8 (b) The making of the Danish kingdom

INGE SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN

Traditionally, the two royal rune stones at Jelling (see Chapter 6) mark the beginning of Danish history. The smaller one bears the inscription 'King Gorm made this monument in honour of his wife, Tyre, the pride of Denmark'. The larger one relates that 'King Harald ordered these monuments to be made in honour of his father, Gorm, and his mother, Tyre – that Harald who won for himself all Denmark, and Norway, and made the Danes Christian'.[1]

Exact dating of runes is rarely possible, but on the basis of the royal names, known from foreign written sources, the Jelling inscriptions have been dated to the second half of the tenth century. They present the first two generations of the royal dynasty that has reigned in Denmark ever since. In the ninth and tenth centuries the title of *konungr* (king) could be used by several petty rulers at the same time but on the Jelling stone it is reserved for the single ruler of the whole of Denmark and at least part of Norway.

In the country itself the name of Denmark (*tanmaurk*, modern Danish *Danmark*) first occurs on the Jelling stones. However, *Denamearc* was already known to the Norwegian magnate Ohthere (Ottar) who visited King Alfred in England in about 890, and shortly afterwards Abbot Regino of Prüm (d. 915) mentions the name of *Denimerca* in his *Chronica*. The name consists of two parts: 'Dan' designates the people, the Danes (OD *danir*), whereas 'mark' has several meanings. One of them, 'borderland', would seem to fit the situation of the country at that time, though it is uncertain which border is meant. The border with Sweden has been suggested, from which the territory of Denmark after various conquests would extend to comprise the entire medieval Danish

1 The following are relevant to the whole of this chapter: I. Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Oldtid og Vikingetid', in A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 15–201 with a full bibliography; A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1, pp. 211–399 with a full bibliography; P. Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark* (O. Olsen, (ed.), *Politiken og Gyldendals Danmarkshistorie*, 3, København, 1989); O. Fenger, *Kirker rejses alle vegne* (Olsen, *Politiken*, 4, 1989).

realm. This theory is based on the sixth-century narrative of Jordanes, historian of the Goths, who believed that the Danes migrated from Sweden to settle in the Danish islands. But Jordanes does not use the name Denmark. A more likely theory focuses on the fact that the realm of the Danes in about 800 bordered on that of the Franks. The Franks used the word 'mark' to denote a border region that needed particular watching. Thus, the name of Denmark would have its origin in the designation of the area along the river Eider at the base of Jylland, well known to the Franks from the end of the eighth century.

The geographic extent of Denmark is indicated by Ohthere's and Wulfstan's descriptions of their voyages in Scandinavia, as recorded in the Old English translation of *Orosius*.[2] Here the three Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway (*Norðweg*) and Sweden (*Sweoland*) – are each mentioned. Denmark consisted of the present-day Danish territories except for the island of Bornholm. It also comprised the southern part of Schleswig as far as the river Eider together with Skåne and Halland in present-day southern Sweden, but not Blekinge which according to Wulfstan belonged to the Swedes. Furthermore, according to Ohthere, Bohuslän in present-day western Sweden and at least part of Viken or the Oslofjord area in present-day Norway belonged to Denmark. At the end of the ninth century, then, Denmark comprised all areas bordering on the Kattegat, that is, the central part of southern Scandinavia. What do we know of the origins of this conglomeration of territories and of its further history throughout the rest of the Viking Age and the early Scandinavian Middle Ages?

Sources

From before 1100 there is very little indigenous written evidence for the history of Denmark, but occasionally foreign writings throw light on Danish events. From about 800 the contemporaneous *Royal Frankish Annals*[3] contain an annual item on the relations between the Frankish kingdom and Danish kings. The first group of annals come to an end in the year 829. After that, as a consequence of the disruption of the Frankish empire, somewhat differing versions take over. The German annals, written in Fulda, continue until 901. From the same period there are also other foreign historical works touching on Danish

2 N. Lund (ed.), *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: the Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan* (York, 1984).

3 *Annales regni Francorum, Annales Bertiniani* and *Annales Fuldenses* are published with a German translation and commentary in R. Rau (ed.), *Quellen zur Karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, 1–3 (Darmstadt, 1968–9).

history; the most important is Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, written in about 875.[4] Apart from reports on Danish Vikings in western Europe (see Chapter 5), very little is known of Danish history during the last decades of the ninth century.

