Introduction

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The word 'Scandinavia' first occurs in the *Naturalis historia* of Pliny the Elder (d. AD 79), in the form of *Scadinavia* or *Scatinavia*. In later manuscripts of this work an *n* was added in the first syllable and the name became *Scandinavia*, as it still is. Pliny used the name to denote what he believed to be a large island in the Baltic. As the basis for his original Latin version of the name, a Germanic form **Skaþin-aujō* or **Skaðin-aujō* has been reconstructed. The last part of this compound, meaning 'land on the water' or 'island', causes no difficulty, but the interpretation of the first element is disputed. Half a score of conjectures have been suggested. One of the more plausible ones, accepted by some of the leading scholars in the field, is that the first part is derived from the Germanic stem of **skaðan* – 'danger, damage'. Scandinavia would then originally mean 'the dangerous land on the water' or 'the dangerous island'.

Pliny also refers to a group of islands in the north called *Scandiae*. In the following century they reappear in the geographical writings of Ptolemy. He places the four islands of *Skandiai* east of Jylland (Jutland) and singles out the largest and most easterly as the proper *Skandia*. This is clearly Skåne (Scania), the southernmost region of present-day Sweden, and the territory north of it; the other three and smaller *Skandiai* would be Danish islands. It appears, then, that Pliny's *Scadinavia* was also one of the islands which he called *Scandiae*. He composed his work from different traditions, and this may explain his use of two names for the same 'island'. The original Latin form of *Scandia/-ae* may have been **Scadnia/-ae*, in which *dn* was later transformed into *nd* by metathesis. *Scandia/-ae*, too, would then originally refer to one or more 'dangerous' islands, and the transformation of *Scadinavia* into *Scandinavia* in the younger Pliny manuscripts may have been caused by contamination with *Scandiae*. The danger that may originally have been implied by both names, *Scadinavia* as well as *Scandia/-ae*, has been explained as that caused by the reefs and sandbanks which threatened seafarers on their way between Kattegat

and the Baltic, above all the long reef of Falsterbo off the southwestern tip of Skåne.[1]

Whatever the original meaning of the name Scandinavia, we may conclude that it was used by classical authors in the first centuries of the Christian era to identify Skåne and the mainland further north which they believed to be an island. If the last part of the name is derived from Germanic *-aujō*, the original meaning would be 'land on the water' rather than 'island'; it is not likely that Germanic-speaking people familiar with the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula would conceive of that territory as an island.[2]

