

“The Summer Before the Great Darkness”

Christianization, Europeanization, and Crusading in Early Twelfth Century Sweden

by

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In 1123, an attack on pagans in the Swedish region of Småland was planned and executed by Danish and Norwegian forces, as told in the narrative of Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*. This attack, known as the Kalmar Expedition, has largely been ignored by scholars, and has never been closely analyzed within the larger context of this age of transition in Scandinavia’s history. This thesis does exactly that, looking at Snorri’s episode in the context of his larger literary narrative, as well as analyzing the issue of identifying the underlying historical truth from the perspective of Sweden’s conversion, the process of state-formation, and the early development of crusading theology along the Baltic. The Kalmar Expedition was a manifestation of several different processes which were in constant development throughout Scandinavia from the beginning of the Viking Age to the end of the Middle Ages, processes which were concurrent and inseparable and yet inconsistent, leading sometimes to conflict. The Kalmar Expedition, having both religious and political motivations and ramifications, is best understood within the context of this era of cultural transition in Scandinavia, as it reflects the development in Scandinavia in general and Sweden in particular of the ideas of Christianization, Europeanization, and crusading.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vi
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 THE SOURCES	5
3.0 THE PAGANS	18
4.0 A CRUSADE?	29
5.0 A GAME OF POLITICS?	35
6.0 CONCLUSION	46
Bibliography	50

Preface

Special thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Archibald for being an exceptional thesis advisor, mentor, translator, and professor over the past several years. I could not have done any of this without her patient assistance. Further thanks are extended to the members of the committee for their time in reading my work, providing feedback, and engaging in the defense.

Generally speaking, I will be using the names of the individuals in the modern languages of their respective countries of origin, hence my usage of the Norwegian “Sigurd” rather than the Old Norse “Sigurðr,” and their bynames will be in English, hence my usage of “the Crusader” rather than the Old Norse “Jórsalafari” or the Norwegian “Jorsalfar” from the first sentence going forward.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Kalmar Expedition is a somewhat lesser-known episode of a more famous historical narrative, the life and reign of Sigurðr Jórsalafari, or King Sigurd the Crusader of Norway. As recounted in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, this expedition began on the initiative of King Niels of Denmark and, following Sigurd's well-known crusade to Jerusalem, targeted pagans in the southern Swedish region of Småland. The episode, dated to 1123, is interesting in many respects, as it represents the intersection of many different processes which were underway in Sweden and throughout Scandinavia, processes of conversion and of state formation by which Scandinavia, over the course of centuries, adopted societal elements of Western Europe. Though on Europe's periphery, developing religious and governmental structures characteristic of medieval Europe later than much of the rest of the continent, throughout its Europeanization Scandinavia became a key site within larger European narratives of religious and social development, and the episode of the Kalmar Expedition in particular highlights some of these trends in the context of a still transitional Baltic region. The expedition also contains several peculiarities, not the least of which being an apparently sizeable number of pagans in Småland, significant enough to be the target of a large expeditionary force. They were also apparently rich enough for the attack to be lucrative. The answer to who these pagans were, what the motivations for attacking them may have been, and whether this episode can rightly be called a crusade lies in the broader context of the rapidly evolving societal conditions of Sweden in this period.

The episode itself begins after much of the memorable action of the *Magnússona Saga*, the section of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* concerning the joint reign of Øystein (1088-1123), Sigurd (1089-1130), and Olav (1099-1115), the sons of King Magnus Barefoot of Norway (1073-

1103), had already taken place. At the point that the episode begins, Sigurd has become the sole ruler in Norway following the deaths of his elder and younger brothers.¹ After recounting the death of King Øystein, the narrative shifts abruptly to Denmark, where King Niels (c.1065-1134) is married to the daughter of King Inge the Elder of Sweden (d. c.1110), Margareta (1080s-1130), who had previously been married to Magnus Barefoot, Sigurd's father.² Niels and Margareta had a son named Magnus the Strong (1106-1134), who would go on to become a king in Sweden (though not necessarily the King of Sweden, meaning king over the entire country) after the death of his cousin, King Inge the Younger (d. 1120s), as described by Saxo Grammaticus.³ With this familial connection established, Niels, already acquainted with Sigurd from having met him on Sigurd's return journey from his famed crusade into the Mediterranean, sends word to the Norwegian king requesting "troops and every kind of support from his kingdom" and to accompany Niels to Småland for the purpose of Christianizing the populace, "as those that lived there did not observe Christianity, though some had accepted Christianity."⁴ Snorri clarifies that, at the time, many in Sweden "were heathen, and many poorly Christian," and points out some of the Swedish kings that had "abandoned Christianity and maintained heathen worship," Blot-Sven and Erik Årsäll.⁵ This conversion of heathens and apostates is Niels' only stated purpose, imbuing the expedition with a strong religious sentiment not even shared by Snorri's recounting of Sigurd's voyage to Jerusalem, which he attributes to the classic, even stereotypical adventuring spirit of the Norse people.⁶ Sigurd promises to join Niels on this venture, and begins assembling an army from

¹ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Heimskringla* III (Exeter: Short Run Press, 2015), "Magnússona Saga" ch. 23, p. 160.

² *Ibid.*, ch. 24, p. 161.

³ Karsten Friis-Jensen and Peter Fisher, ed. and trans., *Gesta Danorum* II, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiii.5.1, p. 919.

⁴ *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússona Saga" ch. 24, p. 161.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 145.

all corners of Norway, a force which would turn out to be massive.⁷ According to Snorri, “when this army assembled, then he had a good three hundred ships,” five times the number of ships he had supposedly taken on his three-year-long crusade to the Mediterranean a decade prior.⁸ Perhaps due to the logistical difficulties on Sigurd’s part in assembling such a large force, the Danes arrive at the meeting place by the Öresund, the straight between the Danish island of Sjælland and Skåne on mainland Scandinavia, well before the Norwegians and, growing impatient, disband their own gathered army, believing that the Norwegians would not be coming after all.⁹ Thus, Sigurd is displeased when he arrives at the meeting place to find Niels and his army absent, declaring that Niels had broken his word, and that “they should carry out some depredation on his land because of this.”¹⁰ Sigurd proceeds to raid the Danish town of Tummatorp near Lund, before continuing on the planned expedition into Småland proper.¹¹ This expedition was apparently lucrative, as Sigurd “exacted a payment in food from Småland, fifteen hundred cattle, and the Småläningar accepted Christianity,” and upon his return he came to Norway “with many very costly things and items of value that he had gained on this journey.”¹² The expedition is dated to “the summer before the great darkness,” presumably the solar eclipse of 1124, meaning the event probably took place in the summer of 1123 (though it is possible that it was the summer immediately preceding the eclipse in August, meaning 1124), and Snorri states that this was the “only warlike expedition by sea that King Sigurd undertook while he was king,” presumably meaning while he was the sole king of Norway, otherwise the comment would be difficult to make sense of considering Sigurd’s

⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 24, p. 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

Norwegian Crusade, as his earlier voyage to Jerusalem is commonly known.¹³ Snorri named the episode “*Kalmarna leiðdangr*,” or the “*Kalmare ledung*” as it is known in Modern Swedish, a *ledung* being the quintessentially Scandinavian practice of raising levies for the purpose of a sea-borne expedition, and so the best possible translation into English from the Old Norse, though not a perfect one in that it lacks some of the cultural nuance, is the “Kalmar Expedition.”¹⁴ Thus concludes the episode, and the narrative moves on to the remainder of Sigurd’s reign, marred by mental health issues and the arrival of Harald Gille (c.1102-1136), the illegitimate fourth son of Magnus Barefoot.

The episode shows us several remarkable things. First, it shows that there were pagans in Sweden as late as the 1120s who were powerful enough and wealthy enough to be the lucrative targets of a large-scale attack by foreign kings. Second, it shows that the Kingdom of Sweden was weak enough or unconcerned enough with the plight of these pagans, however powerful they may have been, that the entire narrative of the attack does not once mention the king who would have had authority in Småland. Furthermore, while the stated purpose of the attack was religious, for the conversion of heathens, it is also clear that it turned a significant profit for Sigurd, the only one who Snorri says followed through with the plan, a fact which casts doubt on the sincerity of the whole affair from the beginning. These revelations raise several questions: who were these pagans? What was the primary motivation behind the attack on them – religious (like a crusade), monetary (like a Viking raid), something in between or something completely different? Where was the Swedish king in this narrative, and what role could politics have played in the larger picture?

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

2.0 THE SOURCES

A discussion of the Kalmar Expedition must first begin with a discussion of the episode's author and sole source we have for the cohesive narrative: Snorri Sturluson (c.1179-1241). Luckily, we are able to know more about Snorri the man than most medieval authors thanks to, among other scattered information, his nephew Sturla Þórðarson, author of the *Íslendingasaga*.¹⁵ In addition to this first-hand biographical information, there is a wealth of surviving writings from Snorri himself, including the *Prose Edda*, a *Saga of St. Olaf*, probably *Egil's Saga*, and his longest work, the more or less historical account of the kings of Norway, the *Heimskringla*.¹⁶

Snorri Sturluson was born in the late 1170s at Hvammur in Western Iceland to Sturla Þórðarson the Elder, who had brought his family into the height of Icelandic aristocracy.¹⁷ Snorri was raised in Oddi, the center of Icelandic learning and history at the time, by the local chieftain and relative of Norwegian royalty Jón Loptsson, an upbringing which reflects Snorri's remarkable career to come.¹⁸ Not only was Snorri a prolific writer, he was also an adept politician. Throughout the early thirteenth century, Snorri engaged in Icelandic politics. He was elected lawspeaker in 1215 and 1222. Through marriages (including one to the richest woman in Iceland) he acquired several large tracts of land; he married his daughters to some of the few remaining powerful Icelandic chieftains in a period when power was being consolidated into fewer and fewer hands on the island, and throughout it all he maintained an amicable relationship with the kings and lords

¹⁵ Birgit Sawyer, *Heimskringla: An Interpretation* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2015), 22.

¹⁶ For the question of the authorship of *Egil's Saga*, see: Ralph Allen West, "Egils Saga and Snorri Sturluson: A Statistical Authorship Attribution Study," PhD. diss., (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974).

