Conclusion

KNUT HELLE

At the end of the Viking Age the establishment of three separate Nordic kingdoms hardly seemed a self-evident course of future events. The prospect of direct Danish rule over most of southern Scandinavia, combined with an indirect overlordship of other parts of the region, must have appeared at least as likely. Yet, in the course of the early Middle Ages the kingdoms of Norway and Sweden came to comprise most of their later territories on the Scandinavian peninsula and developed far enough for their survival to be secured. During the same period Christianity was firmly established in all Scandinavian-speaking communities and its Church reached the organisational stage where bishops ruled territorial bishoprics from permanent sees with cathedrals, monastic institutions were firmly established, and payment of tithe was being introduced. From the beginning of the twelfth century the Nordic churches were also organised as a separate church province under the supremacy of the archbishop of Lund (Part II).

All this does not mean that the political and ecclesiastical situation was stable at the onset of the high Middle Ages in the mid-twelfth century. The three kingdoms lacked centralised systems of government and their unity was seriously threatened by dynastic rivalry and succession disputes. In Iceland the original distribution of power among numerous chieftains within an all-embracing community of laws was in the process of being disrupted by the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of prominent families whose leaders ruled territorial lordships. As a separate legal entity on a smaller scale, the archipelago of Føroyar seems to have been dominated by chieftains and large landowners. On the north-western outskirts of the Norse world the two small colonies in Greenland led a half-hidden life, mostly beyond the scope of surviving written evidence. To the south-west Orkney and Shetland were under Norwegian overlordship, but the Orkney earls, who ruled the islands, also held the northernmost part of the Scottish mainland in fief from Scottish

monarchs who would eventually challenge the Norwegian dominion over the Western and Northern Isles (Chapter 8).

The independence of the church province of Lund and its direct links with the papal curia were threatened by the efforts of the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen to regain his supremacy over the Nordic churches in cooperation with the German king who aimed at overlordship of the divided Danish kingdom. In Finland it seems that Christian religious practices had by now infiltrated the south-western region, but the Finnish tribes were still outside the influence of the organised western Church and the reach of the Swedish kingdom. The half-nomadic Sami of northernmost Scandinavia traded with Finns and Scandinavians who also exacted tribute from them, but they were not integrated in the Finnish and Scandinavian societies; they also remained largely unaffected by Christianity (Chapter 13).

In the course of the two following centuries this would all change. Soon after 1150 separate Norwegian and Swedish church provinces were carved out of the large province of Lund and brought into direct contact with Rome. The remaining high Middle Ages saw the incorporation of almost all the Scandinavian region in the three Nordic kingdoms and also, with the exception of the Sami territories, in the Nordic churches. In Parts III–VII high and late medieval political and ecclesiastical developments have been set out in some detail against a broader demographic, economic, social and cultural background. What remains is a final overview of the main developments in high and late medieval Scandinavia.

Regardless of whether there was a demographic crisis or not in the late sixth and early seventh centuries (see Introduction and Chapter 3) it seems clear that the following six centuries constitute a period of more or less continuous material growth in Scandinavia. Populations may have trebled from the Merovingian Age to about 1300, in interaction with a marked expansion of settlement, including the first phase of urbanisation, and with an increasing output from agrarian and other primary production. These developments and their social aspects have been dealt with in Part III.

The size of medieval populations cannot be safely calculated at any one time, but it is clear that the population of the mainland kingdom of Norway, estimated at somewhere between 350,000 and 550,000 towards the end of the high Middle Ages, was much smaller than (perhaps less than half) the number of inhabitants of the Danish kingdom; it was also significantly smaller than the Swedish-speaking population of the kingdom of Sweden. The fact that the Danish and Swedish kingdoms commanded greater resources in terms

of population and material resources helps explain Norway's weak position when it was drawn into closer contact with its neighbours in the Scandinavian unions of the late Middle Ages.

As populations increased, rural settlement became denser in already colonised areas and spread across a greater part of Scandinavia. Settlement growth was mainly determined by the opportunities to practise farming with the technology available, but in coastal districts fishing and the exploitation of other aquatic resources were also decisive for the location of settlements. There was a general expansion from central areas with favourable conditions for agriculture towards more peripheral and less suitable land. Colonisation proceeded inland from the coasts, towards higher altitudes, and further northwards. Forested areas, including commons, were cleared and heavier clayey soils that were potentially fertile began to be cultivated when improved implements made that possible.

The spread and localisation of settlement were influenced not only by the growth of population but also by improved farming methods and technology, such as the introduction of systematic crop rotation (in large parts of Denmark, Sweden and Finland, and in smaller areas in Norway) and the increased use of iron in farming implements. In Finland settlement expansion started later and lasted longer than in the rest of Scandinavia, and was made particularly extensive by the widespread use of advanced techniques of slash-and-burn cultivation.

Colonisation changed the territorial distribution of ethnic groups in northern Scandinavia. In Finland medieval settlement expansion towards the north resulted in an east-Finnish and a west-Finnish cultural zone. The former was established by Karelians, whose settlements in the twelfth century started to spread from the core area around Lake Ladoga and in the following centuries advanced almost as far as Lake Päijänne in the west and reached the shores of the White Sea in the north-east. The last was the result of the expansion of west-Finnish settlers who at the beginning of the Middle Ages started to colonise Österbotten, the coastal area east of the Gulf of Bothnia. They moved northwards until they reached the Arctic Circle, and at the same time advanced around the head of the gulf towards northern Sweden where, towards the end of the high Middle Ages, they met the northward movement of Swedish colonists. This resulted in a cultural barrier in Swedish Västerbotten at roughly 65°N. Conversely, Swedish colonisation, linked to the eastward expansion of Swedish power in the high Middle Ages, affected the western and southern coastal districts of present-day Finland which have largely remained Swedish-speaking since then.

The Norse Viking Age colonisation of the North Atlantic islands coincided with internal colonisation of areas of mainland Norway which formerly lacked sedentary settlement, and this continued into the early and high Middle Ages. There were already in the Viking Age sparse Norse coastal settlements as far as Finnmark. During the first medieval centuries the districts north of Trøndelag became the object of more active agrarian colonisation in combination with exploitation of the resources of the sea, and from the mid-thirteenth century the expanding fish trade caused an increasing influx of Norse settlers into Troms and Finnmark. In order to gain control of these districts the Norwegian crown supported the Norse coastal colonisation and was behind the first efforts to convert the Sami to Christianity.

The northward and inland expansion of Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish colonists meant occupation of areas where formerly only Sami hunters and gatherers had lived, and must to some extent have reduced their freedom of movement in mountain and forest areas and along the coast of northernmost Norway. Most Sami continued their nomadic way of life throughout the Middle Ages, moving between summer and winter sites and supporting themselves by hunting and fishing. However, the coastal Sami of northern Norway established a more permanent pattern of settlement, fishing in the open sea, catching sea mammals, and engaging in animal husbandry on a small scale. Along the coast of Troms and Finnmark, Sami and Norwegians thus came to live side by side. Elsewhere the dependency of the Sami on the sedentary population developed further, partly by trade with Finns and Scandinavians, partly by taxation by Scandinavian authorities.

The overwhelming majority of the medieval sedentary population of Scandinavia based their existence on a combination of agriculture, mainly grain cultivation, and animal husbandry, but farmers would generally try to diversify their economy by exploiting all available resources – by fishing, hunting, gathering, forestry, iron production from lake and bog ore, mining and quarrying of certain types of rock. Such auxiliary activities were particularly important in areas less suited to agriculture, as was animal husbandry where grain did not grow well. Varying natural conditions thus led to differences in the farming economy, particularly between coastal and inland, low-lying and high-lying, southern and northern areas.

