

NAVAL POWER IN THE VIKING AGE AND IN HIGH MEDIEVAL DENMARK

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THIRTEENTH-CENTURY Scandinavian law codes describe a levy that may be conceived of as a naval militia. Such levies existed in Denmark, Norway and Sweden in similar, though not identical, forms. On the basis of territorial subdivisions into *skipaen*, districts responsible for supplying a ship, and of these districts into *hafnæ* responsible for furnishing a member of the crew, the kings of Denmark had, in theory, a fleet of about one thousand ships at their disposal. They had sizeable naval forces but raised them in a unique way, very different from states in the seventeenth century and later.

The age of this organisation, called in Old Norse *leiðangr*, Danish *leding*, is disputed, as are the contents of the provincial laws in general. Older generations of scholars were prepared to seek the origins of the laws in a remote Tacitean past¹ while in recent scholarship it has been claimed that they were basically new rules, intended to change the law in Scandinavia, not to record or conserve ancient customary law.² It has recently been argued that the code of Jutland was meant to complete and supersede older legislation, like the code of Skåne, and that it was intended as a national law; only the death of Valdemar II in 1241 prevented its ratification at all provincial courts.³

Those believing that the laws were rooted in the Germanic past naturally assumed that the *leding* had to be much older than the writing down of the provincial laws. The cautious dated its origins in the late Viking period, the bolder took its beginnings to early in the Viking period and even into the eighth century. The older generation of Swedish scholars even adduced Tacitus' remark that the Suiones *praeter viros armaque classibus valent*.⁴ The *leding* has therefore often served as an explanation for the successes of the Vikings in Europe and elsewhere. It justified Godfred's self-confidence *vis-à-vis* Charlemagne, it explained Horik's ability to send a fleet of six hundred ships against Saxony in

¹ For example Karl Wührer, 'Die dänischen Landschaftsrechte als Quelle für die ältesten dänischen Rechtsverhältnisse', *Medieval Scandinavia*, 1 (1968), 51–6.

² For example, Elsa Sjöholm, *Gesetze als Quellen mittelalterlicher Geschichte des Nordens*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis 21 (1977).

³ Michael Gelting, 'Skånske Lov og Jyske Lov. Danmarks første kommissionsbetænkning og Danmarks første retsplejelov', forthcoming.

⁴ *Germania*, 'The Suiones . . . are strong not only in arms and men but also in fleets', trans. H. Matingley (Harmondsworth, 1998), 137.

845, the siege of Paris with even more ships in 885–6, and it explained why a small country like Denmark and its kings, Swein Forkbeard and Canute the Great, could finally conquer England in the early eleventh century. In the centuries following the Viking Age this system of naval levies still ensured Danish superiority in Baltic waters and provided the Danish kings with their successes against the Wends in the twelfth century.

It is striking, however, how inconspicuous is this system in the narrative sources reporting Danish naval warfare in the ninth to thirteenth centuries. When Godfred raised two hundred ships to oppose Charlemagne we may of course find it unlikely that they were all his own ships but even if this were true it does not imply that only a *leding* of the type described in the provincial laws could account for their mobilisation. Not even Horik's alleged six hundred ships attacking the Saxons in 845 will vouch for the existence of the *leding*, just because they probably were not all the king's own ships. Horik may have had more than a hand in the sack of Paris in the same year but that does not imply that he was in anything like comfortable control of the military resources of Denmark. There is in fact positive evidence that chieftains who disliked his rule, or were exiled by him, went abroad to live *piratico more*.⁵