¹⁷ Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

of Scandinavia, visiting the mainland twice, including once to Västergötland in Sweden.¹⁹ Despite his promises to support Norwegian hegemony in Iceland, Snorri would ultimately fall into disfavor with the King of Norway, Håkon Håkonsson (1204-1263), perhaps due to his failure to keep those promises, and knowing this he cast his lot with Earl Skule (1189-1240) in his civil war against the king, a treachery which would cost Snorri his life in 1241.²⁰

Amidst this eventful life, Snorri was able to produce some of the most important pieces of Nordic literature of his age. His *Prose Edda* is, along with the earlier *Poetic Edda*, one of the major sources of information that survives today concerning Norse mythology. The contents of the *Prose Edda* were didactic, teaching the aspiring skald the meanings behind the multitudinous kennings and references to myth that populate Old Norse poetry. The need for such a work belies the very late stage of the Christianization of Iceland by Snorri's time, as Christianity was famously adopted as the official religion of Iceland by democratic decision at the Althing in 1000. Two centuries later, only the very most learned poets, such as Snorri himself, remembered the old stories and legends that were the source of such richness in their poetry. Snorri's close affiliation with these old forms of Norse poetry and literature is further evidenced in his most famous saga, *Egil's Saga*, which tells the story of the Icelandic pagan warrior-poet Egill Skallagrímsson, who lived in the tenth century at the height of the Viking Age. Amidst the larger, skillfully crafted saga narrative, *Egil's Saga* is littered with apparently already quite ancient and remarkably complex fragments of skaldic poetry, passed down orally through the generations until Snorri wrote them down several hundred years later.²¹

¹⁹ Sawyer, 22-23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 229.

The level to which Snorri's *Heimskringla* is a purely literary work on the level of the *Prose Edda* or a product of Snorri's political circumstance or, for that matter, a consciously impartial work of history, is a matter of debate among scholars, but is a central issue in the analysis of such episodes as the Kalmar Expedition. Snorri's motivations behind writing the *Heimskringla* must be weighed against their contents in order to discern possible truths from the text. According to the scholarship of Birgit Sawyer, the *Heimskringla* is a primarily political composition, created to disparage the Norwegian kings with whom Snorri was growing displeased and, simultaneously, with whom he was falling out of favor.²² While Snorri had at one point been an enthusiastic supporter of the Norwegian monarchy and its claims to Iceland, during the course of King Håkon Håkonsson's reign he grew bitter over the king's efforts to consolidate power, and wrote the *Heimskringla* as a deeply polemical attack against the institution of Norwegian kingship. Sawyer cites the fact that, of the 22 kings about whom the bulk of the *Heimskringla* is written, only five are judged exclusively positively.²³ Snorri also begins the work by elaborating upon the poem *Ynglingatal* in his *Ynglingasaga*, highlighting especially the many varieties of inglorious or ridiculous ways by which the early kings of Norway met their fates, all as a means to the end of undermining the Norwegian kingship by highlighting their humanity in an age that was increasingly glorifying of its monarchs.²⁴

Sverre Bagge, on the other hand, generally disagrees with the notion that the contents of the *Heimskringla* are primarily reflective of the politics of Snorri's own time, more specifically refuting the theory that the narrative of the work reflects the ongoing conflicts between the monarchy and the aristocracy.²⁵ He prefers instead to highlight the literary nature of Snorri's work,

²² Sawyer, 27

²³ Ibid., 30

²⁴ Ibid., 29-30

²⁵ Bagge, *Society and Politics*, 75

noting that most of the conflicts contained within are conflicts between individuals best thought of as feuds, which are a familiar source of plot and conflict throughout the corpus of Icelandic saga literature.²⁶ The more literary nature of the *Heimskringla* is further emphasized in the nature of Snorri's sources. Much like the ancient poems in *Egil's Saga*, Snorri put great emphasis on skaldic poetry as a source for his historical work, reasoning that skalds would not brag falsely of the deeds of the king they sung about, with whom they were contemporaries, as doing so would have been more like blame than praise.²⁷ While this base assumption about the historical accuracy of skaldic poetry does not exactly hold up to modern historiographical standards, it is emblematic of Snorri's literary approach to his history of the Norwegian kings.

Poems were not, however, Snorri's only source. He also benefited from two nearly contemporaneous compilations of Norwegian monarchic history, the *Morkinskinna* and the *Fagrskinna*. While the precise dynamics between the three historical works are not quite clear, it is generally accepted that the *Morkinskinna* is the earliest and the *Heimskringla* the latest, and that each of the later ones took from their earlier counterparts. Even so, they seem to have separate goals. The *Morkinskinna* is apparently more favorable to the peaceful kings of Norway, perhaps because it was written by an Icelander independent from the court of Håkon Håkonsson who was wary of encroaching Norwegian power. The *Fagrskinna*, meanwhile, is more favorable to warlike kings, even pagan ones, perhaps because it was a direct commission of the King of Norway.²⁸ Sawyer disagrees with the common assumption that Snorri's *Heimskringla* is a compromise between these two viewpoints, saying instead that Snorri is more critical of the Norwegian kings than the *Morkinskinna* ever was, and that the *Morkinskinna* may not have ever been completely

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 27

²⁸ Sawyer, 11

against Norway, and in fact shows great interest in Norwegian courtly life.²⁹ In essence, the different versions of Norway's history have different agendas, even as they tell the same stories.

One such story is what Snorri calls the *Magnússona Saga*, the period of Norwegian history in which the three brothers Øystein, Sigurd, and Olav jointly ruled Norway in the early twelfth century. All three versions begin with the death of their father, Magnus Barefoot, at which point the Kingdom of Norway is divided between the three brothers, with Sigurd taking the east (or south, according to Snorri) and Øystein taking the north, and both of them serving as regents for Olav's share, for Olav was only three years old (or five, according to Snorri) at the time, though the other two brothers were only teenagers themselves.³⁰ Though all three accounts move quickly into Sigurd's famous crusade to the Mediterranean, they already begin to diverge. According to the *Morkinskinna*, Sigurd was, from the outset, "very impatient to travel abroad to Jerusalem with the support of his brothers and all the foremost men in Norway in order to earn God's mercy and a reputation for valor," though he was only able to do so three years after the death of Magnus Barefoot.³¹ Sigurd and Øystein cordially part ways, each wishing the other good fortune in their respective enterprises, Sigurd on his voyage to the Holy Land and Øystein in his efforts to rule Norway in Sigurd's absence, before Sigurd leaves with 60 ships.³² Snorri's *Heimskringla* gives a somewhat different interpretation of Sigurd's motives, telling of the return of Skopti Ogmundsson's men from the Mediterranean, who brought reports of riches to be had in Jerusalem and Constantinople.³³ All of Norway seems to adopt the adventurous fervor that the *Morkinskinna*

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, trans., *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 60, p. 313; Alston Finlay, trans., *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway* (Boston: Brill, 2004), ch. 85, p. 252; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússona Saga" ch. 1, p. 145

³¹ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 60, p. 313

³² Ibid., ch. 61, pp. 313-314

³³ *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússona Saga" ch. 1, p. 145

reserves for Sigurd alone, and Sigurd is only chosen to go instead of Øystein after the preparations had already been made with the 60 ships for the departure.³⁴ In any case, Snorri makes no mention of any religious motivation whatsoever, and ultimately attributes the entire enterprise to the prototypical Nordic quest for glory and riches, at least at first. The *Fagrskinna*, being an altogether briefer work, leaves out discussion of Sigurd's motivation and merely states that for three years, he "had prepared for a voyage abroad at great expense," ultimately leaving with, again, 60 ships.³⁵

The correspondence in these accounts of several details of this story, such as Sigurd taking 60 ships, is not particularly surprising, given that they each referenced one another. The *Fagrskinna* had the *Morkinskinna*, and the *Heimskringla* had both of the other two for reference. The larger narrative of Sigurd's crusade, an important (and much more detailed) step toward the Kalmar Expedition, is, therefore, shared fairly closely between the three. Sigurd first sails to England, where he spends a winter in the court of King Henry I (c.1068-1135), son of William the Bastard (c.1028-1087), before sailing for France and coming ultimately to Galicia, where another winter is spent.³⁶ In Galicia, Sigurd comes into conflict with a local (Christian) duke, who breaks his promise to provide a food market for Sigurd's men in the winter and is therefore attacked, his castle essentially raided, by the Norwegian army.³⁷ As spring comes, the expedition continues on, and the Norwegians do battle with pirates, attack the castle of Sintra near Lisbon, and then engage in another battle in Lisbon itself before attacking another fortress and then finally sailing through the Straits of Gibraltar, where another battle with pirates occurs.³⁸ Further battle is done on the island of Formentera in the Mediterranean, where the Norwegians best the Muslims hiding in a

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Fagrskinna*, ch. 86, p. 253.

³⁶ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61, p. 314; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 86, p. 253; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 3-4, p. 146.

³⁷ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61, p. 315; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 86, p. 253; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 4, p. 147.

³⁸ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61, pp. 316-318; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 86, pp. 253-254; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 4-5, pp. 147-148.

cave fortress, apparently earning more plunder there than anywhere else on their expedition.³⁹ Sigurd fights another battle at Ibiza and one more at Majorca before moving on to Sicily where he is greeted by the young Norman Duke Roger II (1095-1154).⁴⁰ Ironically, most of Sigurd's fighting is done by the time he reaches the Holy Land in the summer. He lands at Acre, and meets King Baldwin I of Jerusalem (1060s-1118) upon his arrival in the capital. Baldwin takes Sigurd to the River Jordan, and together the two kings capture Sidon.⁴¹ After having spent the fall and early winter in Jerusalem with Baldwin, Sigurd and his men move on, stopping in Cyprus briefly before arriving at Constantinople, where they are received by Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (c.1057-1118).⁴² Though at this point the *Fagrskinna* cuts out, the following section of the manuscript not surviving the ravages of time, the rest of the story of the Norwegian Crusade is filled in by the other two documents. Sigurd gives his ships to Alexios and receives horses, and the rest of the journey is by land, passing through Bulgaria, Hungary, Saxony, and Denmark where King Niels of Denmark, important figure in the future Kalmar Expedition, escorts him north through Jutland and gives him ships to reach Norway.⁴³ As Sigurd returns triumphantly to Norway, the narrative recounts Øystein's skillful management of the country in his absence. The whole of the journey took three years, from 1107 to 1110.