It was, however, arable farming that, in terms of energy, supplied most of the food. Denmark produced a surplus of grain while Sweden and Finland were normally self-sufficient in grain production. Even Norway may have been potentially self-sufficient, but here the favourable exchange of foreign grain

for exported fish led to a decline of domestic grain cultivation in the western and northern coastal districts so that, from the thirteenth century, Norway became dependent on imported grain. The Norse communities of Greenland and Iceland, where climatic conditions made grain growing impossible or negligible, depended entirely on grain imports.

Agrarian production generally increased in the early and high Middle Ages, as more land was brought under cultivation, farming methods and technology improved, and the growth of population led to an increased input of labour and consequently a greater output per acre. In present-day Finland and Sweden the reserves of land suited for agriculture were apparently more than sufficient to absorb the growing population. However, in the land that makes up present-day Denmark, which was more densely populated than other parts of Scandinavia, population and settlement growth in the high Middle Ages resulted in a shortage of cultivated land and the emergence of numerous small holdings which operated close to subsistence level. This was also the case in Norway where the limited reserves of tillable land were not sufficient to enable food production to keep pace with the population increase, particularly in western Norway which was the source for most of the Viking Age Atlantic colonists.

From prehistoric times there were different patterns of settlement in Scandinavia which in the course of the Middle Ages developed further into structures that have characterised the region ever since. Looking at the rural settlement and production units of Scandinavia as a whole one is struck by one particularly important geographical division. There is a western and northern region – consisting of present-day Norway, western and northern Sweden, Iceland, Føroyar, Shetland and Orkney – where settlement since the Middle Ages has been tied overwhelmingly to individual, separate farms and holdings. On the other hand, villages and hamlets have been and still are the predominant form of rural settlement in the southern and eastern parts of Scandinavia – in Denmark, Sweden and Finland – though there are also areas where separate farms are common. Generally, separate farms have predominated in regions where arable soil is dispersed or scarce, while villages and hamlets have emerged where it is possible to cultivate larger, contiguous areas of land.

However, the fact that village and hamlet settlement did not occur in the best Norwegian agricultural districts in Østlandet and Trøndelag should serve as a warning against the assumption that rural settlement was shaped by natural conditions alone; social factors were also at work. Conversely, the social structure of rural communities was influenced by the settlement structure.

Where there were villages and hamlets it was possible to create larger and more compact concentrations of landed property than was generally the case in districts dominated by separate homesteads. Society in the latter districts therefore tended to be less aristocratic and more egalitarian than society in the typical village regions. It could be said that this tendency has made itself felt in the social structure of the Nordic countries down to our own time.

At the same time the medieval social structure of rural Scandinavia was generally different from that of most of the rest of Europe in certain important respects. Land ownership was predominantly allodial and only to a very small degree influenced by feudal concepts of land tenure. Both large landowners and ordinary freeholders could dispose relatively freely of their land; it could be sold, inherited and, within certain limits, also bequeathed to other than kin. Kin were, however, entitled to first refusal on the sale of inherited land in a legally determined order. The inheritance system was bilateral, though with a preference for male heirs in the west Nordic laws, and feudal primogeniture was not practised.

Another major difference between Scandinavian and most other European communities in the early and high Middle Ages was that the whole agrarian population, with the exception of slaves, were personally free both legally and in practice. Leases of tenant holdings were based on mutually binding agreements and regulated by law in a way that might give priority to the landowners' rights but did not invalidate the basic legal independence of the tenants. They were not tied to the soil, did not – with the exception of a few boon days annually in Denmark – have to perform labour services on the landowners' demesnes, and were not subject to private manorial jurisdiction. There was, in other words, no serfdom or villeinage in early and high medieval Scandinavia, though it should be noted that freed slaves and their issue would for a time remain dependent to some extent on their former masters and their issue, and that there were in Denmark and Sweden cottagers with only small plots of land whose main function was to provide labour for large landowners, partly as service labour and partly as paid work.

Thraldom or slavery was still a social feature to be reckoned with at the beginning of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, as attested by west Nordic law and saga evidence, but its extent and economic significance is hard to assess and it was clearly declining in the early Middle Ages. In Iceland it ceased before 1100 and in Norway mostly in the course of the twelfth century, while in Denmark it lingered on into the first half of the thirteenth century and in Sweden for a century more. In recent research the decline of slavery has mainly been

regarded as a consequence of economic expediency on the part of landowners who found it more profitable to let freed slaves cultivate tenanted plots rather than continue to use slave labour in farming on their own account. This is seen as one of the motive powers behind the growth of the Scandinavian tenancy system.

There is, however, little reliable evidence for the emergence of land tenancy in Scandinavia; consequently the chronology and character of this process remains one of the basic problems of Scandinavian medieval research. According to a time-honoured view, landowning farmers were the dominant group as late as the Viking Age and the beginning of the Middle Ages so that it was not until the high Middle Ages that the tenantry came to form the majority of the Scandinavian farming population. However, tenant farming appears to have existed to some degree as early as the Viking Age and recent research in Denmark and Norway has attached importance to indications of considerable and growing economic and social inequality in Iron Age society which may well have given rise to a quite extensive early form of land tenancy.

There is nevertheless agreement that the proportion of tenancy in relation to freehold increased in the early and high Middle Ages and that by the end of the latter period the majority of farmers in Denmark, Norway and Iceland were tenants. Only in the Swedish kingdom, including Finland, does the proportion of freehold farms appear to have amounted to more than one-half. However, even here tenant farming was dominant in the best and most centrally placed farming regions while freehold predominated in more peripheral districts, which it also did in certain remote parts of Norway.

All over Scandinavia the high medieval tenancy system formed a stable economic basis for large landowners, allowing them to devote themselves to other activities than primary production; it was consequently a mainstay of Crown, Church and aristocracy. At the end of the high Middle Ages land owned by the Church and secular aristocracy amounted to considerably more than half of the farms in the kingdom of Denmark and roughly 60 per cent of the total land value in mainland Norway. Church and aristocracy were also predominant landowners in the central and most fertile farming regions of Sweden. The proportion of land owned by the Crown has been estimated at about 5 per cent of Danish farms and about 7 per cent of the total Norwegian land value but had at an earlier stage been much greater in Norway.

In Denmark and the central farming regions of Sweden there developed a manorial system with large-scale farming of demesnes by slaves (decreasingly), cottagers and paid labour in combination with holdings farmed by tenants. However, from the end of the twelfth century ecclesiastical institutions in

Denmark started to follow the example of European landowners in farming out their demesnes to stewards, as did their secular counterparts later. The stewards became the leaseholders of large farming units with a status resembling that of tenants. In Norway there was no system of manorial farming, though magnates could have quite sizable residential farms that were worked on a larger scale. Large complexes of landed property were scattered and consisted overwhelmingly of tenanted farms and holdings, even parts of holdings.

Among the farming population there was a relatively rigorous division of labour between men and women, along the same lines as elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless, in peasant society women generally played an important role alongside their husbands in their joint economic activities, and were particularly independent in regions where men were absent for long periods exploiting the resources of the sea and outlying areas. The allodial character of land ownership meant that women could become owners of land, notably through marriage and inheritance. In marriage they had to leave the formal but not necessarily the real administration of their property to their husbands, while unmarried women of age and particularly widows could take control over most of their own assets.

It is a moot question whether the social position of Scandinavian women improved or not in the Middle Ages. Tendencies in both directions have been stressed. Christianity and the Church, for instance, have been blamed for curtailing the religious role of women, important in the pre-Christian cult, and restricting the economic rights of married women, at the same time depriving them of an older right to divorce. On the other hand, it has been argued that women played an important role in the process of Christianisation (cf. Chapter 7) and that the Christian marriage, based on the formal consensus of the spouses, did not only bind them more firmly together as heads of families but also gave both of them a freer position in relation to their kin. Weight has also been attached to the legal right of daughters to inherit alongside sons, established even in west Nordic laws by the late thirteenth century, though it is not altogether clear whether women's economic rights in general improved towards the end of the high Middle Ages. Politically, women of the royal families and the upper aristocracy could play important roles by virtue of their position as wives, widows and mothers, and from the latter part of the thirteenth century queen dowagers could be given formalised political positions during regencies. In Norway women even gained a place in the legal order of hereditary succession in 1302.