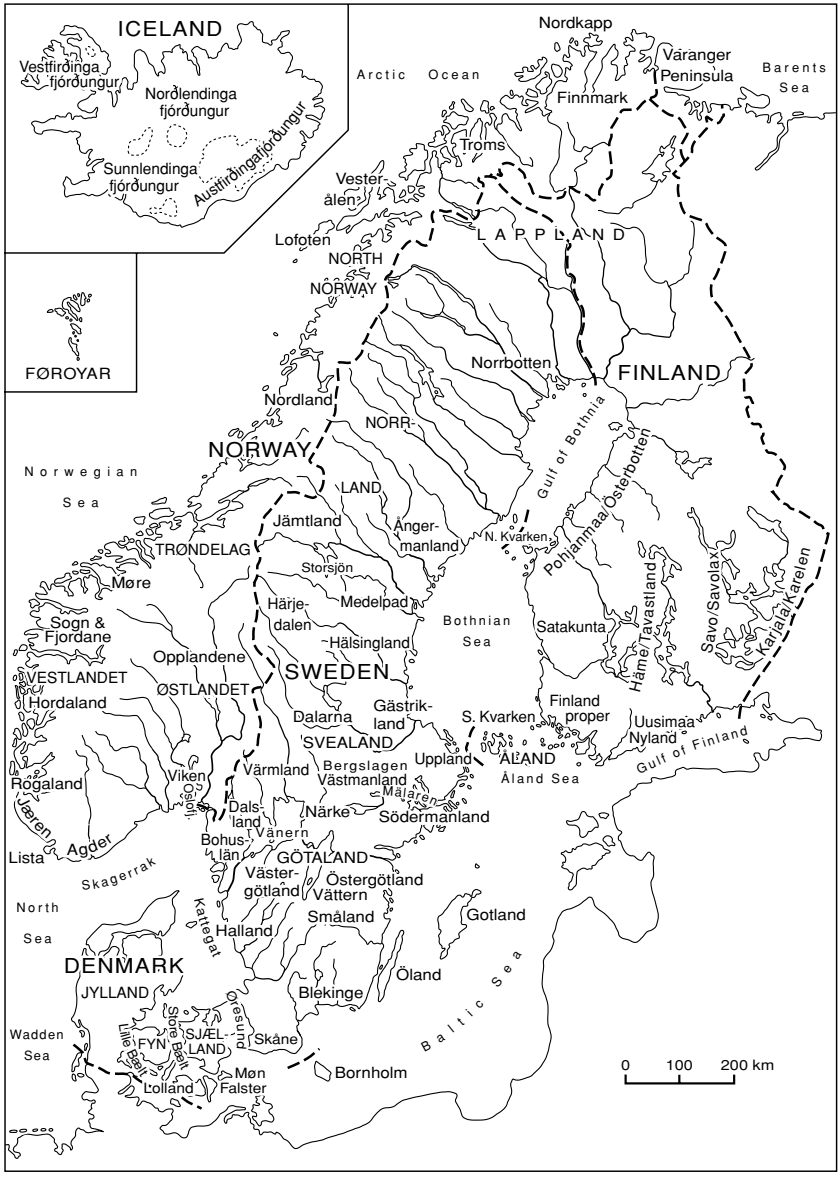
In the region itself Scandinavia (see Map 1) is today generally held to consist of more than the Scandinavian peninsula: for historical and cultural reasons Denmark is added to the peninsular states of Norway and Sweden. Mutually intelligible languages of common Germanic origin are spoken within this region and the histories of the three countries are closely interwoven. In the Middle Ages the kingdom of Denmark included the southernmost provinces of what is now Sweden – Skåne, Blekinge and Halland – and the kingdom of Norway comprised the present-day Swedish provinces of Bohuslän, Jämtland and Härjedalen. This was a territorial situation that was to last until the mid-seventeenth century when all these provinces were ceded to Sweden. Norway shared its king with Sweden from 1319 to 1355 and with Denmark from 1380 to 1814; for parts of the late Middle Ages Sweden, too, including Finland, belonged to the latter union.

Present-day Finland came gradually under Swedish rule from the mid-twelfth century as a result of Swedish religious and political expansion. In the early fourteenth century the Swedish-speaking province of Åland (Ahvenanmaa) was incorporated in the Finnish bishopric of Turku (Åbo).

Iceland and Føroyar (Faeroes) were settled by Norse colonists in the Viking Age and were, together with the small Norse colonies in Greenland, placed under the Norwegian crown in the first part of the 1260s. All these 'tributary lands' followed Norway into the union with Denmark in 1380 but stayed under Danish overlordship when Norway entered the union with Sweden in 1814.

Altogether, the communities mentioned – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Åland, Føroyar and Greenland – conceive of themselves as parts of the larger region called *Norden*, 'the North', in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (in Finnish *Pohjola*, in Icelandic *Norðurlönd*). They share much of

1 J. Svennung, *Scadinavia und Scandia: Lateinisch-nordische Namenstudien* (*Acta Societatis Litterarum Humaniorum Regiae Upsaliensis*, 44:1, Uppsala, 1963).
2 V. Skånland, 'J. Svennung: Scadinavia und Scandia', *Maal og Minne* (1968), pp. 155–6.



Map 1 Scandinavia

their history and display many common traits of culture, one of them being the kinship of the native languages – with the exceptions of Finnish in Finland and some parts of northern Sweden, Sami (Lappish) in the northernmost part of the Scandinavian peninsula and parts of Finland, and Greenlandic and other Inuit dialects in Greenland.

The term *Norden* has not so far taken root in English. The tendency has rather been to expand the concept of Scandinavia to include all the communities which conceive of themselves as 'Nordic'. This has been helped by the fact that these communities, notwithstanding their internal differences, show a common geographical, historical and socio-cultural distinctness from the rest of Europe. It is precisely this distinctness that lies behind the idea of a comprehensive and comparative history of Scandinavia which is carried into effect in the present volume and the two following volumes of *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*. The Scandinavia of this title, then, stands for what the Scandinavians themselves call *Norden/Pohjola/Norðurlönd*. In the following historical representation the terms Scandinavia and Scandinavian will be used in this wide sense. We find it convenient to use the adjectives 'Scandinavian' and 'Nordic' more or less synonymously whereas the term *Norden* will normally only occur when dealt with in its own historical context.

