl in Viken, as the contribution of this region to the *leidang* fleet was set to 60 ships.<sup>285</sup> Further, Erling would raise Valdemar's son (most likely the future King Valdemar II) and make him an earl in Norway. If King Magnus died without an heir, the throne would be inherited by the Danish prince. Saxo ends his treatment of this topic by noting that Erling made the treaty known on the thing in Norway "praising the good faith of the Danes."<sup>286</sup>

This treaty is interesting because it shows with such clarity what Valdemar wanted to

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<sup>281</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 29.

<sup>282</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 30.

<sup>283</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 30.

<sup>284</sup> *GD*, 14.41.3.

<sup>285</sup> Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat: 1130-1319* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 71.

<sup>286</sup> *GD*, 14.41.3.



get out of his relationship to Erling, and I think it is possible to use the agreement of 1170 to understand the importance of Valdemar's interests when he decided to fund Erling during his refuge in Denmark in the beginning of the 1160s. It is clear that Valdemar's priority was getting control over the traditionally Danish-ruled region of Viken. This goal was so important to Valdemar that when Erling broke his agreement, the Danish king flexed his military muscles and invaded Norway, not once, but twice. This could lead us to believe that Valdemar was different from Count Adolf and Duke Heinrich, and more like Archbishop Hartwig in that he was politically dependent on the success of the refugee he supported. This would not be correct, however, and here we can again look to the peace agreement between Erling and Valdemar in order to gain understanding of how the king's political standing shaped the relationship between them.

It is crucial to keep in mind that prior to the treaty of Ringsted in 1170, King Valdemar does not seem to have won any significant victories against Erling. His invasions are presented as failures and mistakes in both the sagas and in Saxo's Danish history. Consequently, it does not seem as if Erling had lost anything of significance. Despite of this, he seems almost desperate to end his conflict with the Danish king. Snorre writes of Erling that he "would on no account be without [Valdemar's] friendship",<sup>287</sup> and when it comes to the treaty, he was willing to put Viken in Danish hands simply in return for an end to the conflict. Erling's behaviour during the negotiation in Ringsted clearly suggest that he saw himself as politically dependent on a functioning relationship to King Valdemar. Otherwise, he would not have been so willing to give up Viken, which he had fought so hard to keep in the preceding years. The peace agreement gives us a sense of the balance of power between Erling and Valdemar, and it is obvious that the Danish king was the strongest party. Erling depended on a good relationship to his neighbour, it does not seem like the same can be said for Valdemar.

If we can conclude that Erling was dependent on Valdemar in 1170, when he was in effect ruling Norway, it should be uncontroversial to claim that he would have been even more dependent on him as an exile during the early 1160s. Valdemar's role during this exile is clearly similar to the one played by Heinrich der Löwe: that of the powerful host, able to demand great concessions of his politically weak guest. The difference, it seems, was that where Heinrich demanded economic compensation, Valdemar wanted a political one. An added difference was of course that in that the relationship between Erling and the Danish

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<sup>287</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 30.

ruler was probably regulated to some extent by the bond of kinship between Valdemar and Erling's son. Nonetheless, it seems clear that Valdemar's own interests, namely his desire for control over Viken, was the driving force behind the support he gave Erling. Furthermore, we get the sense that Valdemar was able to make these demands because of his strong political position, and the importance to Erling of the aid Valdemar was able to give.

## **Conclusion**

In this section, we have looked at instances of potentates who supplied foreign political actors with economic and material resources because of an expectation of concrete compensation. We have seen that the potentates who demanded such compensation differed from those who gave aid due to some threat in that they stood stronger politically and their positions were not dependent on the success of the refugees they supported. We might say that where Hartwig of Hamburg Bremen and Earl Birger Brosa supported refugees because they felt they had to, men like King Valdemar or Adolf of Holstein did so out of a desire for gain.

We have seen that this profit could take different forms. Count Adolf supported Knud Magnussen in return for gifts we read were plentiful. Heinrich of Saxony wanted money in return for aid, and King Valdemar of Denmark demanded compensation in the form of political control over the region around the Oslo fjord called Viken. Despite the difference in price, however, the underlying practice of hosts demanding compensation for material aid seems to have been more or less the same. Thus, demanding payment was a way for patrons who had little invested in the success of a given supplicant to make it worthwhile to lend valuable material support. Here we should also mention the bond of lordship we examined above, which we saw could similarly serve as a way for refugee to make a more powerful patron invested in their cause. Compensation, then, whether in the form of economic or political services, created a bond of shared political interests between hosts and refugees who did not share such interests to begin with.

## **Not lending aid**

### **Knud Magnussen**

When discussing Knud Magnussen's attempt at gaining the support of Heinrich der Löwe, we saw that the German duke proved unwilling to grant the Danish royal claimant Knud Magnussen's requests. This example gives us some insight into an aspect of the relationship of host interests and material support which is naturally obscured by narrative sources

primarily concerned with what happened. That is, the cases in which patrons did not see it in their best interest to give away economic and military aid. However, this is not the only example from Knud's political career of searches for aid not going according to plan.

When we discussed threat as a motive for hosts to support refugees, we saw how Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen was motivated by his political position to lend his support to Knud. In previous chapters, we have also seen that before coming to Hartwig, Knud had unsuccessfully tried to get additional resources with which to fight his enemies by seeking out his stepfather in Sweden and his maternal relatives in Poland. Since these examples have been discussed in considerable detail above, I shall not go into them in as much detail here, but they are important to mention, as they illustrate how and why a host might chose not to support a refugee economically and militarily.

What Knud's attempts to secure support from Sweden and Poland have in common is that they were unsuccessful because the potential patrons, King Sverker and Knud's Polish relatives, were threatened by Knud's presence. In the case of Sweden, we established that the most likely reason for why Knud had to leave was that his paternal grandmother was the daughter of the Swedish king Inge Stenkilsson, and his father had been elected king in Västgötaland. This lineage meant that Sverker did not want to strengthen Knud's position by lending him material support in fear of facing a contender to his position as Swedish monarch. The situation in Poland was very similar. Knud's mother belonged to the Polish ruling family, and so his Polish relatives faced the same problem as Sverker. Unwilling to strengthen the position of a potential rival they not only withheld economic or military support, but according to Saxo they even denied him adequate protection by not letting him into their castles.

The factor that makes Knud potentially threatening in both of these cases is the prospect of him claiming inheritance. Even though Saxo condemns this attitude, claiming that Knud's kinsmen "owe charity",<sup>288</sup> it does make political sense. Funding the wars of a distant relative that might have even more to gain if he turned against you would most likely not be resources well spent. Knud's career therefore shows us how competition for inheritance could make it in the disinterest of a host to support a refugee. More generally, however, Knud reveals that political actors in need of help could be perceived as threats or potential enemies. In these cases, it should not surprise us that patrons were careful about how they spent their resources.

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<sup>288</sup> *GD*, 14.5.3.

## Harald Gille and Erik Emune

We shall now examine another important reason for why a patron might chose not to support a refugee with money or men, an example we touched on in our discussion of friendship, dealing with the Norwegian king Harald Gille and his Danish counterpart Erik Emune. This is told to us by Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, and unlike in the case of Heinrich's rejection of King Knud, the Danish chronicler is careful to explain Erik's justifications for withholding material aid from King Harald.

When we analysed Harald and Erik's relationship above, we saw that the two kings were bound together either by a bond of friendship or one of sworn brotherhood, depending on whether we choose to follow Saxo's chronicle or the kings' sagas. We saw that Harald fled to Erik in Denmark after having lost a battle against his rival Magnus Blinde, and that in the sagas he was then given the revenue and manpower from the province Halland. According to Saxo, Harald rather received military support in the form of ships and men directly from King Erik, but he did not do so right away. It is this delay, Erik Emune's initial hesitation to grant support, we shall be investigating here.

The reason for Erik's hesitation was, according to Saxo, an invasion by the Wends, the Slavs living on the Southern shore of the Baltic, notorious in the sources for their frequent raids in Denmark. When the attack came, Erik was not able to grant King Harald Gille support right away because the he had to concentrate his resources on repelling the invaders.<sup>289</sup> This makes a very clear point that should not surprise us, namely that supporting refugees was not the main priority of most Scandinavian rulers in the Middle Ages. For kings like Erik or Valdemar, who unlike the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen were not dependant on refugees for the continued existence of their powerbase, it was rather a luxury activity, something to engage in if one had a political, military or economic surplus. According to Saxo, Erik was more than willing to support Harald Gille for the reason of avenging his offended niece, but when his kingdom was faced with external threats, there is little doubt about what was most important to him. Harald had to wait.

It seems clear then, that it was often not in the interest of kings or magnates to spend their resources supporting foreigners in need, not only because these foreigners might become a threat, but also because the resources could be better spent elsewhere. In the case of Erik Emune and Harald Gille, this is rather obvious. Naturally, it was more important for Erik to defend Denmark from attack than to fund a war in Norway. It is likely, however, that rulers

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<sup>289</sup> *GD*, 14.1.5.

might choose not to give out aid for much less obvious reasons than the one employed by Erik. There might have been many reasons for why a host did not see it in his best interests to lend support, but thought it better to spend his precious resources elsewhere.

In a thesis dealing with refuge, we must be careful not to presuppose that supporting such refugees were of the highest importance to medieval political actors. The example of the kings Erik and Harald offers an important corrective, and we should take it as a representative of a phenomenon that is most likely underreported in the sources. The narrative sources, whether sagas or chronicles, want to recount their versions of what happened historically, and so they generally have little interest in what did not. This is why Saxo's description of Harald's exile in Denmark is so interesting. It shows us that giving material support could be a low political priority, and we must assume that there were many unrecorded instances where potentates chose not to spend resources in this way, simply because they did not see it in their best interest to do so.

