

# CHAPTER THREE

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## ASPECTS OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SCANDINAVIA DURING THE LATE GERMANIC IRON AGE AND EARLY VIKING AGE

### 3.1 THE LATE GERMANIC IRON AGE: DARK AGES & GOLDEN AGES

Archaeology has revealed no large deposits of wealth, either hoards or burials, of the LGIA from Jutland or the Danish islands. Metalwork finds are largely limited to brooches found in a limited number of modest graves or as small, contextless finds from bogs and dry land.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, few if any runic inscriptions belonging to the LGIA have been found in Denmark; those which may qualify for inclusion fall on the cusp of the Viking Age. This situation is in dramatic contrast with Denmark's EGIA, which was rich in runic inscriptions, as well as in precious metal depositions, especially of gold objects. Gudme has yielded over seven kilograms of gold, more than any other area in Scandinavia, most of it belonging to the EGIA.<sup>2</sup> While there are indications of continuing activity at Gudme in the LGIA, 'om det var med samme karakter/funktion som i ældre germanertid, er andet spørgsmål'.<sup>3</sup> Outside southern Scandinavia, however, this period saw the appearance of rich cremation burials in Sweden's Uppland and eastern Norway, as well as rich inhumation burials on Gotland.<sup>4</sup> England and the Continent also reveal rich burials from this period.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, significant changes took place in southern Scandinavia at the end of the EGIA.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Henrik Thrane, 'Gudmeundersøgelserne', in *FStS*, II, 67-72 (pp. 70-71).

<sup>4</sup>Bjorn Myhre, 'The Royal Cemetery at Borre', in *AoSH*, pp. 301-13 (pp. 308-11); Birger Nerman, *Die Vendelzeit Gotlands: im Auftrage der Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademien*, Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademien: Monografier (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1969-).

<sup>5</sup>H. Steuer, 'Helm und Ringschwert: Prunkbewaffnung und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger, eine Übersicht', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (1987), 189-236.

<sup>6</sup>Analysis of tree-rings and ice-cores has revealed that the years around AD 535-45 were marked by a period of unusually low temperatures, a situation corroborated in contemporary European and Asian records of inexplicable cold and darkness. It is thought that this situation was the result of a 'dust-veil' which reduced Earth's insolation—perhaps the result of volcanic eruption, a comet/asteroid impact, or a passing interstellar cloud. It has also been noted that the 535-45 dust-veil event seems to coincide with archaeologically detectable periods of change on a European—perhaps global—scale; see further Heinrich Härke, 'Bede's Borrowed Eclipses', *Rastar* (October 1991), 12 [*Rastar* = the newsletter of the Reading Astronomical Society]; M.G.L. Baillie, 'Dendrochronology Raises Questions about the Nature of the AD 536 Dust-Veil Event', *The Holocene*, 4.2 (1994), 212-17; M.G.L. Baillie, *A Slice through Time: Dendrochronology and Precision Dating* (London: Batsford, 1995), pp. 83-107 & Figure 6.9. Morten Axboe suggested that the effects of the dust-veil might have caused the Scandinavians to sacrifice 'every scrap' of gold in an effort to alleviate the situation, perhaps explaining the cessation of gold hoards around this time simply because there was little gold left afterwards; Morten Axboe, 'Re: The 536 dust-veil - how did Christians react?', in *ANSAXNET Discussion Forum* [Online], Available archive: <<http://www.mun.ca/Ansaxdat/>>, Available email: <[ansax-1@wvnm.wvnet.edu](mailto:ansax-1@wvnm.wvnet.edu)> (13 May 1998). This

### 3.1.1. BRIGHTENING THE SOUTHERN SCANDINAVIAN ‘DARK AGE’

The ‘hole’ in the archaeological record for Jutland and the Danish islands between the mid-sixth and mid-seventh centuries has been filled somewhat in recent decades, but the overall picture remains unaltered; in 1991 there were no seventh-century precious metal finds from this region,<sup>7</sup> a situation which has not as yet changed.<sup>8</sup> These facts have created no little consternation among archaeologists arguing for the emergence of the ‘Danish state’ between the third and fifth centuries, as precisely the kinds of evidence which suggest wealth and power disappear just when they are needed to confirm the continuance of a ‘Danish state’ into historical times. ‘In the LGIA the whole business seems to come to a stop: neither graves nor votive hoards show anything more than the slightest trace of a social elite, perhaps because the social, political, and economic situation was relatively stable.’<sup>9</sup> This analysis effectively summarises the remarkable solution that has been proposed to address the problem created by the archaeological ‘hole’. The rich environment of earlier periods has been explained as symptomatic of a society in which the emergent élite first signalled their status through rich burials (RIA) and then employed votive offerings to maintain good relationships with the supernatural (EGIA). The LGIA’s poor archaeological environment is argued to reveal a mature society in which the élite were firmly established, making displays of wealth and prestige objects unnecessary.<sup>10</sup> The corollary to such arguments is de-emphasis of LGIA centres elsewhere in Scandinavia, reducing them from a role as the period’s leading lights to one of upstarts on the fringe.

Karen Høilund Nielsen has closely analysed Germanic animal art styles and female jewellery of the LGIA in an effort to uncover information about their production, distribution, and the socio-political messages they may have conveyed.<sup>11</sup> She concluded that most variations of Salin’s Styles II (and III) originated in Denmark, whence they were copied more widely within the Germanic world. This, she argued, demonstrates ‘at Sydsandinavien—Danernes kongerige—er den dominerende skandinaviske magtfaktor i 7. årh.’<sup>12</sup> Høilund Nielsen’s analysis has been criticised for over-relying on a linear, aesthetically-oriented model of artistic development which understands the use of repeated motifs and widespread duplication as indicative of a low-value, uncreative artistic milieu,

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offers a potentially fruitful line of inquiry, but more research on the nature of the dust veil would be required.

<sup>7</sup>Peter Vang Petersen, ‘Nye fund af metalsager fra yngre germansk jernalder: Detektorfund af danefæ fra perioden 1966-88’, in *FStS*, II, 49-66 (p. 52).

<sup>8</sup>I am grateful for the comments of Morten Axboe, ‘Re: Ethnogenesis’, *ONN* [Online], Available archive: <<http://www.hum.gu.se/arkiv/ONN/>>, Available e-mail: <[onn@hum.gu.se](mailto:onn@hum.gu.se)> (4 June 1999).

<sup>9</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup>Ulf Näsman, ‘Det syvende århundrede—et mørkt tidsrum i ny belysning’, in *FStS*, II, 165-78.

<sup>11</sup>Karen Høilund Nielsen, ‘Centrum og Periferi i 6.-8. årh.: Territoriale studier af dyrstil and kvindesmykker i yngre germansk jernalder i Syd- og Østskandinavien’, in *FStS*, II, 127-54.

<sup>12</sup>Høilund Nielsen, ‘Centrum’, p. 151. On Salin’s Styles II and III see, Salin, pp. 245-90.

and it has been suggested moreover that the development of Scandinavian art styles in the LGIA should be seen within a wider European context.<sup>13</sup> Identifying the centres of creation and production is further complicated by the possibility that itinerant craftsmen played a key role in the development and spread of new styles. Yet even if Germanic art styles of the LGIA did originate in southern Scandinavia, this ‘centre-periphery’ interpretation may read too much from the theory that prestigious objects functioned as a medium of political ideology.<sup>14</sup> It seems most plausible that art styles and prestige objects did express ideological messages at a variety of levels—most human fashion trends do—but the élite may have been at least as likely to harness existing trends as they were to create them. Linking artistic creation directly to the exercise of political power requires a bold conceptual leap.

The theory that a lack of prestige objects implies a strong and stable political power, while not impossible, sits uncomfortably with most historical examples from other medieval societies.<sup>15</sup> One is hard-pressed to find examples of political institutions so secure that they did not wish to advertise their strength, which suggests that the need for such advertisement is continuous. This observation casts doubt on models explaining regions rich in prestige goods as peripheral. The preponderance of prestige goods in northern Francia and the Rhine valley, accompanied by other signs of élite activity such as royal burials and the establishment of religious centres, suggests that the region between the Seine and the Rhine actually formed a *Schwerpunkt* for Frankish activities. This region of northern Gaul represented the area most heavily settled by Germanic-speaking Franks, and it was here that Clovis based his operations, at Tournai. Northern Gaul was also a focus for the sixth-century Neustrian and Austrasian courts, in conflict with each other as much as with non-Frankish groups. Though Clovis was buried in Paris and, in the seventh century, Dagobert I moved his court there, northern Francia continued to be a centre of activity, being particularly associated with the Arnulfing family’s rise.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Hedeager’s centre-periphery model of Francia seems to be centred on Tours, unquestionably a city of great importance, but while there was certainly Frankish activity and involvement south of the Seine it may reasonably be questioned whether this region was the Frankish élite’s primary focus.<sup>17</sup> Within Scandinavia, signs of status-display in regions like Swedish Uppland, south-eastern Norway, and Gotland may indeed indicate the emergence of new centres eager to advertise and legitimise their power. The lack of status-display in southern Scandinavia, however, may simply indicate a lack of status to display.

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<sup>13</sup>Gaimster, *Vendel*, pp. 226-36.

<sup>14</sup>Axboe ‘Guld’, 187-202; Fonnebech-Sandberg, ‘Guldets funktion’, 233-44; Andrén, pp. 245-56.

<sup>15</sup>There is, however, evidence for a seventh-century cremation burial on Sjælland; see §3.4.1.

<sup>16</sup>Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms: 450-751* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 38-70; Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 80-83, 117-23, 151-62. See also Gaimster, *Vendel*, pp. 228-33.

<sup>17</sup>Hedeager, ‘Kingdoms’, p. 294-96, Figures 53 & 54.

Such a situation would be hardly unnatural or surprising—perhaps far less so than the smooth development of a ‘Danish state’ from the third century to the present. Axboe, while generally agreeing that the roots of the ‘Danish kingdom’ may lie in the RIA, has cautioned:

Such a generalized picture must be taken with a pinch of salt. Evolution may have gone fast at times and suffered reverses at others which we cannot discover ... We must keep in mind that what we see as a ‘process’ leading to ‘the kingdom of Denmark’ is a construct—our construct.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the very use of a term like ‘reverses’ underscores the deterministic attitude which can hardly but prevail in the study of state development where, as Axboe has pointed out, the end result is known: states do eventually develop. Without such states, the Scandinavian nations would not exist to fund research programs studying their origins.<sup>19</sup> Patriotism is seldom deeply submerged in Scandinavian studies, a fact which might encourage the anachronistic projection of more modern institutions and constructs into periods where they may not belong. Though research into state development is vital to our understanding of this period, we must guard against letting our knowledge of that story’s end obscure wider issues in the development of Scandinavian society, culture, and ideology.

### 3.1.2 ÉLITE ATTITUDES

A strong, centralised Danish kingdom may have existed in southern Scandinavia during the LGIA, though the existing evidence does not guarantee that it was so. As Hedeager and Näsman have rightly pointed out, analyses of southern Scandinavian settlement patterns and environmental conditions during the LGIA undermine simplistic theories of agrarian crisis and depopulation.<sup>20</sup> Continuous settlement and steady population levels on their own, however, are hardly proof of economic prosperity or extensive political influence. Nor should we assume that a region prospered in a particular period simply because there is evidence for such prosperity before and after that period.

In contrast with theories focusing on the establishment of kingdoms, this study suggests that Scandinavia’s EGIA was characterised by a community of chieftains whose activities revolved around central places (such as Gudme) which functioned as cult-centres and communal foci (§2). The bracteates, if strongly connected with an aristocratic Óðinn-cult as Hauck suggested, may have functioned as a special badge of élite interests, perhaps

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<sup>18</sup>Morten Axboe, ‘Towards the Kingdom of Denmark’, in *MoK*, pp. 109-18 (p. 116).

<sup>19</sup>Denmark’s ‘Fra Stamme til Stat’ project was set up to further investigate the results of earlier research which seemed to suggest early state development. See John Hines’s commentary accompanying Axboe, ‘Danish’, pp. 249-50. Complementing Denmark’s ‘Fra Stamme til Stat’ project are Sweden’s ‘Svealand i Vendetid’ project and, in Norway, Bjørn Myhre’s Borre-project.

<sup>20</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, pp. 180-223; Ulf Näsman, ‘Det syvende århundrede’, in *FStS*, II, 167-68.

contrasting with a communal cult primarily concerned with fertility aspects exemplified in the Nerthus/Njörðr deity. One may compare suggestions that the apparent supremacy of Óðinn in the medieval Scandinavian sources may reflect not just the influence of classical models, but the popularity of Óðinn's martial cult among the Viking-Age Scandinavian élite. More contemporary sources, such as Adam of Bremen, imply that Freyr's cult (and Freyja's) may have been at least as strong as Óðinn's during the Viking Age, while that of Þórr may have enjoyed the widest popularity. Indeed, it has been suggested that the so-called 'war of the Æsir and the Vanir' could reflect actual tensions between the cults which came to be characterised by Óðinn and Njörðr/Freyr, respectively.<sup>21</sup> Though it must remain the purest speculation, it is noted that, if there is any credibility to that idea, the religious environment this study suggests existed in Scandinavia's GIA would be highly conducive to the production of inter-cultic tensions which, though perhaps unlikely to have resulted in actual warfare, might have been remembered in myths of divine conflict. It is remarkable that, according to Snorri, the Æsir, led by Óðinn, received Njörðr in the exchange of hostages which ended the war.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.1.3 ICELAND & SAXONY AS EXAMPLES

There is little in human history to demonstrate that the acquisition of power does not most commonly engender the desire for yet more power. It may be assumed that the GIA Scandinavian élite were no exception to this rule and that they jockeyed among themselves for position. Favourable conditions could lead to more power accumulating over time in the hands of progressively fewer individuals and, perhaps, the eventual establishment of large, centrally-ruled kingdoms, much as seems to have happened in Anglo-Saxon England. Similar models are sometimes proposed for Scandinavia, but such a process need not have been smooth, as the history of the Icelandic Commonwealth suggests.

Classic studies of the Commonwealth's history, as that of Jón Jóhannesson, have been criticised for being too quick to dismiss non-contemporary sagas' accounts as a-historical, thereby painting an overly peaceful picture of Icelandic history up through the twelfth century.<sup>23</sup> While early Iceland probably saw feuding much as the sagas describe, the Icelandic political situation seems to have changed considerably by the end of the Commonwealth period. These changes perhaps may be detectable first in the eleventh century with the establishment of *ríki*. Originally this term denoted a *goði*'s authority over

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<sup>21</sup>See, for example, H.W. Stubbs, 'Troy, Asgard, and Armageddon', *Folklore*, 70 (1959), 440-59; Karl August Eckhardt, *Der Wanenkrieg*, Germanenstudien, 3 (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1940); Robert Höckert, 'Völuspá och vana krieget', in *Festskrift tillägnad Vitalis Norström på 60-årsdagen den 29 januari 1916* (Göteborg: Wettergren & Kerber, 1916), pp. 293-309.