The eleventh-century Danish and English kings Sven Forkbeard, Knut and Hardeknut are dealt with in a chronicle called *Encomium Emmae* or *Gesta Cnutonis Regis*.[5] It was written by a monk of St Omer in Flanders in about 1040 with the purpose of supporting Hardeknut as king of England. The author also favours Sven in his revolt against his father, the Harald of the larger Jelling stone, later nicknamed 'Bluetooth'.

In contrast to the author of *Encomium Emmae*, Adam of Bremen in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*,[6] written in about 1075, sides with Harald against Sven. Adam's work is the most important foreign narrative dealing with early Danish and other Scandinavian history. One of his informants was the Danish king Sven Estridsen who died in 1074. Adam wanted to remind the newly appointed archbishop, Liemar, of the fact that mission among the Slavs and the Scandinavians was the reason why the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen was founded, and that this task should not be neglected in favour of royal affairs as it had been under his predecessor.[7] In using Adam's work it is important to keep in mind his bias and his meagre sources for the early history of Scandinavia. His first two books, covering the period from about 800 to 1043, should be approached with particular caution.

No Scandinavian narratives are known until about 1100 when the killing of St Knud (in 1086) caused the writing of the earliest extant Danish texts. English clerics from the monastery of St Alban in Odense composed a *Tabula* on the elevation of Knud's coffin in 1095. Another text, *Passio*, derives from his canonisation in 1101. This is a description of Knud's martyrdom to be used liturgically in connection with his masses. In the years 1111–17 an English Benedictine, Ailnoth, composed the first substantial account of the martyrdom of St Knud, *Gesta Swenomagni regis et filiorum eius et passio gloriosissimi Canuti*

4 Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and Adam of Bremen's history of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen are published with a German translation and commentary in W. Trillmich (ed.), *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches* (Darmstadt, 1968).

5 M. Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Scriptores minores historiæ Danicæ medii ævi*, 2 (København, 1922), pp. 375–426; A. Campbell (ed.), *Encomium Emmae reginae* (*Royal Historical Society, Camden*, 3rd ser. 72, London, 1949).

6 See footnote 4.

7 Aa. Trommer, 'Komposition und Tendenz in der hamburgischen Kirchengeschichte Adam von Bremens', *Classica et mediaevalia*, 18 (1957), pp 207–57.

regis et martyris.[8] A little more than twenty years later, probably in the 1140s, the *Roskilde Chronicle* was written. It covers the period from AD 826 to 1140/45, and was continued up to 1157.[9] The chronicle concentrates on the relations between the kings, some of whom were legendary, and the church. It is based on Adam of Bremen's history of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen to whose church province Scandinavia belonged until 1104, but the author of the Chronicle makes alterations in order to stress that Danish Christianity dated back to King Harald Klak's baptism in 826.[10] The last part of the chronicle is considered to be more trustworthy than the later histories of Sven Aggesen and Saxo (see Chapter 12(c)), although nobody can deny its bias.

Since medieval Danish history writing is late and the contemporaneous works are meagre and biased, great importance must be attached to other types of evidence, archaeological as well as written. To the latter belong *runic inscriptions*. The problem with these inscriptions is that they can only be dated approximately in cases where a person or an event is mentioned, such as in the case of the Jelling stones. In most cases one must resort to rough linguistic and typological dating. Such dating of Danish inscriptions is uncertain in that it is to a large extent based on the Jelling runes.

Important Danish events and kings are sometimes praised in Icelandic *skaldic poems* which may have been composed shortly after the events they relate and preserved fairly well orally because of their strict and complicated prosody. But the fact remains that they have only been preserved in sagas several hundred years younger.

For the period from the end of the eighth century to about 1100, coins, notably in hoards, are important evidence. Most coins from the Viking Age are foreign, such as Islamic coins which reflect trade and other connections with the Caliphate in the ninth and tenth centuries. Only a small number of Scandinavian Viking Age coins are known, and up to about 995 they are without inscriptions. After that coins stamped with the name (and sometimes the image) of a king are found. They can be dated approximately and the mints and mintmasters can be located. In the first part of the eleventh century Danish coins imitate English ones; this was an effect of King Knut's North

8 These hagiographical texts are published in M. Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Vitae Danorum sanctorum*, I (København, 1908).

9 M. Cl. Gertz, (ed), *Scriptores minores historiæ Danicæ medii ævi*, I (København, 1918), pp. 3–33.

10 L. Hemmingsen, *By Words of Mouth: The Origin of Danish Legendary History*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (København, 1996).