### **Why give material support? – Conclusions**

In this chapter, we have tried to answer the question of how the interests of Scandinavian political actors influenced their decision to support petitioners coming from abroad with military and economic resources. We have found that we should not overestimate the importance of giving material aid as a political tool, as the instances where one might chose not to do so are probably underreported. More important priorities, as well as fear of political competition from the recipient of support, are the most important reasons given by the sources for why aid might be held back. Studying the political reasons for rejecting refugees helps explain the most important conclusion from the second chapter of this thesis; namely that a social bond like kinship was not enough to secure an exile the support of his host. Material aid was too expensive to give away to any relative who came asking for it, especially if that relative was a competitor for inheritance.

It was therefore necessary for the giver of aid to get something in return for this considerable expense. It was necessary for there to be a mutually beneficial relationship, politically or economically, between giver and recipient. The political actors who did decide to support exiles with material aid can therefore be separated into two categories, depending on how such a relationship was established.

Included in the first group are the potentates who gave aid because they thought that by doing so they would gain the favour of a royal refugee, who, if successful, could alleviate

some difficult or threatened political situation they found themselves in. Both the Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen and Earl Birger Brosa are examples of this. What characterized them is that they were in some way cornered politically, and that their difficult situations would improve if they were able to establish better relations to neighbouring rulers. In such situations, backing a refugee made sense despite the considerable cost. If he was successful, a former exile would most likely have a favourable relationship to his old patron, which would in turn work to the advantage of the latter's political agenda.

The other group of hosts we have analysed differs from Archbishop Hartwig and Earl Birger in that they did not have any vested interest in backing a potentially successful refugee, and so a bond of shared political interests had to be actively sought out. We saw this happen in the cases of Count Adolf of Holstein's support to Knud Magnussen, King Valdemar's support for Erling Skakke, and we saw an unsuccessful attempt of establishing such a bond between the same Knud Magnussen and the duke of Saxony. Promise of compensation, whether political or economic, seems to have been the most important way in which a political actor in need of help could make a foreign patron invested in his cause. This is very similar to what we found concerning the bond of lordship in the previous chapter. By promising subordination and political loyalty, a refugee could use a social bond to establish the much more important bond of shared political interests, thus earning him material support.

By studying how material aid from abroad is presented in the sources we have found that while a social bond was often insufficient to secure a politician material support from abroad, a bond of shared political interests was much more effective. How this bond was established depended in large part on the political situation of the patron giving aid. In some instances, a politician could take advantage of a difficult political situation a potential supporter might find himself in, but if no such possibility existed, it was necessary to make the giver invested by offering some concrete compensation, whether financial or political.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MATERIAL AID**

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In a sense, this chapter will be a thematic departure from the previous ones. So far, we have tried to establish how support from abroad came into play in the Scandinavian internal conflicts, and sought to understand what governed the relationship between the patron giving

resources and the refugee receiving them. In this chapter, we shall turn away from the factors governing material support from abroad and instead try to answer the question of whether and how such support actually mattered to the politics of twelfth-century Scandinavia. We shall look at the effectiveness of aid from abroad in the context of the conflicts in which such aid figured. The main aim will be to get a sense of how often foreign resources seems to have resolved conflicts in favour of the political actors who received them, and how such resources could tip the balance in the so-called civil wars.

## **Success and failure**

Our sources do not make it easy to establish how effective help from abroad might have been in the conflicts that arose in Denmark and Norway after 1130. As a rule, we often have little or no information about what happened to these resources, or how they were used. What the sagas and chronicles are careful about recording, of course, are the specific outcomes of the conflicts between different royal claimants. Thus, what I want to do here is to look at the political actors who are presented in the sources as having received aid abroad and see whether they were successful in their political endeavours when they came home again, so as to get some broad sense of how significant foreign material support was as a political tool.

In this thesis, we have analysed ten different instances of political actors receiving military and economic resources from patrons outside their own kingdom, Knud Magnussen being counted twice as he supposedly received support from both the count of Holstein and the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. What is striking when we consider these ten cases together is that support from abroad by no means seems to have been a shortcut to political success. This is made clear if we go through each example chronologically, and look at the political fortunes that followed when a politician received material aid from a foreign patron.

### **The 1130s**

Sometime after 1131, when the murder of Knud Lavard set off the Danish civil war, King Erik Emune established an alliance between himself and the Norwegian king Magnus Blinde. He did so by marrying off his niece to King Magnus while Erik himself married Malmfrid, Magnus's stepmother and the widow of the late King Sigurd Jorsalfar. We read in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* that the reason for this marriage alliance was Erik's hope of "recruiting his

neighbours help through family ties.”<sup>290</sup> It is symptomatic of our sources that after this alliance was established, we do not hear of any military aid given by the Norwegian king to his Danish colleague. I do not think we should take a lack of such remarks as a sign that no support was given. It seems more likely that mentioning Erik’s motive for entering into an alliance with King Magnus is an economical way for Saxo to record that Erik received military resources from Norway. That he does not mention Norwegian ships or soldiers more explicitly does however make it difficult to answer the question of whether Saxo perceived the aid to be effective or not.

What we do know is that according to Saxo, Erik won a naval engagement against his rival Magnus, son of King Niels and murderer of Knud Lavard, soon after he had established his alliance with the Norwegian rulers.<sup>291</sup> Though we cannot know for certain, it is not unlikely that this battle was won with the help of Norwegian military resources, which would lead us to conclude that help from King Magnus Blinde had some effect on Erik Emune’s political fortunes. If so, this effect wore off rather quickly. While Erik won his battle against Magnus Nielssøn, one of his close allies was decisively defeated on land by King Niels himself, and a year later Erik was forced to leave Denmark and go into refuge in Norway.<sup>292</sup> What can be said of the effectiveness of foreign material support when it comes to Erik Emune is shrouded in uncertainty. If Erik did receive aid, we get the sense from Saxo’s account that this had some effect, seeing as it contributed to a military victory, but in the longer term, Norwegian support could not keep Erik from being pressured out of his kingdom by his enemies.

As for Harald Gille and the support he received from his sworn brother Erik Emune, we have more information to go on. So far, we have seen that Harald had to flee Norway for Denmark after he was defeated at the battle of Färlev by the forces of King Magnus Blinde in 1134. We have also seen that the sagas and *Gesta Danorum* disagree on the outcome of Harald’s stay in Denmark, the sagas claiming that he was given the revenue from the province of Halland, while according to Saxo, King Harald was given access to Danish ships. However, this difference does not seem to translate into separate views on the effectiveness of the support in question. Not very interested in Norwegian affairs, Saxo is rather brief in his description, but writes that Harald defeated his rival Magnus in battle after having been given

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<sup>290</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, "Gesta Danorum," in *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia Books X-XVI*, ed. Eric Christiansen (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981), 13.8.7.

<sup>291</sup> *GD*, 13.9.2-3.

<sup>292</sup> *GD*, 13.9.4-6.



control over the whole Danish fleet, thus clearly linking Harald's success with the military aid he received.<sup>293</sup> *Heimskringla* is much more elaborate when describing how Harald came to defeat Magnus, and we shall discuss this account in more detail below, but essentially the story is the same. The men Harald brought from Denmark enabled him to make a comeback and beat his enemy.<sup>294</sup> Thus, Harald's story is one of the cases where we can say with some certainty that material support from abroad contributed to political success.

Going through the political actors in chronological order, we have now arrived at Sigurd Slembedjagn and his ally Magnus Blinde, whom Sigurd had removed from the monastery where he had been placed after Harald Gille's victorious return from Denmark. Like in the case of King Harald, the narrative of these men's political careers, recounted in most detail in *Morkinskinna*, paints a clear picture of how effective the material support they got from Denmark was. When Sigurd and Magnus met their enemies in battle, their Danish troops immediately retreated, leaving Sigurd and Magnus to be forcefully defeated by the men fighting in the name of Harald Gille's young sons. Magnus was slain in the battle, and Sigurd captured and tortured to death.<sup>295</sup> While Danish military support seems to have been a great help to King Harald, it was of little use to Sigurd and Magnus. In fact, the Danish soldiers only seem to have given them a false sense of security, while not making any difference in the actual fighting.

## **The 1150s**

Knud Magnussen, the Danish king and political actor in the internal conflict that broke out after King Erik Lam's abdication in 1146, is recorded in the sources as having received some kind of material support from two patrons abroad. The first instance is only recorded in Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum* and it concerns Count Adolf of Holstein. We are told that Knud won a competition for Adolf's favour by giving him gifts, and that in return, the count became Knud's vassal and joined him in his war against Sven. The effect of this alliance cannot have been very significant, because not long after the bond was established, King Knud lost to his rival Sven at the battle of Viborg, and had to go abroad and seek the aid of numerous potentates. It was during this journey, from which Count Adolf is markedly absent, that Knud met with the Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen, who gave the Danish king

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<sup>293</sup> *GD*, 14.1.8.

<sup>294</sup> Snorre Sturlason, "The Saga of Magnús the Blind and Harald Gilli" in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 4-7.

