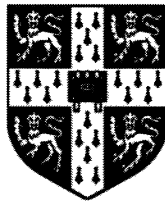


H.M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES . 4

GAD RAUSING

Emperors and popes, kings and bishops:  
Scandinavian history in the 'Dark Ages'



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE, AND CELTIC  
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Hector Munro Chadwick (1870-1947) was Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge from 1912 to 1941. Through the immense range of his scholarly publications, and through the vigorous enthusiasm which he brought to all aspects of Anglo-Saxon studies — philological and literary, historical and archaeological — he helped to define the field and to give it the interdisciplinary orientation which characterises it still. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, which owes its existence and its own interdisciplinary outlook to H.M. Chadwick, has wished to commemorate his enduring contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies by establishing an annual series of lectures in his name.

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# Emperors and popes, kings and bishops: Scandinavian history in the 'Dark Ages'

GAD RAUSING

In Britain, the 'Dark Ages' are a historical period, one from which a substantial body of documentary evidence survives; accordingly, it is possible to know the main outlines of the history of the period, and some of the most important historical persons. In the case of Scandinavia, however, the situation is dramatically different: there, in the absence of documentary evidence, we are obliged to rely principally on archaeological evidence if we wish to understand the economic, political and military situations which shaped the course of events. Unfortunately, in archaeology there is no such thing as 'absolute truth'; if we are to understand the data of archaeology, we require a contextual framework within which to situate those data. In what follows I shall attempt to present a framework of hypotheses and theories which, I believe, help to illuminate the data of archaeology.

It may be helpful at the outset, however, to outline briefly the written sources on which we rely for our knowledge of Scandinavia in the Dark Ages. The most important such sources concern the legendary history of northern Europe: *Beowulf*, *Ynglingatal*, the *Ynglinga Saga*, *Widsith*, the *Bjarkamál* and the *Hervarar Saga*, together with various passages of the *Skjöldunga Saga*.<sup>1</sup> The manuscripts preserving the Old English poems (*Beowulf* and *Widsith*) are of tenth-century date; but the oldest

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<sup>1</sup>Some of these legendary sources are accessible (in translation) in *Beowulf and its Analogues*, trans. G.N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson (London, 1980); see also A. Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1903-10; vol. I is revised as *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. L.M. Hollander (New York, 1919)), as well as R.W. Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction to the Study of the Poem*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1959), esp. pp. 419-50.

manuscripts of the Norse sagas date from no earlier than the thirteenth. There is some scholarly agreement that the genealogical contents of these sagas may be much earlier than the sagas themselves in their present form (I have argued this case with respect to the *Ynglinga Saga*, the *Ynglingatal* and the *Skjoldunga Saga*),<sup>2</sup> and may contain family records of the royal families of Sweden, Gautland and Denmark, in the way such records are also preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>3</sup> We must also remember that we now have only a small proportion of the sagas which must once have existed, since, insofar as they were tied to families or dynasties, they would not have been preserved when families died out or were exterminated (it never having been in the interest of victors to perpetuate the memory of ousted competitors). In the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Norse sagas were taken at face value, as contemporary accounts of actual events. A reaction against such interpretation came when Lauritz Weibull and his school challenged the traditional approach, denouncing the assumption of 'national, political or religious attitudes' and ignoring 'research which deals with loose presumptions and rests on the shifting sands of romantic hypothesis'.<sup>4</sup> But Weibull and his school, in attempting to approach historical issues free from political or religious prejudice, have gone to an opposite extreme in refusing to accept any source material which is not contemporary with, or very nearly contemporary with, the events described. A more balanced approach is clearly desirable.

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<sup>2</sup>G. Rausing, 'Beowulf, Ynglingatal and the Ynglinga Saga. Fiction or History?', *Fornvännen* 80 (1985), 163-78.

<sup>3</sup>On the evidential value of Anglo-Saxon genealogies, see D.N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72-104, as well as K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953), 287-348.

<sup>4</sup>Weibull's most important papers on early Scandinavian history are collected in his *Nordisk Historia: Forskningar och undersökningar*, 3 vols. (Stockholm 1948-9); the papers in vol. I pertain specifically to prehistoric and Viking times.

Historians have hitherto regarded Dark Age Scandinavian society as illiterate. In recent years, as more and more runic inscriptions from Scandinavia have come to light, it has become clearer that literacy in some sense must have been widespread.<sup>5</sup> From the second century onwards, the Scandinavians had their own runic alphabet. According to Venantius Fortunatus in the sixth century, and to Hrabanus Maurus in the ninth, the ‘barbarians’ used runes to record their songs, curses and prophecies. So probably did contemporary genealogists in Scandinavia; but their work has only been transmitted in the much later sagas. The Old Norse word *saga* means ‘what has been said’, not (as seems commonly to be supposed) ‘what has been imagined’. The question which faces the historian is whether the Old Norse sagas, and the continental and Anglo-Saxon annalistic records, present a coherent picture. It is my view that they do; but my view has the corollary that if we accept the evidence of the continental and Anglo-Saxon annals as factual, we must also accept much of the evidence of the sagas. In what follows, I shall attempt to illustrate this view, in order to argue that the first millennium A.D. in Scandinavia should be regarded, not as prehistory, but as a ‘Dark Age’. My contention is that the eternal conflict between the ‘Great Powers’ on the Continent — whether Rome, Francia or the Holy Roman Empire — and the surrounding nations began long before the beginnings of recorded Scandinavian history (that is, in the later twelfth century), and also that the competition between the spiritual (and sometimes temporal) successors of the Roman emperors — the kings or rulers of Francia, Germany and (later) of the Holy Roman Empire — was exploited by the barbarian rulers of Scandinavia, as by the rulers of Anglo-Saxon England.

Writing in 98 A.D., Tacitus refers to the *Suiones*, by which name he seems to mean the ‘Svfar’, who inhabited what is now

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<sup>5</sup>For a general introduction to recent runic research, see E. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen, 1985).

central Sweden, and he also lists a number of other tribes in various parts of Scandinavia.<sup>6</sup> This reference is usually taken to mean that the tribes mentioned all formed independent polities, hence that Scandinavia was populated by a great number of independent tribes. In making such an assumption we forget, for example, that a generation earlier St Paul, himself a Roman citizen, had written letters not only to the Romans, but also to the Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians and the Hebrews, without in any way implying that these peoples were not subject to the Roman emperor. Then, as sometimes even now, the tribal names were used to define the people of a certain geographical area (and often the area itself). Thus the name *Svíþjóð* (that is, the provinces around Lake Mälaren), synonymous with *Sverige*, ‘the Realm of the Swedes’, means simply ‘the people called Svíar’. On the other hand, the reference in Tacitus does not imply that there existed at the time such a thing as ‘Sweden’ or ‘Denmark’.

There is, however, indirect evidence of the existence of fairly powerful political entities in Scandinavia at the time. In presenting this evidence I shall proceed on the assumption that it is possible and permissible to extrapolate backwards, to argue that factors governing political and economic change in the Middle Ages also applied in prehistoric times. For example, there is abundant evidence from historical times that political or military leaders have taken attack to be the best form of defence, that a threat could be countered by the attempt to find allies in the presumptive enemy’s rear, and that a military threat very often triggered a pre-emptive attack. Such patterns are discernible in the Middle Ages; let us assume for sake of argument that similar patterns obtained in the earlier Dark Ages.