Urbanisation in Scandinavia seriously started as one aspect of the strong European cultural influence of the Viking Age and throughout the following early Middle Ages several towns emerged according to the urban criteria used in this volume: a complex centrality in relation to hinterlands of various sizes, a permanently built-up character, and various forms of urban organisation. Such places served the needs of both local and long distance trade but seem above all to have been promoted by the royal power in cooperation with the early Church as centres of government and administration. Early medieval urbanisation in Scandinavia can thus to a large extent be seen as one aspect of the making of the Scandinavian kingdoms. It brought into existence a good handful of Norwegian towns and the royal foundation of Sigtuna in Sweden but was most extensive in Denmark, the most populous of the Scandinavian kingdoms and the one closest to Europe.

In the high Middle Ages Sweden and Denmark, like the rest of Europe, saw a broader wave of urbanisation while in less populous Norway only a few new places were added to the early medieval urban structure, all of them relatively small. Existing Norwegian towns were, however, expanding rapidly, particularly the international trading centre of Bergen which also became the first true political capital of the kingdom. The cases of Bergen and its younger parallel Stockholm clearly reveal the chief motive powers behind the high medieval wave of urbanisation: the commercial revolution of the period – with exchange of a wider range of mass products over greater distances and a more advanced commercial organisation – and the further political centralisation of the Scandinavian kingdoms. Most new high medieval towns were established in the central parts of the Danish kingdom, including Skåne, and in the region round Lake Mälaren, the centre of gravity of the Swedish kingdom.

By the mid-fourteenth century there were altogether about a hundred towns in Scandinavia, most of them in the southern part of the region where they were concentrated in the coastal areas and linked by sailing routes. Denmark had about sixty, Sweden, including the Finnish part of the kingdom, almost thirty, and Norway only a dozen, which reflects the differences between the kingdoms in terms of population. There were no towns in Iceland and the other Norse island communities of the north Atlantic, nor in the northern parts of the Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms, with the possible exception of Vågan in the Norwegian Lofoten Islands. This was a geographic pattern that was to determine the urban system of Scandinavia for the rest of the Middle Ages and long afterwards.

Urban autonomy was increasing in high medieval Scandinavia, as it was in the rest of Europe, and was demonstrated by privileges, urban codes, and above all the introduction of town councils from the mid-thirteenth century. However, the fact that the development of Scandinavian medieval towns was from the start closely connected with the evolution of more centralised political systems meant that their autonomy remained restricted in comparison with that of the most advanced European urbanised areas. Through its urban officials the monarchy continued to play a dominant controlling role, particularly strong – it appears – in Norway and least so in Denmark, which was also in this respect closer to European models than the other Scandinavian kingdoms.

Scandinavian medieval towns were generally small and their populations seem to have constituted less than 5 per cent of the total populations of the three kingdoms. Nevertheless, through their central place functions in relation to their hinterlands – in government and administration, trade and crafts, religious and cultural life – towns played a much greater role than their modest share of the total population would seem to indicate. Urban society was also in general more dynamic than rural society, leading the way, for instance, in expanding local self-management, increasing social mobility, and giving women greater economic independence.

The development of Scandinavian political organisation in the high Middle Ages has been set out in Chapters 8(a)–8(e) and summed up (8(a)) as centralisation and growth of public authority under the king, Church and secular aristocracy. This is a process that can only be understood against the backdrop of the main lines of societal development brought together above. It was basically conditioned by the general growth of population and production and was part of a general tendency towards greater social specialisation and division of labour, of which the growth of the tenancy system and the process of urbanisation were particularly important aspects. At the same time it was heavily influenced by the opening up of Scandinavia towards Europe that was a consequence of the Viking expansion.

In all three kingdoms succession struggles from the 1130s paved the way for stronger and more firmly organised monarchic rule; they lasted less than three decades in Denmark, to give way to the strong Valdemarian monarchy (1157–1241), but went on for a century or more in Norway and Sweden. In Norway it is clear that the extensive civil warfare in the last decades of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries contributed to the general strengthening of the monarchy by increasing its military power and thereby

also its ability to impose greater burdens on peasant society. In Denmark the contemporaneous military expansionism of the monarchy obviously worked in the same direction.

The Valdemarian monarchy led to the emergence in Denmark of a high medieval kingdom of European type in close collaboration with the secular aristocracy and, after about 1170, joined by the Church. In the same period there were clear institutional tendencies in the same direction in the still divided kingdom of Norway, starting with the establishment of a separate Norwegian church province in 1152 or 1153 and particularly close cooperation between the Church and monarchy in the reign of Magnus Erlingsson (1161–84). The development of a more state-like political organisation continued in Denmark up to the end of the Valdemarian Age in 1241 and in Norway was completed, as far as it went in the Middle Ages, in the second half of the thirteenth and the early decades of the fourteenth centuries. Sweden for a long time lagged behind Denmark and Norway in the process of political unification and centralisation. It is true that a separate Swedish church province had been established by 1164, but it was not until the mid-thirteenth century that a more centralised and firmly organised kingdom started to emerge under the Folkung monarchy.

Common features of political centralisation in all three kingdoms were the establishment of a governmental apparatus both locally and centrally, peace legislation inspired by the Church clearing the way for a more extensive royal legislation, and a more comprehensive public justice maintained by the Crown and, in its own field, by the Church. An official ideology representing the king as the holder of his office by the grace of God and the development of a courtly culture may have contributed to creating a more respectful and obedient attitude to his authority among his subjects (Chapter 14).

In all three kingdoms the Crown managed to convert the contributions of the population to the common system of defence – the naval levy – into permanent taxes on land. In Denmark and Sweden magnates of the old aristocracy and smaller landowners had their land, including tenant farms, exempted from such taxation in return for royal cavalry service. In both kingdoms the naval levy lost its military significance in the thirteenth century, giving way to a military system based on heavily armed cavalry and royal castles. In Norway, where natural conditions did not favour the use of cavalry, the naval levy retained its military importance into the early fourteenth century. Royal taxation was consequently more lenient and the tax exemption of the royal retainers of the *hirð* much more limited than in the neighbouring kingdoms. Nevertheless, this exemption in Norway, as elsewhere, created a privileged noble class which

together with the Crown and Church constituted a more distinct ruling élite than had previously been seen in the Nordic societies.

It should, however, be noted that the private resources of the Norwegian *hirð* aristocracy were much more limited than those of its Danish and Swedish counterparts and its dependence on the income and status received through royal service correspondingly greater. This explains why relations between the Norwegian crown and aristocracy were relatively harmonious in the latter part of the high Middle Ages while in Denmark and Sweden the royal power was limited – or at least counterbalanced – by a powerful aristocratic opposition. This helps explain why in Denmark and Sweden the elective principle came to govern the system of royal succession while a virtually automatic hereditary succession was established in Norway in the second half of the thirteenth century. In the late Middle Ages the Scandinavian union monarchs sought to re-establish a Norwegian-type hereditary succession while the aristocratic opposition favoured the elective principle.

The national royal assemblies convoked in Denmark and Norway from the latter part of the twelfth century grew more frequent and assumed a more clearly representative function in the following century, when such meetings are also known in Sweden. In Denmark they came to be called *danehof* and functioned as organs of the aristocratic opposition in the second half of the thirteenth century. They could assume the same function in Sweden, while in Norway they generally served the interests of the Crown. The Nordic assemblies corresponded to the contemporary European pattern of early parliaments, which in the late Middle Ages developed into general estates or a unique institution such as the English Parliament, but they did not become permanent institutions. Instead, the need for a more regular decision-making body alongside the king in the Scandinavian kingdoms from the 1280s was met by the smaller and better institutionalised royal councils, which were given a representative and sanctioning role in addition to their original consultative function. As a more autonomous corporation the royal council became from around 1320 the 'council of the realm', a peculiar Scandinavian institution which in the late Middle Ages was the only regular governmental body at the side of the monarch.