When William of Normandy prepared to conquer England in 1066 he demanded ships from his vassals. A list of their contributions was long regarded as spurious but its authenticity has now been established by Elizabeth van Houts. It lists the following contributions: William fitz Osbern, his steward, sixty ships; Hugh, later count of Avranches, sixty ships; Hugh of Montfort, fifty ships and sixty knights; Remigius, almoner of Fecamp and later bishop of Lincoln, one ship and twenty knights; Nicholas, abbot of St Ouen, fifteen ships and one hundred knights; Robert, count of Eu, sixty ships; Fulk d' Aunou, forty ships; Gerold the steward, forty ships; William, count of Evreux, eighty ships; Roger of Montgomery, sixty ships; Roger of Beaumont, sixty ships; Odo, bishop of Bayeux, one hundred ships; Robert, count of Mortain, one hundred and twenty ships; Walter Giffard, thirty ships and one hundred knights.⁶

In addition to these ships, the duke had numerous others, from certain of his men, each according to their capacity. His queen, Matilda, fitted out an especially magnificent ship, for which she received the county of Kent. Many new ships had to be built before the invasion could take place, as we know from the Bayeux Tapestry, so the magnates of Normandy may not have had these numbers of ships at their disposal under normal circumstances. It is unlikely, though, that the whole invasion fleet was built from scratch. Danish kings could draw in a similar manner on the military resources of their magnates, to the extent, that is, that they could control them. We have no direct evidence of how Godfred collected the two hundred ships with which he threatened to visit Char-

⁵ *Annales Fuldenses* 854. *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, part III, ed. Reinhold Rau. *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, Freiherr vom Stein Gedächtnisausgabe, vol. VII (Fulda, 1960/1975).

⁶ Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 'The Ship List of William the Conqueror', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 10 (1987), 159–83.

lemagne in Aachen but a permanent fleet presupposes a permanent state, and the beginning of the ninth century is far too early to talk about such a thing in a Danish context. Throughout the Viking period Denmark had powerful kings who could organise vast resources and wield very considerable power but they alternated with much less powerful kings with apparently very little control over the magnates. This situation, in fact, applied well into the twelfth century and some would say much longer than that.

It is possible to learn something about the recruiting of Swein Forkbeard's and Canute the Great's armies. It is also possible to see that they were not alone in the business. Competing armies were recruited in Sweden and probably Norway, and possibly even in Denmark. The forces led by chieftains like Thorkel the Tall, who gathered a fleet of some two hundred ships and attacked England in 1009, or by chieftains mentioned in Swedish runic inscriptions, were composed of their own forces, their household troops or *lið*, and such other forces as they could persuade to join them.⁷ When Thorkel's fleet dispersed in 1012 he kept forty-five ships with him, with which he took service with the English king. They were presumably his own forces.

In taking service with his former enemy, Thorkel followed a precedent established by numerous chieftains in the ninth century. Many Viking leaders acted as naval *condottieri*, taking service with whoever appeared to offer the best prospects of pay and loot. Weland is a good example of this. In 860, he was active in the Somme area but made a deal with the West Frankish king, Charles the Bald, to attack and expel another group of Vikings active in the Seine basin. For this he was to receive three thousand pounds of silver. This deal was confirmed with hostages, and while the Franks were collecting the money Weland and his army went to England. They sacked Winchester, but were beaten by the English before they could reach their ships with the booty. Back on the Continent, Weland and his forces burnt Thérouanne and then went up the Seine and began a siege of the Seine Vikings encamped since 858 on the island of Oissel, a little upstream from Rouen. For this service, Charles agreed to pay Weland and his men the increased amount of five thousand pounds of silver as well as to supply them with livestock and corn, that so as to avoid their helping themselves.

Before Oissel Weland was joined by another force of sixty ships, and the Oissel Vikings then gave up. They surrendered, paid Weland six thousand pounds of gold and silver and were allowed to join him, and both groups now made for the sea. They decided, however, that it was too late in the year to put to sea, so they had to find winter quarters in Francia. The *Annals of St Bertin* describe the procedures like this: so they split up according to their *sodalitates* into groups allocated to various ports, from the sea-coast right up to Paris. Weland with his company came up the Seine to the fort of Melun. Former occupants of the besieged fort on Oissel, with Weland's son, now occupied the monastery of St-Maur-des-Fossés.