Sea empire. But even more German coins were imported until minting of domestic coinage began to expand in the mid-eleventh century. A few decades later only coins with the name of the ruling native king were officially accepted in Denmark.[11]

Archaeology has become an increasingly important source for the study of the earliest political history of Denmark. New procedures have been developed, such as the excavation of large areas of settlement and improved dating techniques, notably dendrochronology. Dendrochronology has, for instance, made it possible to date King Gorm's original burial chamber to 958, and exact dates have been determined for the fortification of Danevirke, the Kanhave canal and the early development of the town of Ribe.

Danish history before 950

In his *History of the Franks* from the last quarter of the sixth century Gregory of Tours mentions a Danish king by the name of Chalochillaich who raided the Frankish coast shortly after 500. The attack was repelled and the king slain. Nothing is known of his reign or realm in Denmark. Two hundred years later an English missionary, Willibrord, tried to convert a king of the Danes called Ongendus.[12] Nothing came of this, but at the same time, in the first part of the eighth century, the town of Ribe started to develop, apparently as an emporium where cattle were exchanged for various handmade objects produced in workshops north of the river Ribeå.[13]

Parallel with the earliest urban-like activity in Ribe, a rampart north of the river Eider, originally constructed in the sixth century, was strengthened with a huge oak-timbered palisade. This reinforcement of the so-called *Danevirke* ('fortification of the Danes') has been dated dendrochronologically to 737.[14] It is tempting to see King Ongendus, or Angantyr in the Nordic language, as the ruler of the southern part of Jylland where Ribe and Danevirke were established. A power of royal dimensions must be considered a *sine qua non* for building activity on that scale.

A third feat of engineering belongs to the same years. In 726 the Kanhave canal was dug across the island of Samsø, centrally situated between Jylland

11 J. Steen Jensen (ed.), *Tusindtallets danske mønter: Danish Coins from the Eleventh Century in The Royal Collections of Coins and Medals* (København, 1995).
12 Alcuin, 'De Vita S. Willibrordi', in Ph. Jaffé (ed.), *Monumenta Alcuniania*, Bibl.VI (Berlin, 1873), pp. 47–8.
13 M. Bencard (ed.), *Ribe excavations 1970–76*, 1–4 (Ribe, 1976–91).
14 H. Hellmuth Andersen et al., *Danevirke*, 1–2 (*Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter*, 13, 1976).

and Sjælland.[15] Whoever was in control of this canal was also able to observe and to some extent control traffic on both sides of Samsø, to and from the Danish Belts. So many important works from the same time would seem to indicate that a single Danish king ruled a large part of medieval Denmark. However, even as late as the ninth century there is no clear indication of royal activity outside southern Jylland.

According to the *Royal Frankish Annals*, Charlemagne fought a war with Godfred, the king of the Danes. In 808 Godfred had some traders moved from Reric, probably at the inlet of Kiel, to the fjord of Schleswig (Schlei); at the same time he ordered a fortification to be built along the frontier from the Baltic to the North Sea. Until about twenty years ago, when archaeologists excavated the much older rampart mentioned above, this was believed to have been the origin of Danevirke.

In 810 Godfred was murdered by one of his retainers, and in the following year his nephew and successor, Hemming, made a treaty with Charlemagne. Twelve high-born Franks and twelve Danes met in the neighbourhood of the Eider and swore on their swords to keep the peace. Among the Danish participants were two of Hemming's brothers, and also a person by the name of Osfrid of Skåne, but the fact that the king had a man from Skåne among his most distinguished retainers cannot be taken as proof that Hemming and his successors governed the whole of Denmark.

In the following years there was internal fighting between different branches of Godfred's kin. A new meeting with the Franks in 813 was postponed because two Danish kings went to Vestfold on the western side of Oslofjord to subdue an uprising. When they returned to Jylland a tremendous battle was fought with the sons of Godfred. In 815 the sons of Godfred with 200 ships withdrew in the face of a Frankish attack; eventually the Franks abandoned their pursuit and returned to the emperor with forty hostages. Twelve years later, Horik, a son of Godfred, became king of the Danes. In *Vita Anskarii* Rimbert claims that Horik was the first king to rule all Danes but the truth of that is impossible to assess. We simply do not know how much of Denmark he ruled.