In all three kingdoms the Church contributed very significantly to social cohesion and political centralisation – by its unifying religious influence, by its hierarchically and nationally organised systems of administration, and by churchmen's administrative and ideological support of the monarchy. In Sweden, ecclesiastical support for the Crown remained important throughout the high Middle Ages, and in spite of clashes between the Crown and Church

at certain times it was always important in Norway too. In Denmark, however, the close cooperation of the Valdemarian monarchy with the Church was followed by bitter conflicts between kings and archbishops, which contributed to the weakening of the kingdom in the second half of the thirteenth century.

In general, Christianity seems to have penetrated Scandinavia more or less in the same fashion as the rest of Europe, although more slowly. This is particularly true for Sweden and Finland, and among the Sami we have already seen that it did not strike roots at all in the Middle Ages. It seems clear that the Church succeeded in introducing its doctrine and making its rituals and customs an integral part of people's daily life. To what degree they were also personally moved by the message of the Gospel has been debated but is impossible to assess. It has, however, been suggested that signs of the new tendencies towards a more personal religion in more central regions of Western Christendom in the high and late Middle Ages, leading not least to heretical movements, were less prominent in Scandinavia. On the other hand, the Church and its doctrine may have contributed, together with the monarchy, to personal relations more strongly coloured by a hierarchical organisation of society, making obedience and service more prominent virtues both in religious and secular life (Chapter 14).

Virtually all formal education in medieval Scandinavia took place in ecclesiastical institutions such as monastic and cathedral schools, and it was primarily members of the clergy who sought higher education abroad, first at monastic and cathedral seats of learning and then at the European universities that emerged from the late twelfth century. The Church, together with the monarchy, also created the main milieus for high and late medieval art and architecture, and intellectual life in general, and funded the activities in these spheres.

The medieval narrative literature of Iceland, particularly the classical family sagas, may perhaps be considered as Scandinavia's most remarkable contribution to world literature. Medieval Scandinavian writers, both Icelanders and others, also made important contributions to other literary genres, such as history writing in general, the ballad, the romance and the rhyme chronicle, to the extent that the high Middle Ages stand out as the crowning point of literary life. Religious houses, episcopal sees and royal courts formed the main centres of literary activity (Chapter 15).

Medieval Scandinavian art and architecture clearly reflected the society in which they were produced, not least the dominant position of the Church and monarchy. Most of what remains of art and monumental architecture was

produced for ecclesiastical purposes; there are very few remains of secular buildings and their decorations. European influences were strongly at work, following trade and pilgrimage routes, ecclesiastical and diplomatic lines of communication, so that Scandinavia passed through the main Romanesque and Gothic phases concurrently with the rest of Europe. The full flowering of medieval Scandinavian art and architecture occurred in the high Middle Ages when foreign influences often interacted fruitfully with native traditions. It was essentially the demographic crisis of the late Middle Ages and its negative effects on the economy of the Church and monarchy that put an end to the great artistic and architectural display of the preceding period (Chapter 16).

The expansion of population, settlement and production throughout the early and high Middle Ages had apparently begun to slow down in western Europe by the early decades of the fourteenth century and there may even have been a decline in some places. A corresponding development has been suggested for Scandinavia but there are no clear signs of a serious decline of population and a corresponding contraction of settlement until the Black Death and the subsequent outbreaks of plague (Chapter 18).

The dramatic effects of the great pestilence and the later plague epidemics have left their clearest traces in Norwegian records and settlement structure, and thus it is in Norway that research into these matters has been particularly broad in scope and intensive. It has been calculated that more than half of the maximum number of high medieval named farms and nearly two-thirds of the corresponding number of family holdings were abandoned. The loss of population is thought to have been of the same order, around 60–65 per cent according to the latest estimates.

The desertion of farms caused by depopulation appears to have been less extensive in Denmark and Sweden but this does not mean that the population losses caused by plague were less severe; such a difference would indeed be difficult to explain. Rather it seems that the abandonment of farms is less conspicuous in the recorded settlement pattern of Denmark and Sweden, consisting mostly of villages, hamlets and otherwise close groups of generally larger farms than those constituting the single farm settlement structure of Norway. Moreover, there was in the central Danish and Swedish agricultural districts a greater number of landless or near-landless farm labourers who could disappear without leaving a trace in the recorded settlement pattern. To the extent that they survived and settled on available land they would also reduce the number of abandoned farms.

Finland and northern Sweden appear to have escaped the Black Death and the high medieval expansion of settlement continued throughout the late Middle Ages, as was also the case in northernmost Norway (Troms and Finnmark). Iceland, too, was spared the Black Death but later plague attacks caused depopulation and desertion of farms, though not to the same degree as in Norway. In Greenland the entire Norse population disappeared in the fifteenth century, probably for other (still unknown) reasons than plague.

The decrease of population led to great economic and social changes as different groups tried to adapt to the new situation (Chapter 19). Along with the contraction of settlement land prices and land rents dropped dramatically in Norway and considerably in Denmark, too, whereas the information on rents and prices in Sweden and Finland hardly permits any chronological comparison. There was, however, a declining trend in land prices in Swedish Uppland. Such crisis phenomena primarily affected the great noble and ecclesiastical landowners who were predominant in Denmark, Norway and central parts of Sweden; they suffered a great loss of income and a severe depreciation of their capital in land. The same was true, to some degree, for the Crown.

Conversely, the changes in the late medieval agrarian economy caused by shortage of people and labour were generally to the benefit of the broad mass of the rural population. The decrease in land rents particularly favoured tenants, and farm labourers benefited from the rising wages caused by shortage of labour. Such changes seem to have had their greatest effects in Denmark and Norway. In Denmark, and also in central parts of Sweden, large-scale farming was reduced to the advantage of larger and more homogeneous tenant farms, which meant a homogenisation of the peasantry as well. In Norway the same effect resulted from the abandonment of numerous smallholdings.

In many parts of Scandinavia there was a clear shift of emphasis from cereal cultivation to animal husbandry, caused by changes in demand and prices and helped by the large number of deserted farms which could be utilised for grazing and haymaking. At the same time, subsidiary means of livelihood brought improved conditions and even wealth to some parts of the peasantry, affecting a marked social and economic differentiation in late medieval rural society.

Fishing and the trade in fish products increased their proportional importance in the Norwegian economy and led to settlement expansion in the form of fishing villages on the outer coast, particularly in northernmost Norway. The late Middle Ages also saw the emergence of fishing and the fish trade as important elements in the Icelandic economy. The large-scale herring fisheries of Skåne and Bohuslän continued into the late Middle Ages and from about

1500 the corresponding fisheries in the Limfjord and the bight of Ho in western Jylland grew in importance. Around the Gulf of Bothnia fishing, especially for salmon, brought affluence, with catches being taken to Stockholm and partly exported from there. A similar pattern developed in Norway where north and west Norwegian and Icelandic catches were exported via Bergen.