⁷ Niels Lund, 'The Armies of Swein Forkbeard and Cnut: *leding* or *lið*?', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15 (1986), 105–18.

We cannot tell how big these *sodalitates* were but probably they could be anything from a handful of ships to a fleet like that of Thorkel the Tall, numbering forty-five ships. The *Life of St Ansgar* has an account of the exiled Swedish king Anund, who wanted to reconquer his kingdom. He had eleven ships of his own and found another twenty-two among Danish friends.⁸ The *Annals of Fontenelle* give the names of several chieftains active in the Seine area in the 850s and some of them turn up in other contexts as well. One was named Sidroc,⁹ and he is probably the earl Sidroc, who is reported dead together with his son in the bloody year 871, when the Danes lost nine earls and one king.¹⁰ When such people gathered together, whether willingly or unwillingly, a big Viking army could be formed but they clearly possessed no great permanence. When Spring came in 862, Weland and his forces split up into several fleets, albeit after an attempt on the part of the former Oissel Vikings to resume normal activities in the Seine area. Weland himself stayed and with his company took service with Charles the Bald. He was baptised together with his wife and son but was killed a year later in single combat, having been accused of faithlessness by other Danes in Charles's service. One group of the departing Vikings was employed as mercenaries by Salomon, Duke of Brittany, while another one went into the service of Robert of Anjou for a fresh six thousand pounds of silver.¹¹ Since Salomon and Robert were fighting each other intensely, the Vikings once more found themselves on opposite sides.

Viking fleets were clearly composed of the forces of magnates or chieftains. Some of these were big enough to go on ventures of their own, others had to join company with a big man or with a group their own size. Kings who could coerce these forces into their service could wield power over considerable empires, which would vanish when a less talented king took over. This situation applied long after the Viking period. When Knud the Holy, King of Denmark (1080–6), was planning his invasion of England together with his father-in-law, Robert the Frisian, count of Flanders, in 1085, he did not simply order the Danish levies to be ready to carry out his plans in the spring of 1085. He discussed his ideas with the princes and the magnates of the country. They obviously were the ones who could supply the forces necessary. Little had changed when, almost a hundred years later, and following a series of civil wars during which the fates of the pretenders had been decided by the forces their kin and friends were able to support them with, Valdemar the Great set out to conquer the Wends.¹² He held a council of the magnates and put his plans before them and had to suffer rejection

⁸ *Vita Anskarii*, 19. *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, ed. Werner Trillmich and Rudolf Buchner. Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters. Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe, vol. XI (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1978).

⁹ *The Annals of St Bertin*, trans. Janet L. Nelson (Manchester 1991), 75 n. 9, 76 n. 2.

¹⁰ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Dorothy Whitelock *et al.* (1965), 46–7.

¹¹ *Annals of St Bertin*, trans. Nelson, 94–9.

¹² The importance of personal relations and the power of the elite has recently been demonstrated by Lars Hermanson, *Släkt, vänner och makt. En studie av elitens politiska kultur i*

by them on several occasions. A major theme of his reign was securing control of the magnates and their forces, not restoring an ancient popular levy. His campaign to Norway in 1165 is particularly illustrative. At that time political conditions in Norway were such that a Danish effort to assert traditional claims to superiority or at least influence in southern Norway made sense, and Valdemar staged a campaign to Norway in 1165. After spending some weeks in idleness, parts of the fleet, the Jutlanders in particular, urged the abandonment of the campaign and a return home. They called a meeting of the leaders to decide the matter. The king, seconded by Absalon, bishop of Roskilde, being against, sent some of his men to beat up the participants of the meeting and simply had his way by means of terror. Much the same happened a fortnight later, but finally the Jutlanders achieved the abandonment of the campaign, much to the derision of the historian, Saxo Grammaticus. Some of the leaders of the Jutlanders may be identified as belonging to the very top echelons of society. One was even a relative of the king.