The present volume deals with the development of Scandinavian communities up to and including the Middle Ages, here ending in about 1520, which is considered the start of the early Modern Period treated in the next volume. It should at the outset be noted that due to the scarcity of written evidence the prehistory of Scandinavia stretches well into the early Middle Ages of European history. Up to about AD 800 it is therefore customary to divide Scandinavian history into archaeological periods. Such periods, like the subdivisions of the following historic Middle Ages, tend to vary from country to country, both in their nomenclature and their chronological delimitations. The matter is further complicated by a tendency in recent archaeological research to modify time-honoured chronological limits in order to bring them into accordance with new finds and revised dates of older ones.

In the following account of Scandinavian prehistory and medieval history a common standard of periodisation will be attempted. The system chosen will not completely correspond to the national conventions of any single Scandinavian country, but up to and including the Iron Age it will generally follow the Danish system, from which the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish systems do not radically deviate. Denmark is the region closest to the rest of Europe, from which Scandinavia was influenced throughout the whole of its

prehistory. New cultural developments frequently occurred first in Denmark and then spread to other parts of Scandinavia. The Danish archaeological system of dating will therefore generally reflect the earliest traces of important cultural changes. Because of its closeness to other European periodisation systems it will also be easily understood by non-Scandinavian readers.

In broad outline, Scandinavian prehistory is still divided into the three fundamental, material-oriented periods first proposed by the Danish archaeologist C. J. Thomsen (d. 1865): Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Within the Stone Age the division at about 4000 BC between an early (late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic) and a late (Neolithic) period is particularly important since the latter saw the introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry in Scandinavia. There is little reason to change the conventional boundary between the Scandinavian Stone and Bronze Ages which stands at about 1800 BC. Even if copper and bronze had been imported into Scandinavia for centuries before that, it was certainly around 1800 BC that imports of metal into Scandinavia reached a high level and the Scandinavians themselves started to smelt and cast bronze.

The starting point of the Scandinavian Iron Age is now generally placed at about 500 BC, but it should be noticed that the earliest working of iron can be dated from about 800–700 BC (Chapter 3). The Iron Age is usually subdivided into periods with names and time limits which to some extent vary from country to country. In accordance with Danish practice divisions will generally be drawn between a pre-Roman (Celtic) Iron Age (500–1 BC), a Roman Iron Age (AD 1–400), and a Germanic Iron Age (AD 400–800). The latter will be further subdivided into the Migration and Merovingian Periods (AD 400–600 and 600–800, respectively), as is usually the case in Norwegian archaeology (lately with AD 550 as an alternative dividing year).

The following Viking Age is the transitional period between Scandinavian prehistory and history. Written evidence now starts to shed light not only on the activities of Scandinavians abroad but also on important aspects of some of the Scandinavian communities. Nevertheless, archaeological material continues to constitute the bulk of evidence on which a representation of cultural and societal development within Scandinavia must be based. Since the earliest known Viking raids on western Europe occurred in the 790s it is customary to place the beginning of the Viking Age in about 800 but there is an ongoing debate whether the starting point ought to be pushed back half a century or so. In the light of Viking activity abroad, the end of the Viking Age is usually placed at about AD 1000 or 1050. When important new internal developments in Scandinavia are taken into consideration, such as the earliest steps towards

consolidation of the medieval kingdoms and the official, ruler-supported conversion to Christianity, AD 1000 would seem to be the more suitable turning point between the Viking Age and the early Christian Middle Ages.

Thus, in the present volume the Scandinavian Middle Ages will encompass the period between c. AD 1000 and c. 1520. They will be subdivided into an early, a central and a late part. The central or 'high' Middle Ages are characterised by the organisation of centralised kingdoms in Scandinavia and of corresponding church provinces, as well as by significant intellectual and artistic developments that were stimulated by the high medieval culture of western Europe in a fertile interplay with native traditions. The dividing line between the early and high Middle Ages in Scandinavia is placed at about 1150, while the starting point of the late Middle Ages is the watershed in demographic and societal development that was caused by the Black Death in 1349–50.

That 1520 is chosen as the point of division between the Middle Ages and the early Modern Period has partly to do with the 'Stockholm Massacre' in that year, which definitely put an end to the late medieval efforts to establish a union of all three Scandinavian kingdoms. By ending the volume at about 1520 also makes it possible, in the next volume, to treat coherently the two processes that above all mark the beginning of the early Modern Period in Scandinavia: the Lutheran Reformation and the growth of stronger territorial kingdoms. It should, however, be noted that in Danish and Norwegian history 1536–7 are commonly considered the dividing years between the Middle Ages and the early Modern Period as they marked the end of Norway's formal position as a kingdom in its own right and the decisive break-through of the Lutheran Reformation in the two countries.