In Sweden iron and copper mining developed into an industry of major importance, engaging perhaps 3 per cent of the total population and bringing profit not only to the low nobility and freeholders of the mining districts, but also to the people of the adjacent and sometimes distant regions who provided the mining districts with foodstuffs and other commodities. In the southern part of Norway export of lumber became an important part of the farming economy, particularly after the introduction of the water-powered gate saw in the late fifteenth century. Peasant seafaring activities flourished in the coastal regions, and in some areas a professional carrying trade was established, as was the case in southern Scandinavia and in Åland and part of the south-west Finnish archipelago.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, when the demographic trend finally changed and the shortage of tenants and wage-labourers lessened, economic conditions started to work against most of the rural population and to favour the high-status groups that had suffered in the preceding crisis. This was, however, a long-term process which did not culminate until the early Modern Period. It also appears that the late medieval social and economic trend favouring the broad rural population instilled the peasantry with a greater self-confidence, which goes some way to explain the Scandinavian peasant uprisings of the period that were directed against increasing taxation and to explain other attempts to restore the lost economic positions of the social and political élite.

The effects of the late medieval demographic crisis on urban development (Chapter 20) are hard to assess and still but little understood. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the dramatic population losses of the second half of the fourteenth century and the consequent economic disruptions put an end to the rapid urbanisation of the preceding period. New urban foundations in the late Middle Ages were mostly complementary and unimportant; in the second half of the fourteenth century there was none in Denmark and very few in Sweden. In Norway new towns were not at all established in the late Middle Ages, with the exception of the small township of Oddevall (present-day Swedish Uddevalla) in Bohuslän. However, it is also argued (Chapter 20) that the density of towns achieved before 1350 had come a long way towards satisfying the need for urban centres within the framework of medieval Scandinavian society.

Be this as it may, there is little doubt that as collection centres for royal and ecclesiastical revenues and places of residence for private landowners, the towns must have been hit by the fall in land rents, taxes and other public sources of income. Such consequences cannot easily be quantified but have nevertheless been shown to have had clear negative effects on the development of Norwegian episcopal towns such as Trondheim, Oslo, Stavanger and Hamar, whereas historians have so far been more cautious in outlining corresponding developments in the late medieval Danish and Swedish towns.

On the other hand, the generally increasing degree of commercialisation in late medieval northern Europe clearly favoured those Scandinavian towns whose economic rationale lay in the exchange of goods, and helped them overcome the vacuum created by the population losses. This was particularly true for the regional centres that were the foci of international trade, such as Bergen, Stockholm, København, Malmö and Kalmar. The growing importance of commerce also seems to have proved advantageous to smaller towns able to trade in products for which there was growing demand. In addition, the leading towns of København and Stockholm were particularly favoured by their increasing importance as political and administrative centres.

Foreign guests and immigrants came to play an important part in the urban life of the most prominent trading centres. From the thirteenth century and throughout the rest of the Middle Ages Hanseatic merchants, especially those from Lübeck, increasingly used their organisational and financial strength to dominate Scandinavian foreign trade, notably the export of metals from Sweden, salted herring from Skåne, and stockfish and other fish products from Bergen. The Germans came, originally, as guests in the sailing season in the summer half of the year but soon started to stay for the winter.

Apparently, the restrictive policy of the Crown contributed to keeping the number of permanently resident Germans at a modest level in Danish towns, whereas in Sweden German visitors were invited to settle in Stockholm, Kalmar and other trading towns where they may have constituted up to one-third of the burghers. In Norway German 'winter-sitting' was allowed from the 1250s, though at times restricted, and eventually led to the establishment of the half-extraterritorial and very dominant Hanseatic trading station or *Kontor* of Bergen and to smaller and better integrated trading factories in the east Norwegian towns of Oslo and Tønsberg. In some places and for certain periods Hanseatic merchants faced competition from other foreigners – the English, Scots and, above all, the Dutch, who towards the end of the Middle Ages were favoured by Scandinavian rulers in order to counterbalance the Hanseatic influence – but they kept their grip on Scandinavian foreign

trade until the sixteenth century, which made the Hansa under Lübeck's leadership a significant factor in late medieval Scandinavian politics.

An important social effect of the late medieval demographic crisis was a reduction in the number of noblemen in Norway and Denmark. The Norwegian low nobility was drastically weakened by the loss of income which followed the fall in population and there are indications of a similar trend in Denmark and Sweden, particularly in the fifteenth century. In Denmark and Sweden, however, the high nobility overcame the negative effects of the population decline and acquired a dominant position in late medieval society, separating itself more clearly from the rest of the population, while the corresponding élite in Norway was strongly reduced in number in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Chapter 21). As the secular (and ecclesiastical) aristocracy was the mainstay of the late medieval system of government in Scandinavia, taking care of the royal regional and local administration through the system of *len* (fiefs) and participating in central decision-making through the councils of the realms, this would change the balance of power in Scandinavia to the disadvantage of the Norwegian kingdom.

Following a trend in the German territories east of the Elbe and in other parts of eastern central Europe, the Danish high nobility used its economic and political strength to acquire rights of jurisdiction over their servants and tenants and to restrict the mobility of tenants, eventually tying the tenants of Sjælland and a few small islands nearby to the soil so that their legal position towards the end of the Middle Ages began to resemble serfdom. This would, however, have only a minor impact on the relatively favourable economic status of the Danish tenantry and the internal autonomy of Danish village and hamlet societies. There were tendencies in the same direction in Sweden but the Swedish high nobility were only marginally successful in their attempts to restrict the freedom of their tenants (Chapter 19).

Like the nobility the Church was badly affected by the economic consequences of the late medieval loss of population, as seen by a marked decline in tithe and judicial incomes as well as a dramatic general fall in land rents; at the same time the Black Death and the following plague epidemics caused a severe shortage of clerics. However, the Church's administrative system and organisation remained largely intact, and the systematic work carried out to re-establish its financial basis and adapt to the loss of clergy enabled it to overcome the effects of the demographic crisis sooner than the monarchy. In this way the Church and clergy seem to have increased their influence in late medieval Scandinavian society. The profound effects of plague and warfare on

the minds of the people may also have had a large part to play in bringing the Church and Christianity to prominence during this time.

However, the monastic movement was permanently affected by the loss of population and its economic consequences, and its general stagnation and decline could not be compensated for by the relative success of the Bridgettine movement in the fifteenth century. Ecclesiastical autonomy was threatened by the practice of appointing bishops and other prelates by papal 'provision' in collaboration with kings and princes. Nevertheless, the Church exerted considerable political influence through the *ex officio* participation of bishops and the high position of archbishops in the councils of the realms (Chapter 22).

Politically, the late Middle Ages stand out as the period of unions between two or all three Scandinavian kingdoms. Quite clearly, these unions were rooted in the growing inter-Scandinavian entanglement of the latter part of the high Middle Ages (Chapter 8(e)).

In Denmark the death of King Valdemar II in 1241 marked the end of the expansive Valdemarian Age, and in the following period of political unrest – when Valdemar's sons and their descendants fought each other over the succession and bitter conflicts occurred between the Crown and Church – the Danish kingdom was threatened with disintegration and seriously weakened in relation to its Scandinavian neighbours and the powers of northern Germany.

It was precisely in the same period that the Folkung monarchy was established by Earl Birger Magnusson, converting Sweden into a unified kingdom, and that the strength of the medieval Norwegian kingdom culminated under King Håkon Håkonsson and his descendants. The two consolidated kingdoms directed part of their new-found internal strength to expansion in directions which were determined by their geographical situations. Sweden expanded towards Finland, which was gradually included into the Swedish realm, Gotland and the eastern Baltic, whereas Norway directed much of its foreign interests towards the Norse island communities of the Western Ocean, including Iceland, which were all included in the Norwegian dominion of King Håkon Håkonsson and which, with the exception of the Hebrides and Man, remained there under his descendants. At the same time Norwegian and Swedish interests made themselves increasingly felt in the Sami territories of northern Scandinavia where they found a common antagonist in the Russian principality of Novgorod but did not yet clash with each other. However, internal

Scandinavian relations soon became more tense in the south as the rulers of Norway and Sweden tried to exploit the internal weakness of the Danish kingdom to their own advantage.