<sup>22</sup>*Heimskringla*, 1, 12.

<sup>23</sup>Gunnar Karlsson, 'Goðar and Höfðingjar in Medieval Iceland', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 19 (1977), 358-70 (pp. 360-362).

a district, much like *goðorð* and *mannaforáð*, but eventually came to denote a territorial dominion. The term *ríki* particularly designated a dominion made up of two or more *goðorð*. The formation of *ríki* seems to have accelerated in the twelfth century when many of the *goðorð* came into the hands of six leading Icelandic families; modern studies aptly title the *goðar* who administered such *ríki* as *stórgoðar*.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, as they were able to mobilise more resources from their constituents over whom they had come to wield territorial lordship, the *stórgoðar* employed increasingly aggressive tactics against each other. Laws prohibiting an individual from administering *goðorð* in more than one *ffjórðungur* were routinely disregarded. The final phase of the Commonwealth's history, the *Sturlungaöld*, saw the *stórgoðar* contending in what was effectively intermittent civil war, bringing grievous hardships to the Icelandic population.<sup>25</sup> The power of the *stórgoðar* had become such that they no longer needed to heed the Alþingi, and many did not bother to attend it; the Alþingi did not meet at all in 1238, such was the unrest. The Alþingi's declining status cleared the way for the eventual consolidation of power into a single individual's hands. In the event, this was not to be an Icelander, but the Norwegian king, Hákon gamli Hákonarson, who had been acting as an *agent provocateur* among the *goðar* and gaining influence in Iceland as various chieftains bartered *goðorð* to him in exchange for royal backing. By the mid-thirteenth century Hákon controlled most of the *goðorð*. The *bændr*, encouraged by the Church, had come to see acceptance of Hákon's direct rule as a means to end the wars of the *stórgoðar*. Hákon first appointed Gizurr Þorvaldsson, a *stórgoði* of the Haukdælir family, as jarl over Iceland in 1258. In 1262-64 agreements in which Icelanders accepted the Norwegian crown's sovereignty were ratified, and the Icelandic 'free state' ceased to exist.<sup>26</sup>

This Icelandic example may be compared with the end of the Old Saxon 'Commonwealth'. Saxon nobles may have been interested in expanding their power at the Assembly's expense, and they may have welcomed Frankish intervention (which, in the end, certainly increased the status of the nobility in Saxony).<sup>27</sup> Charlemagne perhaps intended to exploit this situation in order to extend his power over Saxony with aims not so unlike those in Hákon gamli's fomentation of strife among the Icelandic chieftains.<sup>28</sup> The Saxon resistance leader Widukind may have hoped, in the event of victory, to

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<sup>24</sup>On this process see especially Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Fra goðorðum til ríkja: Þróun goðavalds á 12. og 13. öld*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir, B.10 (Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1989).

<sup>25</sup>On the *Sturlungaöld* see especially Jesse L. Byock, 'The Age of the Sturlungs', in *Continuity and Change: Political Institutions and Literary Monuments in the Middle Ages, a symposium*, ed. by Elisabeth Vestergaard (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 27-42; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by Jóhann S. Hannesson, *Islandica*, 36 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953).

<sup>26</sup>Jón Jóhannesson, *Commonwealth*, pp. 247-87.

<sup>27</sup>Reuter, *Germany*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>28</sup>Louis the Pious seems to have been heavily involved in the ninth-century struggles among the Danish nobility, perhaps with hopes of exerting political control in southern Scandinavia; K.L. Maund, 'A Turmoil of Warring Princes': Political Leadership in Ninth-century Denmark', *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, 6 (1994), 29-47 (pp. 36-38). See §3.4.2.

transform his status into a bid for kingship, paralleling Arminius's career (§1.2.4).<sup>29</sup> Widukind's capitulation and baptism in 785, well before the end of Saxon resistance, may have been his attempt to ensure a position in the new Frankish order which he may have come to see as inevitable; in this at least, he seems to have been successful, as his descendants were not without significance in later Saxon society.

Similar processes could have taken place in GIA Scandinavia. The evidence of war-booty deposits from the RIA up until c. 500 suggests that local warfare was endemic in Scandinavia until at least this time. These deposits' cessation could signal a change in ritual practice at least as well as a period of peace and stability. Later Scandinavian history clearly demonstrates that widespread unrest need not have been marked by war-booty sacrifices.

Medieval Iceland was to a certain degree economically dependent on Norway, and the struggle for power amongst its chieftains facilitated an expansion of the Norwegian king's influence in Iceland. Something similar may have happened in GIA southern Scandinavia, when Theudobert I and Chilperic I seem to have been described as having Scandinavian groups within their spheres of influence.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, much of LGIA Scandinavia would have been outside the Merovingians' reach, particularly regions north of Jutland and the Danish islands where élite status-display continued or emerged in the LGIA: Bornholm, Gotland, Mälardalen, south-eastern Norway. These regions may have positively benefited from élite warfare in southern Scandinavia and the attendant collapse of communal foci there.

The overall picture revealed in both the late Icelandic Commonwealth and pre-conquest Saxony is one of societies in which élite power-struggles led to social destabilization which neighbouring groups were able to exploit in various ways for their benefit. A similar process may partially explain the 'hole' in the southern Scandinavian archaeological record in the LGIA, when new centres elsewhere in Scandinavia may have come to the fore.

### 3.1.4 LGIA SCANDINAVIA IN WRITTEN SOURCES

Few historical sources mention sixth-century Scandinavia, but those that do provide information not incongruent with the picture suggested in this study. Both Jordanes and Procopius refer to Scandinavian 'kings', but these may have been leaders of tribal groups.<sup>31</sup> There is no suggestion of overlords ruling multi-tribal confederacies or large areas. Jordanes particularly mentions a Scandinavian king Roduulf of the Ranii, who 'contempto proprio regno ad Theodorici Gothorum regis convolavit et, ut desiderabat, invenit'.<sup>32</sup> What

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<sup>29</sup>Had Widukind succeeded in both leading a successful rebellion and assuming political authority, such a move also would have recalled—ironically—the twentieth-century career of Charles de Gaulle.

<sup>30</sup>*Epistolae Austrasicae*, pp. 132-33 (Letter 20); Venantius Fortunatus, *Ad Chilpericum*, p. 203 (ll. 73-76).

<sup>31</sup>Procopius, II, 215 (Book 6, Chapter 15.4-5).

<sup>32</sup>*Getica*, p. 60.

Roduulf desired is uncertain, though Jordanes's words could reveal a situation paralleling that of Heriold (Harald Clac, Klakk-Haraldr), apparently an unsuccessful claimant to royal power in ninth-century Denmark. In 826, Louis the Pious sponsored his baptism and granted him land in Frisia.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps Roduulf too had come out the worse in an intensifying power struggle among the Scandinavian élite.

Another historical source mentioning Scandinavia in this period is Gregory of Tours' *Historiarum Libri X*,<sup>34</sup> which describes a raid on Frankish territories during the reign of the Frankish king Theudoric made by people Gregory names 'Danes' and led by a 'king' Ch(l)ochilaicus. Hedeager has argued that Gregory's description of Ch(l)ochilaicus as *rex*, a term which he did not use for the leaders among peoples subordinate to the Franks, demonstrates the existence of a powerful Danish kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, we cannot be sure whether Ch(l)ochilaicus was a king in this medieval sense or simply a war-leader of some kind. The raid he led would have taken place between 511 and 533, possibly before 525,<sup>36</sup> and was defeated by the Frankish prince Theudobert.<sup>37</sup> Ch(l)ochilaicus's raid is also mentioned in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (c. 727) which appears to have drawn on Gregory's account.<sup>38</sup> Ch(l)ochilaicus is probably reflected in the *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus* by the *rex Higlacus* who—not described as a 'Danish' king—ruled the Getae (*imperavit Getis*). He was slain by the Franks, and his bones were displayed on an island at the Rhine's mouth.<sup>39</sup> All this information has received much attention from literary scholars, as Ch(l)ochilaicus has commonly been identified with *Beowulf*'s Hygelac, king of the Geatas, who is described as having prosecuted a disastrous raid on Frisia.<sup>40</sup>

*Beowulf* offers many tantalising hints which seem to illuminate GIA Scandinavia. Among others, it tells of an overbearing king Heremod who had oppressed the *Dene*

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<sup>33</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 169-70 (sv 826); *Annales Xantenses*, in *Scriptores rerum Sangallensium: Annales, chronica et historiae aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Heinricus Pertz, MGH: *Scriptores* (in folio), 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1829), pp. 217-35 (p. 225, sv 826); Ermold le Noir, *Carmen in honorem Hludowici*, in *Poème sur Louis le Pieux et épîtres au roi Pépin*, ed. by Edmond Faral (Paris: Champion, 1932), pp. 144-90 (ll. 1882-2513); *Vita Anskarii*, pp. 26-29 (Chapter 7). See §3.4.2.

<sup>34</sup>HF, p. 99 (Book 3, Chapter 3). It was written c. 575-94; Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (AD 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 124.

<sup>35</sup>Lotte Hedeager, 'Mellem oldtid og middelalder: Europa i folkevandringstiden', *Carlsbergfondet, Frederiksborgmuseet, My Calsbergfondet: Arsskrift* (1992), 39-45 (p. 40).

<sup>36</sup>John Haywood, *Dark Age Naval Power: A Re-assessment of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Seafaring Activity* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 78-87.

<sup>37</sup>See beginning of Chapter 4.

<sup>38</sup>LHF, p. 274 (Chapter 19); Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup>*Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus*, ed. and trans. by Andy Orchard, in Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 254-317 (pp. 258-59). The *Liber monstrorum* may have been composed by an Insular author c. 650-750 though it survives in ninth- and tenth-century Continental manuscripts; Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 86-7; Michael Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm, the Liber Monstrorum and Wessex', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd series, 23 (1982), 151-92 (pp. 162-79).

<sup>40</sup>*Beowulf*, pp. 46, 94, 109-10 (ll. 1202-14a, 2490-2509, 2911-21). This identification has been widely accepted since first proposed by N.F.S. Grundtvig, 'Om Bjovulfs Drape eller det af Hr. Etatsraad Thorkelin 1815 udgivne angelsachsiske Digt', *Danne-Virke, et Tids-Skrift* 2 (1817), 207-89 (284-87).

severely,<sup>41</sup> and suggests that after Heremod's exile the *Dene* remained 'aldor(le)ase lange hwile' before the legendary Scyld appeared to rule them.<sup>42</sup> Following the Frisian raid, Hygelac's widow 'bearne ne truwode, þæt he wið ælfylcum eþelstolas healdan cuðe, ða wæs Hygelac dead'.<sup>43</sup> After Beowulf's death, Wiglaf also mused on the legacy of Hygelac's raid:

[...] Nu ys leodum wen  
 orleg-hwile, syððan under[ne]  
 Froncum ond Frysum fyll cyninges  
 wide weorðeð. Wæs sio wroht scepem  
 heard wið Hugas, syððan Higelac cwom  
 faran flot-herge on Fresna land  
 [...] Us wæs a syððan  
 Merewioingas milts ungyfeðe.<sup>44</sup>

Such details fit neatly into the pattern of Scandinavian history from the LRIA to the LGIA suggested in this study. Nevertheless, it can hardly be stressed enough that doubt surrounding the origins of *Beowulf's* narrative argues strongly against the use of it (and related materials) as a historical source.<sup>45</sup> Nothing in the poem, except Hygelac's raid itself, is corroborated by any vaguely historical documents.

Yet even if the details *Beowulf's* composer(s) supplied represent the purest speculations, the general picture presented concerning Hygelac's raid is very much that which might have been expected to attend Ch(l)ochilaicus's raid. The ambiguity of the evidence does not really allow identification of Ch(l)ochilaicus's ethnicity—especially considering the uncertainty over what the terms *Dani*, *Getae*, or *Geatas* signified—but it certainly seems that a large Scandinavian expedition and its leader came to grief in Frankish-administered territory during the early sixth century.<sup>46</sup> Casualties among the southern Scandinavian élite in such a military disaster might have severely altered the balance of power within a society of competing chieftains organised around a cult-centre, such as might have existed since the EGIA (§2). Struggles amongst the remainder of the southern Scandinavian élite may have intensified as they vied to fill the vacuum left by Ch(l)ochilaicus and their other fallen competitors. Perhaps the victorious Theudobert's

<sup>41</sup>*Beowulf*, pp. 34, 64 (ll. 898-915, 1705-23).

<sup>42</sup>*Beowulf*, p. 1 (ll. 4-16a).

<sup>43</sup>*Beowulf*, p. 89 (ll. 2370b-72).

<sup>44</sup>*Beowulf*, pp. 109, 110 (ll. 2910b-15, 2920b-21).

<sup>45</sup>See discussion of issues concerning the Scylding-Skjöldung cycle's historicity in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>46</sup>Another Scandinavian raid, made in conjunction with Saxons, on Frankish-administered territory seems to have been defeated c. 570; Venantius Fortunatus, *De Lupo Duce*, in *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati presbyteri Italici*, ed. by Fridericus Leo and B. Krusch, MGH: AA, 4, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881-85), I, *Opera poetica* (1881), pp. 159-61 (p. 160, ll. 49-58).

*milts* was indeed *ungyfeðe* if he later took advantage of the unrest to exert authority over any southern Scandinavian groups.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.1.5 LGIA CENTRES IN THE BALTIC, SWEDEN, & NORWAY

If élite competition had erupted into strife at a level which brought hard times to Scandinavia's south, élite status-display in other regions suggests a certain level of economic prosperity. Prestige-good finds from Gotland and Bornholm cross-over from the EGIA to LGIA. At Sorte Muld on Bornholm, less wealth was deposited in the LGIA than in preceding centuries, but the transitional period saw considerable activity with the deposition of over twenty-three hundred *guldgubber* (representing more than eighty-nine percent of all known *guldgubber*).<sup>48</sup> The *guldgubber* are small pieces of gold foil stamped with various, usually human figures. Their iconography seems to have drawn on Late Antique and Merovingian influences, though in this they are part of the GIA Scandinavian artistic tradition. Whether Sorte Muld was a cult-centre, chieftain's seat, or both, metalwork finds on Bornholm suggest continuing élite activity at a significant level until the Viking Age—a stark contrast with the Danish islands and Jutland.<sup>49</sup> Bornholm's élite seems to have been very aware of Frankish trends during the sixth century. They enjoyed imports from Alamannic and Frankish regions, and élite burial forms on Bornholm seem to have closely followed customs of the Merovingian élite.<sup>50</sup> Such communication with Merovingian Francia is suggested by similar burial forms on Gotland and in central Sweden.