<sup>295</sup> "Morkinskinna," in *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*, ed. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 92.

the aid he needed to continue his fight against Sven, presumably in return for promises that Knud would reinstall Hartwig as the head of the Nordic church. Funded by the German magnate, we read in *Gesta Danorum* that Knud “enters Jutland with an army of foreigners.”<sup>296</sup> In the account of the following battle between Knud and Sven, Saxo is careful to emphasise what proficient fighters Knud’s Saxon troops were. Despite their best efforts however, the battle did not go well and Knud had to go back into Germany in search of refuge.<sup>297</sup> Unlike in the case of Sigurd, Knud’s foreign fighters were his greatest asset, but it does not seem to have mattered. Material support from abroad did not ensure Knud victory and success.

When Knud returned to Denmark after the diet of Merseburg in 1152, and managed to hammer out an alliance with King Sven’s most important ally, the future King Valdemar, it was not long before it was Sven who had to go abroad in search of help. In 1153, he went to his father-in-law, the German magnate Konrad of Meissen, and stayed there for three years, seemingly without making any attempt to procure the resources needed to return to Denmark in force. Then, in 1157, he allied with Duke Heinrich of Saxony and attempted to invade Denmark. The expedition did not achieve its intended goal, but the explanations are somewhat different in *Gesta Danorum* and *Chronica Slavorum*, the two sources recounting the event. Although it was not material support as we have defined it thus far, we shall return to Duke Heinrich’s invasion of Jutland, as it can help us understand what made political actors with foreign backing successful. As we saw when discussing lordship, Sven then sought the help of the Wends who stood under the duke’s authority. They allegedly lent him both ships and men in addition to ferrying the Danish king over to the island of Fyn.

Sven’s return to Denmark with backing from the Wends is one of the examples where political success followed in the footsteps of material aid. Not long after he had landed, a settlement was negotiated between Sven, Knud and Valdemar in which they agreed that the kingdom was to be shared between the three kings. The treaty thus ended Sven’s exile and made him a powerful player on the Danish political scene. The peace was not to last, however, and ended when Sven attempted to murder his co-rulers at a feast in Roskilde. Knud was killed and Valdemar barely escaped with his life. Soon thereafter followed the battle of Grathe-Hede in 1157, where Valdemar, having rallied his forces, defeated Sven and began his 25-year rule as sole king of Denmark.

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<sup>296</sup> *GD*, 14.5.5.

<sup>297</sup> *GD*, 14.5.5-10.

## 1160–1180

The next political actor we must consider is the Norwegian chieftain and de-facto ruler, Erling Skakke. In 1161, Erling sought the help of his wife and son's relative King Valdemar of Denmark, who had defeated King Sven at the battle of Grathe-Hede four years previously. Erling seems to have received some kind of economic aid from his host, though we have seen that there is some disagreement in our sources as to what Valdemar got in return. Like in the case of Harald Gille and King Sven, Erling Skakke's fortunes seem to have improved considerably after he returned to Norway with King Valdemar's help. He is presented as having won all his military engagements. In 1162, a year after he came back, he defeated and killed Håkon Herdebrei, the man who had killed King Inge Krokrygg and forced Erling and his followers into refuge in the first place.<sup>298</sup> Erling Skakke is therefore an example of a political actor who experienced great political success after receiving material support from abroad.

As for the last three refugees who got help from outside of their own kingdoms, the experiences of Øystein Møyila and Knud and Karl Karlsen were been quite similar. Øystein is said to have fled to Birger Brosa in Sweden when the political climate in Norway became too difficult, and according to the sagas, he received both money and soldiers from the Swedish earl.<sup>299</sup> This did not make much of a difference, for in 1177 he was killed in a battle against King Magnus Erlingsson, and his faction, the Birchlegs, was routed and ran back to Sweden.<sup>300</sup>

The two royal descendants Knud and Karl had been caught up in a plot against the life of King Valdemar in 1176, and when the conspiracy was revealed, they also fled to Earl Birger. Although we cannot be certain that Knud and Karl actually received military or economic resources, it seems likely as they invaded the Danish province of Halland from Götaland in 1178. Like Øystein Møyila, the two Danish pretenders were not successful in their attempts to invade their home country with an army recruited or funded by Earl Birger. They lost their first battle, Knud fell and Karl was captured and locked up.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Snorre Sturlasson, "The Saga of Magnús Erlingsson," in *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), ch. 3-7.

<sup>299</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 36; "Fagrskinna," in *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Alison Finlay (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ch. 130.

<sup>300</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 42.

<sup>301</sup> *GD*, 15.2.1.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, then, we have seen that as the political practice of gaining military and economic resources from abroad is presented in our sources, it cannot be said that gaining the support of a powerful foreign patron necessarily led to political success. In fact, we have only three clear-cut examples of political actors receiving such aid and then experiencing political success at home. These are the cases of Harald Gille, Sven Eriksen Grathe and Erling Skakke. A possible additional example is Erik Emune, but his case is controversial as he was forced out of Denmark not long after he is supposed to have allied with King Magnus of Norway. Similarly, the example of Knud Magnussen's support from Adolf of Holstein is somewhat uncertain because of the brevity of the sources. However, Adolf's assistance can hardly have been decisive, as Knud was for a long time the weakest party in his conflict with Sven, and was forced into refuge abroad after he lost the battle of Viborg in 1151. In the five remaining cases of political actors receiving material support from abroad, this aid was followed by military and political failure. Thus, it is clear that aid from outside is not portrayed in the sources as a political miracle cure. There are cases where such support seems to be connected to victory and success, but they are not in the majority.

## **The reliability of foreign soldiers**

In the previous section, we attempted to clarify the relationship, as it is presented in the sagas and chronicles, between material support from abroad and political achievements at home to see if there was any correlation between the two. What we crucially did not do was to establish a causal connection between outside aid and success or failure. The purpose of the two following sections is to do just that. First, we shall take a brief look at how the sources present the reliability and military proficiency of fighting men from abroad, in an attempt to establish how effective such forces were as political tools for the actors who had them at their disposal. It is very rare that we get information from our sources about how significant foreign soldiers were as military resources. However, there are exceptions to this rule that we can use to construct an image of what the authors of the sources perceived to be the role of such fighters in the Scandinavian civil wars.

The first notable example comes from *Morkinskinna*'s telling of the story of how Sigurd Slembedjagn and Magnus Blinde returned to Norway from exile in Denmark in 1139 with 30 ships, 18 of which were controlled by Danish men. The saga tells us that at the first

sign of battle, the Danes left with the majority of the fleet.<sup>302</sup> This paints quite a dismal picture of the reliability of the Danish troops, whom it is clear that the author sees as responsible for Sigurd's defeat and death. Saxo gives a similar impression of German soldiers in a passage narrating Duke Heinrich's invasion of Denmark at the behest of King Sven. We shall discuss this event in more detail in the following section, but here it suffices to say that according to Saxo, Heinrich's men were not willing to fight once they came up against a superior Danish force, and like Sigurd Slembe's Danish soldiers, they decided to go home.<sup>303</sup> Thus, we have examples from both *Gesta Danorum* and from a saga that portray foreign military forces as less than reliable. Should we then conclude that military resources procured abroad were not necessarily effective as fighting forces?

On the one hand, it could be argued that the Danish and German fighting men probably did not have a great deal invested in who ruled their neighbouring countries. Faced with considerable opposition, therefore, they might have found it in their best interest to leave an upcoming battle. On the other hand, presuming a great difference in the political outlook and priorities among twelfth-century Danes, Germans and Norwegians might be a modern prejudice. If the possibility of loot and other material rewards was one of the main reasons for fighting, as argued by among others the Norwegian historian Hans Jacob Orning,<sup>304</sup> we might be mistaken if we assume that the Danish soldiers had less to win and more to lose than their Norwegian allies did. Norwegian medieval kings, stresses Orning, had to convince their troops to fight by appealing to their self-interest,<sup>305</sup> and we have little reason to think that the same was not true of Danish rulers and Saxon dukes. Thus, an alternative and more useful way of seeing the reluctance of the Danish and German soldiers is as an expression of the more general problem faced by medieval commanders. When faced with the possibility of defeat against an overwhelming force, it was probably difficult for Sigurd, Sven and Heinrich to make the case that fighting a battle was worth it. Furthermore, Sverre Bagge has argued that there existed a kind of medieval patriotism, apparent in opposition to foreign rulers.<sup>306</sup> Such sentiments could have made it even more difficult to convince invading soldiers to commit to battles, if they knew that an invasion from abroad would meet with greater resistance.

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<sup>302</sup> *Msk*, ch. 92.

<sup>303</sup> *GD*, 14.17.5-6.

<sup>304</sup> Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Alan Crozier (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 140.

<sup>305</sup> Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*, 129-36.

<sup>306</sup> Sverre Bagge, *From Viking stronghold to Christian kingdom: state formation in Norway, c. 900-1350* (København: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 174-77.

Next, we must consider the problem of national bias. In the case of *Morkinskinna*, this is somewhat complex, as the account of Sigurd Slembedjagn's political career in this saga was most likely adopted from the earlier work *Hryggjarstykki*, which was a hagiographical account of Sigurd's life. With such a favourable view of him, one would think it was not unlikely that the Danes fleeing from battle was simply a way for Eiríkr Oddsson, who wrote *Hryggjarstykki*, to explain the saintly Sigurd's downfall by putting the blame on the hereditary enemy. On the other hand, both Sigurd and Eiríkr had connections to Denmark, and Bjarni Guðnason has argued that the hagiographical narrative in *Hryggjarstykki* was encouraged by the Danish rulers who were allied to Sigurd.<sup>307</sup> Thus, it is problematic to see the portrayal of Danish soldiers simply as an expression of a bias.