Scandinavia in the wide sense covers some 12 per cent of the total European landmass (about 1.3 million out of 10.5 million sq. km), whereas its population in 1994 only numbered a little more than 3 per cent of the European total (23.7 million out of about 735 million people). These quantitative relations at once draw attention to the fact that the great expanse of Scandinavia – stretching across almost 17 degrees of latitude between North Cape and southernmost Denmark, roughly the distance from the Danish border to the southern tip of Sicily – is, and always has been, sparsely populated by European standards. Most of the land – consisting of mountains and mountain plateaux, glaciers, forests on meagre soils, moorland, bogs and fens – has to this day been left virtually untouched by sedentary settlement.

Nevertheless, as natural conditions for human habitation vary greatly within Scandinavia – in particular between coast and interior, high- and

low-lying areas, north and south – settlement has, since the introduction of agriculture, been relatively dense in most of what constitutes present-day Denmark, southern and central Sweden, and the low-lying areas of Norwegian Østlandet and Trøndelag, as well as in parts of coastal Sweden, Finland and Norway, where most of the natural resources that have always attracted a permanent agricultural population are found. With the passage of time this settlement pattern has been reinforced by the urbanisation and industrialisation that have occurred primarily in the same areas.

It is thus fitting that Part I of this comprehensive history of Scandinavia should begin with a presentation of the prehistoric and historic Scandinavian landscape and its natural resources (Chapter 1), and continue with the story of how people took this landscape into possession, adapting culturally to changing natural conditions, developing various types of community (Chapters 2 and 3), and eventually also creating cultural identities associated with the earliest forms of Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian speech in Scandinavia (Chapter 4).

With regard to geology and landforms the Scandinavian landscape had attained most of its present shape when it was first entered by reindeer hunters from the south some 14,000 years ago, following the retreating continental ice margin after the last glaciation of the Quaternary Period. But natural conditions were still to be transformed by momentous climatic changes in the following millennia, causing land uplift in some areas, flooding in others, continued sedimentation, and changes to vegetation and animal life.

Towards the end of the warm and humid Atlantic Era (about 4000 BC), when hunters, fishers and gatherers had invaded most of Scandinavia and were moving in greater or smaller groups across the land, people in the far south of the region began to practise agriculture, thus marking the start of the Neolithic Period or late Stone Age of Scandinavian prehistory. In the course of this period and the following Bronze Age – when the climate changed to the Sub-Boreal type, but was still quite favourable with warm and dry summers – arable farming became the principal economy of southern Scandinavia and of coastal districts further north, as far as southern Troms in Norway and the head of the Gulf of Bothnia in Finland. Pastoral farming spread even further north and inland, but here hunting and fishing were still the main means of subsistence, and remained so as the climate gradually turned cooler and damper and attained its present Sub-Atlantic character in the pre-Roman Iron Age.

At the beginning of the Iron Age Scandinavia had thus become the meeting place of two contrasting cultural traditions – agrarian societies in the south

and hunting societies in the north (and parts of the interior further south). Culturally, the agrarian societies can be divided into two main groups. In Denmark, in Norway as far north as Trøndelag, in Sweden as far north as the Mälar valley, and in the Baltic islands of Bornholm, Öland and Gotland, there was a stable settlement pattern of villages and farmsteads, which in a number of ways resembled the contemporary culture of what is now northern Germany. To link archaeologically defined cultural entities to linguistic ones is a hazardous business but we can nevertheless be fairly certain that by the beginning of the Iron Age the agriculturalists of southern Scandinavia had been Indo-European speakers for a long time, possibly since the third millennium BC, and that they were then developing Germanic forms of language which may be defined as proto-Scandinavian.

At the same time the coastal districts of southern and western Finland were inhabited by agriculturalists whose material culture resembled that found around the Gulf of Finland and in the east Baltic region. In the west they were influenced by the Scandinavians and appear to have received Germanic loanwords from them, but they probably spoke forms of the Baltic Finnic that developed into the later Finnish dialects. They were not, however, the first Finno-Ugrian or Uralic speakers in the region. Very little is certain about the prehistoric language situation in Finland and various hypotheses have been put forward, but Finnish researchers now tend to assume that Uralic or proto-Finnic speaking people were present in Finland at least from the Bronze Age and possibly from the late Stone Age (the Typical Comb Ceramic culture, see Chapter 2); it has even been argued that they may have been there since the end of the last glaciation.