The Swedish Uppland-Mälardalen region's LGIA sites are well-known,<sup>51</sup> though they have been the subject of much recent reanalysis which will undoubtedly continue with further prosecution of the 'Svealand i Vendeltid' project. The earliest ship-burial yet discovered in Scandinavia is of a woman at Augerum in Sweden from the late sixth century. Gamla Uppsala's sixth-century burial mounds are surrounded by numerous smaller mounds, the dates of which stretch into the Viking Age. A number of gold deposits, perhaps of a votive character, have been found at Gamla Uppsala. The seventh-century burials at nearby Vendel and Valsgarde also indicate continuing élite activity in the

<sup>47</sup>*Epistolae Austrasicae*, pp. 132-33 (Letter 20); Venantius Fortunatus, *Ad Chilpericum*, p. 203 (ll. 73-76).

<sup>48</sup>Margrethe Watt, 'Kings or Gods? Iconographic Evidence from Scandinavian Gold Foil Figures', in *MoK*, pp. 171-83 (p. 174).

<sup>49</sup>Margrethe Watt, 'Sorte Muld: Høvdingesæde og kultcentrum fra Bornholms yngre jernalder', in *FStS*, II, 67-72 (pp. 70-71). It has been suggested that the lower numbers of status-display finds from the late seventh-century indicate the emergence of central kingship on Bornholm. While such an explanation is possible, there is no documentary evidence for kingship on Bornholm until the late ninth century; *Old English Orosius*, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup>Lars Jørgensen, 'Våben grave og krigeraristokrati: Etableringen af en centralmagt på Bornholm i det 6.-8. årh. e.Kr.', in *FStS*, II, 109-25.

<sup>51</sup>See articles in *Arkeologi och miljögeologi i Gamla Uppsala*, ed. by Wladyslaw Duczko, Occasional Papers in Archaeology, 7, II, 2 vols (Uppsala: Department of Archaeology, Uppsala University, 1993-96); and in *Vendel Period Studies: Transactions of the Boat-grave symposium in Stockholm, February 2-3, 1981*, ed. by J.P. Lamm and H.-Å. Nordström (Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1983).

region. They attest to a level of wealth seeming to match that in contemporary Frankish burials and the East Anglian Sutton Hoo burials; finds from Sutton Hoo appear to have stylistic links with contemporary Swedish finds.<sup>52</sup> Material from Helgö on Lake Mälaren is notoriously difficult to date, but the site seems to have flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>53</sup> Helgö has revealed far fewer precious metal finds than Gudme in its heyday, but objects from as far away as Egypt and India testify to Helgö's status as an international trade centre with a role perhaps not unlike those of earlier southern Scandinavian sites.

The Norwegian finds of the LGIA are not as spectacular as those from Sweden, but they likewise suggest growing wealth and power. Based on the distributions of fifth- and sixth-century settlement patterns and the placement of boathouses in southern and western Norway, Bjørn Myhre has suggested that a society of small competing chieftaincies existed during the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>54</sup> Of special interest is the Vestfold region in eastern Norway where mound burials began to appear in the mid-sixth century. At Borre, although lacking the richness of contemporary Swedish burials, there are large mounds of the mid-seventh century. Whether these Yngling traditions have any historical accuracy is highly questionable,<sup>55</sup> but it is interesting to note *Ynglingatal's* claims that the Norwegian dynasty stemmed from the ancient kings of Uppsala and that the Norwegian Yngling king Eysteinn was buried *þars ... Vøðlu straumr at vági kómur*, which Snorri says is *á Borró*.<sup>56</sup>

If southern Scandinavia indeed fell on hard times in the LGIA, perhaps new groups and dynasties struggling for recognition sought to legitimise themselves by establishing centres which they hoped would be seen as the successors of earlier cult-centres, such as perhaps had existed at Gudme (see discussion in Chapter 2). Such a process might explain the strong connections between the Vanir cult and the Uppsala dynasties revealed in the medieval sources.

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<sup>52</sup>M.O.H. Carver, 'Sutton Hoo in Context', in *Angli e sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare: 26 aprile - 10 maggio 1984*, ed. by Raoul Manseli and others, Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 32 (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1986), 77-123; R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford, 'The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: Some Foreign Connections', in *Angli e sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare: 26 aprile - 10 maggio 1984*, ed. by Raoul Manseli and others, Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 32 (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1986), 143-218.

<sup>53</sup>Axel Christopherson, 'Big Chiefs and Buddhas in the Heart of the Swedish Homeland: Barter and Social Organisation at Helgö during the Migration and Vendel Periods, a Proposed Reinterpretation', in *Thirteen studies on Helgö*, ed. by Agneta Lundström, trans. by Helen Clarke and Clifford Long, Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm: Studies, 7 (Stockholm: Statens historiska museum, 1988), pp. 51-59; Ola Kyhlberg, *Helgö och Birka: kronologisk-topografisk analys av grav- och boplatser*, Arkeologiska rapporter och meddelanden från Institutionen för arkeologi, särskilt nordeuropeisk, vid Stockholms universitet, 6 (Stockholm: Institutionen för arkeologi, Stockholms universitet, Akademilitt., 1980); Karin Calissendorff, 'Helgö', *Namn och Bygd*, 52 (1964), 105-51 (pp. 147-51); Mårten Stenberger, *Det forntida Sverige: svensk förhistoria i korta kapitel* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964), p. 633. See §2.2.2.

<sup>54</sup>Myhre, 'Boat houses', pp. 50, 56; Myhre, 'Chieftains', pp. 186-87.

<sup>55</sup>See §3.2.2. Knut Helle, 'The History of the Early Viking Age in Norway', in *IaSiEVA*, pp. 239-58 (pp. 256-57).

<sup>56</sup>*Ynglingatal*, p. 13 (v. 31); *Heimskringla*, 1, 77-78.

## 3.2 LATER REFLECTIONS OF NERTHUS'S CULT

### 3.2.1 NERTHUS & NJORÐR AGAIN

Some of the links between the first-century Nerthus and that deity's Viking-Age form Njorðr (East Scandinavian \*Njærðr) have already been discussed (§2.2.2). We are ill-informed about the history of this deity's cult during the millennium which lies between Tacitus and the medieval Scandinavian sources, though with adequate supporting evidence place-names can provide some clues to the cult's popularity.<sup>57</sup> Generally speaking, many of the Njorðr place-names seem either to label bodies of water, or to be located near bodies of water. The bulk of Njorðr place-names are in the Swedish lake regions or in Norway, along the west coast or in the Oslofjord region. These locations are difficult to reconcile with Tacitus' probable location of the Nerthus cult-centre somewhere in southern Scandinavia; the cult's activities appear to have shifted focus. Widely separated from the Norwegian and central Swedish Njorðr place-names are two in Skåne, and two on Fyn—one of the latter is *Nærå*, from Old Danish *Niartharhøghæ*, very near Gudme.<sup>58</sup> The existence of a few strongly pre-eminent southern Scandinavian sites associated with Nerthus-Njorðr may have discouraged use of the deity's name in naming neighbouring locations of lesser status during the EGIA. In the LGIA, new centres elsewhere in Scandinavia might have begun to reference Njorðr as a means of associating themselves with the prestige once enjoyed by then-declining southern Scandinavian cult-centres. According to John Kousgård Sørensen, 'there is no reason to believe this god [Njorðr] was worshipped in the last centuries of heathendom', and he argues that place-names in *Nær*- would not have been parsable as theophoric during those times.<sup>59</sup> Njorðr's cult may have been in abeyance during the LGIA and Viking Age, though Kousgård Sørensen's view is difficult to reconcile with Njorðr's relatively strong presence in the written sources, as well the existence of Njorðr place-names in Iceland. There are, for example, three place-names *Njarðvík* in Iceland which are unlikely to pre-date the ninth century and probably reflect an active cult.

### 3.2.2 FREYR, YNGVI-FREYR, & ING

Freyr and Freyja ('Lord' and 'Lady') are described in medieval mythological sources as Njorðr's children, and it seems that their cults, which appear to have been closely allied in nature to Njorðr's, may have been overtaking that of their parent. The cognates of their

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<sup>57</sup>Magnus Olsen, *Hedenske kultminder i norske stedsnavne*, Videnskabselskapet i Kristiania Skrifter: II, Historisk-filosofisk Klasse, 1914:4 (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1915), pp. 50-62; Jørn Sandnes and Ola Stemshaug with Kolbjørn Aune, *Norsk stadnamleksikon*, 1st edn (Oslo: Samlaget, 1976), pp. 234 (*sv* 'Njærheim'), 238 (*sv* 'Nærøy').

<sup>58</sup>de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II, 194-99, 201.

<sup>59</sup>John Kousgård Sørensen, 'The Change of Religion and the Names', in *ONaFRaCPN*, pp. 394-403 (p. 399).

names in other Germanic languages are used as secular titles, rather than divine appellations,<sup>60</sup> suggesting that the specific association of these titles with particular deities may be a late development in Scandinavia. Some other deities named in medieval sources originally may have been doublets of Freyr or Freyja, or this pair may have absorbed a variety of local deities under their more generic identities. Freyja, whom Snorri described as having many names,<sup>61</sup> may have been related to apparently minor goddesses (such as Gefn, Gefion, or Iðunn), and even identified with Gerðr and Frigg.<sup>62</sup>

Freyr is commonly identified with the Fricco whom Adam of Bremen named as one of the three gods worshipped at the 'Uppsala temple'.<sup>63</sup> Whether any such building existed is questionable,<sup>64</sup> but Gamla Uppsala was probably an important heathen cult-centre from the LGIA (and continued later as a Christian centre, being made an archbishopric in 1164).<sup>65</sup> Adam's description of Fricco's idol as *cum ingenti priapo* is usually considered proof enough to equate Fricco with Freyr, in his role as a fertility god.<sup>66</sup> There have been many ingenious attempts to explain the curious name-form *Fricco*, though perhaps the simplest explanation is that *Fricco* could be a LG name, perhaps of an old deity, which either Adam (or an informant) substituted in place of the Scandinavian deity's name.<sup>67</sup> According to Saxo, the heathen Swedes held an annual sacrifice (instituted in ancient times by a certain Hadingus) called *Frøsblot* honouring the god Frø (OSw \**Frōr*, OIce *Freyr*).<sup>68</sup>

Of Freyr, Snorri's Edda says:

Freyr er hinn agætazti af asvm; hann ræðr firir regni ok scini solar ok þar með avexti iarþar, ok ahann er gott at heita til ars ok friþar; hann ræðr ok fesælv manna.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>*Freyr* is a strong noun (from \**fraujaŋ*), contrasting with its cognates in the other Germanic languages which are weak (i.e. OE *frea*, from \**fraujoŋ*).

<sup>61</sup>*Snorra Edda*, p. 38; *SnEdHafn*, I, 114.

<sup>62</sup>Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 71, 108.

<sup>63</sup>Adam of Bremen, p. 258-59 (Book 4, Chapters 26-27).

<sup>64</sup>Else Nordahl, ... *templum quod Ubsola dicitur ... i arkeologisk belysning*, *Aun*, 22 (Uppsala: Department of Archaeology, Uppsala University, 1996), pp. 54-62.

<sup>65</sup>Sawyer and Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia*, p. 109.

<sup>66</sup>Adam of Bremen, p. 258 (Book 4, Chapter 26). Adam's description of Fricco is eminently applicable to a statue found at Rällinge, Södermanland, Sweden. For this reason the statue is commonly assumed to depict Freyr.

<sup>67</sup>Grimm notes personal names *Fricco/Friccho/Friccheo* and an eleventh-century place-name *Fricconhorst* (modern *Freckenhorst*), though he connects the latter with a goddess *Freke*; Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, ed. by Elard Hugo Meyer, 4th edn (Berlin: Dümmler, 1875-78), I, 176 n. 1, 252-53; III, 92.

<sup>68</sup>*Gesta Danorum*, p. 29.

<sup>69</sup>*Snorra Edda*, p. 31; *SnEdHafn*, I, 96.

This description recalls Sigurðr Hlaðajarl's toasting Njörðr and Freyr *til árs ok friðar*.<sup>70</sup> Various medieval Icelandic sagas appear to reference Freyr, his cult, and its adherents.<sup>71</sup> Though the details they provide must be held suspect, such passages probably testify to Freyr's genuine popularity in pre-Christian times.

Freyr is several times called a leader of gods: *fólkvaldi goða* in *Skírnismál*,<sup>72</sup> and (by Njörðr) *ása iaðarr* in *Locasenna*.<sup>73</sup> These descriptions recall Snorri's description of Freyr's kingship over the Swedes, following the reign of his parent, Njörðr. After Óðinn's death:

Njörðr af Nóatúnum gerðisk þá valdsmaðr yfir Svíum ok helt upp blótum. Hann kǫlluðu Svíar þá dróttin sinn. Tók hann þá skattgjafar af þeim. Á hans dögum var friðr allgóðr ok alls konar ár svá mikít. at Svíar trúðu því at Njörðr réði fyrir ári ok fyrir fésælu manna. Á hans dögum dó flestir díar ok váru allir brenndir ok blótaðir síðan ... Freyr tók þá við ríki eptir Njörð. Var hann kallaðr dróttin yfir Svíar ok tók skattgjafar af þeim. Hann var vinsæll ok ársæll sem faðir hans. Freyr reisti at Uppsólum hof mikít ok setti þar hǫfuðstað sinn, lagði þar til allar skyldir sínar, lǫnd ok lausan eyri. Þá hófsk Uppsalaauðr ok hefir haldizk æ síðan. Á hans dögum hófsk Fróðafriðr. Þá var ok ár um ǫll lǫnd. Kenndu Svíar þat Frey. Var han því meirr dýrkaðr en ǫnnur goðin sem á hans dögum varð landsfólkít auðgara en fyrr af friðinum ok ári. Gerðr Gymisdóttir hét kona hans. Sonr þeira hét Fjǫlnir. Freyr hét Yngvi ǫðru nafni. Yngva nafn var lengi síðan haft í hans ætt fyrir tignarnafn, ok Ynglingar váru síðan kallaðr hans ættmenn.<sup>74</sup>

Other than following *Skírnismál* in identifying Gerðr as Freyr's spouse,<sup>75</sup> it is not clear whence Snorri derived the information in this section—whether he simply made it up, was depending on oral or written poetry or prose, or was even drawing on traditions learned during his trip to Sweden (see §1.3.2). For the bulk of *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri relied on the poem *Ynglingatal*. Its authorship is traditionally assigned to a named skald, Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, and though in the Eddic *kviðuháttir* metre it makes heavy use of kennings in the skaldic style. *Ynglingatal* is commonly dated to c. 900, but recently Claus Krag argued that the Ynglingar traditions were first synthesised by Ari Þorgilsson and that consequently it

<sup>70</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 13, 168.

<sup>71</sup>*Gísla saga Súrssonar*, in *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943), pp. 1–118 (pp. 55, 57); *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, in *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Íslenzk fornrit, 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), pp. 97–133 (pp. 99–100); *Víga-Glúms saga*, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1956), pp. 1–98 (pp. 16, 34, 66, 87–88); *Landnámabók*, pp. 336, 397; *Vatnsdæla saga*, pp. 30, 33, 151, 158.