The core of the story of Sigurd's crusade is, as shown, largely the same between the three versions, but there is some variation. The *Fagrskinna*, for instance, is significantly shorter than the other two versions, even apart from the missing return journey, and therefore neglects to mention

³⁹ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61, p. 319; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 86, p. 254; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 6, p. 149.

⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61a, pp. 320-321; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 87, p. 255; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 7-8, pp. 150-151.

⁴¹ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61c, pp. 321-322; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 88-89, p. 255; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 10-11, pp. 151-152.

⁴² *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61d, pp. 322-323; *Fagrskinna*, ch. 90, p. 256; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 12, pp. 153-154.

⁴³ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 63, p. 325; *Heimskringla*, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 13, p. 154.

several of the smaller battles such as the battle on Ibiza which Sigurd wages on his way to Jerusalem. The *Morkinskinna* account, on the other hand, is quite lengthy, and includes many scenes and speeches and details which the other two versions lack, such as Baldwin's test of Sigurd's "distinction and wealth" by laying precious items on the road, judging that if he rides straight into the city taking little notice of such things, then "he probably has a good measure of such things in his own realm," but if not, then Baldwin "will have a lower estimate of his kingly honor."⁴⁴ A similar episode occurs in Constantinople with Alexios I Komnenos, a story included in both of the other accounts, but its presence in Jerusalem seems to indicate that the story was originally part of a larger theme in the *Morkinskinna* of foreign rulers judging Sigurd to be, like them, a man of wealth and distinction by his reaction (or, rather, lack thereof) to the exotic and luxurious items and, in Constantinople, cloths laid out before him. If it is true that the similar episodes in Constantinople and Jerusalem were results of the *Morkinskinna*'s tendency to add thematic and literary elements to embellish the underlying history, then the copying of the story in Constantinople in the *Fagrskinna* and the *Heimskringla* loses this context. The complex interplay between the three versions results in the shared stories of the later chronicles being a muddled mix of elements taken from the previous works and those incorporated into the new work by the author working in his own style. Snorri, for instance, follows most of the narrative of the *Morkinskinna*, and seems to approve of the *Morkinskinna*'s citing of skaldic poetry (using the exact same poems to make the exact same points), but cuts out much of the speechmaking and several of the episodes that Snorri must have deemed counter to his intentions.

The differences between the contents of the sagas and therefore the differences in their motivations become more obvious following Sigurd's return from the so-called Norwegian

⁴⁴ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 61c, p. 321

Crusade. The *Fagrskinna* does not dwell on this period, with the deaths of the three brothers happening in fairly quick succession, taking only a brief interlude between the deaths of Øystein and Sigurd to discuss the arrival of Harald Gille, illegitimate son of Magnus Barefoot and therefore claimant to the throne, which he proceeds to take alongside Sigurd's son Magnus (later Magnus the Blind, c.1115-1139) following Sigurd's death in 1130.⁴⁵ Sigurd's crusade ultimately takes up by far the largest part of the *Fagrskinna*'s section on the sons of Magnus Barefoot, showing clearly the author's favorable view of Sigurd and his exploits. The *Morkinskinna*, on the other hand, spends more time with Øystein and highlights several small episodes with Icelanders in the Norwegian court, such as the touching tale between Øystein and the Icelandic skald Ívarr, in which Øystein helps his friend overcome the grief of losing the woman he loved to his jealous brother.⁴⁶ Øystein's compassion in this scene, and how favorably it is portrayed, is evidence of the *Morkinskinna*'s sympathetic portrayal of Sigurd's more peaceful brother compared to Sigurd himself who, though he did indeed earn renown on his crusade, came at times into conflict with Øystein, who the text presents as the better man. A man caught in the middle of one such conflict, Sigurðr Hranason, inadvertently summarized the view of the author best, saying (to Sigurd), "It is my wish that you should never be at odds, and I wish only for the best for all three brothers. But whatever the cost, even if my life should be at stake, I will never honor any man above King Øystein for as long as I live."⁴⁷ Sigurd's honor wanes in the *Morkinskinna*, and ultimately "it came to pass at the end of his life that he could scarcely control his temper and mind and succumbed to severe illness and disorders," but ultimately, he would be remembered well nonetheless for his exploits and achievements abroad.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Fagrskinna*, ch. 93, pp. 257-258.

⁴⁶ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 65, pp. 326-328.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 70, p. 345.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The *Heimskringla* also highlights some elements of the disfunction between the brothers in the narrative following Sigurd's return from the crusade. It includes, for instance, a flyting between the brothers, also included in the *Morkinskinna* but with several notable differences, though with enough similarities that they are clearly referring to the same event.⁴⁹ Besides that, Snorri once again ignores most of the speeches and episodes with individual Icelanders to which the *Morkinskinna* devotes so much attention. In its stead, among other episodes, is the story of Sigurd's expedition to Småland, not mentioned in either of the other two chronicles for unknowable reasons. It is therefore ultimately unclear where Snorri got this information, but it appears to be, at least in essence, historical, as evidenced by a letter from Peter the Venerable, the Abbot of Cluny, to Sigurd which seems to refer to the Kalmar Expedition. While the historical truth of the episode has naturally been filtered through Snorri's authorial lens, and about one hundred years during which the story must have been passed down orally in some fashion, it is somewhat advantageous that, unlike, Snorri's recounting of the Norwegian Crusade, the Kalmar Expedition has only been filtered through *one* authorial lens. As a result, whatever deviations there may be from the historical event itself, or, at least, from the surviving traditions in Snorri's day surrounding Sigurd in Småland, are the doings of one man, Snorri, and his imagination.

The Kalmar Expedition occupies an interesting point in Snorri's narrative of Sigurd the Crusader. Just as the *Morkinskinna* recounted Sigurd's mental deterioration, so too does Snorri, and in fact, unlike the *Morkinskinna*, this mental decline begins prior to the death of Øystein, and therefore also before the Kalmar Expedition, in a curious episode at a banquet in Oppland. While taking a hot bath, Sigurd "thought there was a fish gliding round in the bath beside him," which caused Sigurd to fall into a violent fit of laughter, "and after that this afflicted him very

⁴⁹ *Morkinskinna*, ch. 71, 345-347; *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússona Saga" ch. 21, pp. 157-160.

frequently.”⁵⁰ Subsequently, the mental decline of Sigurd is one of the major elements of the latter half of his reign according to Snorri, and though it receives no mention or allusion in the narrative of the Kalmar Expedition, it provides a curious framing of the episode.

Though the Kalmar Expedition is of immense interest, it is often neglected in scholarship. Birgit Sawyer only briefly discusses the episode, pointing it out as a sign that, compared to his brother Øystein, Sigurd “was obviously more interested in exploits abroad than internal affairs.”⁵¹ This was all, according to Sawyer, in service of Snorri’s larger theme in the *Magnússona Saga* of the duty of kings to their country represented in the duality of the two elder brothers. Snorri favors Øystein and the more inward-facing idea of improving the country and peaceful diplomacy that he represents, similar to Øystein’s portrayal in the *Morkinskinna*, but his appraisal of Sigurd, the more outward-facing of the two, is not altogether negative, and Snorri seems to be at times sympathetic to Sigurd’s mental illness and his troubles with his son Magnus and Harald Gille.⁵² Even so, the governing ideals represented by Øystein are much favored, and Snorri also valued the peace which Norway experienced during the reign of the sons of Magnus Barefoot, contrasted with the wars which would plague the following generations of rulers.⁵³ This nostalgia for more peaceful times may have colored not just Snorri’s approval of Øystein, but also his sympathy for Sigurd.

While Sverre Bagge never explicitly discusses Kalmar Expedition, it is not difficult to apply his saga-based framework to the story within the context of the larger *Magnússona Saga*. Bagge notes that Snorri attributes Sigurd’s crusade to Jerusalem not to religious motivation, but rather to the pursuit of wealth, success, and honor, all noble pursuits and, notably, staples of saga

⁵⁰ *Heimskringla* III, “Magnússona Saga” ch. 22, p. 160

⁵¹ Sawyer, 90

⁵² *Ibid.*, 92

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 93

literature.⁵⁴ Bagge assesses that religious interaction and conflict in the *Heimskringla* lack any degree of theological complexity, and that when people convert, they do it to gain advantage or avoid punishment, or because they are impressed by the power of the Christian kings.⁵⁵ While, unlike the Norwegian Crusade, the Kalmar Expedition does have a religious goal expressly stated by Snorri, it lacks theological complexity, and the conversion of the people of Smålandis, following Snorri's narrative, ultimately a decision based on avoidance of (further) punishment. As Bagge notes, the conflict between Niels and Sigurd can similarly be accounted by, Snorri's preoccupation with feuds, stemming from the saga tradition. In sagas, it is relatively common that a misunderstanding, miscommunication or minor slight turns into a bloody feud, and that is exactly what happens between the kings of Denmark and Norway, though the episode is fairly short and the feud seems to end after Sigurd's raiding of Tummatorp, with no further interactions taking place between the two kings thereafter. A more literary approach can be applied to the interpretations of Snorri's viewpoints on the Kalmar Expedition just as effectively as the more political approach advocated by Birgit Sawyer.

In looking at what may have been creative additions on Snorri's part, then, it is useful to examine any and all angles by which Snorri may have been approaching the writing of the Kalmar Expedition. While Sawyer cites the episode as evidence of Sigurd's interests being outside of Norway, this does not mean that the episode itself did not take place in some form, and in fact Snorri notes that the venture was the "only warlike expedition by sea that King Sigurd undertook while he was king," undermining that point somewhat.⁵⁶ Applying the saga feud framework to the episode may be more fruitful, as outside the strangely specific mention of the raiding of

⁵⁴ Bagge, *Society and Politics*, 107

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 106-107

⁵⁶ *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússona Saga" ch. 24, p. 161

Tummatorp, there is no evidence of ill-will between Norway and Denmark in this period. Though his mental condition is not mentioned in the episode, it may also be possible that Sigurd's willingness, even eagerness, to attack the land of his Danish allies is a subtle reminder of his deteriorating mental state. While the Kalmar Expedition, in whatever form it may have manifested, seems to be essentially historical, elements such as the motivations behind the attack, the numbers of ships brought and cattle taken, perhaps the entire conflict between the Danes and the Norwegians, and even the identity of the pagans themselves at the wrong end of the campaign may have been colored by Snorri's authorial interpretations or, even, imagination.