During the first centuries of the Christian era there was a very marked difference between the Germania lying immediately outside

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<sup>6</sup>Tacitus, *De origine et situ Germanorum*, ch. 44.

the Roman *limes*, and Scandinavia itself. In Denmark, in Scania, and to a certain extent in Sweden, numerous rich graves with Roman weapons and vessels testify to men from these lands having served in the Roman army.<sup>7</sup> Such graves are not found in Germania Libera. It seems as if, at the time, the Germanic nations in direct contact with the Romans on the *limes* were hostile, that after the rebellion of 9 A.D., warriors from these nations did not enter Roman service, whereas the Romans maintained contact with Germanic peoples lying beyond their (German) enemies. But this means that there were states in Denmark and Sweden strong enough to justify Roman diplomatic effort, and that such diplomatic effort paid off.

Most of the bog sacrifices in Denmark testify to the defeat and destruction of fairly large military units. Thus Illerup A comprises 350 shield bosses, 366 lanceheads and 410 spearheads.<sup>8</sup> These finds prove the defeated unit to have comprised at least 350 men, and indicate that it was not a band of robbers but an army intent on conquest. The earliest of these bog deposits coincide in time with the Marcomannic wars (late second century A.D.), and the next important group of such sacrifices was deposited at the time of the Germanic attacks on the *limes* (Eggers C1-C2).<sup>9</sup> On both occasions, the armies attacking Denmark came from the north — from Sweden or from Norway. I suspect that the Germanic nations fighting the Roman empire, first the Marcomanni and then the Alemanni, engineered Swedish attacks on Rome's ally in Denmark.

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<sup>7</sup>L. Hedeager, *Danmarks Jernalden. Mellem stamme og stat* (Aarhus, 1990); *Iron-Age Societies: from Tribe to State in Northern Europe, 500 BC to AD 700*, trans. J. Hines (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>8</sup>J. Ilkjær, *Illerup Aadal, 1. Die Lanzen und Speere* (Aarhus, 1990). See also the review by Monica Rasch, *Fornvännen* 87 (1992), 285-7, as well as J. Ilkjær, 'The Weapon Find from Illerup and its Implications for the Explanation of Similar Finds from Northern Europe', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984), 83-90.

<sup>9</sup>H.J. Eggers, 'Zur absoluten Chronologie der römischen Kaiserzeit im Freien Germanien', *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanisches Zentral-Museums* 2 (1955), 196-244.

Later, the picture changed. By the first half of the fifth century, Rome was no longer the sole great power. The Franks were well established in northern France, the Visigoths in southern France and Spain, and the Ostrogoths in Italy. At the beginning of his reign, Clovis, king of the Franks, was evidently fully occupied, particularly with Syagrius, and his relationships with the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths seem to have been peaceful enough. But as soon as he had eliminated all domestic opposition, Clovis's policy became blatantly expansionist, his first attempts at expansion being directed at the Visigoths, who in turn applied for help to Theoderic, king of the Ostrogoths. To judge from Cassiodorus, Theoderic attempted to establish a network of alliances around Francia, sending weapons as diplomatic gifts to various Germanic kings, and thus adopting them as his 'sons'.<sup>10</sup> (One wonders whether some of the swords from this period found in Scandinavia were originally sent as diplomatic gifts of this sort.) This policy of Theoderic was apparently successful for a time: at least two Frankish attacks failed in the 490s. But in 507 Clovis finally launched a decisive attack against the Visigoths, defeating King Alaric II in the battle of Vouillé, 'at the tenth milestone outside Poitiers'. Alaric was killed, and the Goths were expelled from France. Clovis died in 511, to be succeeded by his sons Theuderic, Chlodomer, Childebert I and Lothar I. Gregory of Tours tells us of their internecine wars, in which Lothar managed to make himself sole ruler, continuing his father's policy until his death in 561.<sup>11</sup>

The destruction of the Visigothic kingdom at Vouillé seems to have led to a counterattack by Theoderic's allies in the north, the Danes. Gregory of Tours tells us that, in about 521,

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<sup>10</sup>Cassiodorus, *Chronica*, ed. T. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.* MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi 11 (Berlin, 1894), 120-61, at 160.

<sup>11</sup>Gregory of Tours, *Gregorii Turonensis Opera*, ed. W. Arndt and B. Krusch, MGH, *SS rerum Merovingicarum* (Hanover, 1885), III.1-37 and IV.1-21; *Gregory of Tours. The History of the Franks*, trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp. 162-217.



the Danes sent a fleet under their king, Chlochilaicus [OE Hygelac] and invaded Gaul from the sea. They came ashore, laid waste one of the regions ruled by Theuderic, and captured some of the inhabitants. They loaded their ships with what they had stolen and the men they had seized, and then set sail for home. Their king remained on the shore, waiting till the boats should have gained the open sea, when he planned to go on board. When Theuderic heard that his land had been invaded by foreigners, he sent his son Theudebert with a powerful army and all the necessary equipment. The enemy king was killed, the enemy fleet was beaten in a naval battle, and all the booty was brought back on the shore once more.<sup>12</sup>

Quite evidently this was no little hit-and-run raid. The enemy 'king' commanded the invaders; the invasion was directed at the land ruled by Theuderic (that is, part of Francia itself and not, as is sometimes said, Friesland); and the occupation lasted long enough to permit Theuderic to assemble an army and to dispatch it against the invaders.

According to *Beowulf*, the Geats — whom I believe to have been the Gauts, the people of Gotland<sup>13</sup> — were allies of Hrothgar, the Danish king, and it is thus likely that they took part in the Danish expedition against Francia. Earlier, when taking leave of Hrothgar, Beowulf stated that, 'as for Hygelac, ... young though he is, he will yield his support both in words and deeds so that I may do you honour and bring you a grove of grey-tipped spears':<sup>14</sup> in other words, Beowulf pledged to Hrothgar both diplomatic and military support. Beowulf's visit to Hrothgar's

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, III.3 (trans. Thorpe, pp. 163-4); see also Chambers, *Beowulf: an Introduction*, pp. 381-7.

<sup>13</sup>There has been much discussion of this identification; see E. Björkman, 'Beowulf och Sveriges historia', *Nordisk Tidskrift* (1917), pp. 161-79; K. Malone, 'The Identity of the Geatas', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 4 (1929), 84-90; and C. Weibull, *Die Geaten des Beowulfepos und Die dänischen Trelleburgen* (Göteborg, 1974), pp. 1-26.

<sup>14</sup>*Beowulf*, lines 1830-4.

court is situated in a historical context datable to the years just before 521.