<sup>72</sup>Recalling the name of the Frisian king Fin Folcwalding in *Widsið*, p. 150 (l. 27a); *Skírnismál*, p. 69 (v. 3).

<sup>73</sup>*Locasenna*, p. 103 (v. 35).

<sup>74</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 23–24.

<sup>75</sup>See Paul Bibire, 'Freyr and Gerðr: the Story and its Myths', in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Herman Pálsson on his 65th Birthday, 26th May 1986*, ed. by Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Vienna: Böhlau, 1986), pp. 19–40.

may date as late as c. 1200.<sup>76</sup> Krag's analysis would cast doubt upon Snorri's equation of Freyr and Yngvi, and would complicate an understanding of Freyr's relation to other Germanic traditions concerning gods or divine heroes whose names contain the *Ing-*element. Krag raised many cogent points about the likelihood that early medieval Scandinavian authors may have been synthesising and rationalising disparate material, but his arguments have not been widely accepted, perhaps in part because even if the information we possess concerning Ynglingar was to some degree a product of the twelfth-century, it may nonetheless go back to much earlier traditions. There are numerous place-names referring to Freyr (and to Vanir deities generally) in east-central Sweden,<sup>77</sup> and, with the combined testimonies of Snorri, Saxo, and Adam of Bremen, the evidence indeed seems to point to a connection between Freyr's cult and Gamla Uppsala. Though Snorri describes the Ynglingar as an ancient dynasty of kings at Uppsala, he explicitly asserts that their rule there ended with the defeat of Ingjaldr inn illráði by Ívarr víðfaðmi (allegedly from Skåne).<sup>78</sup> Such information may represent genuine traditions but cannot be treated as historical, and we have little information about what a term like *ynglingr* might have meant, if anything, to the Swedes. That it—or some related term—did mean something of note, however, may be suggested by the preponderance of *Ing-* and *Yngv-* personal-names,<sup>79</sup> as well as the place-name *Inglinge* in Uppland.<sup>80</sup>

The term *ynglingr* probably stems from *\*ijuliŋar* (perhaps *\*ijwaliŋar* originally, with *-w-* vocalised to *-u-* before the consonant), itself a combination of a weak noun *\*ijulē* (a name?) with the *-ing-* suffix; *\*ijulē* would be a diminutive form of *\*ijwanar* (*\*ijw-* + adjectival suffix) which produced the ON name *Yngvinn*) using a variant of the early *-ila-*type suffix found also in names like *Attila* (§4.2.3).<sup>81</sup> Thus, *ynglingr* means something like 'person associated with someone (or something) with the attributes of Yngvi'. *Ynglingr* is unlikely to be a dynastic title derived directly from *Yngvi* as Snorri stated and Ari implied, though the forms are clearly related. *Yngvi* itself comes from *\*ijwōn*, a weak form of *\*ijwaz*, the PG form from which all these *Ing-/Yng-* forms probably stem. Though of obscure etymology, *\*ijwaz* may spring from an Indo-European root *\*eng<sup>w-</sup>*, denoting 'groin'.<sup>82</sup> Whether terms like *\*ijwōn*, *\*ijwanar*, and *\*ijulē* would have been personal

<sup>76</sup>Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og Ynlingasaga: En studie i historiske kilder*, Studia humaniora, 2 (Oslo: Rådet for humanistisk forskning, NAVF, Universitetsforlaget, 1991), pp. 33, 165-66, 210-11, 218-19. For earlier discussion on *Ynglingatal*'s date, see Walter Åkerlund, *Studier över Ynglingatal*, Skrifter utgivna av Vetenskaps-societeten i Lund, 23 (Lund: Ohlsson, 1939), pp. 1-79.

<sup>77</sup>de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II, 195-203, 308-11 & Karten 7-8, 10.

<sup>78</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 71-73.

<sup>79</sup>Elias Wessén, *Studier till Sveriges hedna mytologi och fornhistoria*, Uppsala universitets årsskrift: Filosofi, Språkvetenskap och historiska vetenskaper, 6 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1924), pp. 64-67.

<sup>80</sup>Eric Elgqvist, *Skäl och Skilfingar: Vad nordiska ortnamn vittna om svenska expansionssträvanden omkring mitten av första årtusendet e.Kr.* (Lund: Olin, 1944), pp. 68-74.

<sup>81</sup>*ANEW*, p. 678 (*sv* 'ynglingr', 'Yngvi'). Another possible meaning for the word *ynglingr* is simply 'youngling'. Krag considered this more suitable than de Vries's 'pure speculation', but his explanation of why such a term would be suitable for designating a king is not very convincing; Krag, pp. 208-11.

<sup>82</sup>Compare Latin *inguen*; Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanische etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern; München: Francke, 1959-69), p. 319 (*sv* 'eng<sup>u-</sup>').

names or titles is unclear, but originally *ynglingr* is perhaps as likely as not to have designated someone of prominent position within a fertility cult. What the name *Ingunar-Freyr* used in *Locasenna* and in *Óláfs saga ins helga in sérstaka* meant is uncertain,<sup>83</sup> but it further strengthens Freyr's association with other *Ing-/Yngv-* names and terms. Whether *ynglingr* was a dynastic appellation or, as suggested here, perhaps more likely a title,<sup>84</sup> it might well represent the interests of LGIA chieftains in claiming legitimacy through association with well-known institutions of earlier times. In this context, it is remarkable that Snorri identifies Freyr, Njörðr's son, as the Uppsala-centre's founder.<sup>85</sup>

Evidence for figures and institutions linked with PG *\*iŋwaz* is at least as old as the RIA, as this element is found in the name of the Inguaeones, the cultic league mentioned by Tacitus and Pliny which seems to have been located in roughly the area that had been the Jastorf superculture's heart.<sup>86</sup> Such a position would have put them in close contact with the tribes of the Nerthus cultic league, and there may even have been some overlap. *Beowulf* describes Hroþgar as *eodor Ingwina* (l. 1044) and *frea[n] Ingwina* (l. 1319).<sup>87</sup> *Ingwine* may represent a folk-etymology of Inguaeones, and it is possible that information derived from Tacitus was known to *Beowulf*'s composer(s).<sup>88</sup> Richard North argued that a cult centred on Ing played a dynamic role in early Anglo-Saxon England,<sup>89</sup> and traditions of some kind of fertility cult may stand behind the Anglo-Saxon myth of Sce(a)f or Scyld (see §5.1.3). Though it is difficult to be sure how old the rune-names may be, the name of the twenty-second rune in the older fuþark (𐌸, in England 𐌷) is commonly reconstructed *\*inguz*. In the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem, the 𐌷-*rune* is accompanied by the following verse:

𐌷 wæs ærest mid East-Denum  
 gesewen secgun, oþ he siððan est<sup>90</sup>  
 ofer wæg gewat; wæn æfter ran;

<sup>83</sup>*Locasenna*, p. 103 (v. 35); *Heimskringla*, II, 421; *ANEW*, p. 678 (*sv* 'ynglingr', 'Yngvarr', 'Yngvi'). See further recent discussion in Picard, *Sakralkönigtum?*, pp. 192-219.

<sup>84</sup>See §5.2.1.

<sup>85</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 23-24.

<sup>86</sup>Shchukin, p. 33; *Germania*, pp. 2-3 (Chapter 2); C. Plinius Secundus, I, 345 (Book 4, Chapter 96). See §2.2.2.

<sup>87</sup>*Beowulf*, pp. 39, 50.

<sup>88</sup>Roberta Frank, 'Germanic Legend in Old English Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 88-106 (pp. 93, 104). *Germania* was known in Carolingian Francia; see §4.2.3 and §5.3.3.

<sup>89</sup>Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>90</sup>It has been suggested that the poem's *est* ('eastwards') may be an error for *eft* ('afterwards').

ðus Hearingas<sup>91</sup> ðone hæle nemdun.<sup>92</sup>

Freyr is likewise associated with wagons. *Ǫgmundar þáttur dytts* recounts the tale of a Norwegian, Gunnarr helmingr, who meets a priestess travelling on a ritual procession around the Swedish countryside in a wagon containing an effigy of Freyr.<sup>93</sup> Gunnarr overcomes the god by wrestling with the idol, and takes his place in the wagon; the Christian Icelandic author was able to poke fun at the Swedes, whom he considered credulous heathens, describing them as well-pleased when ‘Freyr’ is able to talk and feast with them—and impregnate their priestess. But behind this comic tale probably lies a memory and understanding of genuine heathen rites, else the humour would not make sense. Moreover, the perambulation of Freyr’s idol in a wagon strongly recalls the similar rites of Nerthus,<sup>94</sup> as well as Njǫrðr’s possible description as *vagna gvað*,<sup>95</sup> and Freyja’s use of a *reið*.<sup>96</sup> Wheeled vehicles seem to have been popular amongst the Vanir,<sup>97</sup> and it may be speculated that such associations go back to the small RIA wagons found at Dejbjerg,

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<sup>91</sup>The Hearingas may be related to the Scandinavian Haddingjar. Hadingus’s association with the *Fróblot* in *Gesta Danorum* has been mentioned; *Gesta Danorum*, p. 29. Some scholars believe these names are related to ON *haddr*, seeming to mean ‘a woman’s hair-style’. Adam of Bremen characterise rites at Uppsala as having an effeminate nature. See further Georges Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction: The Saga of Hadingus*, trans. by Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) [originally published as Georges Dumézil, *Du mythe au roman: La Saga de Hadingus (Saxo Grammaticus, I, v-viii) et autres essais* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970)]; de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II, 166, 175-76, 248-49.

<sup>92</sup>*The Old English Rune Poem: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Maureen Halsall, McMaster Old English Studies and Texts, 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 86-93 (p. 90); *The Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem*, in *Runic and Heroic Poems of the Old Teutonic Peoples*, ed. by Bruce R. Dickins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), pp. 12-23 (pp. 20-21); George Hickes, *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-criticus et Archaeologicus*, 2 vols (Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre, 1703-05; repr. Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), I.1: *Institutiones Grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-Gothicae*, p. 135. A new critical edition is being prepared by Raymond I. Page.

<sup>93</sup>*Ǫgmundar þáttur dytts*, in *Eyfirdinga sögur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslensk fornrit, 9 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1956), pp. 99-115 (pp. III-15).

<sup>94</sup>*Germania*, pp. 26-27 (Chapter 40).

<sup>95</sup>*Snorra Edda*, p. 97 n. 6 & n. to l. 16; *SnEdHafn*, I, 260 n. 12. See §2.2.2.

<sup>96</sup>*Snorra Edda*, p. 31; *SnEdHafn*, I, 96.

<sup>97</sup>Wheeled vehicles may have been associated generally with Germanic (and Celtic) fertility deities. Þórr, not without fertility associations, like Freyja had a *reið*; *Snorra Edda*, p. 29; *SnEdHafn*, I, 88-90. Gregory of Tours described the idol of a goddess *Berecinthiae* being drawn through the fields and vineyards with much celebration; Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, in *Gregorii Turonensis Opera*, ed. by W. Arndt, Bruno Krusch, and Wilhelmus Levison, MGH: SRM, I, 2 vols (Hannover: Hahn 1885-1951), II, ed. by Bruno Krusch (1885), 744-820 (pp. 793-94, Chapter 76). Such customs continued in Christian times with the perambulation of idols of the Virgin Mary or saints; Pamela Berger, *The Goddess Obscured: Transformation of the Grain Protectress from Goddess to Saint* (London: Hale, 1988).

Jutland,<sup>98</sup> the southern Scandinavian chariot burials of the pre-RIA,<sup>99</sup> and even the Bronze-Age ‘sun-wagon’ model found in Trundholm Mose, Sjælland.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.2.3 FRÓÐI

Another figure associated with ritual wagon processions is Frotho, in *Gesta Danorum*. Saxo described Frotho’s body being transported around Denmark after his death in hopes of ‘extending his life’, perhaps meaning that his beneficent influence on the land would be prolonged; close links with the other wagon rites are clearly apparent.<sup>101</sup> This description is similar to Snorri’s description of Freyr’s death. He asserted that Freyr’s closest followers buried him in a howe, but told the other Swedes that Freyr was still alive so that they kept bringing tribute to Freyr’s howe.

Þá helzk ár ok friðr ... Þá er allir Svíar vissu, at Freyr var dauðr en helzk ár ok friðr, þá trúðu þeir, at svá myndi vera, meðan Freyr væri á Svíþjóð, ok vildu eigi brenna hann ok kǫlluðu hann veraldargoð, blótuðu mest til árs ok friðar alla ævi síðan.<sup>102</sup>

As noted above (§3.2.2), Snorri described Freyr’s reign as coinciding with the *Fróða friðr*, though not until discussing Freyr’s son Fjǫlnir does Snorri mention Friðfróði himself, who *var at Hleiðru*.<sup>103</sup> The reign of Saxo’s Frotho III was likewise marked with peace and prosperity, and he is commonly identified with Friðfróði, while the similarity of Frotho III’s and Freyr’s deaths suggests some link between these figures; Fróði is often thought to have been a hypostasis of Freyr.

The figure—or figures—of Fróði may be more complex, however. Skaldic poetry attributed to the tenth-century seems to know a legendary Fróði,<sup>104</sup> referring to his *friðr* as well as a story explaining gold as *Fróða mjǫl* and a story associating Fróði with the giant

<sup>98</sup>Johannes Brøndsted, *Danmarks Oldtid*, 3 vols (Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1957-60), III (1960), 68-73.

<sup>99</sup>Ole Harck, ‘Zur Herkunft der nordischen Prachtwagen aus der jüngeren vorrömischen Eisenzeit’, *Acta Archaeologica*, 59 (1988), 91-III; Peter S. Wells, ‘Interactions’, pp. 153-56; Klaus Raddatz with Ulrich Schaefer, *Das Wagengrab der jüngeren vorrömischen Kaiserzeit von Husby, Kreis Flensburg*, Untersuchungen aus dem Schleswig-Holsteinischen Landesmuseum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Schleswig, dem Landesamt für Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Schleswig-Holstein in Schleswig und dem Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte an der Universität Kiel: Neue Folge, 20 (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1967).

<sup>100</sup>The elaborately carved Oseberg wagon may also have fulfilled some ritual function; Haakon Shetelig and Hjalmar Falk, *Scandinavian Archaeology*, trans. by E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 156-57 & Plate 25, 282-83 & Plate 47.

<sup>101</sup>*Gesta Danorum*, p. 143 (Book 6). See Axel Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning: en oldtidsstudie*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Gad, 1903-10), II: *Starkad den Gamle og den yngre skjoldungrække*, 239-49.

<sup>102</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 24-25.

<sup>103</sup>*Heimskringla*, I, 25.