The military qualifications of this top layer of society were demonstrated also in 1187 when news of the fall of Jerusalem reached Denmark and was discussed at the Christmas party of King Knud VI in Odense. Fifteen participants vowed to take the cross. Only five actually fulfilled their promise, but they were able by their own means to equip and man five ships and take them all the way to the Holy Land. None of those who carried out their vows to go belonged to the very richest and politically most influential class in the country. There must have been a substantial layer of people with military resources, including ships of their own, with which they could either accompany the king in war, having agreed to do so after consultations, or with which they could go about their own business.

What, then, is the place in history of the *leding* organisation described in the provincial law codes of the thirteenth century? A closer look at this organisation reveals that it was never intended for foreign warfare, nor did it ever serve such purposes. It was a defensive organisation intended to provide a coastguard. The system described in the codes of Skåne and Jutland really consisted of three obligations, all of them called *leding* or some variant of this. The 'legal *leding*' occurs under the names *ræthær lething*, *qwærsaethæ*,¹³ *expeditio*, *lethang withe*, etc. This obligation was a payment for non-service, whether non-service was on a regular basis or occasional. A second obligation described in the codes involved actual service in the ships, service *leding*. This is referred to in the code of Skåne as *wdgerds ledingh* while the code of Jutland calls it simply *lething*. The third obligation described is the obligation of the commended men of the king, or of dukes, bishops and other lords. That these different services

1100-talets Danmark. Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg 24 (Göteborg 2000).

¹³ Modern Danish *kværsæde*, Swedish *kvärsäte*, sitting back, or at home. This term says in one word what Knud the Holy's charter for St Lawrence in Lund of 1085 explained in two sentences: if someone neglects a call to *expeditio*, he shall make amends to the king.

are all referred to by the same term, a term that in itself means nothing more than ‘armed expedition’, has led to much confusion.

In the law of Skåne a distinction is made between two obligations. Basically there was what the law calls *ræthær lethingh*, that is legal *leding*. It consisted of the payment each year of the sum of three marks of money per *hafnæ*, a unit liable to furnish one man for the *leding* ship. In addition to this there was the *wdgerds ledingh*, actual service in the *leding* ship. This could be demanded only every four years and was called with some ceremony. The king’s representative in Skåne would carry a shield and a sword to the provincial assembly and proclaim it. This involved an obligation on those *hafnæ* that had been detailed¹⁴ to furnish a man armed and victualled for sixteen weeks, as well as the payment of certain dues to the leader, the steersman, of the district, or *skipæn*, who provided the ship. The victuals consisted of sixteen *skæpper* (bushels, 1 *skæppe* = c.17 litres) of sifted flour and the same weight in butter, pork and beef. It was disputed whether the meat should be weighed with or without bones! The steersman was entitled to one mark for his byrnie, one for the ship, and to one *ørtugh* (= 12 *skæpper*) of malt and the same quantity of oats. It was also incumbent on the *hafnæ* to furnish the steersman a shield and a spear. Although not recorded before the late fifteenth century these provisions are probably as old as the main law, that is, from the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The law of Jutland was promulgated in 1241 and contains the most elaborate rules for the *leding* in Denmark. Also it distinguishes clearly between *leding* which the *bønder* had to *gøræ uth*, ‘perform’, and the *qwærsæthæ*, which they would *rethæ*, ‘pay’. The first six paragraphs of book III describe the obligations of the *ledingsbønder*, who could serve, how they should be armed, and other practical details. A legal procedure and fines for neglect are also specified. The ship, or the *skipæn*, formed a jurisdiction of its own in these matters, the fines going to the other members of the crew, the *skipperæ*, not to the king. Paragraphs 12–20 describe the distribution of the burdens involved in this service. They were distributed according to wealth as expressed in landownership or rented land.