As for Saxo, it is generally agreed that he had an antagonistic attitude towards Germans.<sup>308</sup> However, it is difficult to argue that this shaped his view of German military accomplishments. To the contrary, Saxo seems to see Germans as more advanced in the ways of war than their neighbours to the north. When telling of how Erik Emune laid siege to a castle near Roskilde, for example, he explains how some Saxons helped the king build siege machines, noting that Danes had not yet learned how such things worked.<sup>309</sup> Then, when Erik finally defeated his enemies King Niels and Magnus Nielsen at the battle of Fodevig, we read that German cavalry played a decisive role.<sup>310</sup> Similarly, when Knud Magnussen invaded Denmark with an army he had recruited in Saxony with the help of Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen, Saxo tells us that despite the eventual defeat, Knud's Saxon knights performed admirably, by executing an ordered retreat.<sup>311</sup> The Danish historian Thomas Heebøl-Holm has argued in the article "Saxo og 1100-tallets danske krigskunst" that Saxo was probably quite well versed in martial matters and that we should take him seriously as a military historian.<sup>312</sup> If Heebøl-Holm is right, and I think he is, it would mean that support from Germany could not only increase the quantity of one's military resources, but apparently also the quality.

In conclusion, it cannot be convincingly argued that troops recruited abroad are

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<sup>307</sup> Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, "Introduction," in *Morkinskinna: the earliest Icelandic chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*, ed. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>308</sup> Ole Fenger, "*Kirker rejses alle vegne*": 1050-1250, ed. Olaf Olsen, vol. 4, Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie (København: Gyldendals Bogklubber, 1993), 74.

<sup>309</sup> *GD*, 13.9.6.

<sup>310</sup> *GD*, 13.11.8.

<sup>311</sup> *GD*, 14.5.9.

<sup>312</sup> Thomas K. Heebøl-Holm, "Saxo og 1100-tallets danske krigskunst - Riddere, armbrøster og tyskere," in *Saxo og hans samtid*, ed. Per Andersen and Thomas K. Heebøl-Holm (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2012).

presented in the sources as less reliable than their domestic counterparts are. Where the sagas and chronicles do portray foreign soldiers as fleeing from battle, this can be understood with reference to the problems that faced any medieval commander, regardless of where his troops originated from. We have also seen that Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, despite its national bias, sees German soldiers as more effective than Danish ones, not less. Foreign troops, then, were not less reliable or detrimental to the cause of the political actors who recruited them. Having established this, I shall go on to argue that the fighting men themselves were not the decisive factor determining whether or not receiving material support from abroad led to success.

### **What governed success?**

Here, we will look closer at the actors who did achieve their political goals after they had gained the backing of a patron abroad, and compare them to those who did not. By doing so, we shall try to establish how one led to the other, and what it took for foreign resources to change the domestic political context. By answering this question, we are also addressing a more general issue of what foreign material support was actually intended to achieve.

#### **King Sven**

A good place to begin such an analysis is with King Sven's return to Denmark aided by the Wends who stood under the lordship of Duke Heinrich der Löwe. To understand the significance of this event, however, it is necessary to see it in light of Sven's preceding attempt to take back power in Denmark, namely the invasion headed by the Duke of Saxony himself.

As we have seen before, Sven went to Germany in 1153 and according to Saxo he is supposed to have stayed for three years with his father-in-law, Konrad Margrave of Meissen. After Konrad had died, we read in *Gesta Danorum* that Sven "gave pledges to duke Henricus of the Saxons, and promised him a great deal of money if he would restore him to his kingdom."<sup>313</sup> The duke agreed, moved into Denmark and laid siege to Schleswig. A similar story is told in *Chronica Slavorum*, but Helmold provides a more in-depth analysis of how Sven actually managed to convince Heinrich. Helmold agrees with Saxo that Sven offered the duke a lot of money, and he claims that Sven promised that Heinrich would be well received in Denmark. However, he also emphasises Sven's connection to important Saxon magnates, noting that: "the princes of Saxony addressed the duke (...), saying that he should help Svein

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<sup>313</sup> *GD*, 14.17.1.

and restore him to his kingdom.”<sup>314</sup>

Sven’s promise that the Danes would flock to him if he came to Denmark with an army does not seem to have come true. According *Chronica Slavorum* no one joined him, and Sven is said to have told Heinrich that: “they are fleeing from us and are going over into the outer parts of the sea”.<sup>315</sup> Faced with such a lack of support we read that Sven decided to turn back to Germany.

Saxo’s recounting of Heinrich der Löwe’s invasion is both longer and more dramatic, and it differs somewhat from Helmold’s. Both chroniclers agree, however, that Sven first met with both a lack of resistance and a lack of support. Saxo also claims that the people of the south of Jutland had left their homes and gone to the northern part of the peninsula. From this point on, though, *Gesta Danorum* differs from Helmold’s work, for, “although they seemed to have run away”, we read that the Jutes, “were preparing for war”.<sup>316</sup> The people of Jutland had supposedly promised to support Sven, but when they saw his German army, they refused. Their justification was that they did not want it to appear as if they were “giving aid to an alien force against their own country.”<sup>317</sup> Having heard of the approaching German army, Valdemar arrived in Jutland and began preparing the resistance. His personal presence and leadership makes a great difference in Saxo’s narrative, and soon he had gathered an army that was so large that the enemy could not face it “without danger and loss.”<sup>318</sup> Allegedly, Duke Heinrich wanted to stay and fight, but his men would have none of it and went home.

Here it is again important to keep in mind both Saxo’s national and anti-Sven bias. Considering that part of the function of *Gesta Danorum* was to legitimize the existence of an independent Denmark vis-à-vis the German Empire,<sup>319</sup> it would not be surprising if Saxo exaggerated and perhaps even invented the Danish resistance to Heinrich and Sven’s invasion. On the other hand, it seems likely that Knud and Valdemar would put up some fight against Sven’s attempt to conquer their kingdom. Especially Valdemar had good reason to fight, as Heinrich and Sven were occupying the area around Schleswig in southern Jutland, which was his own duchy. Thus, Helmold is probably wrong when he claims that the German invasion faced no opposition. Saxo could likewise be exaggerating the Danish response and

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<sup>314</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), ch. 85.

<sup>315</sup> *CS*, ch. 85.

<sup>316</sup> *GD*, 14.17.1.

<sup>317</sup> *GD*, 14.17.1.

<sup>318</sup> *GD*, 14.17.5.

<sup>319</sup> Anders Leegaard Knudsen, "Absalon and the Holy Roman Empire," in *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen and Inge Skovgaard-Petersen (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2000), 35.



Valdemar's heroic role in it.

While differing somewhat in their prejudices and portrayals of events, the accounts from the two chronicles share one important characteristic. Namely, that it was not a battle that forced King Sven, Duke Heinrich and their forces to return to Saxony. Rather, both sources emphasise an expectation that Sven would be surrounded by newfound supporters if he returned to Denmark with the backing of a Saxon army. This expectation was not met, and it seems like this was the deciding factor making the expedition a failure. Reading of Sven and Heinrich's invasion of Denmark, then, we are left with the impression that the purpose of the venture was not to conquer the country outright, but to attract Danish followers and allies. What is interesting, then, is that Sven's strategy when he returned to Denmark with the military backing of the Baltic Wends seems to have been aimed directly at procuring the domestic support he had lacked when he convinced Heinrich to invade. In short, the king appears to have learnt from his past mistakes.

When Knud and Valdemar got word that Sven had landed on Fyn, we read in *Gesta Danorum* that they gathered an army and went to meet him. Saxo writes that this army was very large and could easily have defeated Sven's forces, but it did not come to battle. The Danish chronicler's explanation for this is that Valdemar took pity on the inhabitants of the island, whom Sven had rallied to his cause. "[H]e thought it better", writes Saxo, "to tolerate a rival and suffer losses, than to crush an enfeebled limb of the state".<sup>320</sup> Saxo's explanation of why Valdemar did not defeat Sven in battle is, to put it mildly, unconvincing. A more likely explanation is offered by Helmold, who claims that Sven had gained many new allies through "gifts and promises" (*donis atque promissis*) and therefore, fighting did not break out because of "the strength of his situation" (*firmitate locorum*).<sup>321</sup> Not long after, an agreement was struck between the three kings, in which it was established that the country would be split into three. Valdemar would have Jutland, Knud Zealand (as well as some smaller islands), and Sven would receive Scania.<sup>322</sup>

The Danish historian Carsten Breengaard has argued that this compromise came about because of Sven's German support, which made him too powerful to defeat or ignore.<sup>323</sup> This interpretation is difficult to agree with. Firstly, the German support for Sven could not have been extensive after Heinrich der Löwe's failed invasion of Denmark. Rather, the German

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<sup>320</sup> *GD*, 14.17.9.

<sup>321</sup> *CS*, ch. 85.

<sup>322</sup> *GD*, 14.17.15.

<sup>323</sup> Carsten Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170* (København: Gads Forlag, 1982), 257.

contribution seems to have been the limited support from the duke's Slavic vassals. One could of course argue that Knud and Valdemar feared the prospect of a new German invasion, but in that case, it is difficult to explain why they did not come to an agreement with Sven when he had the support of Heinrich der Löwe's army.