In 826 another Danish king, Harald Klak, tried to obtain the support of Emperor Louis the Pious. Together with his household Harald was baptised in Mainz and sent back together with the missionary Anskar (see Chapter 7).

15 A. Nørregaard Jørgensen, 'Nye undersøgelser af Kanhavekanalen på Samsø', *Marinarkæologisk Nyhedsbrev fra Roskilde* (Roskilde, 1995), pp. 9–15. A roughly contemporary underwater fortification may be an extension of Danevirke; see W. Kramer, 'Ein hölzernes Sperrwerk in der grossen Breite der Schlei als Teil des Danewerk-Baues von 737 n.Chr.Geb.', *Archäologische Nachrichten aus Schleswig-Holstein*, Heft 3 (Schleswig, 1992).

However, it appears that it was not Harald but King Horik with whom Anskar had to negotiate in order to be able to preach among the Danes. In 873 the *Fulda Annals* mention negotiations between the German king and two Danish kings; these encounters seem to have taken place in the border district between the Danes and the Saxons.

In the decades around 900 Danish history is plunged in darkness. Adam of Bremen later claimed to know that a Swedish dynasty settled at Hedeby and ruled the area for three generations. The extent of their realm has been the object of much discussion but their presence is confirmed by two rune stones from the first quarter of the tenth century. The inscriptions mention the royal names of Gnupa and his son Sigtrygg and the stones were raised by Gnupa's wife, Asfrid, daughter of Odinkar. Odinkar was also the name of a wealthy bishop of Ribe in the early eleventh century and it is possible that Asfrid belonged to a powerful Jutish family whereas the predecessor and probable ancestor of Gnupa and Sigtrygg, Oluf, is described by Adam as a Swedish prince. In his *Res Saxonum Gestae* from 970 Widukind of Korvey reports that the German king Henry I fought the Danes in 934, forcing 'Chnuba' (Gnupa) to be baptised.[16] Whatever the extent of the realm of these kings they were, according to Adam, succeeded by King Gorm, but the circumstances and chronology of the take-over are confusing. Suffice it to say that by about 940 the Jelling dynasty had prevailed, at least in southern Jylland. According to Adam of Bremen, Gorm and his son Harald had an encounter with the archbishop of Bremen, apparently in 936.

The dating of Gorm's death depends on the dating of the burial chamber in the northern mound at Jelling, regarded as having been built for him. By use of dendrochronology it has been established that the timber of the chamber was cut in 958 (cf. Chapter 6). Harald seems to have been baptised in about 965. However, three Danish bishops are mentioned in the statutes of a synod at Ingelheim in Germany as early as 948 (cf. Chapter 7). They were subordinated to the archiepiscopal see of Hamburg-Bremen which again belonged to the *Reichskirche* of King Otto I. The Christianisation of Denmark through Harald Bluetooth was probably the consequence of German predominance over Denmark. Otto issued a letter of immunity to the Danish clergy in 965, as did also his grandson Otto III in 988. The documents of 948, 965 and 988 contain the first mentions of Danish urban centres: Schleswig, Ribe and Århus in 948, and Odense in 988.

16 Widukind's work has been published with a German translation and commentary in A. Bauer and R. Rau (eds.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit* (Darmstadt, 1971).

By and large there appears to have been a tendency towards political unification of Denmark throughout the Viking Age but royal sovereignty over the entire medieval Denmark cannot be substantiated until the latest part of that period. At first, kings seem to have ruled over southern Jylland, then over Fyn and the entire peninsula, to which was finally added Sjælland and Skåne. As to the functions of the ninth-century Jutish king it can be seen that he negotiated with foreign powers. Though he had not adopted Christianity he furnished missionaries with sites for the building of churches at Hedeby and Ribe. Corresponding royal control at Århus has been dated to shortly before 900, at a time when Danish royal power appears to have been weak.[17]

The North Sea empire

Whatever the rune carver of the larger Jelling stone had in mind when he declared that King Harald Bluetooth 'won all Denmark' this deed included the building of four large-scale, circular strongholds placed at strategic positions close to either the Kattegat or the Limfjord (cf. Chapter 6). These forts are known as Fyrkat and Aggersborg in northern Jylland, Nonnebakken in Odense, and Trelleborg in Sjælland; they were all excavated in the mid-twentieth century.[18] They are commonly thought to have been commissioned by one person, presumably the king. Their function is disputed, but they were definitely strong enough to control the surrounding areas and the neighbouring waterways and may thus have been instruments for the subjection of the entire country. Trelleborg in Sjælland has been dated dendrochronologically to 981. In the other three there was not enough surviving wood to make possible such exact dating but the close similarity between all four of them indicates that they were built much at the same time. However, Harald Bluetooth seems to have started from southern Jylland, and his conquest probably progressed from west to east. The recently found traces of a circular structure in Trälleborg at the southeast corner of Skåne may reflect some of Harald's influence there as well.