The law also accounts for exemptions. Men in holy orders were exempt to a specified degree, but only if they were celibate, and another group of *bønder* were exempt from the *wdgerds ledingh* because they served when called. This group consisted of men commended to the king or to other lords, bishops or lay magnates. They are called *herræ mæn* and all their demesne lands were free from *leding* payments by their service. If they neglected their service, if, as the

¹⁴ The expression used in the law is: *tha schal af hware haffnæ i schipæn liger*, ‘then from each *haffnæ* that lies in *schipæn* shall . . .’. There are two possible interpretations of this. What happened at the assembly probably was that one ship district, *schipæn* – ship soke as the English would call it – was detailed to do this year’s service. *Haffnæ i schipæn liger* would then be a reference to the *haffnæ* belonging to this *schipæn*. Alternatively, to lie in *schipæn* simply means to have been detailed for service that year. Those not detailed for service that particular year would then not be thought of as lying in *schipæn*, but rather paying their *ræther lethingh*, as lying in what the law of Jutland describes as *qwærsæthæ*.

law puts it, they sat at home without due cause or leave, they had to pay the equivalent of one third of a *hafnæ* to the king on each *gærth*, or *mansus*, they owned. Only if they refused to pay this would they lose their privileged status and be reduced to ordinary peasants and required to contribute to the *wdgerds ledingh*.

These *herræ mæn* are thus comparable to the lower English nobility who in much the same way were able to commute service into a payment. The Danish *herræ mæn* were paying the equivalent of the English scutage. Their payment was also the equivalent of the *ræthær lethingh* mentioned in the law of Skåne, three marks of money per *hafnæ* in those years when *wdgerds ledingh* was not asked of the *ledingsbønder*. It is clear, therefore, that *ræthær lethingh* is what is also called the *ledingsbøde*, or *lethang wite*, the *fyrdwite* of the English.

One group of the Danish population, then, served whenever the king called upon them and through this service liberated their demesne lands, but not their other possessions from royal demands relating to military service, although they might choose to pay rather than to serve. Another group was required to pay rather than serve three years out of four, while in the fourth year it was required to perform the *wdgerds ledingh*.

The obligation common to both groups is the *ræthær lethingh* or *lethang wite*. If we assume that this had originally been a common duty for all, we have several possible explanations. The traditional one is that free and equal smallholders had since time immemorial been sharing the burdens of defence of the nation. Alternatively there might have always been great social differences so that some had to pool their resources to fulfil the military obligations of one man while others could do so on their own. This would resemble the situation in Carolingian France where for offensive purposes normally only the latter category was employed, while for defensive purposes the resources of the former category were also exploited.¹⁵ Finally, an originally uniform group of peasants able to serve on their own may have split up into one continuing to perform their service as *herræ mæn*, and another whose resources had dwindled through the subdivision of their original estates so that they were unable individually to keep up full service. Their service would then have been permanently commuted, appearing in the early thirteenth century as *ræthær lethingh*, except that they were required to perform the *wdgerds ledingh* every four years.

The first evidence that a payment in lieu of service was imposed on Danish *ledingsbønder* dates from 1085. In that year Knud the Holy endowed the church of St Lawrence in Lund with something like fifty-two *mansi* in Skåne and in Sjælland and part of his income from the town of Lund as well as from those of Lomma and Helsingborg. To this he added the royal dues pertaining to those lands, with the following exceptions: if somebody lost his peace, he had to buy it back from the king and his lands would be taken over by the provost and the

¹⁵ Timothy Reuter, 'The End of Carolingian Military Expansion', in *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (1990), 391–405.

brethren. If someone neglected military service, he had to make amends to the king. They had to supply wagon horses only when the king himself came.¹⁶ Knud's younger brother Niels (1104–34) similarly retained for himself the compensation for neglect of *expedicio*, that is military service, here simply called *lethang withe*, when he gave privileges to St Knud in Odense.¹⁷ Clearly, the occupants of the lands that had been given to St Lawrence and those holding land of St Knud had the same obligations as the *herræ mæn* in the law of Jutland. If they neglected *expedicio* they would pay compensation to the king. We are, however, not told at what rate, nor how it was calculated. The system employed in the law of Jutland no doubt belongs to the thirteenth century.