<sup>104</sup>*Skjaldedigtning*, B.I, 33, 64, 120. See also Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn: Schroeder, 1921; repr. Hildesheim: Olm, 1984), p. 228. Fróði’s *friðr* is also mentioned in *HHbI*, p. 132 (v. 13). See further §4.2.2.

maidens known from *Grottasöngur*.<sup>105</sup> Somehow related may be *Beowulf*'s Froda, described as a leader of the Heaðobeardan and as Ingeld's father.<sup>106</sup> By the medieval period, genealogical traditions were becoming complex and heavily interwoven, perhaps explaining the four *Fróðar* each in *Langfeðgatal*,<sup>107</sup> and in Arngrímur Jónsson's epitome of *\*Skjöldunga saga*.<sup>108</sup> These *Fróðar* seem condensable to two main types: a 'peaceable Fróði' (i.e. Friðfróði, Fróði inn friðsami, Old Danish: Frothi hin frithgothæ) and a 'valiant Fróði' (i.e. Fróði inn frœkni).<sup>109</sup> Saxo, in *Gesta Danorum*, spread elements of Friðfróði across his *Frothones* I and III, while splitting Fróði inn frœkni between *Frothones* II and III.<sup>110</sup> P.A. Munch noted that one of Saxo's *Frothones*—Frotho IV—seems to have been borrowed from a Froda in Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, who in turn had been created through a mistranslation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's description of Constantinus as *se froda* in the *Battle of Brunanburh*;<sup>111</sup> a similar borrowing may have influenced the twelfth-century *Chronicon Roskildense*'s Frothi.<sup>112</sup> Niels Lukman argued that the ultimate source for Saxo's Frotho III was a Migration-Age Gothic leader called Fravitta, a Romanized Goth in charge of defence along the lower Danube in the late fourth century AD.<sup>113</sup> However, while Lukman made an interesting case for the possibility that

<sup>105</sup>*Grottasöngur*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 293-97.

<sup>106</sup>*Beowulf*, p. 76 (l. 2025b). See further §4.2.2 and §5.1.3.

<sup>107</sup>Friðfroðe, Froðe (no eke-name), Froðe friðsami, and Froðe frækni; *Langfeðgatal*, 58-59.

<sup>108</sup>Frode fridgode, two *Frodones* without eke-names, Frodo magnus vel celebris, and a further Frodo as his grandson; AJ, pp. 334-44; *DsAl*, pp. 5-23 (Chapters 3-11).

<sup>109</sup>These two separate *Fróðar* may stem from separate sources. Origins in both a mythical Fróði, linked to a Scandinavian Njörðr-Freyr-Yngvi cult, and in a historical king Froda of the Heaðobeardan were suggested by Erik Björkman, *Studien über die Eigennamen im Beowulf*, *Studien zur englischen Philologie*, 58 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1920), pp. 41-47. This view was accepted by Malone, *Widsith*, p. 164. Axel Olrik suggested that there had been two competing strands of Fróði-traditions in Scandinavia, one favoured in West Scandinavian traditions and another in Danish traditions, and that Saxo used both though mostly the latter. Both strands, Olrik asserted, must have stemmed from a single original figure in early Scandinavian legend; Axel Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. by Lee M. Hollander, rev. with Axel Olrik, *Scandinavian Monographs*, 4 (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1919), pp. 446-71. [This book represents a revised version of *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, 1, and therefore is referred to in this study. Certain sections of *Heroic Legends of Denmark* represent summaries of the Danish version, however, and any references to those sections point to both the English and Danish versions.]

<sup>110</sup>Davidson-Fisher, 11 (1980), 72, n. 1.

<sup>111</sup>ASC-Plummer, 1, p. 108; ASC-Thorppe, p. 204-05; *The Battle of Brunanburh*, in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 6 (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia, 1942), pp. 16-20 (p. 18, l. 37-40a); Henry, Archdeacon, of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway, *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 300, 313; P.A. Munch, 'Om den foregivne Kong Frode i Jylland paa Harald Blaatands Tid', in *Norsk Tidsskrift for Videnskab og Litteratur*, 5 (1851-52), 46-55. See also Niels Lukman 'Angelsaksiske krøniker', in *KLNM*, 1 (1956), col. 140-43; Anne K.G. Kristensen, *Danmarks ældste annalistik: Studier over lundensisk annalskrivning i 12. og 13. århundrede*, *Skrifter udgivet af Det Historiske institut ved Københavns universitet*, 3 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1969), p. 123 n. 14; Lars Hemmingsen, *By Word of Mouth: The Origins of Danish Legendary History*, *Studies in European Learned And Popular Traditions of Dacians and Danes before A.D. 1200* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Copenhagen, 1995), pp. 242-52.

<sup>112</sup>*Chronicon Roskildense: incerti auctoris historia Danorum, ab a. 826 ad a. 1140 (1157)*, in *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii ævi*, ed. by M.Cl. Gertz, *Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til Dansk historie*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Gad, 1917-22), 1 (1917), 14-33 (p. 17).

<sup>113</sup>Niels Lukman, *Frode Fredegod: Den gotiske Fravitta*, *Studier fra Sprog- og Oldtidsforskning*, 299 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 1981). Lukman also suggested that elements of Saxo's Frotho

Saxo drew on classical materials discussing Fravitta, seeing this figure as a general source for the legendary Scandinavian *Fróðar* remains problematic.

The medieval traditions are clearly confused, though to what extent is uncertain. Nevertheless, reference to Fróði's *fríðr* in Viking-Age skaldic poetry brands this motif as a relatively early legendary element. In the Middle Ages, Fróði's *fríðr* was commonly linked to the period surrounding the birth of Christ, an idea first suggested by an Icelandic chronological note of 1137 which hints that the idea may have originated with Sæmundr inn fróði.<sup>114</sup> The note certainly asserts that Sæmundr identified the reigns of Friðfróði and Fjölfnir as contemporaneous, a fact which itself may have depended on *Ynglingatal*'s description of Fjölfnir's death as having taken place *þars Fróði bjó*.<sup>115</sup> Ari Þorgilsson and Snorri may have relied on Sæmundr's authority as well as *Ynglingatal* for the association of Friðfróði and Fjölfnir.<sup>116</sup> Snorri does not quite follow Ari's Yngvi-Njörðr-Freyr-Fjölfnir genealogy, instead equating Yngvi and Freyr while describing Njörðr as Óðinn's son, but either way the source for Fjölfnir's descent from Freyr is unknown, as no other mythological source provides Freyr with a son. Fjölfnir is a name of uncertain etymology, but may be connected with ON *ffjöl-* ('many') and is most often used as an Óðinn-name.<sup>117</sup> As it seems Óðinn may have acquired a number of his many names from now forgotten deities (perhaps due to his aristocratic followers' interest in promoting their patron's power), it may be that Fjölfnir was once a fertility deity identical to, or who became identified with, Freyr. Moreover, despite considerable confusion over the origins of the *Fróðar*, Friðfróði's similarities with Freyr suggest that they too may be related, or became so. Freyr is dubbed *inn fróði* in *Skírnismál*.<sup>118</sup> The adjective *fróðr* came to have the sense 'wise' in Old Icelandic, but this meaning seems to have developed from an earlier meaning 'fruitful'.<sup>119</sup> If not actual names, Fjölfnir, Fróði, and Freyr all might have been titles which belonged to a fertility deity.

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III may have been inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur; N. Lukman, 'Saxos kendskab til Galfred af Monmouth', *Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift*, 10.6 (1944), 593-607 (pp. 605-07); N. Lukman, 'British and Danish Traditions: Some Contacts and Relations', *Classica et mediaevalia*, 6 (1944), 72-109, (pp. 99-108). See §4.2.2.

<sup>114</sup>Stefán Karlsson, 'Fróðleiksgreinar frá tölfu öld', *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar*, 30. júní 1969, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson and others (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1969), pp. 328-49 (332-36, 341-47). See §5.3.1.

<sup>115</sup>*Ynglingatal*, p. 7 (v. 1).

<sup>116</sup>*Íslendingabók*, p. 27. Unless *Ynglingatal* really is twelfth-century rather than tenth-century, but even in that case it would seem that Friðfróði and Fjölfnir were linked at least as early as Sæmundr's time.

<sup>117</sup>*Grímnismál*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 56-68 (p. 67; v. 47); *Reginismál*, in Neckel-Kuhn, pp. 173-79 (p. 178; v. 18); *Snorra Edda*, pp. 10, 28; *SnEdHafn*, 1, 38, 86, 340. *Fjölfnir* is commonly used as an Óðinn-name in skaldic poetry.

<sup>118</sup>*Skírnismál*, p. 69 (v. 2). *Skírnismál*'s age is unclear, and dates from the tenth to twelfth centuries have been reasonably proposed.

<sup>119</sup>There are several apparently related Swedish dialect words such as *froda* ('to fatten'), *frode* ('fat'), and *frodlem* ('genitalia'); *Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon*, p. 210 (*sv* 'fróð(u)r').

## 3.2.4 'SLEIT FRÓÐA FRİÐ FIÁNDA Á MILLI'

David Dumville has noted that it is not uncommon for a 'whole epoch [to be telescoped] into one generation or into the reign of a single ruler. This last process may also occur with reference to the period of the foundations of a dynasty or a nation: the first, or the greatest, of the founding rulers may come to stand for the whole founding era.'<sup>120</sup> This tendency opens a question of whether the legendary *Fróða friðr* could have any kind of historical kernel. The chief problem with such a view is that—barring the possibility that southern Scandinavia was dominated by a stable kingdom in the LGIA—there seems no period of southern Scandinavian history during the first millennium which deserves the label 'peaceful'; even the undoubtedly wealthy EGIA was marked by endemic warfare, as the war-booty deposits demonstrate. Leaving aside Lukman's suggestion that Fróði's *friðr* reflected the rule of Fravitta in Gothic south-eastern Europe, it would seem that the *Fróða friðr* could be wholly fantastical. Yet this is an unsatisfactory conclusion, as legendary elements seldom exist without some reason, even if the reason often eludes us.

One possible explanation of Fróði's *friðr* would be that it combines memories of a period of prosperity with a tradition of prohibiting weapons at some cult-centres. Such customs were, according to Tacitus, practised by the Nerthus cult: 'non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne ferrum; pax et quies tunc tantum nota'.<sup>121</sup> Similar customs were known at the Icelandic Alþingi where weapons were banned from the law-court, and peace-breaking of any kind was likewise forbidden. These regulations seem to have been explicitly set forth at the Alþingi's opening, perhaps forming part of the cultic *alþingishelgun*.<sup>122</sup> For this reason the Alþingi's final day on which arms restrictions ceased to operate was termed *vápnatak*.<sup>123</sup> Such *þingskõp* were clearly not universal, however, since Tacitus referred to the clashing of weapons to indicate approval at *consilia*, and Snorri reported the same practice at the Uppsalaþing.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps assembly arms control customs originally had been associated with certain cults, such as Nerthus's, which were retained by the Icelandic Alþingi while the rise of a military aristocracy in mainland Scandinavia led to their abandonment at Uppsala. It may be noted that as unrest in medieval Iceland grew and the Alþingi lost power, the rules prohibiting weapons in the law-court were increasingly flouted. If elite power-struggles brought sufficient unrest to southern

<sup>120</sup>David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. by P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1977), pp. 72-158 (p. 87); see also D.P. Henige, 'Oral Tradition and Chronology', *Journal of African History*, 12 (1971), 371-89 (p. 375).

<sup>121</sup>*Germania*, p. 27 (Chapter 40). Compare also Anderson's suggestion that Tacitus' description of the Suiones' arms control measures reflect those of a cult-assembly; *Germania*, p. 30 (Chapter 44); *Germania-Anderson*, pp. 204-07. See §1.5.3.

<sup>122</sup>Weapons (and drinking) are banned from the Alþingi in a sixteenth-century formula for opening the Alþingi; 'Lögsumannatal og lögmanna á Íslandi: með skýringargreinum og fylgiskjölum', ed. by Jón Sigurðsson, in *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmenta að fornu og nýju*, 6 vols (Copenhagen: Møller, 1856-1939), II (1886), 1-250 (pp. 184-86).

<sup>123</sup>However, *vápnatak* could also mean 'the expression of consent by brandishing weapons' (and, thus, 'to pass a resolution at a þing'); Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 685 (*sv* 'vápnatak').

<sup>124</sup>*Heimskringla*, II, 117; *Germania*, p. 10 (Chapter II); Green, *Language*, pp. 37-42. See §1.3.2.

Scandinavia in the LGIA, with concomitant economic decline and the collapse of cult-centres and assemblies, this period might have been recalled in later legends as the breaking of Fróði's peace.

The suggestion that southern Scandinavia was torn apart by internal strife during the LGIA is unlikely to find much favour among those arguing that the Danish state grew continually and smoothly from the RIA into historic times. Yet the very strife postulated in this study for the LGIA may have played a key role in the creation of the medieval Danish kingdom. It would have represented an intense phase of élite competition which, as was broadly the case in medieval Iceland and Anglo-Saxon England, led to the accumulation of power in the hands of progressively fewer individuals who exercised influence over progressively larger social and territorial blocks. This culmination of the process might be seen in the late Viking Age when most of the region which would make up medieval Denmark was brought together under one king, perhaps under Haraldr blátǫnn, or later under Knútr inn ríki. The centuries leading up to such a point are unlikely to have progressed smoothly. There were probably periods of relative stability when a particularly skilled individual acquired considerable control, and also periods of relative chaos when several factions struggled for dominance; this is very much the picture of southern Scandinavia in the early historical period.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.3 NORTH SEA RELIGION, TRADE, & POLITICS

#### 3.3.1 POLITICAL MISSIONS

In the course of the sixth century, Byzantine Christian missionary activity became an important diplomatic tool for the Byzantine state. Successfully implanting Christianity within previously pagan (or heretical) neighbouring groups—such as the Slavs and Bulgars—brought these peoples into the Byzantine cultural sphere and could transform them from potential enemies to allied subject populations.<sup>126</sup> A similar technique was soon in use in Western Europe, where Pope Gregory I sent the first major mission to the Anglo-Saxons in 596. Gregory had spent some years in Byzantium, where he may have learned something about evangelization's political value, and perhaps he even intended the English mission to bolster Rome's standing against the Byzantine Church.<sup>127</sup> Gaul had a long history of missionary activity in one form or another, but the first 'political missions' seem to have been the work of Amandus in the early seventh century. Amandus enjoyed Dagobert I's royal support, and even became godfather to the Merovingian king's

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<sup>125</sup>Maund, "Turmoil", 29-47 (pp. 46-47).

<sup>126</sup>Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371-386 AD* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 332-68; Collins, *Europe*, pp. 2 19-24.

<sup>127</sup>Collins, *Europe*, pp. 219-20, 234; *HE*, pp. 42-47 (Book 1 Chapters 23-24); Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Continental Influence at Bath Monastery in the Seventh Century', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 4 (1975), 1-10.