Thietmar of Merseburg refers to encounters between Saxons and Danes at Danevirke in 974. A Danish fortification was conquered by the Saxons

17 H. Hellmuth Andersen, P. J. Crabb and H. J. Madsen, *Århus Søndervold. En byhistorisk undersøgelse* (*Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter*, 9, 1971).

18 P. Nørlund, *Trelleborg* (København, 1948); O. Olsen, E. Roesdahl and H. Schmidt, *Fyrkat*, 1–2 (København, 1976); R. Skovmand et al. (eds.), *Aggersborg i 1000 år* (København, 1980); B. Jacobsson, 'Utgrävningen av borgen Trelleborg, Skåne', in G. Fellows-Jensen and N. Lund (eds.), *Fjortende tværfaglige vikingesymposium* (København, 1995), pp 12–22.

but reconquered by the Danish king in 983.[19] The identification of the king mentioned depends on the date of Harald Bluetooth's death. Towards the end of his life he was, according to Adam of Bremen, faced with a revolt led by his son, Sven Forkbeard. Harald was defeated and took refuge in the Slavonic town of Jumne, in spite of the fact that the population there was heathen. He died there but his body was brought back to Denmark and buried in the Trinity Church in Roskilde which he had built himself. *Encomium Emmae* has it that the civil war was started by Harald because he was envious of Sven's popularity, and that the war came to an end when Harald fled to the Slavs among whom he died, but his funeral is not mentioned. After Sven's death in England in 1014, his body was transferred to a port in Denmark and buried in a monastery dedicated to the Trinity, which he had built.

In spite of their opposite biases – Adam regarding Sven as a rebel whereas the Encomiast takes Sven's side – the two authors agree on the civil war and Harald's death among the Slavs. It is, however, uncertain whether it was Harald or Sven who built the church or monastery dedicated to the Trinity, but since the Encomiast seems to know less about Denmark than Adam, it was probably Harald. Although the date of Harald's death is uncertain, it was most likely in 986, in which case he was the king who fought the Saxons in 983.

Sven Forkbeard's Viking raids on England may have started in 991, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions a raid in which the later Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason took part (cf. Chapter 5). Sven is not named then, but in 994 he raided England together with Olaf, and returned to England several times later. The English king Æthelred tried to buy him off with great sums of money, but in vain. In 1013 Sven conquered England, but a few months later, in 1014, he died. Sven was successful in England because he had been able to regain the rule of Denmark and obtain a leading position in Scandinavia. A determining factor was a battle in 1000 (or 999) when Sven fought together with the Swedish king Olof Skötkonung, probably already his man, against Olaf Tryggvason who had now become king of Norway. The location of this sea battle has been much discussed among modern historians. According to Adam it took place in Öresund 'where kings used to fight' whereas the Icelandic sources place it at the isle of 'Svoldr' near the Slavonic coast. At any rate, King Olaf was killed and two Norwegian earls were installed by Sven to rule Norway.[20]

19 Thietmar's *Chronica* is published with a German translation and commentary in W. Trillmich, (ed.), *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 9 (Darmstadt, 1966).

20 S. Ellehøj, 'Olav Tryggvesons fald og Venderne', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 11: 4 (København, 1953–6), pp. 1–51.

After the death of Sven Forkbeard his eldest son, Harald, took over the government of Denmark. In England the situation was precarious for the Danes and Sven's younger son, Knut, had to return home for reinforcements. In 1016 his rival, the Anglo-Saxon king Edmund Ironside, died and Knut married his mother, Emma; their son was christened Hardeknut, a Danish name. In Norway a new Viking king, Olaf Haraldsson, had prevailed. He defeated one of the two ruling earls; the other was called to England to assist Knut in the subjection of that country. Olaf ruled Norway for twelve years.