Secondly, our most important sources emphasise Sven's establishing of new alliances inside Denmark prior to the agreement with Knud and Valdemar, not his foreign support. When the Saxon invasion led by Duke Heinrich failed, both sources seem to agree that it was because Sven lacked internal support in Denmark. Saxo even tells us that the fact that Sven came with a foreign army estranged his allies the Jutes. Upon coming to Fyn, on the other hand, the sources instead emphasise King Sven's willingness and ability to establish local alliances, Saxo noting that "on all sides a host of men and women rallied to his assistance",<sup>324</sup> while Helmold mentions his strategic use of "gifts and promises".<sup>325</sup> Sven's success seems to be presented not as the product of military force enabled by the support of Duke Heinrich or the Wends, but rather of his ability to use his material support as a tool to rally domestic support.

### **Harald Gille**

The same pattern, I would argue, can be found in the saga account of Harald Gille's return from Denmark, after he had received the aid of King Erik Emune. We read that after Harald had marched his forces out of Halland and arrived in Konghelle, he was met by an opposing force of townsmen and magnates. Instead of fighting them, the king opted for negotiations, "declaring that he was not claiming more than was his by right."<sup>326</sup> As a result of these talks, the army according to Snorre changed sides, and swore allegiance to Harald rather than fight him. What follows in *Heimskringla* is a description of a strategy that seems very much in line with the one Sven practiced on Fyn. "Then Harald, in order to win adherents, gave lands in fief and for revenue to the landed men, and granted amendments of the laws to those yeomen who would join his forces. Thereupon a great host collected for King Harald."<sup>327</sup> Like Sven, and despite the soldiers he is said to have brought from Denmark, Harald was actively establishing alliances as the first thing he did when he came back to his own country. It is also significant that Snorre lays much weight on Harald establishing aristocratic alliances by

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<sup>324</sup> *GD*, 14.17.9.

<sup>325</sup> *CS*, ch. 85.

<sup>326</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 4.

<sup>327</sup> *HmkMB*, ch. 4.

giving land to the magnates, because as we saw in the first chapter, losing such alliances was the central reason for seeking help abroad in the first place.

Another important similarity between King Harald and King Sven, of course, was that they were both successful in their attempt to win back power. Thus, two out of the three political actors who received material support from abroad and were clearly politically successful are presented in the sources, both sagas and chronicles, as building networks of high-status allies upon returning to their home countries. The same cannot be said for Erling Skakke, who is characteristically presented by Snorre as behaving quite brutally when he returned from Denmark.<sup>328</sup> It could be argued, however, that Erling did not need to build alliances in the same way as Harald and Sven, as he seems to have been able to keep together some of the late King Inge Krokrygg's impressive aristocratic network.

### **King Knud**

At this point, one can be forgiven for asking if there was any point to receiving material aid from abroad at all, if all it took to win back power in a kingdom was to make some promises to the local elites. I would argue, though, that the military strength one could procure from neighbouring countries and potentates was an essential tool for the political actor who wanted to re-establish his domestic powerbase. To illustrate this, we shall return to Knud Magnussen, who unlike his rival Sven was not able to use aid from abroad to achieve political success.

We have already seen how Knud was able to persuade Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen to commit resources to his war against Sven. It is while describing these events that Saxo gives us some interesting information about the state of Knud's political network back in Denmark. He writes that Knud "sent privately to his household warriors to test their fidelity." The king was in luck for the answer he got was that, "they would all desert to him with the utmost readiness, and would exchange the allegiance they had sworn to Sven for their former loyalty."<sup>329</sup> The same point is driven home in an earlier passage where Saxo writes that Sven had allowed many of Knud's men to swear fealty to himself after Knud was defeated in the battle of Viborg. Many of these men, however, "returned to the service of Kanutus; as their earlier allegiance was dearer to them than the most recent".<sup>330</sup>

This information firstly tells us that Saxo conceived of the possibility that the followers of a political actor could stay loyal to him even after he had lost a battle and gone

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<sup>328</sup> *HmkME*, ch. 3.

<sup>329</sup> *GD*, 14.5.4.

<sup>330</sup> *GD*, 14.4.9.

into refuge abroad. Further, he seems to see this behaviour on the part of Knud's followers as an expression of genuine, perhaps even sentimental loyalty.

However, I suspect that the view expressed by Saxo might carry a bias in favour of Knud, who would later be Valdemar's in-law and ally. When Knud sent word to Denmark, we must assume that he was not simply stating his intentions to return home, but also his intentions to return home with a German army, funded by the archbishop. Thus, it is possible that what compelled Knud's original followers to join up with him again was not their loyalty, but rather the belief that if Knud returned to Denmark with the support of Hartwig he would defeat Sven. If that was the most likely outcome, the best course of action would be to declare loyalty to Knud. With such an interpretation, the consistent support Knud could count on in Denmark is not explained by personal and emotional relationships, but rather political calculations on the part of Knud's followers. More importantly, the decision-making of Knud's followers illustrates the importance of having access to military power when attempting to build a political network on which to establish a new powerbase when returning home from refuge.

This idea that a political actor with the support of a foreign army could attract local support can also be found in the law of the Frostating. Here, we read that if a magnate attacked someone in his one home he were to be killed, but if he was lucky and managed to escape he should never return to the country, "except in the train of a king who comes to conquer the land".<sup>331</sup> Like Saxo, then, this medieval Norwegian law makes the point that aristocrats would rally around a king invading the country from abroad. Military strength promised victory, and as has been stressed by the Norwegian historian Sverre Bagge: the prospect of success attracted followers.<sup>332</sup> As we have seen in the examples of Sven Grathe and Harald Gille, gaining domestic followers was crucial for the political actor who wanted to use the military and economic resources acquired abroad to re-establish a powerbase at home.

Having thus investigated some of the underlying factors that governed whether the outcome of receiving material support from abroad was a success or a failure, we might be able to come to some conclusions concerning in what ways foreign resources were effective during the twelfth-century internal conflicts in Scandinavia.

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<sup>331</sup> "The Frostathing Law," in *The Earliest Norwegian Laws: Being the Gulathing law and the Frostathing law*, ed. Laurence M. Larson (Clark N. J.: The Lawbook Exchange, 1935), 278.

<sup>332</sup> Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 96.

## **The effectiveness of material aid – Conclusions**

In the preceding analysis, we have looked at how the sources portray the political process that followed the instances where military and economic resources were given to a political actor by a patron from another polity. We examined ten examples of this practice and found that there is no clear correlation between receiving support from abroad and achieving political success. Only three cases are indisputable examples of foreign aid being followed by the recipient accomplishing his political goals, and in as many as five instances, support was followed by failure.

Having established this, we attempted to answer the more complex question of how receiving military and economic resources from abroad could help a Scandinavian political actor achieve his political goals. In order to do this we first examined the sources' portrayals of foreign soldiers, and found examples of such men being presented as fleeing home to their own countries prior to important battles. Rather than seeing these accounts as indicative of some inherent unreliability of such troops that could explain the low success rate of refugees who received military aid from outside their own kingdoms, we had to conclude that the unreliability must be seen as an expression of the culture of medieval warfare in general.

We concluded that the quality or fighting proficiency of the soldiers themselves was not the deciding factor of whether support from abroad led to political success at home. Instead, the decisive factor was whether or not the political actor who received aid was able to use his newfound resources to attract followers and allies in his homeland. Thus, when foreign support was applied effectively, it was not used for violent conquest. Rather, it gave an impression of strength and a promise of political success, which in turn could make an exiled king look like a viable leader, and give him the network of high-status allies that was so crucial for the would-be ruler. Here, our findings are in line with modern historians like Sverre Bagge and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, who have argued for the importance of high-status alliances, generosity and appearance of success to the medieval political culture.

This final chapter ties together with the first one, where we saw that the most important reason for a king to go into refuge and search for resources was a breakdown in relations to the domestic ruling elite, whether this came about through political estrangement or deaths in battle. Such a breakdown in turn harmed the king's ability to rule, his access to resources, and his capacity wage war, which was crucial in times of internal conflict. In this chapter, we have seen how the political actors who were most successful after receiving material support from abroad were those who managed to use their new resources to build

alliances and bonds to local magnates. In conclusion, we can say that in order for foreign material aid to have an impact on the domestic political environment of the actor who received it, he would have to use it to attract, not to conquer.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **MATERIAL SUPPORT AND TWELFTH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIA**

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This thesis has analysed the conflicts over royal power that took place in the Scandinavian kingdoms between circa 1130 and 1180. The investigation has been carried out somewhat unconventionally, because instead of examining the internal political conditions and practices of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, we have tried to study what we have labelled an external factor of the Scandinavian civil wars. By analysing how political actors travelled away from home in search for material resources, we have been able to see the tumultuous histories of twelfth-century Denmark, Norway and to some extent Sweden in a regional and transnational perspective that is often lost in more nationally oriented history writing. In this concluding chapter, we shall try to get a sense of how our findings fit into the larger picture of Scandinavia in the 1100s, painted by modern historians working in the field.

#### **The internal perspective**

First, we have to establish how foreign material aid fits into the nationally oriented historiography, dealing with the internal political conditions of the individual Scandinavian kingdoms. At the beginning of this thesis, we introduced a number of historians who helped us understand that the medieval political culture was dominated by honour, vengeance, personal bonds, giving of gifts, competition for influence, and patron-client relations. Prominent examples include Gerd Althoff, Sverre Bagge, Lars Hermanson, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Hans Jacob Orning. The image painted by these historians, by and large constructed from the study of the internal politics of specific polities, has in turn guided our analysis of political practice across borders, most importantly in the way that we have chosen to study the relationship between a giver and a recipient of material aid as a social bond.