3.0 THE PAGANS

One major consideration when reading the narrative of the Kalmar Expedition is the issue of the pagans at the target. There are issues which to contend with: the narrative problem, that is, what Snorri was thinking when he was writing about them, and the historical problem, or who they could have actually been from what we know of the conversion of Scandinavia in the early twelfth century. The first of these problems is, luckily, fairly simple. Snorri of all people knew what he was referring to when he talked about Norse pagans in Scandinavia. Author of the *Prose Edda*, he wrote in intricate detail about their myths and legends. Though the purpose of the *Prose Edda* was didactic, to teach aspiring poets about all of the mythological references which were characteristic of the Icelandic skaldic style, he recognizes that the stories that make up much of the Edda's content were truly believed by many people for a long time. Though in the metanarrative the stories are confirmed as fabrications, he writes that Gylfi, returning to his kingdom from the realm of the Æsir, who were skilled in magic but not quite so divine as they presented themselves, "told of the events that he had seen and what he had heard. And after him, people passed these stories down from one to the other."⁵⁷ Linking the Æsir to Homeric Troy, Snorri appears to believe in a broad historical basis for the individuals in Norse mythology, but the stories and religious practices built around them are products of mankind's quest for the divine and the explanation of natural phenomena following the Biblical flood, after which, eventually, the majority of mankind "lost God's name, and nobody could be found anywhere in the world who knew his maker."⁵⁸ As a Christian himself, Snorri naturally labels the pagans in the *Prose Edda* as misguided, but ultimately an understandable lot. It is impossible for them to know God if their ancestors failed to pass down

⁵⁷ Jesse Byock, trans., *The Prose Edda* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), "Gylfaginning" ch. 54, p. 78.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, "Prologue" ch. 1, p. 3.

his worship to them. However, this sympathetic conception of pagans does not apply to the pagans who were the target of the Kalmar Expedition. Rather than the passive receivers of false traditions, Snorri describes these pagans as not observing Christianity, “though some had accepted Christianity,” and goes on to describe how many in Sweden at the time were heathens or “poorly Christian.”⁵⁹ The pagans present in the *Heimskringla* are more comparable in a moral sense to the apostates in the first generations after the flood that started to turn away from God, the sin which had caused the flood in the first place, as “the majority of mankind loved worldly desires and ambition,” and eventually “they abandoned their obedience to God, going so far that they no longer desired to name God.”⁶⁰ This was likely what Snorri had in mind while writing of the pagans in Småland and Sweden, but it does not answer who they actually may have been. For that, a closer analysis of the Christianization process is required.

Though it was not until the ninth century that large numbers of Scandinavians converted to Christianity, by that point the diffusion of knowledge of Christianity into the region had already begun. On the periphery of the Roman Empire, Scandinavia was not subject to the whims of the emperors, but Scandinavians did frequently interact with Romans through trade routes. In this way, knowledge of the Christian had religion already begun to penetrate Scandinavia even before the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century.⁶¹ Even so, missionary expeditions into this periphery region did not begin in earnest until the ninth century following the conquest of the Saxons by the Franks, which brought the border of Christendom to the immediate south of Denmark.⁶² While some Danes opposed Frankish influence, others welcomed their support, and eventually Ebbo

⁵⁹ *Heimskringla* III, “Magnússona Saga” ch. 24, p. 161.

⁶⁰ *The Prose Edda*, “Prologue” ch. 1, p. 3.

⁶¹ Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, “Scandinavia enters Christian Europe,” in Knut Helle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. 1, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147.

⁶² *Ibid.*

(c.775-851), Archbishop of Rheims, was sent as a missionary to Denmark.⁶³ Though Ebbo's mission to Denmark met little success, a king of the Svear in Sweden sent a request for preachers to come to Birka, and Anskar (801-865) was sent on the mission there, which achieved moderate success and managed to convert at least one notable figure in Birka and build a church on his land.⁶⁴ As a reward for his success, Anskar was granted the newly created see of Hamburg, soon to be an archbishopric, and after the sacking of Hamburg by the Danish King Horik (d. 854) in 845 Anskar was compensated by being given the rich see of Bremen to be held jointly with Hamburg, thus creating the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen, which for a long time was the center of efforts to Christianize Scandinavia.⁶⁵ Anskar died in 865, and the next major text after the *Vita Anskarii*, his biography, concerning the conversion of Scandinavia is the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum* of Adam of Bremen (d. c.1085) 200 years later.⁶⁶ The result is a gap in knowledge of how the conversion proceeded in this period of two centuries. It is undoubted, however, that the process was underway the entire time. As Anders Winroth states, "the religious landscape of Scandinavia had undergone a radical shift between the early ninth century and the mid-twelfth, becoming Christian in the interval. How that happened and why is less obvious."⁶⁷ The problem is made even more difficult in the case of Sweden, as there was no Snorri Sturluson or Saxo Grammaticus who set out to record Swedish history as they did for Norway and Denmark, respectively.

One method to overcome the scarcity of written evidence, employed by Alexandra Sanmark, is to compare the Christianization processes in other areas to what may have occurred

⁶³ Ibid., 148.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Anders Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 103.

in Sweden. Sanmark looks to fill in the gaps using the better-documented conversions of Anglo-Saxon England in the seventh century and Frisia and Saxony in the eighth century, particularly looking at the role of secular rulers in the Christianization process.⁶⁸ Sanmark emerges with several generalizations, namely that “a converted ruler is necessary, although not sufficient, for widespread conversion,” and that missionaries by themselves can gain a few converts (as seen in Sweden with Anskar in Birka) but are not able to fully turn the society Christian by themselves.⁶⁹ For that, there must not just be a converted king, but a converted king willing to actively promote the new religion. Ultimately, however, the comparative method can only get the researcher so far. Sanmark notes that “this method must be used with great caution in order to avoid overinterpretations,” but that “when comparative studies are applied in a correct manner they can contribute to our existing knowledge of events,” and that “they can also be used to indicate areas that may prove to be fruitful in future research.”⁷⁰ Comparative studies can at best reveal a likely course of events, though in the case of the conversion of Sweden they seem to be safe assumptions which are sometimes confirmed by existing written evidence: that missionaries are insufficient by themselves, that a converted ruler is insufficient by himself, and that in order for a full society to undergo the process, the converted ruler needs to use his secular authority in support of the spiritual venture of the missionaries.

Another use of comparative studies is to take an existing model and alter it to fit the different context. Fridtjov Birkeli created a model of the conversion of Norway in 1973, consisting of three phases: the phase of infiltration, during which the population passively receives Christian

⁶⁸ Alexandra Sanmark, “The Role of Secular Rulers in the Conversion of Sweden,” in Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 551.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 558.

influence from without; the phase of mission, during which there is a concerted effort on the part of missionaries to convert the populace, resulting in a growing number of Christians; and finally, the phase of institution, by which time there is an ecclesiastical organization and the building of churches.⁷¹ Linn Lager takes Birkeli's model for Norway and adjusts it to better fit the reality of Sweden, noting that "since the conversion of Sweden was a very slow and diverse process it seems reasonable to assume that several of Birkeli's phases occurred at the same time in different parts of the country," and that setbacks in the conversion almost certainly occurred, putting regions back a phase or even two.⁷² The separation of the conversion into phases, though seemingly artificial, "puts focus on the fact that the terms Christian and Christianity are very relative concepts during the conversion, both from our point of view and from the perspective of the converts."⁷³ Anders Winroth similarly splits the conversion of Scandinavia into phases, though they look somewhat different, having two broad, somewhat parallel processes, the first being the slow infiltration of Christian ideas into Scandinavia which started as early as the Roman conversion to Christianity and can only really be evidenced in the archaeological record.⁷⁴ The other is the institutional conversion of the elite, which began later but progressed much quicker, and can be itself split into three phases: the missionary pioneers such as Ebbo and Anskar, the conversion of kings between 960 and 1020, and then the establishment of a regular church infrastructure.⁷⁵ Whatever phase structure one adopts, it is likely that since the earliest phase, there were people who considered themselves to be in some way or another Christian, though they would likely have been utterly

⁷¹ Fridtjov Birkeli, *Norske steinkors i tidlig middelalder: et bidrag til belyaning av overgangen fra norren religion til kristendom* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973), 14-26.

⁷² Linn Lager, "Runestones and the Conversion of Sweden," in Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 497.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 498.

⁷⁴ Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia*, 103.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

unrecognizable as such to even their descendants 100 years later. Despite the fickle nature of the conversion of Sweden, “many Christians would have had the experience of considering themselves to be ‘the most Christian’ that people in that area had ever been.”⁷⁶ Birkeli’s idea of phases of conversion, though originally only intended to be applied to Norway, whether adapted by Lager or completely reconfigured by Winroth, can be applied to Sweden given these extended theoretical considerations.

Lager’s primary scholarship is in the study of runestones, which can shine some important light on the conversion process in ways which written records, whether the histories of a few hundred years later or even the contemporary histories from Hamburg-Bremen, cannot. Using Anne-Sofie Gräslund’s system of runestone chronology, Lager maps the production of runestones in different regions throughout Sweden. The results are quite interesting, showing that runestone production fell in Östergötland, Västergötland, and Småland in the early eleventh century, dying off completely by the middle of the century, while there was a small boom of runestones in Södermanland, which largely fell by the middle of the eleventh century, and a bigger boom in Uppland, which saw the greatest amount of production in the latter half of that century, eventually dying down after the start of the twelfth century.⁷⁷ Lager connects these findings to Birkeli’s phases, noting that the institution of the diocese in Skara in Västergötland followed the boom of runestones there, theorizing that “even though the erection of runestones can be considered a Christian phenomenon in a Scandinavian context, the erection of this type of monument was not compatible with the mature Frankish Christian way of life.”⁷⁸ Thus, it was the introduction of the final conversion phase, the phase of institution, symbolized by the establishment of the diocese at

⁷⁶ Lager, 498.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 501.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 504.