If the service of the *herræ mæn* in the law of Jutland and their compensation to the king in case of neglect and the *ræthær lethingh* of the law of Skåne are possibly connected with the *expedicio* appearing in the royal diplomas, where does the cooperative *wdgerds ledingh* belong? Is it, as traditionally claimed, how lesser landowners always organised their contribution when the king called up the *leding*, or is it something else?

The Danish provincial laws do not permit any closer insight into the character and purpose of the *wdgerds ledingh*. Parallel organisations are, however, described in the Norwegian and Swedish provincial laws in much greater detail, and particularly the Swedish *leding* was clearly not an organisation of the military forces of Sweden for anything like the purpose for which the Danish *leding* was supposedly created and most often used: attack on foreign enemies. It was an organisation designed for coastguard service and defence. The rules laid down for it positively reek with the boredom of peacetime service in domestic waters. They deal with such problems as may arise in harbours, like damaging your neighbour's ship, occupying the bishop's berth, or falling asleep on watch duty. The last was more expensive if the enemy came and managed to harry and burn than if the negligence had no consequences.¹⁸

In the same way as the Norwegian laws restrict royal use of the *leding* to domestic waters, not beyond the end of the land,¹⁹ the Swedish laws lay down that the king cannot demand the service of the organisation described beyond certain limits. It is not for offensive warfare abroad. However, if the king wanted to undertake such warfare, the same people might be persuaded to participate, but that would be under different rules. For attacks on foreign countries the king would also call upon the chieftains of the land and their household troops.

The conditions in Norway, not presented in detail here, were very similar to the conditions in Sweden. The regime prevailing in Norway is described in a complex of laws which are clearly closely related to the Danish description of

¹⁶ *Diplomatarium Danicum*. Udg. af Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab (Copenhagen, 1938–), 1. ser. vol. 2 (1053–1169), ed. L. Weibull and N. Skyum-Nielsen (1963), no. 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 32.

¹⁸ Swedish *leding* is described in *Upplandslagen*, *Västmannalagen*, *Södermannalagen* and *Hälsingelagen*; from Västergötland and Östergötland, no rules are extant.

¹⁹ The Law of Gulathing, *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, ed. R. Keyser et al., 5 vols. (Christiania, 1846–95), vol. 1, 295.

the *wdgerds ledingh*. If we take as a point of departure what is known about Norway and Sweden it is *a priori* likely that in Denmark we also have to distinguish between the forces of the magnates and a coastguard.

A coastguard was, according to Saxo, introduced in Denmark after the conquest of the Wends in 1169. In the previous ten years incessant campaigns had been waged against the peoples on the Baltic coasts opposite Denmark but in 1169 the main fortress of Rügen, Arkona, was conquered and the people were converted and submitted to the king of Denmark. Rügen became part of the diocese of Roskilde. The campaigns, then, had achieved the (alleged) goal of all war: peace. So rather than sending a fleet against the Wends every year, patrolling Wendish waters was now required. It was therefore decided to divide the Danish fleet into four parts taking duty in turns. Saxo does not describe this reform in much detail. He only informs us who were put in charge of this coastguard and that it was decided to pick young and unmarried men for the job. They were supposed to be less liable to home-sickness than married men.²⁰ Norwegian laws are concerned with the maintenance of work on the farms of those away on service and give rules of how those remaining at home should look after these farms.²¹ The organisation described in the provincial laws was clearly not introduced immediately, and very soon the ships on guard duty were sent away into the Baltic on a good old-fashioned plundering expedition.²² However, what happened in 1169 foreshadowed the later *wdgerds ledingh* in at least one respect: the *wdgerds ledingh* could be called upon every fourth year, and in 1169 the fleet was divided into four parts, probably implying that each part would be called upon only once every four years. The more detailed rules for the distribution of the burden are the result of later development.