Detailed domestic analyses of the conflicts in the Scandinavian kingdoms in the twelfth century are not only important because of the theoretical foundation they provide, however. Having only examined a specific aspect of these struggles, political actors who went

abroad in search of economic or military aid, there is a danger that we might lose sight of the whole, that we might forget that our object of study also had an internal political dimension. In the following, we will therefore need to establish how the conclusions we reached above relate to important issues in the literature dealing with the internal political conditions of the Scandinavian kingdoms during the civil wars.

While many of the topics we must consider, such as gift giving and patron client relationships, are obviously not exclusively bound to the internal politics of the Scandinavian kingdoms, studies carried out by modern historians into such social bonds have largely been constrained by national borders. Thus, it should be interesting to see if there are significant differences between the observations of scholars with an internal perspective on twelfth-century politics, and this study, which has been concentrated on external dimensions. First, however, we need to turn to the question of whether institutions, and not personal relationships, were the crucial feature of the internal struggles in Norway and Denmark.

### **Institutions**

As we saw in our introduction, there is a strong tradition in both Danish and Norwegian historiography for interpreting conflicts, including the civil wars of the twelfth century, as struggles between institutions. In Norway, the crown and the aristocracy were generally seen as the institutions competing for power, while in Denmark the crown and the church were perceived to be in opposition.<sup>333</sup> We have also seen that most of the historians referenced in this thesis do not support this institutional interpretation of politics, and it has largely gone out of fashion among modern scholars.

Where a social bond could be both internal and external depending on who took part in the relationship, institutions have been seen as possessing a more inherently national character. When historians speak of “the crown”, they are thinking of the Norwegian or Danish crown, so too with the aristocracy or the general population. An institutional interpretation of medieval societies and conflicts is therefore difficult to apply to an external perspective on the Scandinavian internal struggles. Consequently, I think there can be little doubt that this investigation into material support from abroad has contributed to the view that institutions did not play any significant part in politics of the Northern European region in the

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<sup>333</sup> Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 64-65; Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat: 1130-1319* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 38-39; Sverre Bagge, "När sägen och dikt sopats bort..." *Den weibullske kildekritikk etter 100 år*, (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 93, no. 4 (2014): 572.

twelfth century. The reason for this could be that the political actors who went abroad for help were almost by definition disconnected from the powerful institutions of their kingdoms. However, this does not explain the behaviour of the hosts of those who sought support, such as Archbishop Hartwig of Hamburg-Bremen. Hartwig clearly acted in his own personal interest when he supported Knud Magnussen in the hopes that he would reinstate the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen's primacy over the Nordic church. It was after all the papacy that had taken away this supremacy in the first place. If it was the case, as some have argued,<sup>334</sup> that Hartwig's aid to Knud was part of a larger conflict between the archbishop and the Saxon duke over the ancestral property of Hartwig's family, it is even more obvious that Knud's patron should not be understood as a representative of institutional interests or ideals.

Additionally, and institutional theory is not very useful if we want to understand the shifting aristocratic loyalties that forced kings out of their kingdoms in search for aid, as well as made it possible for them to come back. It seems unlikely that the aristocracy acted as one unified institution when different magnates supported different royal claimants, and routinely switched sides from one pretender to the other. With an external perspective on the politics of the 1100s, then, an emphasis on individuals and groups fighting for their own interests is clearly preferable to the institutional alternative.

### **Individuals or groups**

The conclusion above leaves us with a question, however, because even among historians who agree that the institutional interpretation of medieval politics is faulty, there is some disagreement as to who should be considered political agents.

The Swedish historian Lars Hermanson thinks we should not see the people of the Middle Ages as "rational, calculating politicians of power who only acted out of personal interest."<sup>335</sup> Rather, he argues, political actors were governed by their social and political situation. Medieval people were parts of large groups, and this could compel them to make choices that were not in their best interests, as well as stop them from those that were. Here, he clearly differs from scholars like Sverre Bagge, who holds onto an individualistic approach to the politics of medieval Norway. This is especially apparent in his book *Society and Politics*, where he argues that medieval politicians were rational actors, fighting for their own,

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<sup>334</sup> Lone Liljefalk and Stefan Pajung, "Hemolds Slaverkrønike som kilde til Danmarks, Vends og Nordtysklands historie," (*Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift* 113, no. 1 (2014): 27.

<sup>335</sup> Lars Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt: en studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2000), 184. "rationell, kalkylerande maktpolitiker som endast handlade utifrån personligt vinstintresse."



personal interests.<sup>336</sup> Does an external perspective on the Scandinavian internal conflicts cast any light on this issue?

As when discussing the political significance of institutions there is a risk that the nature of our subject, material support from abroad, obscures rather than helps clarify the question of whether individuals or groups played the dominant roles in medieval Scandinavian politics. The reason for this is of course that a study of political actors who sought support from patrons outside their own kingdoms is inherently individualistic in focus. The kings and magnates who sought resources abroad were those who could not find sufficient support at home, thus they are often portrayed in the sources as acting alone or with only a small band of followers. Thus, because the portrayal in the sources of this specific practice is particularly focused on individuals we should perhaps be careful about concluding that the same is true for our period in general. This is at least one way to see it. Another, which I think is preferable, is to see the practice of seeking material support abroad as precisely a way in which individuals did act politically during the twelfth century. I would argue that it is difficult to see men like Knud Magnussen and Sigurd Slembedjagn, constantly travelling from place to place more or less alone, but always in search of resources to fuel their political ambitions, as being portrayed in the sources as anything other than “rational, calculating politicians”. Thus, I think it is clear that our investigation has shown how individuals could be considered political agents during the Middle Ages.

### **Patron-client relations**

In the 1986 article “Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen” Sverre Bagge argues that it is crucial to take into account the obligation of the politically strong to protect the weaker members of their political networks if we want to understand the mechanics of the Norwegian internal conflicts. “The sagas”, he writes, “provide a lot of examples of how people in crisis situations seek out powerful men, kings or magnates, to get help.”<sup>337</sup> This point is repeated in Bagge’s much more recent book *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, where the powerful magnate Gregorius Dagsson’s appeal to King Inge Krokrygg for support after he had come into conflict with Inge’s co-ruler Sigurd Munn is seen as the

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<sup>336</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics* 90, 96.

<sup>337</sup> Sverre Bagge, “Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen,” (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 65, no. 2 (1986): 151. “Sagaene gir en rekke eksempler på hvordan folk i krisesituasjoner søker til mektige men, konger eller stormenn, for å få hjelp.”

source of the conflict between the two kings.<sup>338</sup> The importance of such patron-client relationships has also been explored by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, who argues that in return for support, a powerful patron could demand respect and loyalty.<sup>339</sup>

The question that presents itself is whether the practice we have been discussing in this thesis, that of political actors seeking abroad in search of material aid, is in essence an extension of the patron-client relationships described by Bagge and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson. When Erling Skakke sought out Valdemar and when Sigurd Slembe sought out Erik Lam, were they in fact conforming to a behaviour that was well established in internal politics, but doing so on a larger scale?

In some ways the similarities are striking. We have seen how social bonds often determined where political actors sought help, and it makes sense for these social networks to function in the same way across frontiers as they did inside them, namely as a way to ensure support in conflicts. Furthermore, this was not exclusive to Norwegian political actors. Kings like Erik Emune, Sven Grathe and Knud Magnussen also took advantage of their personal networks when they were politically weak and were in need of support. When it comes to the importance of social networks as a tool for garnering aid, the impression of Scandinavian politics we have gotten from studying the civil wars from an external perspective seems to be in line with conclusions made by historians who have taken an internal one.

On the other hand, this point should not be overemphasised. We have seen that social bonds in themselves were not enough to ensure that a king or magnate in need could get military or economic resources abroad. In the sources, we see that for material aid to be given there almost always had to be shared political interests between giver and recipient, sometimes in addition to a social bond such as friendship or kinship, but a personal relationship does not seem to have been required. This does not mean that Bagge is wrong when he claims in his 1986 article that social bonds and the obligations that followed them played an important role in the Norwegian civil wars. Rather, it means that we should be careful about seeing all the instances of material support from abroad as expressions of patron-client relationships.

It is perhaps useful to split the relationships between the givers and recipients of material aid into two categories. On the one hand, we have the instances in which political

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<sup>338</sup> Sverre Bagge, *From Viking stronghold to Christian kingdom: state formation in Norway, c. 900-1350* (København: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>339</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet: vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden* (Oslo: Pax, 2008), 24.

actors promised subordination to their patrons in exchange for resources. Sigurd Slembedjagn's relationship to King Erik Lam and Knud Magnussen's attempt to gain the support of the German king Konrad falls into this category. These examples are the ones that to the greatest extent conform to the type of patron-client relations described by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, as political loyalty was exchanged for material resources. Although it is difficult to say for certain, these vertical relationships seem to have been quite stable, once they had been successfully established. The most well-known example is that decades after Erling Skakke had become the vassal of the Danish king, his son and even grandson could count on military and economic support from Denmark.