In the Viking Age it is clear that the Sami (Lapps) formed a distinct hunting and fishing culture in northern Scandinavia, with their own forms of language, but how far back this culture extends is a much debated problem. Earlier – when the Sami were commonly thought to have migrated to northern Scandinavia as a distinct population group, with its own physical appearance, language and cultural identity – one hypothesis was that their ancestors were the first Finno-Ugrian speakers to arrive in Finland but that they later retreated northwards in the face of the expansion of Baltic Finnic speaking people. Nowadays researchers tend to assume that Sami identity and speech gradually developed among hunting and fishing groups in the north as a consequence of a uniform way of life, different from that of neighbouring populations. The linguistic differentiation between proto-Finnic and proto-Sami is by some thought to have developed in Finland in the late Stone Age and Bronze Age, reflecting a cultural split into a primarily farming community, influenced from the east

Baltic and southern Scandinavia, and a primarily hunting inland community without such external contacts.

At any rate, as late as the pre-Roman Iron Age many features of the Sami culture known from the early Modern Period seem to have been established and were developing further in the hunting and fishing communities of northernmost Scandinavia, accompanied by a differentiation between proto-Sami and proto-Scandinavian speech in northern Norway and northern Sweden. What appears to have been a continuous development of such communities from as far back as the northern slate and metal culture of the late Stone Age and Bronze Age may also indicate that the ethnic identity of the Sami was already starting to develop in those periods.

In the survey of the Iron Age (Chapter 3) the main line of argument is that Scandinavia in this period changed from being a separate region in Europe to becoming a border area, first to the Roman Empire and then to the Frankish kingdom. Because Scandinavian resources were in demand in the major centres of continental Europe opportunities were opened for political leaders who were able to supply Europe with northern goods, and Scandinavia was at the same time exposed to strong influences and a certain pressure from Europe. In southern Scandinavia it is assumed that stratified Bronze Age chiefdoms were replaced in the pre-Roman Iron Age by comparatively egalitarian tribal and kin-based communities which in the following phases of the Iron Age developed into warlike chiefdoms and petty kingdoms in close interaction with the Roman Empire and the later Germanic kingdoms of the continent and the British Isles. Thus, it is argued, the ground was prepared for the Viking expansion from the end of the eighth century.

The Roman and Germanic Iron Age of Scandinavia is represented as a period of continuous material expansion, marked by growth in population, settlement, and the exploitation of outlying areas. Doubt is cast on the earlier assumption that there was a marked, albeit passing, decrease in population and contraction of settlement in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, caused by plague and various other factors (though the crisis hypothesis cannot so far be said to have been refuted, and still has its adherents). In southern Scandinavia it is assumed that there was a change from communally-run villages in the pre-Roman Iron Age to private ownership of land and livestock in the following centuries so that part of the farming population became tenants. Contributions from this population constituted the main economic basis of the élite of an increasingly stratified society – chieftains and magnates who enhanced their social standing by possessing imported prestige products, often preserved as grave goods.

Due to their geographical situation Danish chiefdoms and petty kingdoms played a key role in the political and economic interaction between Scandinavia and the continent. They took advantage not only of the resources available in their own region but gradually also drew larger areas of northern Scandinavia into their network of political alliances and economic exchange, including chiefdoms as far north as Lofoten/Vesterålen in Norway, Medelpad/Ångermanland in Sweden, and parts of Finland. The northernmost chiefdoms are believed to have suppressed, but partly also cooperated with, the Sami population in order to procure the hunting products in demand further south.

The Germanic Iron Age saw the development of thoroughly Scandinavian forms of language. The more rapid and economic speech that emerged after the so-called 'syncope period' AD 550–750 is often known as Common Scandinavian, but it appears that there were already at this stage differences between the dialects of East Nordic (spoken in Denmark and Sweden) and West Nordic (spoken in Norway and later in the Norse communities of the Atlantic), and that within East Nordic the speech of Jylland and Sjælland was diverging from that of Götaland and eastern Sweden.