In Sweden, the fifth century seems to have been one of continual civil war: the times of the brothers Alrik and Erik, who killed each other, ostensibly with their snaffles; or of Alf, who murdered his brother Yngve; or of Jorund, who apparently waged war with the Danes and was hanged on the Limfjord. Finally, Aun re-established order, by 'making his kinsmen bleed', and died in his bed a very old man. His son Egil/Ongentheow was driven out by Tunne, a usurper, but managed to regain his throne. Hygelac's brother Hæthcyn, king of the Geats, attacked Sweden but was killed by Egil/Ongentheow, who in turn was killed by Eofor, Hygelac's son-in-law, whereupon Hygelac's son Heardred became king of the Geats. Egil/Ongentheow's son Othhere/Óttar was captured by the Danes in an attack on Jutland, perhaps inspired by Clovis, and hanged; whereupon, according to the legendary account in *Beowulf*, Othhere/Óttar's brother Onela/Áli drove his nephews Eanmund and Eadgils/Aðils into exile in Gotland. Heardred, Beowulf's king, supported their claim by invading Sweden, but was killed in the battle.<sup>15</sup>

Beowulf, then king, had to defend Gotland against the Swedes, and this prevented him from interfering in Denmark, when Hrothgar's nephew Hrothulf fought for the crown. Did a pro-Frankish party win temporary supremacy, killing Hrothgar's sons and exiling Hrothulf? Or did Hrethric and Hrothmund, Hrothgar's sons, submit to Lothar in order to be kings of Denmark? In any event, Hrothulf appeared in Ravenna, where he applied to Theoderic for assistance. According to Jordanes, he obtained the assistance for which he applied.<sup>16</sup> He did win the crown, to become that Hrólf kraki, king of Denmark, whom we know from

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<sup>15</sup>On *Beowulf* and Swedish (legendary) history, see L. Levander, 'Sagotraditioner om Sveakonungen Adils', *Antikvarisk Tidskrift för Sverige* 18 (1908), and Björkman, 'Beowulf och Sveriges historia'.

<sup>16</sup>See Appendix, below, p. 30-31.

the sagas.<sup>17</sup> With him the anti-Frankish party again won the upper hand in Denmark, sometime before Theoderic died in 525. According to the *Bjarkamál* and to Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, Hrothulf/Hrólf later fell in battle against his brother-in-law Hjørvarð, who did not survive the victory.<sup>18</sup>

Later Beowulf, now king, helped Eadgils/Aðils overthrow Onela/Áli. Eadgils/Aðils lived to an old age and died falling from his horse, at Uppsala. When looking back at these events, at Beowulf's funeral, the herald states that 'it has not been granted to us since to receive mercy from the Merovingian king', and also that, 'I scarcely expect peace or fair dealing from the Swedish nation either'.<sup>19</sup> Egil/Ongentheow, who was an old man when killed by Eofor, Hygelac's son-in-law, should thus be roughly contemporary with Hygelac. If the latter was killed in battle in 521, when his son was still under age, Egil probably fell sometime around 530-540.

The nucleus of this legendary history implies unambiguously that the kings of Denmark, Gotland and Sweden were deeply involved in European power politics already in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. The hillforts of east Sweden offer interesting corroboration of this implication.<sup>20</sup> Most of them seem to be fortified habitation sites, dating from between approximately 450 and 550. In medieval Scandinavia, every ruler strong enough to do so forbade the erection of private fortifications and, very often, destroyed the existing ones. The hillforts speak eloquently of civil disorder and war between 450 and 550; and the sagas testify to both civil wars and wars against Denmark and its ally, Gotland,

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<sup>17</sup>See esp. *Hrólf's saga kraka*, ed. D. Slay, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, ser. B, 1 (Copenhagen, 1960).

<sup>18</sup>Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, trans. Garmonsway and Simpson, *Beowulf and its Analogues*, pp. 156 and 163-76.

<sup>19</sup>*Beowulf*, lines 2920-3.

<sup>20</sup>See S. Norén, 'Om fornborgar i östra Mellansverige' (unpubl. doctoral dissertation, Institute of Archaeology, University of Stockholm, 1971).

during this period. And *Beowulf*, archaeological finds and the Frankish chronicles all testify to wars between Denmark and Francia during the time of Clovis and his successors.

We do not know what happened in Scandinavia in the seventh century, but Frankish influence made itself felt, not least in the art of the period. Nevertheless, Scandinavia clearly had contacts with other powers during this period. The Skabersjö brooch of the early eighth century, and the Irish bishop's crozier of the same period, found at Helgö, as well as the bridle mounts from Broa in Gotland, suggest that agents from Britain also found their way to Denmark and Sweden at this time.<sup>21</sup> Could the owner of the Helgö crozier have been sent from Britain?

Unfortunately, we have no further information on the relations between Scandinavia and the continental powers until the beginning of the eighth century. The *Ynglingatal* is silent on the subject; the hillforts were abandoned; and we may guess that the Scandinavian rulers managed to maintain a certain precarious peace in their countries. Apparently the Merovingian rulers were busy at home or on their eastern frontiers, as well as in the south, with Aquitanians, Langobards and other neighbours.

Just as Muhammed was later to do, Clovis revived the imperial idea of using one common religion to cement his kingdom together. Since his own pagan beliefs were not acceptable to his romanized subjects, he and his people converted to Christianity — but to orthodox Catholicism, the religion of the natives, not to the Arianism espoused by most other Germanic nations. In Francia Christianity thus became a cohesive force, whereas the Visigoths in Spain were detested by their Catholic subjects for being Arians.

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<sup>21</sup>See W. Holmqvist, 'Was there a Christian Mission to Sweden before Ansgar?', *Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Antikvariskt Arkiv* 57 [= *Early Medieval Studies* 8] (1975), 33-55, and L. Thunmark-Nylén, 'Gammalt och nytt i Broa', *Fornvännen* 87 (1992), 225-40; see also J. Graham-Campbell and D. Kidd, *The Vikings* (London, 1980), pp. 152, 155 and 158. Recent research on Helgö is collected in *Thirteen Studies on Helgö*, ed. A. Lundström, Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm, Studies 7 (Stockholm, 1988).

This also meant that the established Catholic Church survived in Francia with its whole organization, which had in turn been inspired by late Imperial administration. In Francia the Church retained its own laws; it was not subject to the individual landowners or to the king, as were the new Churches in other Germanic countries. For several generations, Clovis and his immediate successors ruled Catholic subjects, at the price of having the established Church as a power in the land. Clovis and his immediate successors, like Muhammed and his successors, defeated neighbouring peoples, imposing Christianity and Islam respectively on the vanquished.

In the disintegrated Europe of the 'Migration Period', the Catholic Church represented a stabilising force. But it was not merely a spiritual power; it was very much a temporal reality as well. Already the Merovingian kings had experienced certain problems with the popes of their time; and Charles Martel, Pippin the Short and Charlemagne had problems in turn. In the year 800 the pope crowned Charlemagne; the coronation implied, symbolically, that the emperor of this world was the liegeman of the pope. But like all liegemen, the kings of Francia and most other temporal rulers of Europe throughout the centuries — the kings of France and the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire — were perennially to find their interests to be in conflict with those of the papacy.

In the seventh century, Frankish power gradually declined. Austrasia and Neustria acted independently, until Pippin defeated Neustria at Tertry in 687.<sup>22</sup> By 714, political instability in Francia had brought trade between Britain and Francia almost to a standstill.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the Arab invasion of Europe and the collapse of the hereditary 'potential enemy', the Visigothic

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<sup>22</sup>For these events, see R. McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians* (London, 1983), pp. 28-33.

<sup>23</sup>R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement* (London, 1989), pp. 72 and 90.

kingdom in Spain, must have come as a shock, and even more so did the rapid advance of the Arab armies towards the north. Tariq had landed in Spain in 711; and by 732 Arab power was firmly established in Spain, southern France had been conquered and Arab armies stood halfway between the Pyrenees and Paris. This was no mere 'raid'. Probably it was this serious threat which made it necessary and possible for Charles Martel to seize absolute power.