King Håkon Håkonsson had territorial ambitions in Danish Halland, south of the Göta river, probably with a view to finally controlling Skåne and the increasing trade and shipping between the Baltic and the North Sea. This would strengthen his position in relation to Lübeck and other German ports of the Baltic which now seriously started to make themselves felt in the economies of all three Nordic kingdoms. Håkon's active and aggressive policy towards Denmark, based on Norwegian naval power and exploiting the various forces of opposition to the ruling royal line there, was softened by his son and successor Magnus Law-mender, but was resumed after 1280, in the reigns of his grandsons Eirik and Håkon V.

An alliance with the Swedish kingdom, which was now in the process of opening up towards the west, was of high priority in Norwegian foreign policy but did not succeed. Basically, it was not in the long-term interest of the Swedish monarchy to help to promote a coherent Norwegian dominion over the western coastal districts. From a Swedish point of view it was preferable to preserve a Danish–Norwegian power balance to the west and pursue purely Swedish ends in relation to Denmark; in the latter respect the riches of Danish Skåne and its International Fair would eventually attract Swedish more than Norwegian interests. Consequently, the main political constellation in the increasing inter-Scandinavian entanglement of the latter part of the thirteenth and the first two decades of the fourteenth centuries was an alliance between the ruling monarchs of Denmark and Sweden, leaving it to the Norwegian government to cooperate with the forces of opposition in Denmark and Sweden. Hence the Norwegian support of the Danish magnates outlawed for complicity in the murder of King Erik Klipping in 1286 and of the Swedish dukes Erik and Valdemar in their conflict with their brother King Birger after 1304.

One result of this policy was the establishment of an inter-Nordic enclave at the intersection of the three kingdoms around the mouth of the Göta river, consisting of Danish North Halland to the south and Norwegian Elvesysle (south Bohuslän) to the north. The castles dominating the two districts were first held by Count Jacob of North Halland, one of the Danish outlaws' leaders, and later by Duke Erik Magnusson who added the adjoining west Swedish provinces. From this powerbase Erik took over the Norwegian policy of expansion towards Denmark, outmanoeuvring his father-in-law to be, King Håkon V, who had hoped to use Erik for his own ends. It now became clear that the

economic and military resources of the Norwegian kingdom were not sufficient to enforce the intentions of its Scandinavian policy in a military situation where success depended more on castles and landed forces than naval power. This would explain the dawning isolationism that is noticeable in Norwegian government circles in Håkon V's last years. The Norwegian kingdom had been reduced to a pawn in the Scandinavian power-play it had done so much to start in the mid-thirteenth century, and had every reason to fear the dominance of stronger adversaries.

The strongest of these, besides Duke Erik, was the Danish king Erik Menved whose renewal of the Danish claims to Germany north of the Elbe and further ambitions in the eastern Baltic threatened the Wendish ports headed by Lübeck and made them prone to join the coalitions Duke Erik worked to build against him. In the short run, Duke Erik seemed the more successful of the two, as he managed to work out agreements with both Erik Menved and his brother King Birger which secured for him and his ducal brother Valdemar the greater part of the Swedish realm as well as the acceptance of his Norwegian marriage, which promised to give him control of Norway through the eventual succession of his infant son to the Norwegian throne. At the same time, Erik Menved's power was weakening as he met with increasing internal opposition and had to mortgage parts of his realm in order to finance his warfare in north Germany.

In the second decade of the fourteenth century the scene thus seemed set for a closer dynastic connection between ducal Sweden and Norway, threatening both King Birger in Sweden and the Danish kingdom, particularly the Danish possession of Skåne. It was in this situation that King Birger took the dramatic action against his ducal brothers which ended in their death in prison in 1318. However, what Birger and Erik Menved, his probable accomplice, had not anticipated, was the strength of the following Swedish uprising which put Duke Erik's three-year-old son Magnus on the Swedish throne in 1319, the same year which saw his hereditary succession to the Norwegian throne and the death of Erik Menved. Thus was ushered in the series of late medieval unions between two or three Scandinavian kingdoms.

Scandinavian high politics in the late Middle Ages cannot be understood without basic knowledge of the contemporary political system (outlined in Chapter 23). In all three kingdoms the privileged élite of nobility and high clergy was the main political factor alongside the monarchs. As the tendencies towards institutionalisation of national royal assemblies were largely broken off in the fourteenth century, the chief decision-making body alongside the king was the

council of each realm, consisting of members of the high nobility and leading churchmen with the archbishops and bishops as more or less self-appointed members, although the councils could at times be supplemented by a wider circle of nobles and clerics and occasionally also by a broader popular element. The latter gained importance in the Swedish political meetings of the realm that from the 1430s were convoked in politically turbulent periods and eventually developed into the Swedish *riksdag* (parliament). However, until the end of the Middle Ages only the three councils regularly represented the commonalty of their respective realms in their relations with the monarchy whose tools they could also be.

Local administration was taken care of through the system of *len* (fiefs), the districts of varying size in which royal grantees exercised royal authority in return for a share of the royal incomes they collected. Particularly important were the castle-*len*, surrounding the royal castles which formed the nodal points of local and regional administration. For members of the high nobility it was vitally important to have access to the power and income enjoyed by *len* holders. Consequently, it was a consistent policy of the council aristocracy of all three kingdoms throughout the late Middle Ages to reserve castles and other *len* for themselves, to the exclusion of royal favourites of lower or foreign descent. The monarchs, on their part, did what they could to control the *len* through loyal servants and gain as much income as possible from them.

It was with the accession of new rulers in all three Scandinavian kingdoms in 1319–20 that the councils of the realms emerged as more independent than the royal councils they superseded. In Sweden the council was behind the election of King Magnus Eriksson in 1319 and the accompanying Charter of Liberties which placed him under the law. In the same year, the Swedish and Norwegian councils came to terms on the personal union that followed from Magnus' hereditary succession to the Norwegian throne. Both acted as regency councils during Magnus' minority, setting the king's mother, Duchess Ingebjørg, and her circle aside. In Denmark the counsellors of the realm were the effective force behind the election of King Christopher II and the accession charter which set bounds to his rule in 1320 (these and other events of late medieval union history have been outlined in Chapter 23).

Thus, the Swedish and Danish councils in 1319–20 established themselves as elective bodies, and they continued as such throughout the rest of the Middle Ages. The Norwegian council for a long time continued to cling to the principle of hereditary succession but, starting with the acclamation of King Magnus' younger son Håkon VI as his Norwegian successor in 1343–4, manipulated the legal rules of succession in a manner that gradually brought

the Norwegian kingdom towards the elective status it finally reached in the mid-fifteenth century.

Late medieval Nordic politics continued to be strongly influenced by the geopolitical conditions and aspirations which were behind the inter-Scandinavian entanglement of the latter part of the high Middle Ages. As trade and shipping between the Baltic and the North Sea increased further, the towns and castles of the Sound region gained in importance and in the fourteenth century the Danish sovereignty over Skåne was for a period lost to Sweden. The quest for Skåne brought the German Hansa, particularly the Wendish towns under Lübeck's leadership, ever deeper into Scandinavian politics, and also attracted the north German princes of Mecklenburg who through the marriage of Duke Albrecht to King Magnus Eriksson's sister Eufemia established a claim to the Swedish throne and later also to the Danish throne through the marriage between Albrecht's son Heinrich and the eldest daughter of King Valdemar IV. There were other foreign players, too, in the political game centred on Skåne and the Sound region, such as the Dutch, whom the union monarchs from the fifteenth century were inclined to favour at the cost of the Hansa. The Hansa, together with the Teutonic Order, also took a strong interest in the strategically placed island of Gotland, which had been drawn into the Swedish realm in the late thirteenth century but became another bone of contention between Sweden and Denmark from the latter part of the fourteenth century.