Skara, which at first subdued and finally eradicated runestone production in the southern part of Sweden by the mid-eleventh century. Lager explains the differing results in Södermanland and Uppland by a difference in external influence, tracing the styles of crosses to those on the British Isles, ultimately postulating that “the Christians who came to Sweden were aware of the Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses in the British Isles and that they recognized that the runestones were comparable with these as expressions of Christian faith,” therefore endorsing their erection where Hamburg-Bremen, which held official authority over the ecclesiastical organization of Scandinavia, did not.⁷⁹ The English influence dominating that of Hamburg-Bremen, combined with the earlier phase of conversion apparently characterizing Svealand (the diocese of Sigtuna only being established in 1060), may explain the vast differences in runestone production in different parts of Sweden throughout the eleventh century.

The existence of foreign influence on the conversion of Sweden is a prominent topic in conversion scholarship. While Hamburg-Bremen has received the most attention as a source of missionaries and the creation of an ecclesiastical structure, some note the influences of other cultures, institutions, and individuals, as Lager does with the English in Svealand. English influence in Scandinavia in general is also evidenced by the commemoration of several English saints, notably the enduring popularity of the otherwise obscure St. Botolph (d. c.680).⁸⁰ There is also some evidence of Polish influence as, in fact, the first king in Sweden who was said to have dabbled in Christianity, Erik the Victorious (c.945-c.995), may have done so on account of his marriage to the daughter of the Christian Duke Mieszko of Poland (c.931-992).⁸¹ In addition to

⁷⁹ Ibid., 505.

⁸⁰ John Toy, “St. Botolph: An English Saint in Scandinavia,” in Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 565.

⁸¹ Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 415.

this Polish influence, as well as likely influence from Sweden's Scandinavian neighbors Denmark and Norway, which were generally further along in the conversion process than Sweden at any given point in time, some scholars propose that there was influence from as far afield as Byzantium, owing to the extensive trade networks that were known to flow between Sweden and the Byzantine Empire through Eastern Europe. As Per Beskow argues, however, there is no concrete evidence of Byzantine Christianity having any influence on the conversion of Sweden, with "some of the suggested proofs" thereof "in fact dissolved into thin air."⁸² Whether or not there was any Byzantine influence, it is abundantly clear that the outsiders were heavily influential in the conversion process in Sweden, especially the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen, from which the first missionaries came to Sweden, and which controlled all of Scandinavia in an ecclesiastical organizational sense until 1103, when the Archbishopric of Lund was founded.

The influence of Hamburg-Bremen has major repercussions, not just on the way the conversion progressed in Sweden itself but also the way in which we perceive it. Despite not being able to claim credit for the conversion of any individual Scandinavian king, the pope gave the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen authority over all of Scandinavia, and the archbishops were eager to exert this authority.⁸³ This eagerness to exert and maintain power naturally colored the portrait the archdiocese painted of conversion-era Scandinavia in the two major sources which came out of it, the *Vita Anskarii* of Rimbert from the ninth century and the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum* of Adam of Bremen from the eleventh century. Though ultimately the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen would lose authority in Scandinavia with the establishment of the archbishopric in Lund at the start of the twelfth century spurred by the alignment of Archbishop

⁸² Per Beskow, "Byzantine Influence in the Baltic Region?" in Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 562.

⁸³ Sawyer and Sawyer, 154.

Liemar (d. 1101) with Emperor Henry IV (1050-1106) in the Investiture Controversy, these writings often define the discourse surrounding the conversion of Scandinavia.⁸⁴ The writers of Hamburg-Bremen inherently distrusted influences on Scandinavia's conversion outside of themselves. In reference to Adam of Bremen's famous description of the pagan temple at Uppsala, Anders Winroth notes the lack of any archaeological evidence of such a temple, and the predominance of Christian runestones in the area, writing that "the conclusion seems unavoidable: Adam simply made up the temple in Uppsala on the basis of his imagination and borrowings from earlier literature. Adam placed the temple in Uppsala because Christian rulers in that part of Sweden refused to recognize the authority of the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen," opting instead to obtain an English bishop, Osmund, ordained in Poland.⁸⁵ This interpretation of Adam's text aligns remarkably well with Lager's interpretation of runestone art and production. The question of who a pagan is, in Winroth's view, relies solely on who the writer is.

Throughout his scholarship, Anders Winroth emphasizes the political aspect that pervades everything, greatly critical of the available sources, writing that "the sources distort the story so much that they cannot be used for understanding conversion, although they may perhaps be employed to establish individual details in counterpart with other sources. The stories they tell are more inspired by hagiographical tropes or political considerations than by actual events."⁸⁶ Essentially, conversion narratives are inherently untrustworthy, and their only usefulness to the historian is in correlating with other, independent sources. The political motivations which drove the narrative of conversion also drove the conversion itself. According to Winroth, "the great driving force behind the conversion of Scandinavia was, [he argues], the machinations of political

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia*, 148.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 122.

leaders in northern Europe.”⁸⁷ In arguing this, Winroth goes against scholarship that places greater importance on missionaries, which portrays the conversion of Scandinavia as almost an act of colonization, instead of representing a conversion-era Scandinavia in which the northerners were “willingly, indeed, eagerly, embracing European civilization.”⁸⁸ By shifting to focusing on the political dynamics, Winroth returns some agency to the converted populace. He also demonstrates an important task for the researcher, which is to look closely at the political motivations behind both the actions of the conversion and the writings that surround it.

As Winroth makes clear, from the perspective of Scandinavia, Christianization was a process that occurred on their own terms. From the perspective of the rest of Europe, however, Scandinavia was very much on the edge of the known world. Kurt Villads Jensen has explored this idea of Scandinavia on Europe’s periphery, further confirming Winroth’s conceptions about conversion being welcomed by the Scandinavians and encouraged by their leaders. In Jensen’s scholarship, it is proposed “that cultural transmission always involved negotiation between sender and receiver, and that beliefs and institutions had to be adapted to local circumstances in order to be accepted.”⁸⁹ In this way, Scandinavia was simultaneously on the periphery of Europe and at the center of a newly developing kind of Scandinavian Christianity, coherent with Scandinavian culture. Christianity, according to Jensen, had to adapt to its environment in order to appeal to the Scandinavians, and it did so early on in the missionary process, as Pope John IX (d. 900) in the late ninth century “declared directly that the newly baptized Scandinavians should not be burdened with a strict observance of too many of the rules for a proper Christian life, for then they would

⁸⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁹ Kurt Villads Jensen, “Martyrs, Total War, and Heavenly Horses: Scandinavia as Centre and Periphery in the Expansion of Medieval Christendom,” in *Medieval Christianity in the North: New Studies*, Kirsi Salonen, Kurt Villads Jensen, and Torstein Jørgensen, eds., (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 89.

probably fall away from the faith again.”⁹⁰ This sentiment mirrors the ideas in the correspondence between Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604) and Pope Gregory the Great (c.540-604) around 600 in the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England, which also allowed for a lax interpretation of Christian law. This tendency in early mission work made the religion more palatable for the potential convert and in Scandinavia it was complimented by certain elements which made the new faith particularly attractive to the Scandinavians, such as the development of crusade theology in the late eleventh century. According to Jensen, on the periphery of Christendom, whether that be in the north in Scandinavia or in the south in Iberia, wherever there was this extensive contact between Christians and non-Christians, crusading ideology was embraced enthusiastically.⁹¹ The 1123 expedition against Småland was not just a part of this enthusiasm, according to Jensen, it was also an evolution of crusade theology, as, if Snorri is to be believed that the targets were heretics or apostates in some fashion, it is the first expression of the later idea that so-called crusades could be used as a tool to force heretics and apostates back to Christianity, codified by Gratian into canon law around 1150.⁹² Though on the periphery in the perspective of the rest of Europe, Scandinavia becomes a central destination for missionaries and the center of a broader ideological change in European Christianity, which indubitably was influenced by the local cultural circumstances of conversion-era Sweden.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁹¹ Ibid., 100.

⁹² Ibid., 100-101.

4.0 A CRUSADE?

One must be wary of labeling the Kalmar Expedition as a proper crusade, not because it didn't contain many of the hallmarks of later crusades but rather because of its place so early in the crusading era that these hallmarks had yet to be officially recontextualized to be able to fit the specific context that the Kalmar Expedition demanded. Gratian's widening of the acceptable uses of violence in canon law was articulated a quarter of a century after the Kalmar Expedition. Snorri, in any case, never used any separate terminology for crusading, even in reference to the 1107-1110 Norwegian Crusade, instead calling it Sigurd's "journey," and instead of the currently popular English byname "the Crusader," Sigurd is known even today in Nordic languages as "Jerusalem-farer." In the specific instance of the Kalmar Expedition, Snorri refers to it as a *leding*, which is simply any sea-borne expedition carried out by raised levies, a word which would certainly go on to be applied to later crusades around the Baltic, though it does not necessarily contain crusading connotations. Whether or not the Kalmar Expedition was a proper crusade is impossible to answer because the concept of a crusade had not yet been fully formed.

Even so, the expedition may well be an important step in the development of crusading ideology. At the northern periphery of Europe, one of several places where Western Christendom met the religious "other," Scandinavia was able to take on a central role in the development of a larger European religion and society.

It has been stated previously that the historicity of at least the basic elements of Snorri's Kalmar Expedition is not so much in doubt as are the details and the exact course of events. This is due to the existence of what appears to be contemporary attestation of an expedition against pagans by Sigurd. Peter the Venerable (c.1092-1156), Abbot of Cluny, wrote a letter to Sigurd

sometime between Peter's ascension to the seat of abbot in 1122 and Sigurd's own death in 1130.

Peter writes in praise of Sigurd's piety, saying:

For indeed all people, and especially we who love you more affectionately than the rest, have heard gratefully the news of your devotion concerning the observance of God, how you revere and love the things that are God's, how you subject the royal observance to the sweet yoke of Christ, how you have installed yourself as the protector of the church of God, how you have previously repelled the enemies of Christ's cross from the domination of the faithful not only in your own but also in the most remote southern and eastern territories with warlike power, and even now you hurry to repel them with an enormous fleet.⁹³

It is technically possible that the mention of an "enormous fleet" may have been preparation for a different venture, something that could never have come into fruition as there exists no written record of it anywhere.⁹⁴ However, it is far easier and more sensible to link this letter to the period between the initial formulation of the expedition and the time by which Sigurd finally set out, according to Snorri a long enough time that the Danes grew tired of waiting for the Norwegians and disbanded. This letter of Peter the Venerable fits remarkably well into Snorri's narrative, even conforming the "enormous fleet" of three hundred ships which Snorri claims Sigurd brought, which again was five times the number of ships that he had brought on his voyage to Jerusalem.