The great battle at Poitiers, on 17 October 732, stopped the Arab advance in the West. Charles Martel's reorganization of the kingdom must have been thorough indeed, since he was able to reconquer the south almost immediately, establishing his frontier in the Pyrenees. Very soon Francia emerged as the great power of the time; and very soon Charles's ambitions led him to an expansionist policy. He seems to have turned his attentions northwards almost immediately, for the Danish king of the time felt sufficiently threatened to fortify the foot of the Jutish peninsula. Dendrochronology proves the great wall — the Danevirke — stretching from Haithabu to the bogs on the Treene and the Rheide to have been built in the year 737, no more than five years after the battle of Poitiers.<sup>24</sup>

Charles Martel also tried to interfere in England — as later did his grandson Charlemagne — but the king of Northumbria immediately launched a diplomatic counterattack. Conditions in England were rather different from those in Francia. In Britain the organized Roman Church had not survived the Anglo-Saxon invasions, and the Anglo-Saxon conquerors had not become Christian until several centuries later. When an English king adopted Christianity, he became the patron of the Church in his country; he appointed the bishops, who then were responsible to him; and the Church became subject to the Germanic laws of the

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<sup>24</sup>*Danevirke*, ed. H.H. Andersen, H.J. Madsen and O. Voss, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1976) I, 90-1; see also E. Roesdahl, *The Vikings* (London, 1991), pp. 132-4.

people. Germanic law did not recognize juridical persons, and an organized Church with finances of its own was thus impossible until some of the precepts of Roman law had been incorporated in local law codes. Thus in England, as much later in the Scandinavian countries (including Iceland and Greenland), the local landowners, including the kings, built and maintained the churches, appointed and paid the priests and bishops — and took all the income arising from this situation. Although the English bishops at the Synod of Whitby in 664 had already objected to this system, it seems to have survived in England until Norman times. The point is that a Church thus organized, without any finances of its own, could not send out any missionaries; but its head, the king, could of course do so.

Already by the end of the seventh century, Ecgfrith, king of Northumbria (670-85) had conceived the idea of using religion as an offensive weapon, sending out missionaries as ambassadors to convert potential allies and to consolidate their adherence, or to convert and subvert potential enemies. Religion thus became a tool of political aggression, a weapon of war. Thus in 678-9 Wilfrid of York ‘preached among the Frisians’ at a time when King Ecgfrith had only just united Deira and Bernicia under his sway; and in 690 Willibrord, also a Northumbrian, went first to King Radbod in Frisia, and later to Denmark, during the reign of King Aldfrith, who was trying to re-establish Northumbrian power after the catastrophe at *Nechtanemere* in 685. Later, Willibrord went south, to Frankish Frisia, to become archbishop of Utrecht in 695.<sup>25</sup>

Somewhat later, Æthelbald of Mercia, the Anglo-Saxon ruler whose interests were most immediately threatened by Francia, turned religion into a formidable political weapon. Æthelbald had made himself king of the Mercians, and Bede shows that, already

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<sup>25</sup>Bede, *HE* V. 11 (ed. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 484-6).

by 731, all the kingdoms south of the Humber were subject to him.<sup>26</sup> Æthelbald's opponents could expect no support from Francia during these years, when the Arab invasion from the south seemed to threaten the very existence of Francia; but the situation changed in 732. Up until that time, Æthelbald had been content to use religion to keep his country together, but now, fearing the growing might of Francia, he used religion, and the propagandists of his religion, to tie potential allies to his cause. Æthelbald sent Liawine as a missionary and ambassador to the Old Saxons on the Continent — the nation that was long to oppose Frankish expansion until it was finally broken by Charlemagne — and he sent Boniface to the 'continental Germans', another thorn in Charles Martel's side. By 746 Boniface's missionary field had been conquered by Charles Martel, and in 751 Boniface, who had become archbishop of Mainz, was obliged to crown Charles's son Pippin the Short. But we should note that Boniface abdicated as archbishop in 754, to go as a 'missionary' to Frisia, where he was killed soon afterwards.<sup>27</sup> By whom was he sent, and why?

This seems to be the first recorded case of missionaries being used to set up a 'fifth column'. It was a diplomatic game which more than one could play; and we shall see it being played by both emperors and Norse kings. Later Anglo-Saxon kings also used men of the Church on diplomatic missions. For example, in 770 or so, King Alhred of Northumbria presided over the council which sent Willehad to the Frisians, evidently in an attempt to knot diplomatic and military ties with these longstanding enemies of the Franks.<sup>28</sup> In his two-pronged diplomatic negotiations, Alhred also attempted to establish peaceful relations with Charlemagne and the

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<sup>26</sup>Bede, *HE* V. 23 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 558).

<sup>27</sup>On the politics of the Bonifatian mission, see T. Schieffer, *Winfriid-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas* (Freiburg, 1954). On Liawine (Lebuin), see W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 109.

<sup>28</sup>A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869-71) III, 433.



Franks. In a letter to Lul, archbishop of Mainz, Alhred expressed a vain hope that Lul would help the Northumbrian envoys in Gaul to establish peace and friendship between the Northumbrian and Frankish courts;<sup>29</sup> but at Easter in 774 Alhred was driven from York, his enemies possibly being supported by Charlemagne.

Offa had become king of Mercia in 757. In 785 he intervened in Kent, possibly to pre-empt a Carolingian invasion.<sup>30</sup> Charlemagne reacted in 786, sending a legatine mission consisting of Theophylact, bishop of Todi, and George, bishop of Ostia, on behalf of Pope Hadrian I, together with Abbot Wigbod, representing Charlemagne himself. These men first visited Jænberht, archbishop of Canterbury, who was later believed to have plotted with Charlemagne against Offa, to guarantee the Franks free entry into Kent, should Charlemagne decide to invade.<sup>31</sup> A proposal by Charlemagne in 789 or 790 that his eldest son, Charles, marry one of Offa's daughters (so as to make her a hostage at Charles's court!) may have been more than an attempt to patch up bad relations. And when Offa made his acceptance of this 'prestigious offer' dependent on one of Charlemagne's daughters marrying Ecgrith, Offa's son (so as to make a Frankish princess a corresponding hostage in England!), Charlemagne was so affronted that he ordered that no-one from England be allowed to land in Francia for purposes of trade. In 790 all trade was forbidden, which means that an invasion was indeed imminent, and that Charles was doing his utmost to prevent any news of his preparations from reaching Offa. For some reason, the invasion came to nothing, but in 796 Charlemagne openly supported Eadberht Præn in his invasion of Kent.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, III, 434.

<sup>30</sup>D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), pp. 166-8.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 175-8.

In the meantime there was much activity in the north. The Danevirke had been built in 737.<sup>33</sup> For the next half century the rulers of Francia seem to have been fully occupied elsewhere. All through his reign, until his death in 768, Pippin was occupied with wars against the Langobards and against Aquitaine. By 769 his son Charles, soon to be called Charlemagne, had conquered Aquitaine; but the Saxon war, which he started in 772, dragged on until 777. In that year Ibn-al-Arabi, governor of Barcelona and leader of the Abbasid faction in Spain, appealed for help against the Umayyad emir of Cordoba.<sup>34</sup> Charlemagne welcomed the excuse to intervene, but suffered a defeat in the ensuing Spanish war of 778. In 782 the Saxons, under Widukind, rebelled in a war which lasted until 785, when Francia's frontier was definitely established on the Eider river.