Like other Scandinavian rulers Knut was surrounded by a retinue called *hirð* or *lið*. Its constitution is known through the Danish law of *Vederlagen*, preserved in three versions. The two oldest were put into writing in the late twelfth century by the historians Sven Aggesen and Saxo respectively. A *lið* was no new institution at the time of Knut; runic inscriptions bear witness to the fact that Viking chieftains had retinues. The number of men in a *lið* would necessarily vary but fifty men was considered a large *lið*. Between the leader and his men there was a contractual relationship to be renewed or terminated by either side at the time of Yule. Some of the men had special tasks in addition to their main obligation of military service for the king. A retainer might for instance be the king's deputy in a district, his *ombudsmand*. But sources are scant and Sven Aggesen's and Saxo's renderings of *Vederlagen* could just as well express wishful longing for the discipline of the past.

Much more is known of Knut's English reign than of his rule in Denmark but an institution such as the English earldom may have been influenced by Scandinavian customs. Knut appointed earls who ruled parts of his kingdom, four in England and two in Norway, whereas only one is known in Denmark, a man of uncertain extraction by the name of Ulf. He was married to Knut's sister, Estrid. In a battle at the mouth of the river of Helgeå in Skåne (or Uppland, see Chapter 8(e)) in 1026 the Norwegian and Swedish kings joined forces against Knut. According to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the Swedes had control of the battlefield whereas skaldic poems proclaim Knut victorious. However, his enemies were unable to stem his growing influence in Scandinavia. He was successful in supporting the opposition against King Olaf Haraldsson in Norway. In Denmark Ulf was charged with treason and killed at Knut's request. The king had to do penance by paying a large sum of wergeld to his sister who used the money to build a stone church in Roskilde.

Owing to the nature of extant sources Knut's relations with the Church are the best-known aspect of his Danish rule. In the face of protests from the see of Hamburg-Bremen he appointed several English bishops. The English

influence on the Danish church is reflected in the vocabulary of the latter which is partly of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Other transactions helped to strengthen Knut's position: during a pilgrimage to Rome he succeeded in arranging a marriage between his daughter, Gunhild, and the son of the German emperor. His last victory was won in his absence. When Olaf Haraldsson tried to regain his Norwegian realm after having been expelled in 1028, Norwegian magnates in alliance with Knut met him in the battle of Stiklestad near Trondheim in 1030. Olaf was killed and Knut had his son Sven installed as ruler of Norway under the tutelage of his English mother Ælfgifu (ON Álfifa). This was an unpopular arrangement ending in the expulsion of Sven and his mother from Norway and the ascension to the throne of Olaf's young son Magnus in 1035 (see Chapter 8(c)).

The change of power in Norway may have occurred before Knut's death in 1035. With his death, however, it became clear how loosely Knut's North Sea empire had been organised. At first his sons took over his kingdoms but when the youngest of them, Hardeknut, suddenly died in 1042, an heir of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty, Edward the Confessor, became king of England. This marked the end of the North Sea empire. Twice, in 1069 and 1086, Danish kings attempted to reconquer England, but in vain.

Tradition has it that there was an agreement between Hardeknut and the Norwegian king Magnus Olafsson that the survivor was to rule both countries.[21] At any rate, Magnus lived five years longer than Hardeknut and succeeded him on the Danish throne. By defeating the Slavs he won a place of his own in Danish history. After his death there was incessant fighting between his two successors, King Harald Hard-ruler of Norway and the Danish king Sven Estridsen, Knut the Great's nephew. The Norwegian frontier was now pushed south to the Göta river and the three later Scandinavian kingdoms began to emerge from the aftermath of the North Sea empire.

The early medieval Danish kingdom

The main source for this period in Danish history is Adam of Bremen and it is therefore important to recognise that his accounts tend more to the ecclesiastical than the secular. Following the constant warring between the Danish and Norwegian kings which lasted until 1064, Sven Estridsen managed to take control of the situation in Denmark. The country was divided into eight

21 Adam of Bremen (II, 78) tells of a similar agreement between the English king Edward the Confessor and Sven Estridsen.

dioceses, all except one with urban sees. Beside the old sees of Schleswig, Ribe, Århus and Odense, Roskilde and Lund had cathedrals by about the year 1000. By 1060, at the latest, both Viborg and the district of Vendsyssel in northern Jylland had their own sees. Skåne for a short while had two cathedrals, one at Dalby in addition to that of Lund.