(illegitimate) son Sigebert, emphasising the pragmatism of Amandus's politics. In return, Amandus seems to have undertaken evangelising missions to areas in which the Franks hoped to gain or consolidate power: among the inhabitants of the Scheldt valley, the Slavs, and the Basques.<sup>128</sup> Towards the end of the seventh century, Insular missionaries found the Continent a profitable mission-field. In the 690s Willibrord won approval from the Pope and the Frankish *maior domus* Pippin II alike for his efforts to convert the Frisians. The Frisians, however, were largely unreceptive, perhaps because they had already become familiar with Frankish efforts to subdue them by military means.<sup>129</sup>

### 3.3.2 FRANKS & FRISIANS

Pippin had good reason for wishing to bring the Frisians under a Frankish yoke. Frisia's *terp*-region (centred between the Rhine and Weser deltas) grew in importance from the late sixth and early seventh centuries, as the appearance of large quantities of Frankish pottery, imported gold, and other prestige goods from that period reveals. These goods may have been the result of alliances with the Franks, perhaps reflected historically in such Franco-Frisian efforts as the defeat of Ch(l)ochilaicus's early-sixth-century raid. Success, however, seems to have brought an expansion of Frisian power into Frankish territory.<sup>130</sup> Around 650, the Frankish-held strong-points of Dorestad (which included a mint) and Utrecht in the Rhine delta came into Frisian hands. Dorestad must have been able to generate considerable revenues for whoever controlled it, and Pippin II managed to regain that control before c. 695.<sup>131</sup> The Frisians continued to menace Frankish holdings, however. They may have recovered Dorestad by 716 when Radbod, the Frisian king who had rebuffed Willibrord's attentions, took a Frisian fleet up the Rhine to threaten Cologne, causing considerable mayhem.<sup>132</sup> Charles Martel mounted a major, and apparently

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<sup>128</sup>Fletcher, pp. 147-54; Collins, *Europe*, pp. 234-38.

<sup>129</sup>Fletcher, pp. 197-201.

<sup>130</sup>Anthonie Heidinga, 'The Frisian Achievement in the First Millenium AD', in *MoK*, pp. 11-16; Danny Gerrets, 'Evidence of Political Centralization in Westergo: The Excavations at Wijnaldum in a (supra-) Regional Perspective', in *MoK*, pp. 119-26.

<sup>131</sup>*Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, in *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica. Vitae sanctorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH: SRM, 2 (Hannover, Hahn, 1888), pp. 168-93 (p. 172, Chapter 6); *Annales Mettenses priores*, ed. by B. de Simson, MGH: SRG in usum scholarum separatim editi, 10 (Hannover; Leipzig: Hahn, 1905), pp. 13, 17 (*sa* 691, 692, 697). On Franco-Frisian relations in this period see further Gerrets, p. 119; Wood, *Merovingian*, pp. 293-310; Reuter, *Germany*, p. 69; Haywood, pp. 87-89. Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade, A.D. 400-1000*, New approaches in archaeology, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1989), p. 39.

<sup>132</sup>*Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, pp. 173-74 (Chapter 9); *Annales Petaviani*, in *Scriptores rerum Sangallensium: Annales, chronica et historiae aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Heinricus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1826), pp. 7-18 (p. 7, *sa* 716); *Annales Mosellani*, ed. by J.M. Lappenberg, in *Annales aevi Suevici*, ed. by Georgicus Heinricus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 16 (Hannover: Hahn, 1859), pp. 494-99 (p. 494, *sa* 716).

successful, expedition against the Frisians c. 734.<sup>133</sup> Yet it was clearly difficult to exert much authority over the Frisians' marshy coastal territories; there is mention of a Frisian *rex* in the 740s.<sup>134</sup> Frisian economic activities continued to grow in scope and power under the Frankish kings, and it was largely under a Frankish eye that Dorestad grew into a north-western European trading centre of great importance in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>135</sup> Resistance to Christianity remained strong through the eighth century, however, and some Frisians fought as Saxon allies against Charlemagne.

The Christian missions' political role must have placed a sharply ideological cast on the Franco-Frisian struggles. Perhaps it is also no coincidence that Frisian metalwork styles show their strongest affinities with the English and Scandinavian spheres.<sup>136</sup> It is almost certainly wrong to see a hostility towards Christianity *per se* among the Frisians, Saxons, and other non-Christian peoples in the early medieval Germanic world. The Christian God was probably as acceptable as any other, and the example of the East Anglian king Reduald, who worshipped Christ alongside more familiar gods, fits within an expected pattern—it was beneficial to secure the favour of a new and efficacious deity.<sup>137</sup> Radbod granted Willibrord permission to preach, and his rejection of baptism was probably strongly influenced by his awareness that accepting Christianity was tantamount to accepting Frankish domination, the engaging tale of his concern to spend eternity with his heathen ancestors notwithstanding.<sup>138</sup> Ideological concerns also may have influenced the fate of the 'two Heuualds', English monks on a mission to the Old Saxons who ran afoul of a growing gulf between the Saxon nobility and commons. According to Bede, the commoners feared the local satrap might be converted by the Heuualds, thereby forcing Christianity on them, too. Accordingly, they slew the missionaries. The angered satrap had the commoners killed and their village burned. The Saxons in this period seem to have been encroaching on the Franks even more strongly than the Frisians. Pippin II was swift to capitalise on the propaganda value of the Heuualds' martyrdom, having their bodies buried in Cologne with considerable pomp and circumstance,<sup>139</sup> though a strong military response was wanting until (as with the Frisians) the time of Charles Martel, who initiated

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<sup>133</sup>*Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, p. 176 (Chapter 17); *Annales S. Amandi*, in *Annales et chronica aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Heinrichus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1826), pp. 6-14 (p. 8, *sa* 733); *Annales Mettenses*, pp. 27-28 (*sa* 734, 736).

<sup>134</sup>*Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, p. 181 (Chapter 30).

<sup>135</sup>Detlev Ellmers, 'The Frisian Monopoly of Coastal Transport in the 6th-8th Centuries AD', in *MCFS*, pp. 91-97.

<sup>136</sup>Gerrets, p. 125.

<sup>137</sup>*HE*, pp. 116 (Book 2, Chapter 15).

<sup>138</sup>*Vita Vulframni episcopi senonici*, in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, ed. by B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH: SRM, 3-7, 5 vols (Hannover: Hahn, 1888-1920), v (1910), pp. 657-73 (pp. 668, Chapter 9). Which is not to say Radbod's alleged concern over post-baptismal relations with his ancestors need not have represented genuine heathen attitudes. Similar concerns were encountered during efforts to convert the Sámi; Håkan Rydving, *The End of Drum-Time: Religious Change among the Lule Saami, 1670s-1740s*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia religionum; 12 (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), p. 86.

<sup>139</sup>*HE*, pp. 298-303 (Book 5, Chapters 10-11).

offensives against the Saxons in 718.<sup>140</sup> The English missionary Boniface's efforts began in earnest the following year, and the evangelization of the Saxons would occupy a central place on his agenda.<sup>141</sup>

### 3.3.3 FRANKS & SAXONS

The Saxons' origins are obscure, but they seem to have been one of the confederations which formed in the early second century AD and expanded steadily from (probably) Schleswig-Holstein east to the Elbe valley and south towards the Rhine, absorbing various other groups through peace or war.<sup>142</sup> Early on, Saxons were frequently found operating in conjunction with other piratical groups, including the Franks.<sup>143</sup> Some Saxons appear to have settled in Gaul while others, of course, settled in Britain. In the sixth century, the Saxons appear to have been loosely subject to a Frankish hegemony. In the early seventh century, the Saxons are said to have yielded an annual tribute of five hundred cattle to the Franks until these payments were remitted by Dagobert I. The Franks were beset with political and military difficulties in the latter part of the seventh century, perhaps cueing renewed Saxon expansion. By the early eighth century, the Saxons had pushed their frontiers into the Lippe valley. It would not be surprising if the Saxons exerted similar pressures on their Frisian, Slavic, and Scandinavian neighbours, though Frankish chroniclers mentioned none. Groups of Frisians and Wends sometimes joined the Saxons against the Franks, and the Danes provided refuge for the Saxon resistance leaders during the wars with Charlemagne.<sup>144</sup> If there was one power about which any of these groups worried, it was the Franks.

In 718, Charles Martel began a series of campaigns against the Saxons, the last of which took place in 738. Charles's sons Carloman and Pippin III continued the program after their father's death in 741, despite being distracted by problems elsewhere.<sup>145</sup> A campaign in 747 forced the Saxons to recommence the annual tribute of five hundred

<sup>140</sup>*Annales S. Amandi*, p. 6 (sa 718); *Annales Petaviani*, p. 7 (sa 718); *Annales Tiliari*, in *Annales et chronica aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Heinricus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1826), pp. 6-8 (sa 718); *Annales Laureshamenses*, in *Annales et chronica aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Heinricus Pertz, MGH: Scriptores (in folio), 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1826), pp. 22-39 (p. 24, sa 718).

<sup>141</sup>Fletcher, pp. 204-13.

<sup>142</sup>Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, p. 550; Chadwick, *Origins*, pp. 87-97; Martin Lintzel, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des sächsischen Stammes', *Sachsen und Anhalt*, 3 (1927), 1-46 (pp. 4-8, 16). Martin Lintzel produced a large quantity of work specifically on the Old Saxons and much (including the cited article) is conveniently collected in Martin Lintzel, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 2 vols (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), II, *Zur altsächsischen Stammesgeschichte*.

<sup>143</sup>Ian Wood, 'The Channel from the 4th to the 7th Centuries AD', in *MCFS*, pp. 93-97; M.O.H. Carver, 'Pre-Viking Traffic in the North Sea', in *MCFS*, pp. 117-25.

<sup>144</sup>Roger Collins, *Charlemagne* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), pp. 43-47; Reuter, *Germany*, pp. 65; Haywood, p. 89.

<sup>145</sup>*Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, pp. 177, 180-83 (Chapters 19, 27, 31, 35); *(R)RFA*, pp. 4-9, 16-17 (sa 743, 744, 747, 748, 758). On the early Saxon campaigns see Collins, *Charlemagne*, pp. 45-47; Wood, *Merovingian*, pp. 285-92, 304-21; Reuter, *Germany*, p. 65.

cattle, a figure apparently increased in 753. A further campaign in 758 exacted a tribute of three hundred horses. An ideological element to these conflicts may be revealed by indications in letters from Gregory and Boniface that missionary work was intended to accompany Charles Martel's 738 campaign and by the baptism of defeated Saxons following the 744 and 747 campaigns.<sup>146</sup>

The renewal of campaigns against the Saxons under Charlemagne in 772 ushered in a bloodier phase of conflict.<sup>147</sup> Roger Collins has noted that whereas chroniclers described most of the earlier Saxon campaigns as punitive expeditions to quell Saxon rebelliousness, the 772 campaign was not so marked, perhaps implying the Franks were on the offensive.<sup>148</sup> That could have been so, but it seems likely that the Franks and Saxons, both expanding societies, seldom needed excuses to attack each other.<sup>149</sup> A more significant fact may be revealed in the sources' emphasis on the campaign's target: a Saxon frontier stronghold at Eresburg in the Diemel valley containing the Irminsul shrine. This, Charlemagne destroyed and despoiled of its gold and silver treasures. It may be no accident that in retaliation the Saxons targeted a Frankish church, Boniface's foundation at Fritzlar.<sup>150</sup>

To a certain extent, Christian churches formed an obvious target for the Saxons simply because they offered sources of valuable loot; if Saxon shrines were similarly endowed, as we are told Irminsul was, they would have made equally practical targets for the Franks. It is, in any event, clear that the Christian Franks were more than happy to raid each other's churches in the course of their internal disputes.<sup>151</sup> Yet specifically targeting centres of religious ideology does not seem to have been previously an important feature of Franco-Saxon conflict, underscoring the weight the chronicles placed on it in the early 770s.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, Irminsul's position represents the known high-water mark of Saxon expansion against the Franks. It seems unlikely that Irminsul had been a Saxon shrine for long, and its frontier position suggests it may have functioned as a symbol of Saxon power and as an ideological rallying point against the Franks. Likewise, Christian centres must have been recognised by the Saxons as bases for the missionary work which served as an ideological weapon against them. It would almost certainly be wrong to identify religious differences as the cause of Franco-Saxon conflict. Yet religion seems to tap deep wells of human emotion and moreover provides ready-made ideological symbolism. It comes as

<sup>146</sup>Collins, *Charlemagne*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>147</sup>On Charlemagne's Saxon Wars, see Collins, *Charlemagne*, pp. 47-57; Reuter, *Germany*, p. 65-69; Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: 751-987* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 61-63.

<sup>148</sup>Collins, *Charlemagne*, p. 47; *(R)RFA*, pp. 32-35 (sa 772).

<sup>149</sup>Reuter, *Germany*, p. 65; Einhard, *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. by G.H Pertz, G. Waitz, and O. Holder-Egger, MGH: SRG in usum scholarum separatim editi, 25, 6th edn (Hannover: Hahn, 1911), pp. 9-10 (Chapter 7).

<sup>150</sup>*(R)RFA*, pp. 32-38 (sa 772, 773).

<sup>151</sup>Timothy Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society: Fifth Series*, 35 (1985), 75-94.

<sup>152</sup>Collins, *Charlemagne*, p. 48.

little surprise to find the border disputes of these two expanding societies transformed into religious war.

Charlemagne made the conflict's ideological character explicit in 775, when we are told he 'consilium iniit, ut perfidam ac foedifragam Saxonum gentem bello adgrederetur et eo usque perseveraret, dum aut victi christianae religioni subicerentur aut omnino tollerentur'.<sup>153</sup> One might speculate as to whether this change owed something to the concept of *jihād* espoused by the Franks' Islamic foes. The new crusading emphasis seems revealed in the intensification of military efforts against the Saxons from 776, in which year the Saxons 'sponderunt se esse christianos et sub ditione domni Caroli regis et Francorum subdiderunt', making explicit the connection between political and religious submission.<sup>154</sup> Widukind, the Saxon resistance leader, was first mentioned in 777 when he went *ad Sigifridum Danorum regem*, taking refuge in *partibus Nordmanniae*.<sup>155</sup> This information also marks, effectively, Scandinavia's entrance into a historically illuminated period, dim though that illumination remains for some time to come. That Scandinavians had become involved in the Saxon Wars is not without significance.

### 3.3.4 SCANDINAVIANS IN THE PRE-VIKING NORTH SEA WORLD

It is sometimes suggested that the Frankish conquest of the Frisians—who are characterised *gentem dirissimam maritimam* in the continuation of Fredegar—ended Frisian naval domination of the North Sea, leaving it open to Scandinavians and thus helping usher in the Viking Age.<sup>156</sup> While this is possible, John Haywood has noted that, however important the Frisians may have been to North Sea trade, there is little evidence that they constituted much of a naval power. Apart from Radbod's riverine attack on Cologne, firmer indications of Frisian naval prowess date only from the late ninth century.<sup>157</sup>

It is difficult to gauge how active the Scandinavians were in the North Sea world's politics before the end of the eighth century. The testimony of the *Freswæl*-narrative, in the 'Finnsburuh Episode' of *Beowulf* (ll. 1068-1159) and the apparently self-contained *Finnsburuh Fragment*, describes a conflict erupting between Danish and Frisian nobles

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<sup>153</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 40 (sa 775); Scholz, p. 51

<sup>154</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 46 (sa 776).