It should be noted that Widukind was the brother-in-law of the Danish king. It seems fairly obvious that one of the reasons why the Saxons were able to resist Charlemagne as long as they did was that they had support from Denmark, whose king would have felt threatened by the Frankish advance. And in fact the inevitable clash between Charlemagne and Denmark followed almost immediately on the end of the Saxon war.

In 808 the Danish king Godfred, who had already conquered Reric and settled its inhabitants within his own frontier, at Hedeby, attacked the Obodrites who were, at the time, within the Frankish sphere of influence.<sup>35</sup> He also reinforced the Danevirke.<sup>36</sup> Godfred was murdered in 810, but the fighting continued until, in

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<sup>33</sup>See above, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup>*Annales regni Francorum 741-829 qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH, SS rer. Germ. (Hanover, 1895), s.a. 777; *Carolingian Chronicles*, trans. B.W. Scholz (Ann Arbor, MI, 1970), pp. 55-6 and 184-5.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, s.a. 808 (trans. Scholz, pp. 88-9). For a summary account of ninth-century relations between Denmark and the Empire, see I. Wood, 'Christians and Pagans in Ninth-century Scandinavia', in *The Christianization of Scandinavia*, ed. B. Sawyer, P. Sawyer and I. Wood (Alingsås, 1987), pp. 36-67, at 42-9.

<sup>36</sup>*Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 808 (trans. Scholz, pp. 88-9); Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, p. 135.

811, Godfred's successor Hemming retreated beyond the Eider. Hemming died in 811, and Charlemagne's puppet, Harald Klak, immediately claimed the throne. Godfred's son Horic took up arms against Harald, and the latter submitted to the emperor in 814, the year in which Charlemagne died. His son, Louis the Pious, continued his policy of supporting Harald Klak; nevertheless, by 819, Harald retained only south Jutland and Schleswig.

Even though Pope Paschal I had crowned Louis's son Lothar I in 822, he seems to have had certain problems with the Frankish party in the papal curia. He took very drastic steps to eliminate the Francophiles, and appointed Ebo, archbishop of Rheims, to be his missionary/ambassador in Denmark. Ebo went to Denmark in 823.<sup>37</sup> Was the pope trying to form an alliance with Horic against Francia, or was he simply attempting to influence the emperor's ally Harald? We know little of Ebo's mission, or of its result. In the same year, however, Harald once again appealed to the emperor for assistance and his appeal was granted; nevertheless, he failed to win control of Denmark. His hold on his Danish possessions must have been tenuous indeed, and in 826 Horic clearly gained the upper hand. Even though Harald submitted to the emperor in that same year and was baptized in Mainz, he was unable to return to Denmark, and spent the rest of his life as an imperial vassal in Frisia. In 826 Ansgar was sent to Denmark as a missionary, together with Autbert, a member of a leading family and a close friend of Abbot Wala of Corbie. It seems that he never penetrated further than Harald's domains, either in south Jutland or Frisia, and his diplomatic mission was probably directed principally at Harald and his entourage.<sup>38</sup>

In the meantime, Horic was consolidating his power in Denmark. The emperor found a willing ally against Horic in King

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<sup>37</sup>*Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 823 (trans. Scholz, p. 114).

<sup>38</sup>Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii auctore Rimberto. Accedit Vita Rimberti*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Germ. (Hanover, 1884), chs. 7-8; *Anskar. The Apostle of the North: 801-865*, trans. C.H. Robinson (London, 1921), pp. 43-4.

Björn of Sweden, who sent an embassy to the diet at Worms in 829, asking for a Frankish plenipotentiary to be sent to Sweden.<sup>39</sup> Ansgar immediately left for Sweden, where he was to remain for a year and a half. Apparently his negotiations were successful, since he returned to the emperor with 'a certain experience and with a letter, written by the king himself in the manner of the Swedes'.<sup>40</sup> King Björn may not have ruled long, and may not even have been recognized over all Sweden, since he is not mentioned in the *Ynglingatal*, and since he obviously had to seek support in Francia. He does, however, appear in the *Hervarar saga*.<sup>41</sup>

Ansgar, according to his biographer Rimbert, reported to the emperor who immediately started to plan a new see on his northern frontier, one from where a bishop could easily reach 'all the nordic countries'. Although Rimbert uses the expression *sedes episcopalis*,<sup>42</sup> the emperor quite evidently envisaged a roaming ambassador. But even a peripatetic bishop needs a base, and in 831, at the synod of Diedenhofen, Louis created the archdiocese of Hamburg and appointed Ansgar its first incumbent. At the same time Gautbert was made auxiliary bishop in Birka, in Sweden, being consecrated in 832 (he probably arrived in Birka in the autumn of 832 or, more likely, in the summer of 833).<sup>43</sup>

Apparently King Björn tried to maintain diplomatic contacts with Francia as an ally against his southern neighbour, since a Swedish embassy, which had come to Constantinople by way of Russia in 839, returned home, not by the direct route through Russia but by way of Francia, with a letter of introduction from the emperor at Constantinople to Louis the Pious.<sup>44</sup> One might

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 9 (trans. Robinson, p. 45).

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 12 (trans. Robinson, p. 49).

<sup>41</sup>*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ch. 11, ed. C.R. Tolkien, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (London, 1960), pp. 60-1.

<sup>42</sup>*Vita Anskarii*, ch. 12 (trans. Robinson, pp. 51-2).

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 14 (trans. Robinson, pp. 55-6).

<sup>44</sup>*Annales Bertiniani*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Germ. (Hanover, 1883), s.a. 839; *The Annals of St-Bertin*, trans. J.L. Nelson (Manchester, 1991), p. 44.

surmise that they were Swedish ambassadors to the emperor of Francia — seeking an alliance against Denmark! Quite evidently the Danish king, Horic, was aware of the emperor's plans and of Björn's and, like a good Scandinavian, he decided that attack was the best defence. In the first instance he fomented a revolt in Sweden. Sometime around 840 Gautbert had to flee for his life from Birka, his companion Nithard having been murdered. Rimbart states that King Björn had no hand in this, but that it was the result of a popular revolt, one in which Björn was probably killed.<sup>45</sup> At approximately the same time (the Fulda annals give 845, whereas Adam of Bremen claims that the attack was a few years earlier), and evidently not a coincidence, King Horic attacked and sacked Hamburg.<sup>46</sup>

In Sweden the anti-Frankish, pro-Danish party ruled for about seven years, according to Rimbart, who states that this was the time when Birka had no priest (that is, roughly from 840 to 847). At the end of this period, perhaps in 847 or 848, Swedish politics took another turn. A new king, perhaps the Önund (Björn's nephew) who is mentioned in the *Hervarar saga*,<sup>47</sup> seized power. The emperor immediately established diplomatic contacts with the new ruler: Ansgar sent an *anachoreta* ('anchorite'), the hermit Ardgar, to Birka, where the new king received him, as did Herigar, 'the first Christian', whom Ansgar had baptized. Ardgar built a church, and remained in Birka for 'many years'.