Sven also wanted to create a Scandinavian church province separate from that of Hamburg-Bremen but this did not come about until 1104 when the archiepiscopal see of Lund was finally established (cf. Chapter 7). Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen, Sven's contemporary, was understandably opposed to relinquishing the largest part of his province, and claimed the right to continue as the *primas* of the Scandinavian churches. However, since he was on the imperial side in the antagonism between the German emperor and the pope, this was denied him. The situation changed when separate Norwegian and Swedish archbishoprics were established in the mid-twelfth century. The Danish archbishop Eskil (like his next two successors) was now allowed to use the title of *primas* of Sweden, which gave him the right to appoint the Swedish archbishop.

Sven Estridsen has been accused of having a dissolute character. His several children had different mothers, and he had no son by the woman to whom he was married. Nevertheless, the next five Danish kings were all his sons. In his *Gesta Danorum* from about 1200 Saxo asserts that kings should be acclaimed at the four provincial Danish *things*. This was probably a much older procedure which implied great risk of disagreement when there was more than one claimant.

The fraternal order of succession among Sven's sons appears to have been according to age. The first, Harald Hen, reigned from 1074 to 1080. He is reported to have issued laws, and his queen, Margrethe, is praised by the author of the *Roskilde Chronicle* as a rich donator to the cathedral of Roskilde. A letter from Pope Gregory VII urges Harald to follow in his father's footsteps by reinforcing the Church and protecting the weak: women, clerics and foreigners. The two latter groups were more or less identical.[22] Such a letter was a response on the part of the papal curia to complaints from groups within Danish society but it is impossible to assess the possible abuses which had caused the complaints.

Knud, the successor of Harald Hen, ended his life a martyr. After having been hunted through Jylland by a rebellious crowd he was killed in the church

22 C. Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: Regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050–1170* (København, 1982), pp. 111–22.

of St Alban in Odense in 1086. The cause of the revolt is one of the great issues in modern Danish historiography.[23] The texts written to support the canonisation of Knud express opinions quite opposite to those of the *Roskilde Chronicle*. The hagiographic writings of Odense attach great importance to the fact that Knud had to give up his plan of a military expedition to England because the army refused to wait for his arrival at the meeting place in the Limfjord. According to the *Roskilde Chronicle* the rebellion was caused by a new and unprecedented law called *nefgjeld*, a sort of poll tax. The delay at the beginning of the war is said to have been due to the fact that Knud found his brother Oluf deeply involved in high treason. Knud took Oluf prisoner and sent him to his father-in-law, the count of Flanders. The later Icelandic *Knytlinga saga* relates that Oluf was released from prison to succeed Knud as king of Denmark.

During Oluf's reign (1086–95) there was a failure of crops in Denmark as well as in other parts of Europe. In the Danish hagiographical texts this was represented as divine punishment for the murder of Knud. Knud's canonisation is justified by his death as a martyr and by the miracles occurring at his tomb. The latest of these texts is Ailnoth's chronicle, dedicated to Sven Estridsen's youngest son, Niels (1104–34), who was also the last of his five reigning sons. Ailnoth urges Niels to imitate Knud as the protector of the Church, notably in Odense where the cult of the saint was by then well established.

King Niels, who succeeded his brother Erik Ejegod (1095–1103), minted a coin with the legend *Pax Portus* (peace of the port or the town). We do not know in what way this peace was to be observed but the idea would match the *Roskilde Chronicle's* characterisation of Niels: 'Kind and straightforward, by no means a ruler'.[24] By the standards of the time this was hardly praise. The description may refer to what happened in 1124 when Niels was unable to prevent a revolt against the clerics of Sjælland. Nor did he interfere when, in January 1131, his son Magnus killed his own cousin, Knud Lavard, son of King Erik Ejegod.

Social and political organisation in the eleventh century

By the mid-eleventh century the Viking era of quick raids and brief conquests was definitely over. With relations between kingdoms and principalities

23 Hemmingsen, *By Words of Mouth*.
24 Gertz, *Scriptores minores*, 1, p. 25: *virum mansuetum et simplicem, minime rectorem*.

being regulated more and more through diplomacy and wars, it is important to turn now to the political and social organisation of eleventh-century Denmark.

The mainstay of the economy was of course agriculture (see Chapter 10). Agrarian settlement was to a large extent organised in villages which, according to archaeological evidence, were continually relocated within their separate districts throughout the first millennium AD until they found their permanent place, probably in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when churches were built in many of them. This new stability should not be underestimated. Many new villages were also established and older ones enlarged between the eighth and thirteenth centuries as supported by archaeological evidence and topographical names. A large number of the new villages bore names ending in *-torp* (cf. German *Dorf*); other names had the suffixes of *-bølle* or *-toft*.