The examples from the sources where there is no bond of lordship between the giver and recipient of aid, which is the majority, do not fit very well into the model of the patron-client relation. Rather, these horizontal connections seem more like ad-hoc alliances, entered into out of short-term political convenience. In the cases where there were personal relationships between giver and recipient, these do not seem to have been particularly strong, certainly not strong enough to justify the considerable expense that giving economic and military support undoubtedly was. Only when we look at vertical relationships does the practice of seeking material support from abroad conform to the model of patron-client relations described by historians studying internal political conditions. This conclusion fits well with Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's observations in his book *Den vennlige vikingen*, where he argues that horizontal bonds between kings or magnates of the same social status were often more opportunistic and short-lived than their vertical counterparts.<sup>340</sup>

### **Gifts and generosity**

In addition to patron-client relations, Bagge stresses gift giving as a crucial aspect of Norwegian political culture at the time of the internal struggles. In his 1986 paper, he leans on the work of anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss and Marshall D. Sahlins, and claims that the practice had legal as well as social dimensions. If a man received a gift, he was required to give one of corresponding value in return. In the cases where the gift received was so valuable that he did not have the resources to give something adequate in return, the gift could be repaid with service, thus signifying a hierarchy in which the receiver was subjugated to the giver. Thus, by rewarding potential followers with valuable gifts, kings and magnates could

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<sup>340</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Den vennlige vikingen: vennskapets makt i Norge og på Island 900-1300* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2010), 150.

expand their social networks.<sup>341</sup> This point has also been put forward by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, who has stressed that a king's aristocratic allies expected generosity, and that if their expectations were not met they would retract their support.<sup>342</sup>

There can be little doubt that generosity was politically significant in Scandinavia during the Middle Ages. When discussing the role foreign economic and military resources played in the civil wars of the twelfth century, we have seen that a lack of generosity in a king could be the reason for why he lost his allies and had to go abroad in search of support, the best example being King Sven of Denmark.

A more difficult question is whether the giving of material support itself should really be understood as an expression of gift giving. As when we considered patron-client relations, the parallels are immediately striking. Erling Skakke's support from Denmark seems to fit well; we saw how Erling and his son King Magnus went to Denmark in 1161 and asked King Valdemar for help to take back power in Norway after King Inge Krokrygg had been killed Håkon Herdebrei. According to the sagas, Erling received the material support he needed in return for promising the Danish ruler control over Viken. Should we understand the interaction between Erling and Valdemar as a kind of gift giving, where Valdemar gifts Erling the resources needed to take Norway, and gets Viken as a gift in return? Perhaps it is also in this light we should see Heinrich der Löwe's role as a supporter. Perhaps he was not paid off, but rather given gifts of money, in return for which the Danish kings who petitioned him expected material support.

The argument for seeing the giving of material aid abroad as a kind of gift giving seems very strong when we consider the instances where the sources makes the connection absolutely explicit. The most prominent example, Helmold of Bosau, mentions gifts in both his portrayal of Knud Magnussen's relationship to Count Adolf of Holstein, as well as when he is writing about the Danish king's attempts to curry favour with Heinrich der Löwe.<sup>343</sup> In *Fagrskinna*, we can also read how Birger Brosa gave Øystein Møyla "gifts of money" (*féggjofum*).<sup>344</sup>

Despite these similarities and parallels, we should be careful about categorically seeing material support as examples of gift giving. There certainly are instances, such as the

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<sup>341</sup> Bagge, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling," 151-56. See also: Marshall D. Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief," in *The Pleasures of Anthropology*, ed. Morris Freilich (New York: New American Library, 1983).

<sup>342</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Det norrøne samfunnet*, 87.

<sup>343</sup> Helmold of Bosau, "Chronica Slavorum," in *The chronicle of the Slavs*, ed. Francis Joseph Tschann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), ch. 67, 70.

<sup>344</sup> "Fagrskinna," in *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, ed. Alison Finlay (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ch. 130.

ones quoted above, where the sources make it obvious that we should understand the giving of material support in a social and ritual gift-giving context. In the vast majority of examples, however, the sources do not use the same kind of terminology as Helmold or the author of *Fagrskinna*. On the other hand, this differing terminology does not have to reflect differences in the actual events. Saxo and the saga authors could be describing the same practice as Helmold, except with words that do not make it so immediately clear to a modern audience that ritual gift giving was involved.

More important is that the sources generally do not give the impression that exchanges of material resources for money or political favours are examples of gift giving. Where gift exchanges were often used to establish relatively long lasting social relationships between giver and recipient, the relationships between the givers and recipients were, as I argued above, usually short-term alliances of political expediency. As we have demonstrated, it was the political interests of the actors that were of greatest importance when material resources were given from one kingdom to another, and it follows from such an interpretation that we should see material support as primarily a political transaction, and not as a social and ritual act.

Clearly, we should not assume that there was a sharp line dividing gift giving and more pragmatic political transactions. The separation is inherently vague, and the nature of our sources makes it even more difficult to be certain of what kind of practice we are dealing with. In conclusion, we might say that there are instances where it can be appropriate to see material support coming from abroad as a kind of gift giving. The majority of the examples the sources present us with, however, seem much more like instances of political and economic transactions between agents with shared interests. This, in turn, means that the practice we have been investigating is not the same as the gift giving described by historians like Sverre Bagge and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson.

### **The origins of the civil wars**

In our introduction, we saw that Norwegian historians have differed considerably on the question of how the internal conflicts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries should be interpreted. We discussed the views of two recent scholars, Sverre Bagge and Hans Jacob Orning, who disagree on the matter of what caused the struggles. Bagge held that the end of the Viking expeditions as well as donations to the church had led to a lack of resources within the Norwegian aristocracy, which in turn intensified the normal competition for power and

influence within the group.<sup>345</sup> Orning, on the other hand, holds that Erling Skakke had brought the wars about by persecuting and killing his enemies rather than reconciling with them. This was possible, he argues, because Erling had the ideological backing of the church, as well as the political backing of the Danish king, which ensured that Erling's enemies would have nowhere to hide or reinforce.<sup>346</sup>

Which of these two theories are relevant to the external perspective we have been applying to the Scandinavian internal conflicts, and is it possible that the conclusions of this thesis can add to our understanding of how the Norwegian civil war broke out? Since our main subject has been how Scandinavian political actors went abroad in search for military and economic resources, it is natural to ask whether this was a consequence of a resource crisis within the Norwegian aristocracy, as expressed in Bagge's theory. The answer to this is clearly no. The great majority of the political actors who are recorded in the sources as seeking support abroad were kings, not aristocrats. Additionally, when they did it was not due to some lack of resources within Norway in general, but rather because they, through loss in battle or bad policy, lost their crucial high-status allies. This is not necessarily an argument against Bagge, but it does mean that our investigation into the nature of material support from abroad has not offered any evidence that his theory regarding the outbreak of the Norwegian internal struggles is correct.

In the case of Orning's theory, the findings of this thesis seems very relevant as he, unlike most of the historians working before him, lays great emphasis on the impact of external factors on Norwegian politics in the 1100s. In emphasising the Danish influence on the Norwegian political situation, Orning clearly has a point. We have seen in our discussions of Erling Skakke's successful attempts to procure the support of King Valdemar, as well as Birger Brosa's active policy of supporting Norwegian and Danish pretenders, how the rejuvenated Denmark after 1157 shaped the Scandinavian political situation. On the other hand, Earl Birger's role as a host for Norwegian political refugees after 1170 runs contrary to Orning's claim that Erling's alliance to Valdemar gave the Norwegian chieftain a lot of leeway to pursue his enemies with special zeal. When Denmark was closed off, it did not mean that Erling's enemies had nowhere to run, but rather that Götaland took its place as somewhere refuge and material aid could be found. I do not think Orning is wrong in emphasising Denmark, however, as the resources Valdemar would have been able to spend on

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<sup>345</sup> Bagge, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling."

<sup>346</sup> Hans Jacob Orning, "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen - en revurdering," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 93, no. 2 (2014).

Norwegian rebels must have been far greater than the amount available to Birger Brosa.<sup>347</sup> This survey into the practice of seeking material support from abroad therefore fits Orning's conclusions to some extent, although Sweden clearly played a bigger role as a harbour for Norwegian pretenders than he seems to acknowledge.

While Norwegian historians have taken a great interest in discussing why internal conflict broke out in the twelfth century and what it eventually led to, the same cannot be said of their Danish colleagues. The two periods of Danish internal struggles, from 1131 to 1134 and from 1146 to 1157, has not been subject to the same kind of analysis and discussion as its Norwegian counterpart. The reason for this is probably that the Danish conflicts were a lot shorter than the Norwegian ones, and they have not been viewed as having a great impact on later Danish history. Thus, there is little our analysis can add to the understanding of the outbreak of the wars, but we can say that what we have found does not fit the institutional lens through which many Danish historians have tended to view medieval conflict.

### **The external perspective**

Having established how an external perspective on the Scandinavian civil wars fits in with and even adds to our knowledge of internal political conditions, we must now turn to the question of how material support from abroad helps expand and nuance the external perspective itself. In other words, how has our particular topic given us a better understanding of the civil wars in Denmark and Norway as transnational, integrated events?

### **The civil wars revisited**

In the introduction to this study, we saw that few historians have attempted to study the conflicts of the twelfth century in a way that includes more than one of the Scandinavian kingdoms. One of the few who has is the Swedish historian Birgit Sawyer, in her paper "The 'Civil Wars' revisited". We saw Sawyer argue that due to the international personal networks of the political elites, we should understand the political struggles in Denmark, Norway and Sweden as interconnected events, with the people moving about from kingdom to kingdom.<sup>348</sup> Sawyer's article does not contain much in-depth analysis, however, and it is my hope that the present study has expanded on her inconclusive outline.

Studying material aid from abroad has made it clear that Sawyer is right when she

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<sup>347</sup> Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom*, 50.