Horic reacted rapidly and characteristically. He found a pretender to the Swedish throne, Anund, whom he sent out with a fleet of twenty-one Danish and eleven Swedish ships, probably in

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<sup>45</sup>*Vita Anskarii*, ch. 17 (trans. Robinson, pp. 58-9).

<sup>46</sup>*Annales Fuldenses*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH, SS rer. Germ. (Hanover, 1891), s.a. 845; *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. T. Reuter (Manchester, 1992), p. 45. Also Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. B. Schmeidler, MGH, SS rer. Germ. (Hanover and Leipzig, 1917), ch. 21; *Adam of Bremen. History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. F. Tschan (New York, 1959), p. 26.

<sup>47</sup>*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ch. 11, ed. Tolkien, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, p. 61.

849 or 850. Anund ravaged the Mälars region, apparently capturing or burning all the *ledung* ships, and captured Birka. Remarkably, the citizens of Birka managed to ransom themselves with a hundred pounds of silver, and, even more remarkably, managed to persuade the Danes to turn their attention to Estonia.<sup>48</sup> Although Rimbart does not say so, the really important result of this raid was probably that the Swedish *ledung* ships had been destroyed piecemeal, before they could be mobilized. Rimbart is emphatic that the raid was a complete surprise. Thirty-two ships, assuming them to have had fifteen pairs of oars each, would mean more than 900 men. However, given that the unit of measurement of distance was the *vikasjö*, the distance which one watch could row before being relieved, it seems likely that the warships generally carried two watches who could, and did, relieve each other at the oars. This would mean that the attacking force comprised  $32 \times 62$  men, that is, more than 1800 men. Since Birka had probably no more than 500 inhabitants, it is clear that such a force was intended for more than merely plundering the town.

Meanwhile, given that Hamburg had been destroyed sometime soon after 840, Ansgar was left as a bishop without a see. However, Leuderich, bishop of Bremen, died on 24 August 845, whereupon King Louis the German (who had succeeded his father Louis the Pious in 840) decided to appoint Ansgar to the vacant see of Bremen. Confirmation for the decision was sought in October 847 at a synod at Mainz, over which the archbishop of Mainz, Hrabanus Maurus, presided; the synod agreed to the confirmation, but only after the bishop of Werden had been compensated for the loss of some territory to Bremen. However, Gunther, the archbishop of Cologne, to whom Bremen was subject, objected, and it was only at a subsequent synod, at Worms, that Gunther was persuaded to relinquish his objection.<sup>49</sup> It seems that Gunther

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<sup>48</sup>*Vita Anskarii*, ch. 19 (trans. Robinson, pp. 61-2).

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, chs. 22-3 (trans. Robinson, pp. 75-9).

was certain both of King Lothar's support and of that of the pope, Benedict III, implying that he was in some sense the pope's representative in north Germany at this time. Soon afterwards he imprudently supported King Lothar in his attempt to win a divorce from Queen Theutberga, in order to marry one Waldrada. This action provoked the wrath of the new pope, Nicholas, on both Lothar and Gunther, and caused the pope to support Ansgar's claim to Bremen. Until then, both Bremen and Werden had been subject to Cologne, but henceforth they became completely independent. It seems that Ansgar was, and remained, King Louis's man in the far north, having the authority to preach 'to all peoples, Swedes, Danes, Slavs and any others living in those lands'.<sup>50</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that in a papal bull of 31 May 864, Ansgar is no longer listed as subject to Ebo of Rheims, as he had been in a bull of Pope Gregory of 831.

Peace had been concluded between Louis the German and Horic of Denmark in 847, and from 850 onwards, Ansgar had tried to establish diplomatic relations with Horic. Rimbert explicitly states that Ansgar led several royal embassies to Denmark. Having eliminated the Swedish threat for the time being, Horic was in a position to cultivate diplomatic relationships with his southern neighbour, permitting Ansgar to build a church at Hedeby. However, this does not mean that he permitted Ansgar to establish a parochial organization: for centuries to come all churches in Scandinavia were built, endowed and owned by individual magnates.

By this time, King Olof ruled in Sweden. Sometime during the early 850s, probably in 851, Ansgar went to Sweden once again on King Louis the German's behalf, and also carried a message from Horic. At Birka he found both king and people to be 'the victims of a terrible delusion'; a pagan prophet had appeared, claiming to have been present at a meeting of the gods, where the gods had

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<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 23 (trans. Robinson, p. 79).

demanded that the Christians be expelled and the pure pagan cult be reinstated.<sup>51</sup> This episode seems to be the result of an anti-Frankish national movement. Since Horic was, for the moment, on a friendly footing with King Louis, the ‘nationalists’ could not hope for support from Denmark, but they seem to have had strong local support, since the royal hall (whether that at Adelsö or at Uppsala is unclear), where the great annual sacrifice was performed, had already been dedicated to the long-dead but deified King Erik, possibly the father or ancestor of an unnamed pretender to the throne.

At a meeting of the *thing*, possibly that at Adelsö, Ansgar spoke on behalf of Kings Horic and Louis, and persuaded the local chiefs, as well as the king, by means of political as well as commercial arguments. Both at this *thing*, and later at the main one, probably at Uppsala, the pagan revival suffered a defeat, peace was maintained, and Ansgar received permission to build a church, where one Erimbert was duly installed as priest.<sup>52</sup>

In 854 King Horic of Denmark fell in battle against his nephews Gorm and Harald, together with most of his leading men. Horic the Younger, possibly a distant relative of the elder Horic, gained the throne. For obvious reasons he turned against his predecessor’s ally, King Louis the German, and against the nascent Christian Church in Denmark. His newly-appointed earl of south Jutland demolished the church at Hedeby, and expelled the priest.<sup>53</sup> This earl seems to have had greater ambitions; but Horic defeated and expelled him. At this point the king apparently felt the need of King Louis’s support since, soon afterwards, in the latter part of the 850s, he asked for an embassy to be sent to Denmark — an embassy for which Ansgar was the obvious leader. The German influence in Denmark was re-established, the church at

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<sup>51</sup> *Vita Anskarii*, chs. 25-6 (trans. Robinson, pp. 85-91).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 27-8 (trans. Robinson, pp. 92-5).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 31 (trans. Robinson, pp. 100-1); *Annales Fuldenses*, s.a. 854 (trans. Reuter, p. 36).



Hedeby was rebuilt and a new church was constructed at Ribe. Horic nevertheless maintained his political independence. In 857 a pretender, one Roric, who was probably supported by King Lothar — as Harald Klak had earlier been supported by Louis the Pious — claimed part of the kingdom; but Horic managed to beat him off, and Roric received nothing but a part of land between the Eider river and the sea.<sup>54</sup> This land was possibly an imperial fief, the same as that which Harald Klak had held. In any event, this state of affairs persisted at least until 865, when Ansgar died, and probably until 888, the year of Rimbert's death.

In 873 there were some border negotiations between the Danish king and Louis the German; but thereafter our sources for events in Scandinavia peter out. In western Europe, France had gained the dominant position it was to retain until the French Revolution, and in central Europe, Germany had gained that which it still retains. The old conflict between emperor and pope, which was to dominate European politics in the Middle Ages, continued, and it seems likely that Scandinavian monarchs and German emperors tried to exploit the possibilities it afforded, even though we know little or nothing about events during the next couple of generations. But history was to repeat itself in the tenth century.