Another factor of great importance in late medieval Scandinavian politics were the north German counts of Holstein, to whom the greater part of Danish *len*, including Skåne, were mortgaged in the 1320s. In the following period the Holsteiners vied with the Danish monarchy over the control of the duchy of Schleswig which they held fully or partly as a princely *len* under the Danish crown and did their best to remove from Danish sovereignty. It was not until King Christian I of Oldenburg was elected duke of Schleswig in 1460 that the duchy reverted to the factual control of the Danish crown, followed by the county of Holstein which shortly afterwards became a duchy of its own.

Politically, the demographic crisis of the latter part of the fourteenth century had its greatest effects in Norway, leading to a drastic fall in royal incomes which put overwhelming strains on a governmental system which, long before this time, had been based on scant personal and material resources. The local communal apparatus, which had previously been developed on the initiative of the Crown and Church, continued its activities in the late Middle Ages

with a greater independence than earlier, but the Crown's initiative and ability to act, internally as well as externally, diminished in the second half of the fourteenth century. The last separate Norwegian monarch of the Middle Ages, King Håkon VI (1355–80), acted in concert with the council of the realm, but during the ensuing union with Denmark, and for periods with Sweden too, the Norwegian aristocracy and council were not able to hold their own against the union monarchs and the much stronger aristocracy of the neighbouring kingdoms.

In Denmark and Sweden, the politico-structural changes which occurred from the mid-fourteenth century cannot be related in the same fashion to the demographic crisis. From 1340 Denmark saw the policy of monarchic recovery and restitution carried out by King Valdemar IV with broad societal support, including that of the nobility and high clergy and consequently also the council of the realm. Valdemar's failure in his warfare against the Hanseatic League and his death in 1375, with the succession question still unresolved, opened the way for a strong aristocratic influence on the government of the kingdom through the council of the realm.

Sweden was nevertheless the kingdom where the aristocracy, acting through the council of the realm, came most strongly to the political forefront in the fourteenth century, opposing and finally deposing King Magnus Eriksson, calling in and electing Albrecht of Mecklenburg (1363–89) in his place, setting bounds to Albrecht's power, and finally deposing him as well.

Seen in the influential perspective adopted by the Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth, Scandinavian high politics in the late Middle Ages appear as a tug-of-war between two main political agendas. On the one hand, the monarchy was seeking to retain its power as free from restrictions as possible; on the other hand the aristocracy was seeking to use the council of the realm to set limits to royal power, following a programme of constitutionalism. Both took their inspiration and shape from monarchic and constitutional movements in contemporary Europe, partly from royal and princely ideology and policy, partly from the relationship between the papacy and the conciliar movement, and were by Lönnroth labelled *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum*, respectively, in accordance with contemporary political theory.

The constitutional programme was that the king should rule in accordance with the laws of each individual kingdom. The council of the realm should participate in all important governmental decisions: legislation and judicial matters, foreign and trade policy, financial matters and the granting of privileges, etc. Above all, it was important for the council to take part in the allocation of castle and other *len* (fiefs) which were to be held by native noblemen

and not by foreigners and men of lower descent. The Scandinavian unions should be largely personal with considerable powers of self-government for each kingdom through its council.

Conversely, the monarchic agenda favoured direct royal control over castle and other *len* holders and looked to the Norwegian principle of hereditary succession as a means of reducing the dependence of the royal power on conciliar consent. From the monarchic viewpoint the unions between two or three kingdoms should be more than personal, opening each kingdom to royal rule through *len* holders of the monarch's own choice, preferably with the support of an amalgamated union council controlled by the monarch.

The two agendas should be regarded as ideal types which could never be fully realised. To integrate the huge and diverse landmass of all three Scandinavian kingdoms with their different political, social and cultural traditions into one directly ruled realm was far beyond the reach of any late medieval monarch. On the other hand, the secular and clerical aristocracy of each kingdom tended to split into factions determined by separate political interests, and there was always the need of individual noblemen and leading clerics to keep in with the king in order to promote their position in society. Consequently, a united aristocratic front for the advancement of the constitutional programme was never attainable in any kingdom and it was always possible for a monarch to find some aristocratic support for his own policy. Nevertheless, the programmes of *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum* make sense because they denote main courses followed by contemporary Scandinavian politics. Important political actors and groupings were constantly working in one or the other direction, and the shifting balance between the two agendas is an apt criterion for subdividing late medieval Scandinavian political history into main phases.

Generally, it can be said that the influence of the councils of the realms was in the ascendancy throughout most of the fourteenth century. They still played an important role in the dramatic events of 1387–9 which made Margrethe, daughter of King Valdemar IV, the regent of all three Scandinavian kingdoms and brought them together in a union that was to last for more than half a century. The reigns of Margrethe and her grand-nephew Erik of Pomerania were nevertheless the phase of late medieval union history when reality came closest to the monarchic agenda. The Act of Coronation issued at the Kalmar meeting in 1397 gave the queen and king the entire right to dispose of the Crown's castles and opened the way for the monarch to appoint castellans even beyond his own lifetime, thus pointing in the direction of a hereditary

union monarchy. The constitutional programme perceptible in the incomplete Union Document from the same occasion was set aside.

The union monarch came to reside in Denmark where a central union administration took shape. There were no autonomous central organs in Norway and Sweden where only modest functions were allowed the respective councils. Instead, the monarch tried to use the three councils as a single committee and deliberated regularly only with the Danish council. Both Margrethe and Erik sought to control the two kingdoms and obtain as much royal income as possible through the *len* system, putting royal appointees in charge of the particularly important castle *len* and at the same time carrying out a policy of extra taxation and restoration of Crown rights and property. Altogether, there was a tendency towards disintegration of the Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms within a Danish-dominated union realm.

What turned the tide against the monarchic agenda was the uncompromising course followed by King Erik in his ambitious external and internal policies. His conflicts with the counts of Holstein and the Hansa led to particularly harsh extra taxation in Sweden and impeded the Swedish export trade. At the same time his use of foreign (and native) bailiffs challenged the Swedish high nobility and contributed to his unpopularity among the broader population. Thus were triggered the Swedish risings of the 1430s and the chain of events which ended in Erik's deposition.

Faced with the Swedish rebellion Erik sought the aid of the councils of his realms, only to find that the Swedish and Danish counsellors joined each other in pursuing a programme of constitutionalism, aiming at a union of three independent kingdoms, each ruled by its council. As Erik could not bring himself to accept this, the way was opened for his deposition both in Denmark and Sweden and the election of his nephew, Christopher of Bavaria, in his place in 1439–41. The Norwegian council, traditionally loyal to the hereditary king, played a passive role in these events but finally saw no other option than to withdraw its allegiance from King Erik in 1440 and finally accept Christopher of Bavaria in 1442.

Christopher's brief reign marked the heyday of Scandinavian council constitutionalism. The ideal of a personal union of kingdoms governed independently by the councils was now realised to a higher degree than in any other period. After Christopher's unexpected death in 1448 the disputed succession kept the three councils in the political forefront. After the majority of the Swedish counsellors had decided on the former supervisor of the realm, Karl Knutsson, as their king, the Danish council fulfilled its plan of electing Count Christian of Oldenburg king of Denmark.

Faced with the two kings' claims to the throne of Norway, to which neither had hereditary right, the Norwegian council split into factions which supported the rival candidates in return for accession charters which contained far-reaching promises in the spirit of conciliar constitutionalism and heralded the change from hereditary to elective monarchy in Norway. In the end Christian prevailed, after the Swedish counsellors had abandoned Karl's claim to Norway. In 1450 he was crowned king of Norway and a union treaty was concluded between the Danish and Norwegian councils in Bergen, making Norway definitively an elective monarchy with the council as the electoral body.