The link is not explicit, as Peter never names Småland nor who exactly the "enemies of Christ's

⁹³ Giles Constable, ed., *The Letters of Peter the Venerable II*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), letter 44, p. 141; *Vere enim omnes, et praecipue nos qui ceteris uos affectuosius diligimus, gratulanter famam uestrae erga dei obsequium deuotionis audimus, qualiter quae dei sunt reueramini et diligatis, qualiter regium fastum suauiter Christi iugo affectuosissime subieceritis, qualiter uos protectorem aecclesiae dei constitueritis, qualiter inimicos crucis Christi, a fidelium dominatione non tantum in uestris, sed etiam in remotissimis meridiei et orientis finibus, ui bellica terra marique et olim reppuleritis, et nunc etiam maxima classe repellere festinetis*; special thanks to Elizabeth Archibald for assistance with translation from the original Latin.

⁹⁴ The letter could not, in any case, be referring to Sigurd's famous journey to Jerusalem, his only other known journey abroad with ships, as that event occurred in 1107-1110, and Peter the Venerable only became abbot in 1122.

cross” are, though it is clear that both Scandinavian pagans and Muslims can fit the description, given that he credits Sigurd with contending with them both in his own land (where he could only be referring to pagans) and far to the south and east (where he could only be referring to Muslims). Even without an explicit confirmation, it is quite likely that the future events referenced in the letter and the past events written about by Snorri are, in fact, one and the same. The abbot closes the letter by beseeching Sigurd to see his new expedition through:

Above all these things, because such a great fervor for the Holy Spirit has been kindled in your being that it inspired you a desire of scorning such superiority of power and such opulence of possessions and seeking the way of perfection on behalf of the eternal kingdom, we give thanks to the giver of all good things and exhort you with all prayers that you strive to carry this out to its completion.⁹⁵

Peter the Venerable would become a major figure in the development of crusade theology, especially for his studies on Islam, but here, even so early in his abbacy, he is seen to promote a strictly religious motivation for Sigurd’s planned expedition. By lauding Sigurd’s “scorning such superiority of power and such opulence of possessions,” curiously echoing the tests of Baldwin and Alexios in the *Morkinskinna*, Peter emphasizes that the endeavor which Sigurd was about to undertake ought not to devolve into petty looting, as Snorri indicates it inevitably did. The religious significance endowed upon this expedition by the only contemporary evidence of it, incidentally from a figure as prominent throughout Europe and noteworthy in the development of crusade ideology as Peter the Venerable, is a remarkable indication that it was a part of a larger trend of the evolution of the budding ideas of crusade theology. Peter’s equation of Muslims and the people

⁹⁵ *The Letters of Peter the Venerable* II, letter 44, p. 141; *Super haec omnia, quod in animo uestro tantus spiritus sancti feruor exarsit, ut tantam regni excellentiam, et tantam rerum opulentiam contempnendi, ac pro aeterno regno uiam perfectionis arripiendi uobis affectum inspirauerit, ipsi bonorum omnium largitori grates quas possumus agimus, et ut hoc ad effectum perducere satagatis, uotis omnibus exoramus.*

of Småland, whether they be completely pagans or apostates and heretics, as Snorri seemed to indicate, or people practicing a still transitional form of Christianity, as the study of the conversion of Sweden would seem to indicate, as both “enemies of Christ’s cross” lends significant credence to the idea of the Kalmar Expedition as not just a crusade, but a significant step in the development of crusades across the Christian world.

The scholarship of Kurt Villads Jensen also emphasizes the religious aspect of the Kalmar Expedition, but from a perspective other than Sigurd’s. In his book *Crusading at the Edges of Europe: Denmark and Portugal c.1000-c.1250*, Jensen treats the Kalmar Expedition particularly from the Danish perspective. Denmark under King Niels had already been called to a crusade by the Archbishop of Magdeburg against the pagan Slavs (though it is uncertain whether it ever materialized).⁹⁶ Crusading may thus have been on Niels’s mind when he met and travelled through Jutland with Sigurd on his return journey.⁹⁷ Whether the Magdeburg Crusade had ever come into fruition or not, crusading, specifically around the Baltic, would have been a topic of conversation between the kings over a decade before the crusade against Småland manifested. Around the same time as the Kalmar Expedition, several “missionary wars” were taking place, instigated by the Danes against the pagan Wends between Denmark and Poland.⁹⁸ The episode, therefore, has very close links to a larger trend of crusade-like wars started by Danes around the Baltic.

Jensen also postulates that Sigurd and Niels may not have been the only participants in the campaign against Småland. According to Polish annals, Duke Boleslaw III Wrymouth of Poland (1086-1138) went across the sea on an expedition in 1123, during which he supposedly conquered

⁹⁶ Kurt Villads Jensen, *Crusading at the Edges of Europe: Denmark and Portugal c.1000-c.1250* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 113.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

several castles.⁹⁹ Boleslaw would have just finished conquering Pomerania from pagans in 1121 after nearly two decades of war, meaning that not only was there a larger trend of crusade-like wars started by Danes around the Baltic, but there was also a larger trend of crusade-like wars started by Poles around the Baltic.¹⁰⁰ Boleslaw and Niels were closely acquainted and were likely allies, as Boleslaw's daughter Richiza (1116-1156) was betrothed to Niels's son Magnus, adding further credence to the theory that the Poles were involved.¹⁰¹ These details are consequential, as not only do they suggest that Snorri's narrative does not capture the entirety of the story while simultaneously supporting the significance of the undertaking, but it would also place the expedition squarely in the center of the early development of Baltic crusading ideology.

Tore Nyberg has proposed an interesting, if hard to substantiate, theory concerning the motivation behind the Kalmar Expedition. Drawing on prior research on the sacrificial cycle, Nyberg calculates that a sacrifice would have been upcoming in the winter of 1124.¹⁰² Therefore, assuming Niels and Sigurd knew about the sacrificial cycle, it would not be outside the realm of possibility that they decided to attack Småland at that time in order to deter the sacrifice from taking place.¹⁰³ If the kings styled themselves as promoters of Christianity, as Peter's letter certainly seems to indicate, it would have (possibly) been an ideal time to attack a group of Norse pagans.

An alternate theory has been put forth by Nils Blomkvist that the pagans which were the target of the Kalmar Expedition were not Norse pagans at all, but rather pagan Wends who had somehow established a presence in Småland. Noting the wording of Peter the Venerable about the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Gesta Danorum* II xiii.5.2, p. 919.

¹⁰² Tore Nyberg, *Monasticism in North-Western Europe, 800-1200* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 120.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 121.

purpose of the expedition being not necessarily the conversion of heathens but rather their expulsion from Christian lands, Blomkvist postulates that this may indicate a foreign presence in the area.¹⁰⁴ Blomkvist further bases his theory on skaldic poetry which, at least on the surface, concerns an altogether different Sigurd, Sigurd Slembedjaken (“the Evil Clerk”), who claimed to be the half-brother of King Sigurd the Crusader, going to battle against the Wends, though Blomkvist argues that those verses are, in fact, about Sigurd the Crusader.¹⁰⁵

Whatever the specific identity of the pagans of Småland, evidence seems to back up the notion that the episode was, in essence, an early Baltic crusade. Whatever intentions Sigurd or Niels had in the planning of the attack, it was apparently Peter’s assumption – or, perhaps, hope – that they had the sole intention of fighting the pagans on behalf of Christianity. Barring Blomkvist’s theory of a Wendish Småland, these pagans would have been undergoing a gradual process of Christianization, though at a significantly earlier stage than their attackers. There is, in any case, another explanation for the cause of the expedition, rooted in the process of state formation running simultaneously with the process of conversion.

¹⁰⁴ Nils Blomkvist, *The Discovery of the Baltic: The Reception of a Catholic World-System in the European North (AD 1075-1225)* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 311.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

5.0 A GAME OF POLITICS?

Just as Sweden became a uniformly Christian nation by the end of the Middle Ages, it also became a united, cohesive state in that time. As far back as historical memory can bring us, Sweden had been split into two parts, based around arable land in the vast forests that cover the majority of the country. Population centers emerged in Svealand around Lake Mälaren and Östergötland and Västergötland (together called Götaland) around the lakes Vättern and Vänern, respectively. These centers of population became centers of power, and ultimately a source of conflict between the Svear of Svealand and the Götar of Götaland for control of Sweden at large. Even as these areas lost their tribal identities over the years, Sweden was rife with dynastic strife, different groups from different regions vying for power. It was only in the mid-thirteenth century that Sweden finally saw dynastic continuity and, therefore, a relatively stable monarchy. In the period prior to this stabilization, Sweden was in the throes of incorporating and adapting to European conceptions of society and governance.

This process is often called Europeanization, and it is inseparable from the process of Christianization which was occurring simultaneously. Europeanization occurred throughout Scandinavia, with the notable effect being the concrete formation of the three Europeanized kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. One agent of this process, which also reflects the inseparability of conversion and state formation, was the introduction of literacy to Scandinavia through the simultaneous introduction of an ecclesiastical structure. Prior to about 1000, the only literacy in Scandinavia was runic, but by the end of the Middle Ages the region was dominated by Christian kingdoms literate in the Latin of the western church.¹⁰⁶ Arnved Nedkvitne has researched

¹⁰⁶ Arnved Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 1.

the advent of literacy and its consequences on society. The era of conversion and its inherent tensions between pagans and Christians as well as the tensions between local and centralized political organization makes the study of literacy particularly interesting, as “the most important use of writing in this period was connected to the efforts of the elite to create religious conformity.”¹⁰⁷ Though brought by the church, literacy was not just a tool for the church; it also found use in the increasingly Europeanized governmental structure of Scandinavia. In the study of literacy and elsewhere, it is impossible to separate the process of conversion and the formation of a strong government.