In the light of this the jigsaw puzzle of Danish *leding* should probably be solved in the following manner. The *leding*, or *expedicio*, in Knud's charter of 1085 and later charters referred to the military service of magnates and chieftains. It expressed an attempt to bring these forces under a royal control comparable to the control William the Conqueror exercised over his vassals, and an attempt to enforce defined quotas on warlords of any kind, lay or ecclesiastical, based on an assessment of their resources. Knud was killed in his attempt to bring the magnates under such control, and their military independence loomed large among their grudges against the king. We should therefore beware of assuming that because *expedicio* is referred to in Knud's charter that this royal claim was now established in Denmark. Whether it could be enforced or not would always depend on the authority of the ruling king. He may have made the claim, as Erik Lam must have done when he gave away the *expedicio* belonging to the tenants of St Peter in Næstved. It previously belonged to the donor, Peder Bodilsen and his mother and brothers,²³ but this does not imply that Erik Lam

²⁰ Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder (Copenhagen, 1931), 14, xxxix, para. 49.

²¹ See, for example, the Law of Gulathing, 295

²² Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 14, xl.

²³ *Diplomatarium Danicum*, 1. ser. vol. II, no. 78.

was able to enforce it when the lands were still in the hands of the Bodilsen family.

Effective royal control of the magnates was hardly established before the reigns of Valdemar I the Great (1157–82) and his sons, Knud VI (1182–1202) and Valdemar II the Victorious (1202–41). By the end of this period the men who could accept the commendation of others as their *herræ mæn* had been limited to the king himself, who could do so throughout the country,²⁴ the Duke of Slesvig, who could do so within his duchy, and the king's children or relatives who had been enfeoffed by him, who could do so within their fiefs. Bishops could also do so, but only in their dioceses.²⁵ The *herræ mæn* performed, in principle, full military service, putting their lives on the line for the king whenever he called upon them, although it was possible for them to pay compensation for the service if they had due cause or had been granted leave of absence. The compensation paid on such occasions corresponded to the payment asked of those who were not *herræ mæn*. They had apparently, technically speaking, been granted permanent permission to sit at home, except that they were required to participate in the *wdgerds ledingh* every four years. Assuming that these obligations all go back to a common source, the *expedicio*, the best explanation is that the group of men supporting the original *expedicio* had split in two, one of which was still capable of doing full service, while the other had given it up in favour of paying and doing coastguard service in the *wdgerds ledingh*. Apparently some of those originally liable to perform the *expedicio* were no longer able to do so.

A study of the narrative sources of Danish history before 1200 produces few or no traces of this organisation. Viking fleets and armies as well as the fleets and armies raised by Scandinavian kings in the two centuries immediately following the age of the Vikings were *ad hoc* phenomena and consisted of whatever forces a king or chieftain could persuade to follow him. References to *expedicio* in charters of this period are to knight service, also described in the codes.

This old-fashioned way of recruiting military forces sufficed as long as the purpose was occasional attacks on enemies. When the Wends had been conquered, however, by c.1170, a need arose for forces to patrol the home waters as well as the waters of subdued but not necessarily reliable former enemies. This is probably when the cooperative navy described in the law codes originated. It was meant to preserve peace rather than to conduct war and thus comes closer to the idea of a standing navy than generally thought. It presupposes a degree of control and an administrative capacity that Danish kings did not possess before the closing years of the twelfth century. It was far from the standing naval forces of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, but also far from the *ad hoc* naval forces of the Viking Age.

²⁴ Although there is evidence of an understanding with the bishops that he should not take men within their *skipæn*, *Diplomatarium Danicum*, 1. ser. vol. VI, no. 147.

²⁵ The Law of Jutland, iii, 8.