As ruling king of Norway Christian I showed little inclination to respect the constitutional clauses of his accession charter and the union treaty of 1450. He rarely visited Norway, and the kingdom was ruled through a København-based chancellery government. The Norwegian council was left little part in important political decisions concerning Norwegian interests. It was ignored in 1468–9 when Orkney and Shetland were pledged to the Scottish crown for the dowry of Christian's daughter in her marriage with King James III. Christian's financial and political dependency on the Hansa also made him fail to protect Norwegian commercial interests. Though he was willing to strengthen the position of the Norwegian church, his reign (1450–81) put an end to the conciliar influence of the preceding decade.

However, Norway was of little importance to Christian in comparison with the project of winning Sweden back under the union crown. The Swedish council was in favour of a union which embodied the principles of constitutionalism and would not let the disputed election of Karl Knutsson stand in the way of such a union. Consequently, it concluded a union treaty with the Danish council in Halmstad in 1450, opening the way for the election of a common king in the future. Taken together, the Danish–Swedish Halmstad treaty and the Danish–Norwegian Bergen treaty from the same year reflect the desire of the counsellors of all three kingdoms to preserve a union based on constitutional principles.

That, however, was not the type of union in which Christian I and his Oldenburg successors on the thrones of Denmark and Norway were interested. They primarily wanted to rule Sweden according to monarchic ideals and were willing to use military means to reach that goal, but the strong Swedish forces of opposition repeatedly made them fall back on alliances with one or more of the rival factions into which the Swedish conciliar aristocracy was constantly divided, making more or less token concessions to the principles of constitutionalism. Against them were aligned, increasingly, a national Swedish

movement led by Karl Knutsson and the later Sture supervisors of the realm who made use of effective propaganda and could count on the support of the population of Dalarna, with their potential for armed revolt, and the increasingly important burghers of Stockholm with whom the metal-exporting Dalecarlians had common economic interests. There was strong opposition in the Swedish ecclesiastical and secular council aristocracy to the monarchic aspects of the policies of Karl Knutsson and the Sture supervisors but the Oldenburg monarchs were never willing to make the concessions necessary to forge more effective and lasting alliances with such forces of opposition.

Christian I initially allied himself with Karl Knutsson's Swedish opponents of the aristocratic-constitutional Oxenstierna–Vasa faction, at the same time gaining the support of the Swedish border nobility for whom peace and free connections across the Danish–Swedish border were absolutely vital. Karl was ousted and Christian elected king of Sweden in 1457 in return for constitutional guarantees which for a short time seemed to hold good. However, Christian's Swedish rule only lasted to 1464 when his policy of gaining control of the castle *len*, broadening the tax basis, and exacting harsh extra taxes made the Oxenstiernas break with him and recall Karl Knutsson.

The following years saw an internal Swedish power struggle, dominated by the interests of the Oxenstiernas, the Axelssons of the Danish Thott family, and Karl Knutsson with his followers, in which there was no longer a clear-cut division between adherents of a strong royal power and those favouring conciliar government. As Christian I had come to the conviction that he could only regain the Swedish throne by military means, and was not willing to make essential constitutional concessions, the scene was set for the bloody battle of Brunkeberg in 1471 where Christian's forces were defeated by the coalition led by Sten Sture the Elder, who had been elected supervisor of the realm after Karl Knutsson's death in the preceding year.

In the following decades Sten Sture built up his power as head of the Swedish council government in a manner that went far towards making him regent with a king-like status in the eyes of the broader population. However, the union still had prominent supporters in the Swedish council, mainly among the border nobility. The possibility of recalling Christian I in return for constitutional guarantees was kept alive for several years after Brunkeberg, and after his death in 1481 negotiations started between the councils of all three kingdoms about the acceptance of his son Hans who had in his father's lifetime been recognised as successor. The spirit of council constitutionalism was strongly revived in Hans' Danish–Norwegian accession charter, the Halmstad Recess of 1483, based on the union programme drawn up by Danish and Swedish

counsellors in the previous year. Later in 1483 the Swedish council set forth its conditions for accepting Hans in the Kalmar Recess. However, Sten Sture and his followers managed to prevent his takeover of royal power, using among other things the Gotland question against him.

In the meantime Hans strengthened the monarchy significantly both in Denmark and Norway, eroding the power of the separate institutions of the two kingdoms. There was nevertheless a certain community of interests between him and the Danish high nobility which was strong enough not to fear for its own position and saw advantages for itself in an expansive royal foreign and union policy. In Norway, the royal promises of the Halmstad Recess remained largely on parchment, as the council lacked the political apparatus to carry out its policies in practice and was at the same time weakened by the reduction in the number of the native high nobility and the king's reliance on favourites in castle *len* and as council members. The kingdom was in reality governed through the Danish chancellery without its own financial system.

For many years King Hans tried to achieve a negotiated solution of his claim to the Swedish throne, keeping in contact with the aristocratic opposition to Sten Sture in the Swedish council, but in the end he adopted an offensive alliance and war policy and in 1497, when an open conflict had broken out between Sten Sture and his opponents, he invaded Sweden. Sten Sture was forced to retire and Hans was crowned king of Sweden. However, his defeat in Ditmarschen in 1500 reinvigorated the Swedish opposition to the union and he lost most of the kingdom to Sten Sture and his followers in 1501. For the remainder of his reign there was an internal Swedish struggle between the opponents of the union, led by Sten Sture and his successor Svante Nilsson, and its conciliar adherents. The former could draw on the support of the Hansa, as King Hans worked consistently to reduce Lübeck's commercial hegemony in Scandinavia, and peace agreements acknowledging his right to the Swedish throne had no practical effect.

The Norwegian rebellion of Knut Alvsson in association with King Hans' Swedish enemies in 1501–2 was quelled, and the takeover of the government of Norway by the heir apparent Prince Christian (1506–13) meant that all opposition was harshly uprooted and the Norwegian council totally disregarded. The Danish–Norwegian accession charter issued by Christian II at his election in 1513 retained the principles of the Halmstad Recess, but had no practical effects in Norway where Christian continued to exclude the council from the government. Though the political rights of the Danish nobility were maintained and their economic privileges greatly improved in Christian's accession charter, his reign saw an increase of royal power in relation to the council in

Denmark as well, with a strengthened grip on administration and finances, use of non-noble officials in the chancellery and *len*, and favouring of urban burghers at the cost of the nobility and Church. Attempts at uniform national legislation strengthened the king's role in the enforcement of law.

A parallel strengthening of tendencies towards monarchic rule occurred in Sweden when Sten Sture the Younger was appointed supervisor of the realm after the death of his father Svante Nilsson in 1512. He worked consistently to draw the broader population to his side in more or less open opposition to the council of the realm, making use of meetings of estates and regional assemblies all over the country. Christian II, on his part, prepared a large-scale military invasion of Sweden and received increased support from Swedish opposition circles after Sten Sture deposed Archbishop Gustaf Trolle. When Christian's invasion of Sweden in 1520 led to the defeat and death of Sten Sture and ended in the surrender of Stockholm, the way seemed open to a renewal of the union much on the king's terms. However, the ensuing trial of the Sture supporters and their brutal execution in the Stockholm Massacre destroyed the basis for Christian's Swedish rule and caused the reactions that brought Gustaf Vasa to power as supervisor of the realm and later king, forever ending Sweden's participation in the Scandinavian union of which it had been a member for periods that grew shorter and shorter.

Seen in the perspective of the late medieval agendas of *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum*, it was thus the national monarchic tendencies that triumphed in Sweden at the end of the Middle Ages, enabling Gustaf Vasa to start building up the strong monarchy that was to set its stamp on Scandinavian history in the early Modern Period.

In the case of Denmark and Norway the late medieval union, now also including the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, was to last for another three centuries. Although the policies of Christian II were defeated when he left his kingdoms in 1523, monarchic rule was strengthened towards the end of the Middle Ages in Denmark and Norway, too. Here, as in Sweden, the royal power was to increase further through the Lutheran Reformation, which is the initial theme of the next volume of the *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*.