Though the connection is far from clear, such linguistic features were probably associated with the development of larger and more powerful political units in Scandinavia – Norwegian and Swedish petty kingdoms or chiefdoms with centres such as Borre west of Oslofjord and Old Uppsala in central Sweden and above all a strong eighth-century Danish kingdom with its centre in Jylland, confronting the expanding Franks to the south. The eighth century also saw the establishment of the first Nordic trading centres corresponding to those that had earlier been established in the Channel area, such as Ribe in Jylland from the beginning of the century, later Kaupang at Oslofjord in Vestfold, Birka in Lake Mälaren, and Hedeby at the base of Jylland. These emporia were nodal points in an economic exchange which involved all areas around the North Sea and the Baltic, and the political powers controlling them were in close and perhaps hostile interaction with their Germanic counterparts on the continent and in the British Isles. Consequently, the unrest of the Viking Age could have its roots in economic and political conflicts around the North Sea in the preceding century.

That the commercial expansion in north-west Europe in the preceding century was an important condition for the outburst of Viking piracy from the end of the eighth century seems clear, but it is at present a matter of debate whether the first recorded incursions on the coasts of the British Isles and the Continent were more than sporadic plundering raids. In contrast to the

long-standing conflict between Danes and Franks there is so far no clear evidence of close interaction between the Germanic and Christian kingdoms of the British Isles and Scandinavia prior to the first known Viking raids. Consequently, it has not been possible to substantiate the argument that the raids were organised by Scandinavian rulers in order to counteract what was believed to be threats from those kingdoms. At any rate, the raids were soon followed by territorial conquests and colonisation which made a lasting impact on both western and eastern Europe. Part II of this volume therefore starts with a chapter devoted to the external Viking expansion (Chapter 5).

Associated with this expansion was a material and spiritual culture that was, for the most part, common to all the Scandinavian-speaking populations and conditioned not least by the fact that their territories were almost completely surrounded by water. Communication by boat or ship was the favoured way of maintaining contacts internally and necessary for interaction with the rest of Europe; consequently, the development of sailing ships was a prerequisite for Viking expansion. Society was predominantly agricultural and clearly stratified, with slaves as the lowest stratum and a warlike aristocracy at its head. The polytheistic religion was a household religion, closely woven into life and culture – and, unlike Christianity, lacking a professional clergy and, apparently, largely without specialised cult buildings. The Scandinavian runic script was used for inscriptions and probably also for short messages but hardly to record literature; Viking literature was oral, consisting of mythical Eddic poems and metrically intricate skaldic verse. Fondness for decoration led to a vital ornamental and figurative art, mainly adorning functional objects of every kind (Chapter 6).

Viking culture was influenced from the territories conquered and colonised abroad, and from a Scandinavian viewpoint the importance of the external expansion was, above all, that it opened Scandinavia to Europe to an hitherto unknown degree. Christian influences seriously began to make themselves felt, and led to what amounted to a cultural revolution. After missionary endeavours in the ninth and tenth centuries the official conversion of the Scandinavian populations took place under the leadership of Christian kings, starting with the conversion of the Danish king Harald Gormsson in the 960s. In the course of the eleventh century the first elements of a Christian church organisation, with permanent bishops' seats and cathedrals, were introduced (Chapter 7).

Scandinavians abroad in the Viking Age also became aware of more sophisticated forms of political organisation under royal or princely leadership. This was part of the background for the main thrust of political development

in Scandinavia during the late Viking Age and early medieval period: the emergence of the three kingdoms of the region – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – all of them precursors of the later national states. Norse communities were also permanently established in Føroyar and Iceland whereas such communities in the British Isles and Greenland did not survive the Middle Ages. From the mid-twelfth century the incorporation of Finland into the Swedish realm was started by Swedish missionary and military activity in Finland proper (Chapter 8).

In the late Viking and early Middle Ages Scandinavia also entered the world of script. It is therefore possible, from the twelfth century onwards, to construct a more coherent and detailed Scandinavian history than that outlined so far. The account of Scandinavian medieval history up to about 1520 is here divided into five main parts (III–VII). Two of them deal with political events and political organisation in the high and late Middle Ages (Parts IV and VII). Each of these is preceded by a part outlining the societal background to political events in the form of demography, rural and urban settlement, economy, and social structure (Parts III and VI). Centrally placed in the volume is a set of chapters on high and late medieval Scandinavian spiritual and material culture – ideologies and mentalities, literature, architecture, art, handicrafts and music (Part V). The Conclusion to the volume brings together and emphasises the main developments of the high and late medieval history of Scandinavia.