<sup>348</sup> Birgit Sawyer, "The 'Civil Wars' revisited," (*Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 82, no. 1 (2003): 70-72.

points out that political actors during the 1100s were not bound to their geographical place of origin. Rather, we have seen that the search for material resources that could improve a king's political position was not bound by any political borders. Danes could go to Norway, Sweden, Germany, and even to Poland in search of economic and military support, while Norwegians likewise sought help from Denmark and Sweden, but also from the Western Isles. Furthermore, we have seen how the political conditions of one polity could impact another, and lead foreign resources to be pulled into what might have started out as a domestic conflict, one prominent example being the hazardous position of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen leading to Knud Magnussen's German invasion of Jutland.

Consequently, it is easy to agree with Sawyer that the series of events often called "internal conflicts", in place of the much more problematic term "civil wars", perhaps were not really that internal, as we have seen how resources, people, as well as political networks and interests, routinely travelled from one kingdom to another. Examining just one of the external aspects of these conflicts, then, has contributed to widening the almost exclusively national focus that can be found among modern historians writing about the wars of twelfth-century Scandinavia.

Perhaps the central point in Birgit Sawyers interpretation of the so-called civil wars is that the transnational networks of the Scandinavian political elites helped prolong and intensify the conflicts.<sup>349</sup> When analysing the role of foreign material support in these struggles, we have time and again seen the importance of international political networks for establishing contact between a political actor receiving material support, and the one providing it. Thus, we might say that our findings support Sawyer's theory, as economic or military aid from abroad could undoubtedly give politicians who had lost either battles or crucial political support a chance to make a comeback, thus extending the conflicts.

On the other hand, our investigation has also clearly shown that social and political alliances abroad were no guarantee that one would receive aid from a foreign patron. The reason such support was given was not obligations to certain pre-existing social bonds between the supporter and the recipient, but rather that a bond of shared political interest could be found between the person giving support and the one receiving it. In other words, this inquiry into the external factors governing the conflicts over royal power in medieval Scandinavia has uncovered a significant corrective to the view that social networks and the obligations that followed them in themselves had the power to drag foreign players into

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<sup>349</sup> Sawyer, "The 'Civil Wars' revisited," 71.



domestic conflicts. To the contrary, potentates outside of a given kingdom did not, on the whole, intervene in its politics without having a personal interest in doing so. I therefore have to disagree with Sawyers conclusions, as it does not seem to have been the existence of social networks themselves that prolonged and intensified the twelfth-century struggles in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The decisive factor was the ability of political actors in need of help to establish bonds of shared political interests with resourceful patrons abroad. Sometimes such a bond of self-interest was built on the foundation of a social bond like kinship, but other times it was not.

### **Danish and Norwegian foreign policy**

In the few instances where modern historians have written about the external elements of the civil wars they usually focus too narrowly on the political self-interest of the actors involved, or they have a simplified view of the importance of kinship and marital ties between the political elite of Northern Europe. Examples of both of these approaches can be found in *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie* and *Dansk udenrigspolitikks historie*, written by Narve Bjørge and Esben Albrechtsen and chronicling Norwegian and Danish foreign policy respectively. Here, Bjørge's analysis ascribes next to no importance to international social bonds in the Scandinavian royal struggles,<sup>350</sup> while Albrechtsen seems to operate under the naïve assumption that a social bond to a foreign ruler was equal to a political alliance.<sup>351</sup>

Thus, the conclusions of this investigation are significant because they provide nuance to these well-established interpretations of what we might call the external politics of the Scandinavian civil wars. After having analysed the way political actors sought material support from outside their own kingdoms during the 1100s, it is obvious that Bjørge and those who share his perspective underestimate the political importance of social networks. After all, Scandinavian kings and magnates often sought help from their foreign kinsmen, in-laws, friends or lords when they were in need of resources. However, it is also easy to overestimate the binding nature of these social bonds, and I would also argue that scholars like Esben Albrechtsen and Birgit Sawyer, who see a strong connection between social bonds and political alliances, are doing so. Our survey into the practice of seeking and receiving material support from abroad has shown that political actors in need could not necessarily count on such aid

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<sup>350</sup> Narve Bjørge, "800-1536. Makt - og avmakt," in *Selvstendighet og union - Fra middelalderen til 1905*, ed. Narve Bjørge, Rian Øystein, and Alf Kaartvedt, *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 42.

<sup>351</sup> Esben Albrechtsen, "Konger og Krige, 700-1523," in *Dansk udenrigspolitikks historie*, ed. Carsten Due-Nielsen, Ole Feldbæk, and Nikolaj Petersen (*København: Danmarks Nationalleksikon*, 2001), 83.

from their social relations. Bjørge is justified in stressing interests, as success in obtaining economic funding or military reinforcements from neighbouring countries depended on a political actor's ability to make a foreign patron politically invested in his cause.

In sum, studying material support coming from abroad has added considerable weight to the position that the Scandinavian conflicts of the twelfth century cannot and should not be considered purely internal conflicts. It has also shown that to understand the complex political culture of the Scandinavian region in the Middle Ages, it is crucial to be aware of the connective tissue of social networks, which put agents in contact with one another. However, it is equally important to understand that personal interests almost always trumped any theoretical obligations to social bonds. By studying military and economic foreign aid, this thesis both expands on the regional perspective on the Scandinavian civil wars, and adds much needed nuance to this perspective, which is too often oversimplified because it is so seldom in use.

## **Concluding remarks**

In the end, the internal and external perspectives on the Scandinavian civil wars are not in conflict. Rather, we have seen how a focus on the regional nature of the wars that broke out after 1130 can add to our understanding, not only of the Northern European region as a whole, but also of the political conditions within the individual kingdoms. This should not surprise us. Many of the historians referenced in this thesis see personal relationships and social networks as a cornerstone of medieval politics. When we know that these bonds were not restricted by national frontiers, studies of medieval political practice and culture bound to modern nation states seem arbitrary. What this thesis has done is to take the methodological and theoretical ideas of historians like Sverre Bagge and Lars Hermanson, and apply them more rigorously than they themselves do. By analysing how the search for material support abroad is presented in the sources, we have seen how political networks as well as the interests of individual Scandinavian political actors could stretch all across Northern Europe. Therefore, the Scandinavian politics of the twelfth century must be understood as inherently transnational and studying the practice of seeking material resources from abroad has helped emphasise this point.

However, when trying to tie together the external and internal perspectives on the Scandinavian civil wars, it is crucial to remember where we started. Namely, that it was the alliances to internal magnates that determined whether it was necessary for Scandinavian

political actors to seek external help. It is clear that although the practice of seeking foreign support is an expression of the regional nature of Scandinavian politics, the origins of the practice can be found in the internal politics of the individual kingdoms. The importance of the internal political scene returned to the fore when we considered how aid from abroad could be used effectively, and found that the politicians who were most effective did not use their newfound resources to conquer their home kingdoms by force, but rather to attract aristocratic allies. Thus, while a transnational study is necessary, what happened locally seems to have impacted on the regional political scene, and vice versa. Even when studying an aspect of politics that is so obviously transnational, it has not been possible to discount the significance of internal politics.

After looking at the causes of why medieval Scandinavian political actors sought economic and military aid away from their own kingdoms, we turned to the question of which social bonds existed between the givers and receivers of this aid, and how significant these relations were. We found that social bonds crossing kingdoms' frontiers were widespread during the twelfth century, and that such relationships were used consciously as means to procure outside aid that could turn the tide in internal conflicts. We also found that obligations to kinsmen, in-laws and perhaps even friends were not sufficient to make a foreign patron lend valuable material support. In the cases where resources were given away, it was because there was some shared political interest between the supporter and the person being supported. Such shared interests could arise out of a variety of circumstances. In some examples from the sources, the giver of aid was in some difficult political situation that could be mended with the favour of a foreign monarch. Giving much needed material aid to a king who had been forced out of his kingdom could therefore be a way to obtain such favour. Where no common ground existed, the political actor in need of support offering his patron some kind of political or economic compensation could establish a bond of shared political interest.

This means that in order to consider Scandinavia politically interconnected in a meaningful and practical sense, it is not enough for the elite to have been connected by personal bonds. For these transnational bonds to have any impact they had to go hand in hand with political interests that also crossed the borders of kingdoms. By studying the role of foreign material support in the Scandinavian internal conflicts, we have seen how such regional political interests existed, but we have also seen that they could be created by the very practice this thesis has attempted to study.

The final point will therefore be that the conflicts that broke out in Scandinavia after

1130 gave rise to a political situation that often made it necessary for leading politicians to seek support outside of their own kingdoms. In order to do so, it was common for them to have to find or establish shared political interests with their hosts abroad. Thus, the civil wars made Scandinavia more politically interconnected, because they encouraged political interests, as well as social bonds, to cross borders.

Although we have come to interesting conclusions about how we should understand the politics of Scandinavia in the twelfth century, many questions have been left open, questions that should be subject to further study. Here, we have only analysed one very specific aspect of political interaction between kingdoms, and it would be interesting to see inquiries into other ways in which political actors interacted across the frontiers of kingdoms. Reading the sources, one comes across a number of examples of foreign patrons who lent their support to participants in the Scandinavian internal conflict in ways that did not involve military or economic aid. Most notable are perhaps the ways in which foreign potentates could act as mediators in seemingly domestic conflicts, such as when Friedrich Barbarossa attempted to settle the conflict between the Danish royal claimants Sven and Knud. An analysis of this practice would offer valuable insights into how our sources portray political authority, symbolic as well as actual, in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages. Looking at how the medieval Scandinavian kingdoms were part of larger political communities is a field with great opportunities for further studies, and hopefully one that is not hastily abandoned.

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