The twelfth century was a particularly innovative time for European ideas of government and society in general. Scholarship into this monumental process of change has been done by Thomas Bisson, emphasizing the changing definitions of power as Europe came off of the effects of a series of major events at the end of the eleventh century, such as the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, the first wave of the Investiture Controversy from 1075 to 1085 and its similarly controversial successors over the next fifty years, and the First Crusade from 1095 to 1099.¹⁰⁸ With these events rattling Europe to its core, the following century became one of massive changes, with the “experience of power,” as it were, ultimately becoming “that of government” over force.¹⁰⁹ At the periphery, however, it is not entirely clear how quickly Scandinavia was able to adopt these innovations of governance. Sverre Bagge, assessing the process of state formation in Scandinavia, says that the formation of the three Scandinavian kingdoms can be “regarded as a kind of European history in miniature, showing the rise of kingdoms from their very beginning and how the borders originally established by military conquest became part of the right order of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 17.

the world.”¹¹⁰ In this way, the starting point of the Scandinavian state formation process could be said to be the equivalent of Western Europe several centuries prior, and the end result, owing to the larger processes of Europeanization, is the rapid development of European ideals in the region, eventually on par with their status on the continent.

Bagge’s focus is this rapid development in Scandinavian government. The starting point is the Early Middle Ages, in pagan times when society was divided into a trifold structure: the slave, the commoner, and the earl.¹¹¹ Though the presence of Roman artifacts found in Scandinavia reveal that the region was connected to the rest of Europe and had some level of social stratification from as far back as the first century CE, it is hard to pinpoint what exactly this looked like.¹¹² While earlier scholarship’s emphasis on kinship and the construction of this early society around large clans is probably inaccurate, it is also possible to go too far rejecting this framework, implying that familial connections were insignificant in this period, which is surely a false claim, as kinship was a binding force in Norse society.¹¹³ Consolidation of power eventually allowed for expansion, the so-called Viking Age, which Bagge argues was a major step in the creation of more coherent entities, and out of this age come the first vaguely recognizable roots of the modern Scandinavian kingdoms, with Denmark being the first to apparently be ruled by a single dynasty in the middle of the tenth century.¹¹⁴ By 1000, skaldic poetry and sagas record kings of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. The trifold division of Scandinavia was further reinforced throughout the pagan and Christian eras by the different ambitions for expansion that each kingdom developed increasingly strongly in the centuries following the Viking Age. As Bagge writes, “the various fields of

¹¹⁰ Bagge, *Cross and Scepter: The Rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms from the Vikings to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

expansion of the three kingdoms, to a great extent determined by geopolitical factors, served also to cement the apparently coincidental division between them that was established in the mid-eleventh century.”¹¹⁵ However, the level of unity within each of these kingdoms, even as they emerged as separate entities, is somewhat unclear, especially in the case of Sweden.

Before the Folkung dynasty, when the sons and descendants of powerful statesman Birger Jarl (c.1210-1266), rose to power in 1250, Sweden was victim to near constant dynastic strife.¹¹⁶ This especially took the form of the conflict between the dynasties of Sverker and of Erik, with their roots being, respectively, in Västergötland and Östergötland.¹¹⁷ This major dynastic conflict began in 1130 after the end of the line of Stenkil and the ascension of Sverker I. The church became an important force for legitimation in this period as well, with the first church-sanctioned coronations in Norway in 1163 or 1164, Denmark in 1170, and Sweden in 1210 marking, to some estimates, one of the conclusive ends of the conversion process.¹¹⁸ Christianity was adopted fairly early by rulers, as from the perspective of power it strengthened their positions and ultimately allowed them to do away with pagan rituals which reinforced the power of local chieftains.¹¹⁹ Ultimately, as Bagge writes, the monarchy was, by the end of the era, stabilized, with the resulting changes able to be “summarized in the terms ‘centralization’ and ‘bureaucratization.’”¹²⁰ The process which Scandinavia underwent was, therefore, similar to the transition articulated by Bisson from power as force to power as government, only Scandinavia did so at both a delayed and at a somewhat more rapid pace, ultimately catching up with the rest of Europe.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

Another major scholar of Scandinavian state formation is Thomas Lindkvist, who generally agrees with Bagge's assessment that the process was one of Europeanization, bringing Scandinavia more in line with the simultaneously developing governments of Western Europe. Lindkvist writes that "during the period 1000-1300 CE Sweden emerged as a political unit, with economic, social and cultural structures similar to those of Western Europe."¹²¹ Focusing specifically on Sweden, however, Lindkvist notes that the Europeanization process occurred later there than in Denmark or Norway, and did so in an era in which the rest of Europe was also coming into its own.¹²² Lindkvist notes several transitions which spurred on this process, such as the shifting economic system, which began as an economy largely based on slavery and developed into one where slavery was insignificant, but the elites found new forms of exploitation and appropriation such as in serfdom.¹²³ This went along with the major cultural changes inherent in the adoption of Christianity and importation of ecclesiastical structures, as Christianity was a more rigid faith compared to the relatively flexible paganism.¹²⁴ Similar to Bagge, Lindkvist emphasizes the dynastic struggles which plagued the fledgling kingdom, writing "the fragile Christian kingdom that established itself in Sweden in the eleventh century was frequently contested," and that local lords could sometimes simply proclaim themselves to be king and were sometimes simply accepted as such.¹²⁵ Lindkvist has also emphasized the importance of the military expedition organizational structure of the *leding*, of which the Kalmar Expedition is an example, in the state formation process inasmuch as it brought about a further centralization of power.¹²⁶ The many

¹²¹ Thomas Lindkvist, "The Making of a European Society, the Example of Sweden," in *Medieval Encounters*, vol. 10, 1-3 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 167.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²⁶ Thomas Lindkvist, "Om ledung och statsbildningsprocess," in Peter Ericsson, Fredrik Thisner, Patrik Winton, and Andreas Åkerlund, eds., *Allt på ett bräde: stat, ekonomi och bondeoffer: en vänbok till Jan Lindegren* (Uppsala Universitet, 2013) 23.

changes that Scandinavia in general and Sweden specifically underwent over these few centuries resulted in, by the latter half of the thirteenth century, a fairly recognizable precursor to the modern Kingdom of Sweden. The Kalmar Expedition in 1123 stands in the midst of these massive changes in governmental and societal structure. It is difficult to discern the precise structure of Sweden in this transitional period, but it is clear in any case that it was, indeed, transitional, and the entire country was subject to frequent dynastic struggles for power and, simultaneously, the continuing process of Christianization.

Throughout its early monarchic history, power in Sweden shifted between Svealand and Götaland. The first king to have a connection to both was incidentally the same king to have a concrete connection to the Christianization process, Olof Skötkonung (c.980-1022), as it was during his reign that the bishopric at Skara in Västergötland was established, he had coins with Christian imagery minted in Sigtuna in Svealand, and he was supposedly the first Swedish king to be baptized, which took place at Husaby in Västergötland.¹²⁷ In about 1060, with the death of Olof's son Emund the Old (c.1000-c.1060), a new dynasty rose to power with the election of Stenkil (c.1030-1066), possibly legitimized by a marriage to Emund's daughter.¹²⁸ Over the next sixty years, until the 1120s, the era of the Kalmar Expedition, Stenkil's dynasty would be dominant in Sweden, but subject to much internal strife. Adam of Bremen records that, after Stenkil's death in 1066, "two Erics struggled for the throne, and all Swedish nobles are said to have fallen in the fighting. The two kings also perished then."¹²⁹ Though the connection is not explicit, one Eric could be identified with Snorri's Erik Årsäll, one of his two examples of Swedish kings who

¹²⁷ Thomas Lindkvist, "Kings and provinces in Sweden," in Knut Helle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. 1, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 223.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹²⁹ Francis Tschan, trans., *The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), liii (52), pp. 159-160

maintained heathen worship, though Adam of Bremen's description does not clearly state that the motivation behind the strife was religious in any fashion. After the conflict between Adam's Erics, whether the conflict was religious in nature or not, "the order of the kingdom was altered and Christianity there [in Sweden] was seriously disturbed."¹³⁰ The succession after this is incredibly unclear. Lindkvist notes a letter from Pope Gregory VII (c.1015-1085) in 1081 which is addressed to "the kings of the Götar (Wisigothorum) I. and A." which would seem to indicate Inge I (the Elder) and probably Halsten his brother, sons of Stenkil.¹³¹ Co-rulership was not uncommon, as shown earlier with the shared kingship of Norway between Sigurd and Øystein in the early twelfth century, but this evidence is contradictory with other sources. Adam of Bremen records that "after the two Erics were killed in battle, Alstan, the son of Stenkil, was raised to the throne," with another king, called Anunder, being summoned from Russia after the deposition of Alstan, who can undoubtedly be equated to Halsten.¹³² Anunder was, in turn, deposed and replaced with Håkan the Red.¹³³ Snorri, meanwhile, gives another chronology: "King Stenkil of the Svear died about the time of the fall of the two Haralds [in 1066]. The king that was next in Svíþjóð [Sweden] after King Stenkil was called Håkan. After that Stenkil's son Inge was king, a good and powerful king, of all men the biggest and the strongest."¹³⁴ The *Hervarar Saga*, or the *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, records the succession similarly, writing that Stenkil "died of a sickness in Sweden about the time that King Harald fell in England. The son of Stenkil was called Inge, whom the Swedes took for king next after Håkan."¹³⁵ The *Hervarar Saga* gives a relatively lengthy account of Inge, telling how "he put down sacrificing in Sweden and ordered all the people of the land to become

¹³⁰ Ibid. 160

¹³¹ Lindkvist, "Kings and provinces," 224.

¹³² *The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, liii (52), p. 159

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ *Heimskringla* III, "Magnúss Saga Berfœtts" ch. 12, pp. 136-137.

¹³⁵ Christopher Tolkien, trans., *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), 62.