Village names ending in *-toft* are particularly interesting. As an appellative the word denotes the enclosed messuage of a farmstead on the village site. This unit was the key element in calculating the share of the farm in the common field and its obligations. But the word also had another meaning: the seat of an oarsman in a warship. This may indicate a connection between the organisation of the village and that of the naval levy, the *leding* (OD *lethang*).

A kind of land registration based on a unit called *bol* seems to be very old. Originally, *bol* may have meant as much land as was needed for a household. This would vary from one village to another. *Bol*-assessments occur in the earliest Danish record, St Knud's charter of 1085 in favour of Lund cathedral.[25]

St Knud's charter transferred large landed estates to the church of Lund and states the number of *bol* in each village that were included in the gift. In Sjælland the villages are described as being in administrative districts called *herreder* (sing. *herred*, OD *hæreth*) whereas no *herred* is mentioned in Skåne. Royal rights connected with the lands in question were transferred to the dean and brothers of the cathedral, but with three notable exceptions: if a man was outlawed he would have to buy his peace from the king; if a man avoided the *leding* he was to pay a fine to the king; and the king reserved the right to take horses for his own use while visiting the various districts.

The charter also reveals that the king possessed many estates, some of them acquired through 'buyings of peace'. Another source of income were the annual dues from tenements in the towns of Lomma, Helsingborg and Lund. The king's control of these towns rested in his ownership of the town land; people could hold sites on payment of an annual fee. Several towns

25 S. Skansjö and H. Sundström, *Gåvobrevet 1085* (Lund, 1988).

had royal residences and mints; eleventh-century coins were struck in urban centres such as Lund, Roskilde, Odense, Slagelse, Ringsted and Viborg. It was from these and other towns that the king was able to control a large part of the country.

Exactly when the villages were divided into *herreder* is uncertain. St Knud's charter has been used to support the opinion that the *herred* had at that time only been introduced in Sjælland, not in Skåne.[26] At any rate, by the thirteenth century there were *herreder* all over Denmark. The function of this unit has been the subject of much debate. In the high Middle Ages it was an administrative and judicial district. The Old Danish word *hæreth* is a compound of *hær* (army) and *rath* (riding on horseback) which suggests a military origin. There is, however, no contradiction between the military and the administrative and judicial functions. Under royal rule the entire country would have had to have been organised to ensure general participation in defence. A different division into *sysler* (sing. *syssel*), which were larger than the *herreder*, is only known in Jylland. The age of this unit is also uncertain but in the high Middle Ages a *syssel* was an area for a special type of jurisdiction (cf. ON *sýsla*, Chapter 8(c)).

The royal rights reserved in Knud's charter give important information on the character of eleventh-century royal rule: the king guaranteed the peace of the country in return for considerable payments when the peace was broken. The fines mentioned in the charter are high; their purpose was obviously to have a deterrent effect.

The king's right to fines for neglecting summons to serve in the *leding* confirms that he was in command of the naval defence. How and when the *leding* originated is uncertain, nor do we know the full extent of the system until the Danish provincial laws were put into writing in the thirteenth century. At that time the country was divided into *skipæn*, from one to four in each *herred*, and each *skipæn* was again divided into a number of *havner* (sing. *havne*). Every *skipæn* would supply one ship, every *havne* one man and his personal provisions. The kings tried to exercise their right to supreme command of the *leding* but even when the system functioned at its best, in the latter half of the twelfth and in the early thirteenth centuries, 'the Age of the Valdemars', there are several stories of defections. The revolt against St Knud in 1086 may have been the earliest example.

It should be stressed that a great part of the Danish population was not included in the *leding* system. Thus, only landowners of some substance took

26 Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', p. 254.

part. Even the right to buy one's peace was reserved for the upper strata. It has been said of the European feudal society that inferior persons could implore a saint to punish unjust magnates but no justice could be enforced by law.[27] The majority of the people sought protection within their kin and households. These were the social conditions under which the early political unification of Denmark progressed.

27 M. Gelting: 'Loven i de europæiske feudalsamfund', in O. Fenger and Chr. R. Jansen (eds.), *Jyske lov 750 år* (Viborg, 1991), pp. 26–36.