In 934 Henry the Fowler defeated Gnupa of Hedeby and tried unsuccessfully to extend his power over Denmark, where another Gorm, Gorm 'the Old', ruled at the time. Having failed in Denmark, King Conrad had sought to bring Sweden into an alliance against Denmark, sending Unni, archbishop of Hamburg (915-36), to Birka, where he died in 936.<sup>55</sup> King Gorm of Denmark evidently died at roughly the same time since, during the rule of Unni's successor, the annals mention only Harald, Gorm's son and successor.

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<sup>54</sup>*Annales Fuldenses, s.a. 857* (trans. Reuter, p. 39).

<sup>55</sup>Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, I.56-62 (trans. Tschan, pp. 49-53).

In 948 Otto I appointed bishops of Hedeby, Ribe and Aarhus.<sup>56</sup> The new king of Denmark, whom we know as Harald Bluetooth, realized the danger. He married the daughter of a prince of the Obodrites, a pagan nation living in what is now northern Germany and violently opposed to Otto's expansionist policy. But he also saw that, as long as he remained pagan, the German king would always have an excuse for aggression, and consequently that it was necessary for him to become Christian. When Harald Bluetooth realized that other churches were independent of Hamburg-Bremen, that he could be a Christian king of a Christian kingdom and still keep the emperor's ecclesiastical agents at bay, he summoned Bishop Poppo and his collaborators, who were in effect the first official missionaries in Denmark for well over a hundred years. In 960 (or thereabouts) Poppo baptized Harald, and before his death the king could boast, on the great rune-stone at Jelling, that 'Harald, the king, raised this stone after Gorm, his father, and Þýri, his mother — that Harald who won all Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian'.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless the German pressure against Scandinavia continued unabated, with Danish rulers attempting to find allies against the emperor, and other enemies of the emperor trying to enlist Denmark in their alliances. During Harald's reign, in 965 or 966, a Jewish merchant from Spain named Al-Tartushi visited Hedeby.<sup>58</sup> He claims also to have visited Prague, Schwerin and Mecklenburg. (It has generally been assumed that he came north by way of Francia, but if so, it is decidedly odd that he does not

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<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, II.4 (trans. Tschan, p. 57).

<sup>57</sup>On Poppo, see Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum Libri Tres*, ed. H.-E. Lohmann and P. Hirsch, MGH, SS rer. Germ. (Hanover, 1935), III.65. For the Jelling runestone, see E. Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark* (London, 1982), pp. 171-2.

<sup>58</sup>H. Birkeland, *Nordens Historie i Middelalderen etter arabiske kilder*, Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, historisk-filosofisk 2 (Oslo, 1954), pp. 103-4. See also G. Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 174-7.

mention any place in Francia; it seems therefore more likely that he came north by sea, by way of England, or just possibly by way of Constantinople and the Russian river system.) Schwerin and Mecklenburg lay in what was, at that time, the territory of the pagan Obodrites; Prague, on the other hand, was the capital of Bohemia. In 929 the Christian prince Vaclav of Bohemia, a vassal of the emperor, had been murdered by his brother Boleslav (d. 967) who, like his son Boleslav II, tried to free Bohemia from vassalage. The question is: what could have caused a Spanish merchant to travel to Denmark and Bohemia? Presumably not salt herring or dried codfish. But we should recall that at this time Al-Tartushi's sovereign was Abd-er-Rahman III, who had made himself caliph of Cordoba (912-61), and that he and his son, al-Hakim II (961-76), were notorious for their aggression and diplomacy against the Christians. It seems likely, therefore, that Al-Tartushi was acting as the caliph's plenipotentiary, and was endeavouring to weld Bohemia and Denmark into an alliance against the Franks.

Dendrochronology has established that Harald connected the Danevirke wall with the wall around Hedeby (Haithabu) in 968, apparently in anticipation of an attack from Germany. In 974 Otto I duly attacked, taking the Danevirke and building a fortress on the new border; but by 983 Harald had already recovered the lost territories.<sup>59</sup>

It seems, too, that the German emperor also involved Sweden in his plans at this time. Harald of Denmark evidently felt threatened enough to attack Sweden. Like his predecessor, he found a claimant to the Swedish throne, one Styrbjörn, nicknamed 'the Strong', a nephew of King Erik, whom he armed with a Danish fleet. The expedition ended in a catastrophic defeat outside Uppsala: this is the famous 'Battle on the Fyris fields', where

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<sup>59</sup>Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark*, p. 145; Andersen *et al.*, *Danevirke I*, 91.

Styrbjörn fell with most of his men.<sup>60</sup> A runestone at Torna Hällestad in Scania implies that the real commander of this expedition may have been a brother or half-brother of Harald: ‘Gorms son Toke gingo de naermast’ — ‘they attacked shoulder to shoulder with Gorm’s son Toke’.<sup>61</sup> In any event, this defeat seems to have triggered Swein Forkbeard’s revolt against his father. Harald subsequently died, probably in battle. Swein Forkbeard, who married a Polish princess of a house opposed to Germany, allied himself with the new Swedish king Olof, to defeat and kill Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway in the great battle at Svold (Svǫlð).<sup>62</sup> Swein also continued his father’s policies in England and elsewhere, as did his son Cnut, who finally conquered that country.

Since the time of Ansgar, the established dioceses in Denmark were subject to Hamburg-Bremen. Nevertheless, Swein and Cnut called on the services of a number of English churchmen; similarly, contemporary Swedish kings turned to England for their missionaries. Even though Sweden was also subject to Hamburg-Bremen, only two of the missionaries known to us were German or had been consecrated in Hamburg-Bremen, whereas five were Englishmen and three were Swedes who had been consecrated in

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<sup>60</sup>On the Battle of Fyrisvellir, see *Styrbjarnar þáttur*, in *Flateyjarbók*, ed. S. Nordal (Akranes, 1949) II, 146-9; *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ch. 11, ed. Tolkien, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, p. 61, as well as discussion by O. Moberg, ‘Slaget på Fyrisvallarna’, *Historisk Tidskrift* 83 (1963), 385-90, with reply by S. Körner, ‘Genmåle. Slaget på Fyrisvallarna’, *ibid.* 84 (1964), 252-3.

<sup>61</sup>*Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, ed. L. Jacobsen and E. Moltke, 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1941-2), no. 295 and pls. 692-5; *The Runic Inscriptions of Denmark*, ed. L. Jacobsen and E. Moltke, trans. E. Nissen (Copenhagen, 1947), p. 55; and S.B.F. Jansson, *Runeindskrifter i Sverige* (Stockholm, 1963), p. 88.

<sup>62</sup>The Battle of Svǫlð and the death of Óláfr Tryggvason are treated in many sources: *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, ed. F. Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932), pp. 191-236; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. Ó. Halldórsson, Editiones Arnarnæ, ser. A, 1-2 (Copenhagen, 1958) II, 253-97; and *Heimskringla*, ed. B. Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols., Íslenzk fornrit 26-8 (Reykjavík, 1961) I, 351-70 (chs. 100-11); for variant forms of the name Svǫlð, see *ibid.*, p. 358n. See also *Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway*, trans. L.M. Hollander (Austin, TX, 1964), pp. 230-43.

England.<sup>63</sup> In any event, by the turn of the millennium, Denmark was effectively Christian, as was Sweden a century later.