<sup>155</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 49 (sa 777).

<sup>156</sup>*Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, pp. 176 (Chapter 17); J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West*, 4th edn with revised bibliography (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 152; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Vikings in Francia*, The Stenton Lecture, 1974 (Reading: Univeristy of Reading, 1975), pp. 16-17; F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford History of England, 3rd edn, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 240; Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, trans. by Howard B. Clarke, World Economic History (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), p. 113; Chadwick, *Origins*, p. 88 n. 2.

<sup>157</sup>Haywood, pp. 89-90.

related by marriage.<sup>158</sup> The Danish leader, Hnæf, is described in the *Beowulf* manuscript as *hæled healf dena hnæf scyldinga* (l. 1069). Without emendation, this line appears to mean ‘hero of the Half-Danes, Hnæf of the Scyldingas’, discussing a figure, *Hnæf*, who is connected with both the Scylding dynasty and a group known as the Half-Danes. J.R.R. Tolkien vacillated over whether to accept this reading or whether to emend the passage to *healf dene*, viewing it as an eke-name for the hero Hnæf.<sup>159</sup> Either rendition could mean that, as Tolkien thought, Hnæf belonged to a branch of the Danish nobility which had established itself in Jutland at the expense of the native Jutes.<sup>160</sup> Tolkien identified Hnæf’s lieutenant, Hengest, with the Hengest known from Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as one of the early Germanic leaders in Britain.<sup>161</sup> Bede characterised Kent’s settlers as Jutes, and Tolkien accordingly identified Hengest as a Jute, believing his presence with Hnæf in Frisia caused him to be seen as a ‘collaborator’ by other Jutes driven to Frisia by the Danes.<sup>162</sup> Tolkien’s editor, Alan Bliss, offered a different explanation, identifying Hengest as an Angle, but similarly locating the character’s motives in tribal politics. He pointed to *Gesta Danorum*’s description of ‘Danish’ kings exterminating the Jutish royal line and suggested the ‘Danish’ kings were probably Angles whom Saxo had relabelled ‘Danes’.<sup>163</sup>

Both Tolkien’s and Bliss’s interpretations may place too much faith in historical legend’s accuracy (and consistency). None of the events connected with the *Freswæl* are corroborated elsewhere, and it may be that *Beowulf*’s more detailed account derives from an imaginative interpretation of some version of the *Finnsburuh Fragment*’s original narrative.<sup>164</sup> In the *Finnsburuh Fragment*, the name *Finn* appears only in the compound *Finnsburuh*,<sup>165</sup> and one wonders if Finn’s identity in *Beowulf*’s ‘Episode’ was derived from something like *Widsið*’s Frisian king, Fin Folcwalding.<sup>166</sup> No ethnic groups are mentioned in the *Fragment* (barring *Sigeferþ*, *Secgena leod*), not even Frisians. Danes, Half-Danes, and Scyldingas are likewise absent from the *Fragment*. Much of Tolkien’s and Bliss’s reconstructions depend on information found solely in *Beowulf*, a complex creation of

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<sup>158</sup>*Beowulf*, pp. 40-44; *Finnsburuh Fragment*, pp. 245-49; George Hickes, *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-criticus et Archaeologicus*, 2 vols (Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre, 1703-05; repr. Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), 1.1: *Institutiones Grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-Gothicae*, pp. 192-93. Various ‘normalised’ names have been given to the fragment, but this study essentially reproduces the form in Hickes’s transcription: Finnþbupuh.

<sup>159</sup>J.R.R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest: the Fragment and the Episode*, ed. by Alan Bliss (London: Allan & Unwin, 1982), pp. 37-45, 94. A verse in *Grottasongr* contains a possible reference to ‘Half-Danes’: *mun Yrso sonr við Hálfðana hefna Fróða*; *Grottasongr*, p. 300 (v 22). I am, however, grateful for Clive Tolley’s commentary on problems with this verse, drawn from his work on forthcoming volumes of *The Poetic Edda* with Ursula Dronke, which suggests the verse may be a late interpolation.

<sup>160</sup>Tolkien’s suggestion that the poem’s *eotena* (genitive plural) are ‘Jutes’ rather than ‘giants’ seems reasonable; Tolkien, *Finn*, p. 37.

<sup>161</sup>ASC-Plummer, p. 12-15; ASC-Thorpe, p. 18-23; *HE*, pp. 30-32 (Book 1, Chapter 15).

<sup>162</sup>Tolkien, *Finn*, pp. 159-62.

<sup>163</sup>Tolkien, *Finn*, pp. 168-80; *Gesta Danorum*, pp. 76-92.

<sup>164</sup>The *Finnsburuh Fragment* is known only from Hicke’s transcription and consequently is almost impossible to date.

<sup>165</sup>*Finnsburuh Fragment*, p. 246 (l. 36a).

<sup>166</sup>*Widsið*, p. 150 (l. 27a).

exceedingly doubtful historicity. Moreover, Bliss's 'Anglian' kings in *Gesta Danorum* derive this ethnicity from the identification of their names (Vigletus, Vermundus, Uffo) with those of Wihtlæg, Wærmund, and Offa who stand at the head of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's Mercian genealogy.<sup>167</sup> However, Saxo's information about these kings could itself be entirely of English origin,<sup>168</sup> making any historical interpretation based on them highly speculative. Tolkien and Bliss both used Hengest's appearance to date the *Freswæl* to the fifth century, but given Germanic legendary figures' propensity for appearing in chronologically inappropriate places, even this must remain suspect.

The kind of events described in the *Freswæl*-narrative, as Tolkien and Bliss understood it, might well have been typical for the fifth-century North Sea world, though Frisia seems to have been poor and depopulated then, remaining so up until the late sixth century.<sup>169</sup> Frisia may have offered Ch(l)ochilaicus's early-sixth-century raid little in the way of loot. Perhaps its real target was Frankish and farther up the Rhine: Nijmegen or, as with Radbod in 716, Cologne. Smaller-scale Scandinavian raids during this period may have been endemic, as Haywood suggested,<sup>170</sup> but we know nothing of them and cannot assess their natures or motives. John Hines has convincingly argued that Scandinavia was in contact with Britain and the remainder of the North Sea world at this time,<sup>171</sup> and it is clear that Scandinavians remained aware of Frankish trends throughout the LGIA (§3.1.5). Nevertheless, it is possible that Scandinavian political activity did not follow their wider ranging mercantile interests and was directed largely towards internal affairs. If there was a powerful, stable kingdom in southern Scandinavia we know nothing about its politics—except that various Frankish kings claimed hegemony over tribes in that region.<sup>172</sup>

### 3.4 THE EARLY VIKING AGE

#### 3.4.1 RE-EMERGENCE OF THE SOUTHERN SCANDINAVIAN ÉLITE?

The first known foreign mission to Scandinavia was Willibrord's Frankish-supported effort to evangelise the *ferocissimos Danorum populos* through their *rex*, Ongendus.<sup>173</sup> Perhaps the number of chieftains vying for power had become sufficiently small that southern

<sup>167</sup>ASC-Plummer, I, 50 (*sa* 757); ASC-Thorpe, pp. 86-87 (*sa* 755).

<sup>168</sup>Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Fra sagn til historie og tilbage igen', in *Middelalder, metode og medier: Festskrift til Niels Skyum Nielsen på 60-årsdagen den 17. oktober 1981*, ed. by Karsten Fledelius, Niels Lund, and Herluf Nielsen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 1981), pp. 297-319; Hemmingsen, pp. 147-73.

<sup>169</sup>Heidinga, p. 12.

<sup>170</sup>Haywood, p. 84.

<sup>171</sup>Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Boats and ships of the Angles and Jutes', in *MCFs*, pp. 98-116; Hines, *Scandinavian*, pp. 270-301.

<sup>172</sup>*Epistolae Austrasicae*, pp. 132-33 (Letter 20); Venantius Fortunatus, *Ad Chilpericum*, p. 203 (ll. 73-76).

<sup>173</sup>That *populos* is plural suggests a multiplicity of 'Danish' groups. Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, p. 60 (Chapter 9); Fletcher, p. 201.

Scandinavia was stabilising—meaning that a sufficiently small number of competitors were left in the power-struggle—and only at this point was such a mission worthwhile. Ongendus is said to have welcomed Willibrord, as had Radbod. Also like Radbod, Ongendus declined to convert, perhaps for similar reasons. Nothing further is heard of Scandinavians in written sources until the Saxon Wars, but the archaeological record indicates there was much afoot in Scandinavia at the time of Willibrord's visit

Towards the end of the seventh century a number of sites in Jutland and on the Danish islands, though yielding little in the way of rich treasures, offer indications of power-consolidation among the élite.<sup>174</sup> The Danevirke's earliest phases, low banks fronted by shallow ditches, may belong to the mid-seventh century while a more robust palisade was added in 737.<sup>175</sup> At roughly the same time, a large maritime defensive work seems to have been built in the Schlei fjord.<sup>176</sup> The almost kilometre-long Kanhave Canal cutting across Samsø dates to 726, and it may have been intended to facilitate military navigation.<sup>177</sup> A series of navigation barriers at Gudsø Vig range in date from c. 690 to c. 780.<sup>178</sup> Doubtless, this period of construction was partly inspired by internal conflicts, but it also seems no accident that it dates from the time of Charles Martel's campaigns against the Frisians and Saxons from 718 to 734.<sup>179</sup> The southern Scandinavians may well have been protecting themselves against the Frisians and Saxons, as well as from each other, but demonstrations of Frankish power must have caused considerable alarm.

Perhaps less military in nature, the market-place at Ribe in western Jutland (not far from an earlier centre at Dankirke) appears to have been deliberately planned and founded in the first decade of the eighth century.<sup>180</sup> Somewhat earlier, and on Sjælland, is the mid-seventh-century burial mound of Grydehøj which, though apparently robbed long ago, is the only LGIA 'princely' burial yet discovered in Denmark. It has yielded traces of a rich

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<sup>174</sup>I am grateful to Morten Axboe for bringing to my attention the references accompanying his recently-published summary of these issues in Axboe, 'Towards', pp. 115-16. See also Axboe, 'Danish', pp. 221-22.

<sup>175</sup>H.H. Andersen, 'Nye Danevirke-undersøgelser', *Sønderjysk Månedsskrift*, II (1993), 307-12.

<sup>176</sup>Anne Nørgård Jørgensen, 'Sea defence in Denmark AD 200-1300', *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1-1300: Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 2-4 May 1996*, ed. by Anne Nørgård Jørgensen and Birthe L. Clausen, The National Museum Studies in Archaeology and History, Copenhagen: Publications, 2 (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, Department of Archaeology and Early History, 1997), pp. 200-09 (p. 207); W. Kramer, 'Ein Seesperrwerk des 8. Jahrhunderts in der Schlei', *Archäologie in Deutschland*, 3 (1994), 20-21.

<sup>177</sup>Nørgård Jørgensen, p. 207; Axboe, 'Danish', pp. 222, 239-41; O. Olsen, 'Royal Power in Viking Age Denmark', in *Beretning fra syvende tvaerfaglige vikingsymposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Hans Frede Nielsen, *Beretning fra Det Tvaerfaglige Vikingsymposium*, 7 (Højbjerg: Hikuin, Afdeling for middelalder-arkæologi ved Aarhus universitet, 1989), pp. 7-20.

<sup>178</sup>Axboe, 'Towards', p. 116; Nørgård Jørgensen, p. 207; Flemming Rieck, 'Aspects of Coastal Defence in Denmark', in *AoMS*, pp. 83-96 (pp. 93-96).

<sup>179</sup>There seems to have been another Saxon campaign in 738; *Chronicarum Fredegarii continuationes*, pp. 174-77 (Chapters II, 17, 19); *Annales Mettenses*, pp. 26-28, 30 (sa 718, 719, 734, 736, 738); Collins, *Charlemagne*, p. 45; Haywood, p. 88-89.

<sup>180</sup>Steen Wulff Andersen, 'Lejre—skibssætninger, vikingegrave, Grydehøj', *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed och Historie* (1993), 7-142 (p. 113); Stig Jensen, 'Dankirke-Ribe: Fra handelsgård til handelsplads', in *FStS*, II, 73-88.

cremation burial.<sup>181</sup> Most impressive is the recently excavated complex at nearby Lejre, with a series of halls dating from c. 700 into the late tenth century. The largest measures 48.5 metres long and 11.5 metres wide at its widest point—slightly larger than Gudme’s EGIA hall.<sup>182</sup>

Lejre is traditionally identified as the seat of the legendary Skjöldung-Scylding dynasty, and the speculations about *Beowulf*’s Heorot and Hrólfr kraki’s hall—in England and Scandinavia, respectively—which resulted from these finds were entirely predictable.<sup>183</sup> The fact that the Lejre-complex’s seventh and eighth century dates conflict violently with the imaginatively reconstructed dates for figures belonging to the Skjöldung legends is often overlooked; had Hroþulf/Hrólfr kraki been the contemporary of Hygelac/Ch(l)ochilaicus, he would have been nearly two hundred years old when the Lejre hall was first built. The overall picture drawn by the Scandinavian legends whose historical horizons are commonly assigned to the LGIA—including those of Haraldr hilditǫnn and Ívarr víðfaðmi—is one of considerable warfare among the élite, a picture not in any way at odds with the model suggested in this study. Even so, the legends may represent very poor historical sources, and considerable further study and evaluation are called for.<sup>184</sup>

Speaking of ninth-century Danish history, Maund has noted:

There are periods for which we cannot identify any leaders at all, and others in which it is very uncertain how influence was distributed between multiple rulers ... One thing is clear: it is almost always the case that political power was held by more than one man at a time and, even when we know the name of only one leader, it is dangerous in the extreme to allow ourselves to think in terms of monarchy.<sup>185</sup>

It seems unlikely that the situation had been much different a century earlier. There may have been ‘Danes’ who called themselves ‘kings’, but we are probably still unjustified in speaking of ‘the kingdom of Denmark’; it is not clear that a political entity which included both Jutland and the Danish islands existed until the late tenth century. Given the difficulty of being sure what ‘Dane’ meant in the GIA—if indeed it did not have more than one meaning—it is probably best to shy away from discussing a ‘Danish kingdom’, too. Nevertheless, the southern Scandinavian kings encountered in Charlemagne’s time were clearly strong enough that they felt capable of treating with the Frankish king, even while harbouring Saxon resistance leaders. Scandinavian leaders cannot have failed to recognise that they had a vested interest in the survival of an independent Saxon region between

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<sup>181</sup>S.W. Andersen, ‘Lejre’, pp. 103-26; Steen Wulff Andersen, ‘Vikingerne i Lejre’, *Historisk årbog fra Roskilde amt*, 2 (1977), 11-23 (p. 22).