Christian; but the Swedes had too strong a belief in the heathen gods and held to their ancient ways.”¹³⁶ Inge’s reform efforts targeted “many things that Stenkil his father had let be,” and the powerful men of Sweden grew angry, giving Inge an ultimatum, “either to observe the ancient laws or else to give up his throne.”¹³⁷ Inge was deposed, and Inge’s brother-in-law Sven “offered to make the sacrifice for the Swedes if they would grant him the kingdom; all agreed to Sven’s offer, and he was accepted as king over all the Swedish realm.”¹³⁸ After the sacrifice was made, “all the Swedes cast off the Christian faith, and sacrifices were instituted, and they drove King Inge away; he departed into Västergötland. For three years Sven the Sacrificer [Blot-Sven] was king over the Swedes.”¹³⁹ In a dramatic conclusion to the episode, Inge and a small company trap Sven in a house, which they then set aflame, killing all inside, and Inge is able to claim the kingship in Sweden once again, and he “restored the Christian faith.”¹⁴⁰ After recounting the death of Inge, the *Hervarar Saga* finally mentions Halsten: “King Stenkil had a son called Halsten, and he was king together with King Inge his brother.”¹⁴¹ It then notes Halsten’s sons, Filip and Inge the Younger, who became kings after Inge the Elder’s death around 1110.¹⁴² This reinforces the idea that Halsten and Inge were co-rulers, but contradicts Adam of Bremen’s line of succession in which Halsten became king after Stenkil and was then deposed and replaced by an “Anunder” from Russia, whom many scholars nowadays identify with Inge, due to similarities between Anunder’s deposition and replacement with Håkan the Red and Inge’s deposition and replacement with Blot-Sven, though identifying Blot-Sven with Håkan the Red complicates the issue with the Håkan in

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 63

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

the line of succession between Stenkil and Inge in both the *Heimskringla* and the *Hervarar Saga*, as Blot-Sven is mentioned in both as a separate individual.

The reality of the situation is that it is impossible to know who exactly was king when and where in Sweden during the period following Stenkil's death in 1066. Nevertheless, a narrative of religious and political conflict emerges, spurred on by Inge's radical reforms in promotion of a more Europeanized Christianity, which finally did away with pagan traditions and sacrifices which were tolerated, if not participated in, by earlier Christian kings. The crux of the situation is that the conflict is not so much between Christianity and paganism, but rather between Europeanized Christianity and the Christianity of transition, which maintained many of the ancient customs of the Norse people. There was no binary, but a continuum, upon which Inge must have been placed farther to one side than was comfortable for the local nobility and populace. Even so, however, when Inge was driven out, the *Hervarar Saga* records that he retreated to Västergötland, which was, as evidenced by Lager's study of runestones, at a later stage of conversion than Svealand, where Blot-Sven seized the throne, and was therefore more open to Inge's staunch position.

Saxo Grammaticus reports that Inge had a daughter, Margareta, who first married King Magnus Barefoot of Norway, father of Sigurd the Crusader, and then married King Niels of Denmark.¹⁴³ Niels and Margareta bore a son, Magnus, called Magnus the Strong by Snorri in his only mention in the *Heimskringla* during the Kalmar Expedition, coinciding with a time when Margareta was making efforts to tie the Danish and Swedish kingdoms closer together, marrying her Swedish nieces with Danish noblemen, though ultimately when she divided her father's inheritance among herself and these nieces "there rose a quarrel between the Danes and the Swedes, which was quickened by several further sources of enmity, and it has lasted right to this

¹⁴³ *Gesta Danorum* II xiii.1.1, p. 897

day, clinging to its old hatred.”¹⁴⁴ Despite the enmity, Magnus, the Danish prince, had a claim to power in Sweden, being the grandson of the long-reigning reformist King Inge the Elder and sole heir to Margareta’s portion of the inheritance. Saxo records that, after the death of Halsten’s son Inge the Younger, “the Götar had the effrontery to confer supreme control on Magnus.”¹⁴⁵ This election was controversial, with the Götar or Magnus himself breaching some part of the electoral procedure for Swedish kings, and so the Svear elected a monarch in opposition to Magnus, “but in a short time the Götar murdered him and at his decease the sovereignty reverted to Magnus.”¹⁴⁶ Whether he was king over all of Sweden or not, Magnus was a king in Västergötland, the center of his grandfather’s power and the area where Margareta’s inheritance in property would have been located. The exact date of Inge the Younger’s death, setting this entire succession crisis into motion, is unknown, but it is commonly accepted to have happened at some point in the 1120s.¹⁴⁷

It is quite possible that Inge the Younger’s death occurred prior to 1123, and would, therefore, have been inextricably tied to the motivations behind the Kalmar Expedition. In the interregnum that followed, Magnus the Strong was elected, linked to Götaland (and therefore also Småland on Götaland’s periphery) through the inheritance of his mother, the daughter of Inge the Elder, wife of King Niels of Denmark, and former step-mother of King Sigurd the Crusader of Norway. In addition, Magnus was betrothed to the daughter of Duke Boleslaw of Poland, who is linked to an expedition across the Baltic in the very same year that Snorri cites as the year of the Kalmar Expedition. Magnus is positioned right in the middle of all of the significant players in the planning and execution of the Kalmar Expedition, and his election provides a compelling motivation for an attack on Swedes in Småland who may have been resistant to the foreign prince,

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* xiii.1.4, p.899

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* xiii.5.1, p.919

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Lindkvist, “Kings and provinces,” 224

similarly to Saxo's Svear who elected a king in opposition to Magnus. The expedition may therefore have been one of more political purpose than of religious purpose, supporting Magnus's claim to kingship in Sweden in some fashion.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This is not a new theory. In fact, Nils Blomkvist has argued against it specifically, stating that, based on Snorri's narrative, it doesn't make sense for Sigurd to fight a battle on behalf of Magnus which Niels, Magnus's own father, apparently did not fight.¹⁴⁸ Blomkvist also says that Småland seems to be a strange target for a political attack, and that Svealand, which Saxo explicitly states to have been resistant to Magnus, would have made more sense if that was the motivation.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Blomkvist claims, a political explanation for the expedition completely ignores the religious motivations which were not only mentioned by Snorri, but also featured prominently in the letter of Peter the Venerable, the only contemporary source for the event.¹⁵⁰

It may be fruitful to remember, however, that Sweden was still undergoing a long and gradual process of conversion which combined with its continual dynastic struggles. Just as Inge the Elder witnessed the consequences of moving too far to one end of the continuum between full paganism and full Christianity in Svealand, this could very well be the case with Magnus in Småland. In fact, Saxo Grammaticus notes this very character in Magnus, writing that he, "in his enthusiasm for Christian teaching, hated the heathen religion, and held it an act of piety to rob the shrine of its objects of worship and Thor of his emblems. The Swedes even today look on Magnus as a sacrilegious despoiler of heavenly treasures."¹⁵¹ Much like his grandfather, Magnus appears to be a radical reformer, a believable position from a prince of Denmark, which was generally further along in the conversion process than Sweden.

¹⁴⁸ Blomkvist, 310

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 311

¹⁵¹ *Gesta Danorum* II xiii.5.5, p. 923

It has already been demonstrated that, in order for a population to be remembered as pagan, they need not necessarily be pagans, they could simply be practitioners of a form of Christianity which contained vestiges of pagan tradition, possibly influenced by foreign forms of worship, threatening the power of the institutionalized church. The question of who the pagans at the target end of the Kalmar Expedition are must be answered in order to reconcile its connection with the letter of Peter the Venerable. Considering the sliding scale of conversion in Scandinavia, and considering that it could apparently fluctuate back and forth, it is entirely possible that the pagans of Snorri are the very same pagans of Saxo Grammaticus who were targets of Magnus's raids, likely people who considered themselves to be Christians, but were not Christian *enough* for the fully Europeanized institutions of Christianity in Denmark, Norway, and perhaps Poland, and of course Cluny Abbey. This also makes sense of Snorri's statement that "those that lived there did not observe Christianity, though some had accepted Christianity," and that "many people were heathen and many poorly Christian," indicating that, though they may have thought themselves Christians, by the standards of the rest of Europe they would not be.¹⁵² Whereas once Scandinavia had been the center of the development of a transitional Scandinavian Christianity, the Kalmar Expedition may signal the end of that religious form, a milestone in Europeanization and Christianization across Scandinavia.

Ultimately, the Kalmar Expedition remains something of a mystery. It cannot be known to what extent Snorri faithfully tells the story. It may well be that the element of the misunderstanding between Sigurd and Niels was a literary fabrication intended to introduce a feud akin to those in the sagas, or alternatively a literary fabrication intended to remind the reader of Sigurd's declining mental state, causing him to act aggressive towards allies. In any case, Snorri ignores the potential

¹⁵² *Heimskringla* III, "Magnússon Saga" ch. 24, p. 161.

involvement of the Poles, which would fit clumsily into the feud framework that he seems to employ for that part of the episode. It also cannot be known to what extent Snorri's (and Saxo's) pagans were, indeed, pagans, or rather how far along they were on the continuum of conversion. It is evident, however, that they were far enough removed from the phase of institution that they presented a credible target to ostensibly religiously motivated attacks, including the raids of Magnus the Strong mentioned by Saxo and the Kalmar Expedition, though both events resulted in markedly secular material gain. It is furthermore likely that they presented some sort of political threat to Magnus's already weak claim to power in Sweden, as Sweden was still in the midst of growing pains in the state formation process, with the period directly following the death of the dynasty of Stenkil surely being far from an exception. The expedition fits comfortably under the umbrella of crusades, which were ostensibly religiously motivated attacks, endorsed by clergy just as Peter the Venerable endorsed the Kalmar Expedition, and which, when successful, resulted in material and political gain for the crusaders.

Despite a poverty of written evidence, it is possible to take clues from the available evidence and assemble a fuller picture than what is given in the *Heimskringla*. Though in some ways this fuller picture of the Kalmar Expedition raises new questions and doubts about the original narrative itself, it also sheds further light on this transitional era of conversion and state formation in early twelfth century Sweden, showing that instead of a dichotomy there was a continuum, but to those within the continuum it could be mistaken for a dichotomy. In an era when the Christianization of the Swedish people and the formation of the Swedish state were both underway, the simplest explanation for the truth behind the narrative of Snorri Sturluson is not simple at all, but rather is the product of both religious and political motivations, instead of simply one or the other. The story which is woven between the sources tells of a dead king, a power

vacuum, a young, ambitious prince and a few overzealous crusader-kings, and of transitional Christians caught in the midst of all of it. The Kalmar Expedition is not only emblematic of the complexity of the geopolitics of its age, but it is also a significant milestone in the development of Christianization, Europeanization, and crusading in Sweden and across Europe.

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