However, the emperor and the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen were not prepared to relinquish their authority. On the death of Cnut's son Harthacnut in 1042, Magnus the Good, king of Norway, conquered Denmark, only to be defeated and ousted by Cnut's nephew, Swein Estridsson, in 1047. On his victory, Swein Estridsson found the most important see in Denmark, that of Lund, in the hands of Henry, formerly bishop of Orkney, who had been appointed by Magnus of Norway. Needing support against the partisans of his ousted opponent, the new king called in one Egino from Hamburg-Bremen to succeed Henry.<sup>64</sup> Hamburg-Bremen thenceforth retained and strengthened its authority over the Scandinavian Church, maintaining it until Scandinavia became an independent diocese in 1104, with Lund as its metropolitan see and Asger, a native Dane and the son of Swein Thorgunnason, as its first archbishop. Anselm, then archbishop of Canterbury, who was fully conscious of the threat posed by the German empire, was the first to congratulate Asger on his new dignity.<sup>65</sup> Until Trondheim and Uppsala were split off to form subordinate archdioceses, that of Lund was the largest in Christendom, comprising all lands between the Eider, North Cape, Lake Ladoga and Newfoundland.

The archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen continued to do his utmost to bring this vast territory back into his diocese, and his ambitions were supported by the emperor, who still had designs on Denmark. As a consequence the archbishop of Scandinavia and the king of Denmark were usually allied against the emperor and the

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<sup>63</sup>For the conversion of Sweden, see C.J.A. Oppermann, *The English Missionaries in Sweden and Finland* (London, 1937); T. Lundén, *Sveriges missionärer, helgon och kyrkogrundare* (Malmö, 1983).

<sup>64</sup>Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, IV.8-9 (trans. Tschan, p. 57).

<sup>65</sup>Anselm's letter is *Diplomatarium Danicum*, I række (Copenhagen, 1963- ) II, no. 29. On Archbishop Asger's career, see A.E. Christensen, 'Archbishop Asser, the Emperor and the Pope', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1 (1976), 25-42.

archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. For example, in January 1131 King Niels's son Magnus murdered his cousin, Knud Lavard, and the murder precipitated Denmark into a civil war, in which the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen loyally supported the king. Two years later, Archbishop Adalbero of Hamburg-Bremen used forged papal bulls to persuade Innocent II to order Asger and his bishops to submit to Hamburg-Bremen, and to abolish the new archdiocese. In the meantime, the civil war dragged on: King Niels was unable to defeat the rebel Erik, the murdered Knud Lavard's brother. To save his crown, King Niels swore fealty to the Emperor Lothar in 1134: that is to say, he made Denmark part of the Holy Roman Empire.

In order to preserve the independence of his archdiocese, Asger immediately changed sides, joining the rebel Erik, who called the men of Scania to arms and also raised troops of mercenaries. On 1 June 1134, the supporters of Erik and those of Magnus met in battle in Lund itself; and the decisive engagement took place three days later, at Foteviken, between the men of Scania, under Erik and Asger, and those of the rest of Denmark, under King Niels and Prince Magnus. Magnus fell, together with Bishops Petrus of Roskilde, Thore of Ribe, Kettel of Vendel, Henrik of Sigtuna, Adalbert of Schleswig, and 'most of the nobility of Denmark', to quote the *Necrologium Lundense*;<sup>66</sup> but Denmark was saved for King Erik against the Emperor Lothar, and the archdiocese was saved for Archbishop Asger and Pope Innocent against Archbishop Adalbero of Hamburg-Bremen. And with these events we have now reached (what might be called) 'historical times' in Scandinavia. From this point onwards, Scandinavian history, both ecclesiastical and political, is a matter of record, and as such stands in stark contrast to the darker centuries which went before.

I hope to have shown, nonetheless, that even where historical records are lacking, it is sometimes possible to perceive — if only

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<sup>66</sup>*Lunds Domkyrkas Nekrologium*, ed. L. Weibull (Lund, 1923), pp. 75-6.

dimly — the political and ecclesiastical forces which shaped Scandinavia during the first twelve centuries of the Christian era. In other words, it is essential to view early medieval Scandinavia as part of the larger European polity, and to attempt to see how events in the far north of Europe can often only be properly understood as reflexes of developments which took place in the better-documented countries to the south. Within this wider European perspective, the fragmentary and often partial evidence of legendary history and archaeology can be seen to acquire new meaning and help us towards a coherent understanding of 'Dark Age' Scandinavia.

## APPENDIX

## A NOTE ON KING HROTHULF

Jordanes (*Getica* III. 23-4) offers the principal historical account of King Hrothulf (since the manuscripts are notoriously at variance concerning the division of the text and in matters of punctuation, I quote the passage in question without punctuation):

Suetidi quamvis et Dani ex ipsorum stirpe progressi Herulos propriis sedibus expulerunt qui inter omnes Scandiae nationes nomen sibi ob nimia proceritate affectant praecipuum sunt quamquam et horum positura Grannii Augandzi Eunuxi Taetel Rugi Arochi Ranii quibus non ante multos annos Roduulf rex fuit qui contemptu proprio regno ad Theodorici Gothorum regis gremio convolvavit et ut desiderabat invenit.

There are several possible interpretations of this passage. Theodor Mommsen (MGH, *Auctores antiquissimi* 5.1 (Berlin, 1882), 59-60) understood the words *sunt quamquam et horum positura . . . Ranii* as an informative subordinate clause, and making *quibus* refer to *Herulos* and thus making Hrothulf king of the Herules. Lauritz Weibull, on the other hand, introduced a full stop after *praecipuum*, thus allowing *quibus* to refer to the whole group *Grannii . . . Ranii*, making Hrothulf king of these tribes (*Nordisk Historia* I, 124). In Late Latin the distance between the relative pronoun and its antecedent could be much greater than in Classical Latin. The whole passage *Herulos propriis . . . Ranii* may therefore be an informative subordinate clause. The translation would then be: ‘the Swedes, taller than other people, as are the Danes (who have branched out from them and who drove the Herules, who called themselves the tallest of all Scandinavians, from their land, and as are also the Grannii . . . Ranii), whose king Hrothulf a few years ago disdained his country and came to Theoderic’s court and obtained what he wanted.’

According to Procopius, a certain Hrothulf became king of the Herules in 493, in which year he made war on the Langobards under King Tato, but suffered defeat. He fled (according to the *Origo gentis Langobardorum*; according to Paulus Diaconus, he was killed in the battle) and found shelter with the Byzantine emperor Anastasius I, *in partibus Romanis*.



In 493 Theoderic defeated Odoacer and captured Ravenna, making himself master of Italy. Had a fugitive Herule king appealed to him for help in that year, it seems unlikely that contemporary authors would interpret this as his having been granted shelter *in partibus Romanis*. The Hrothulf referred to by Jordanes thus seems to have been a different person, one who joined Theoderic at Ravenna sometime before 525, the year in which Theoderic died. It seems even more likely that Jordanes did not refer to a Herule king of the early 490s, since he wrote *non ante multos annos*, 'a few years ago'. Writing in around 550, he may very well have used this expression for an event of the early 520s, but hardly for one of 493. Apparently there were two Hrothulfs: Hrothulf, king of the Herules in 493, and Hrothulf Halgason, pretender to the Danish throne and future king of Denmark, in about 520-5.



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