<sup>182</sup>Tom Christensen, ‘Sagntidens kongsgård’, *Skalk*, 1996.5 (1996), 5-10; Tom Christensen, ‘Lejre Beyond Legend: The Archaeological Evidence’, trans. by Michael Anderson, *Journal of Danish Archaeology*, 10 (1991), 163-85 (p. 172-73).

<sup>183</sup>See discussion at the beginning of Chapter 4 and also in §5.2.4.

<sup>184</sup>See further discussion of Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>185</sup>Maund, pp. 31-32.

themselves and the Franks. The Frankish expansion would have been worrying enough, but the crusading character which Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns took on must have sounded further alarms. The Scandinavians could well imagine they were next on Charlemagne's agenda.

### 3.4.2 FRANKS, SAXONS, & SCANDINAVIANS

By the late 770s, the Saxon Wars were reaching a level of savagery which may have seemed unprecedented to the participants. Judging from the Frankish records, both sides regularly committed fearful atrocities against each other. In 778, we hear of the Saxons destroying every settlement and sparing no one between Deutz, on the Rhine, and the Moselle, as well as molesting nuns.<sup>186</sup> In 782, we hear that Charlemagne had forty-five hundred Saxon prisoners beheaded.<sup>187</sup> Perhaps deciding victory was impossible, Widukind and his immediate followers accepted a promise of immunity, surrendered, and submitted to baptism in 785. Conflict seems to have abated for some years, though in 793 the Saxons rebelled once more and destroyed a Frankish army. Warfare continued each year until 798 when all except northernmost Saxony seems to have been pacified. Pockets of resistance remained in Wihmodia and Nordalbingia until 804, but afterwards there was no further overt rebellion reported in Saxony until the Stellinga uprising of 841 (§1.3.1).

The Saxon Wars' final decade coincides with the first records of 'Viking' raids. The earliest raids were directed against Britain, though an expedition was attempted against the coast of Aquitaine in 799.<sup>188</sup> The Royal Frankish Annals and *Annales Fuldenses* both provide information on Franco-Scandinavian relations in the first decades after 800.<sup>189</sup> We first hear of the Danish king Godefrid in 804, arriving at Sliesthorp for a summit meeting with Charlemagne concerning the return of 'fugitives', perhaps fleeing Saxon rebels. In the end Godefrid declined to meet with Charlemagne, and the negotiations were conducted by legates. In alliance with several Slavic groups, Godefrid attacked Charlemagne's Abodrite allies (Slavs themselves) in 808 and is said to have made two-thirds of them tributary to him. In the same year he sacked the Baltic port of Reric and transplanted its merchants wholesale to Hedeby, which in time became north-western Europe's leading commerce-centre. Perhaps this move was inspired by Charlemagne's translocation in 804 of the Saxon population from Wihmodia and the region east of the Elbe, turning these territories over to the Abodrites. Godefrid seems to have been willing to play risky diplomatic games with Charlemagne, as in 809 he called a meeting with the Franks, assuring them that his actions against the Abodrites had been defensive; meanwhile, Godefrid's men killed an Abodritic

<sup>186</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 52-53 (sa 778).

<sup>187</sup>The prisoners appear to have been handed over by the Saxon *primores*, presumably members of the largely pro-Frankish Saxon nobility; (R)RFA, pp. 62-65 (sa 782).

<sup>188</sup>Alcuin, *Alcuini Epistolae*, pp. 309 (Letter 184).

<sup>189</sup>See chronological summary and references in Maund, pp. 33-42.

leader at Reric. In 810, a large Scandinavian fleet descended on Frisia, defeating the locals, and exacting tribute from them. Perhaps it had been sent by Godefrid, but he was assassinated in the same year by his own men. Maund suggested they might have found his attitude towards the Franks too aggressive for safety. Godefrid's successors swiftly concluded a peace with the Franks in 811.<sup>190</sup> Subsequent years saw a struggle for power in southern Scandinavia, primarily between Godefrid's sons and Harald Clac (Heriold, Klakk-Haraldr).<sup>191</sup> Harald seems to have generally come out the worse, despite having enlisted Louis the Pious's support. Louis sent a Frankish army into Scandinavian territory in 815 to support Harald, but it accomplished little. In 826, Harald and his household were all baptised, and Louis granted him land in Frisia.<sup>192</sup> Harald was promptly ejected from Scandinavian territory by Godefrid's sons the following year and never regained power there. The leading figure in southern Scandinavia from this point seems to have been Horic I, one of Godefrid's sons. Horic may have inherited a capacity for equivocation from his father and was perhaps emboldened by the Franks' less aggressive stance during Charlemagne's later years and after his death. By that time it had become clear that the Franks possessed little effective defence against Scandinavian raiding. Frankish sources regularly catalogued Scandinavian raids, accompanied by records of Horic's blithe assurances that he had nothing to do with them. It is difficult to credit Horic's protestations, especially considering that the *Annales Bertiniani* assert that Horic himself sent out a raiding fleet in 845.<sup>193</sup>

### 3.4.3 EXPLAINING THE VIKING AGE

Medieval theories could explain Scandinavian invasions as expressions of God's wrath or as the effects of over-population brought about by promiscuous Scandinavian habits. As one of the most commonly repeated modern explanations for the Viking Age has likewise pointed to overpopulation, it seems there is still much room for improvement. Bjørn Myhre has challenged the view that an agrarian crisis in the LGIA created population pressures which, in turn, helped instigate the Viking Age.<sup>194</sup> He explained farm-desertions during this period (much as they have been explained for Denmark in earlier periods) in terms of the introduction of new agricultural methods and social reorganisation,<sup>195</sup> leading to the formation of 'strong petty kingdoms' in the seventh and eighth centuries. Myhre

<sup>190</sup>Maund, pp. 33-36.

<sup>191</sup>Ian Wood, 'Christians', pp. 36-67.

<sup>192</sup>(R)RFA, pp. 169 (sa 826); *Annales Xantenses*, pp. 225 (sa 826); Thegan, *Vita Hladowici Imperatoris*, in *Scriptores rerum Sangallensium: Annales, chronica et historiae aevi Carolini*, ed. by Georgicus Heinrichus Pertz, MGH: *Scriptores* (in folio), 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1829), pp. 585-603 (p. 597, Chapter 33); *Astronomer*, p. 629 (Chapter 40); *Vita Anskarii*, pp. 26-29 (Chapter 7); Ermold le Noir, pp. 144-90 (ll. 1882-2513).

<sup>193</sup>*Annales de Saint-Bertin*, p. 49 (sa 845).

<sup>194</sup>Bjørn Myhre, 'The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Norway', in *IaSiEVA*, pp. 3-36 (pp. 8-19).

<sup>195</sup>Hedeager, *Societies*, pp. 180-223; Ulf Näsman, 'Det syvende århundrede', in *FStS*, II, 167-68.

noted that deserted farms on Norway's marginal land were not reoccupied until after the Viking Age, suggesting that population pressures in the LGIA and Viking Age were not so great as to require earlier reclamation. Of course, the very process of such reorganisation may have caused some unrest and encouraged those dissatisfied with the situation to try their luck elsewhere. It has been suggested that the effort farming sometimes required may have seemed unattractive in comparison to the opportunity to plunder almost unimaginable wealth only few days' sail distant.<sup>196</sup> In this context, progress in Scandinavian naval architecture may have been significant.<sup>197</sup> Perhaps such activities are reflected in possible evidence, as yet poorly understood, for Scandinavian activity in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland in the eighth century, perhaps even in the seventh century.<sup>198</sup>

Nevertheless, while such processes may have played a role in initiating Scandinavian raiding and migration, these are likely to have resulted from the conjunction of multiple factors. It has been suggested that Scandinavian interest in the situation of Christian Europe may have been intensified by political developments there.<sup>199</sup> Myhre has suggested that, besides a simple desire to acquire loot, the Scandinavian raids and invasions may have resulted from ideological conflict between heathen Scandinavian culture and Roman Christian cultures in England and on the Continent.<sup>200</sup> Myhre's is a radical point of view, as the possibility of any ideological motivation in the Scandinavian raids and invasions is commonly downplayed or dismissed. It would surely be wrong to brand every raid and piratical action perpetrated against a Christian target as ideologically motivated—major ecclesiastical establishments were the repositories of significant wealth which might have attracted any raider untroubled by the possibility of provoking the Christian God's ire. But the role which religion had begun to play in the Franks' conflicts with the Frisians and, more pointedly, with the Saxons suggests that ideological contrast should not be ruled out as one of the factors which could have encouraged widespread Scandinavian raids and invasions.

#### 3.4.4 SCANDINAVIAN RELIGION & POLITICS IN RELATION TO CHRISTIAN EUROPE

It has often been assumed that late Scandinavian heathenism was moribund, facilitating rapid Christianization, but such an approach is strongly contradicted by the available

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<sup>196</sup>Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia*, Great Civilizations Series, 2nd edn (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984), pp. 13-14.

<sup>197</sup>Myhre, 'Beginning', p. 189; Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Boats', 98-116.

<sup>198</sup>Myhre, 'Beginning', pp. 188-92.

<sup>199</sup>Torggrim Titlestad, *Kampen om 'Norvegen': Nytt lys over vikingteden fra år 500 til 1050 e.Kr.* (Bergen-Sandviken: Skjalgsson, 1996); John Hines, 'Tidlig kontakt over Nordsjøen og de bakenforliggende årsaker', in *Nordsjøen: handel, religion og politikk: Karmøyseminaret 1994 og 1995*, ed. by Jens Flemming Krøger, Helge-Rolf Naley (Karmøy: Vikingfestivalen; Stavanger: Dreyer Bok, 1996), pp. 18-30.

<sup>200</sup>Myhre, 'Archaeology', p. 27; Myhre, 'Beginning', pp. 195-99.

evidence;<sup>201</sup> people weary of a moribund religion are seldom willing to kill or die for it, as we are told some heathens eventually were. Scandinavians seem to have been in contact with Christian cultures for most of Christianity's history. Elements of Christianity and other foreign religions must have been known in Scandinavia from the RIA and may have influenced native beliefs and practices. It is possible, even likely, that some Scandinavians became Christians (or semi-Christians) before the Viking-Age 'conversion period'; Harald Clac's case offers one example of how this might have come about. Yet Scandinavia remained overwhelmingly non-Christian even after outsiders' explicit efforts to change that began c. 700. Surviving evidence suggests that heathen beliefs and practices were an integral part of everyday Scandinavian life, and the term 'heathen religion' which we of necessity employ probably reveals more about modern conceptions of what constitutes 'religion' than it does about pre-Christian Scandinavian understandings.<sup>202</sup> It seems questionable whether such a religious system, unfixed in form, an indivisible part of its society, and part of a continuous evolution to suit that society's needs,<sup>203</sup> could become moribund. Two-and-a-half centuries separate Willibrord's mission to Ongendus from the point at which Haraldr blátǫnn could claim he **t(a)ni (karpi) kristna**,<sup>204</sup> with several more decades before the militant evangelization of Norway. Heathen ritual at Uppsala is thought to have continued until c. 1100, and, if we credit *Sverris saga*,<sup>205</sup> some people in the Scandinavian interior remained heathen until c. 1200—half a millennium after the first recorded mission. Christianity had spread through the whole Roman empire in less time. Clearly, heathen beliefs and practices suited the Germanic-speaking Scandinavian peoples well enough.<sup>206</sup>

Yet there is little evidence of hostility to Christianity *per se*. Scholars disagree on how antagonistic the relationship between Christianity and heathenism became,<sup>207</sup> but it

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<sup>201</sup>Gro Steinsland, 'The Change of Religion in the Nordic Countries—A Confrontation between Two Living Religions', *Collegium Medievale*, 3 (1990), 123-35 (pp. 123-28).

<sup>202</sup>Compare remarks by Turton on modern African religious situations in discussion over Wood, 'Pagan Religion', pp. 273-74. Likewise, for the Sámi the concept 'religion' *per se* remains associated with Christianity rather than indigenous Sámi beliefs and practices. Though subject to aggressive evangelization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Sámi's native religion is, arguably, 'not entirely extinct'; Rolf Kjellström, 'On the Continuity of Old Sámi Religion', in *Saami Religion: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Saami Religion, Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 16th-18th of August 1984*, ed. by Tore Ahlbäck, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 12 (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 1987), 24-33 (p. 33).

<sup>203</sup>John McKinnell with Maria Elena Ruggerini, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, Philologia, 1 (Roma: Il Calamo, 1994), pp. 20-27.

<sup>204</sup>Erik Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseets Forlag, 1985), p. 207 [a revised translation of Erik Moltke, *Runerne i Danmark og deres Oprindelse* (Copenhagen: Forum, 1976)]; *DR*, 1, col. 79 (DR 79).

<sup>205</sup>*Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4º*, ed. by Gustav Indrebø, reprinted edn with errata list (Oslo: Kjeldeskriftfondet, 1981), p. 12. Credulous heathen Swedes are something of a topos in West Scandinavian literature, though the Christianisation of more remote areas of Scandinavia may indeed have lagged somewhat.

<sup>206</sup>Neither did their Finno-Ugric-speaking neighbors seem to feel much desire to convert, and indeed resisted fiercely when conversion was brought upon them—probably for much the same reasons.

<sup>207</sup>Steinsland, 'Change', 123-35 (pp. 129-33); Else Mundal, 'Kistinga av Noreg og Island reflektert gjennom samtidig skaldedigtning', *Collegium Medievale*, 3 (1990), 145-62; Stefan Brink, *Sockenbildning och*

seems likely that attitudes differed from situation to situation.<sup>208</sup> If we may trust accounts of the early missions, Scandinavian leaders welcomed missionaries, gave them leave to preach—and, like Radbod, in general declined to convert. The élite may have had their own reasons for flirting with Christianity (§3.4.5), but Scandinavian heathenism seems to have been a strongly inclusive system, willing and able to accommodate new beliefs and practices. The Icelandic settler Helgi enn magri, *blandinn mjök í trú*, worshipped both Christ and Þórr without violating any heathen orthodoxies, largely as there could be none.<sup>209</sup> Writing of Haraldr blátǫnn's pre-conversion court, the Saxon chronicler Widukind (descendant of the Saxon resistance leader), wrote: 'Danis affirmantibus Christum quidem esse deum, sed alios eo fore maiores deos'.<sup>210</sup> In contrast with Scandinavian heathenism, Christianity is an exclusive, evangelising religion requiring for the most part firm adherence to its basic precepts; it could not legitimately tolerate such blended beliefs as Helgi's. Accordingly, heathen hostility towards Christianity seems to have become a problem only as heathens became aware of Christian ideology's incompatibility with their own.<sup>211</sup> Evangelists offering new and intriguing cosmological insights might have been quite acceptable, but zealots keen to desecrate local shrines understandably seem to have been less popular.<sup>212</sup>

Such troubles, though they were surely real enough, seem to have functioned largely at a local level. Scandinavian heathenism was more a way of life than a credo, and the idea of a Scandinavian heathen dedicating his life to the defence, maintenance, and spread of his religious ideals in the manner of a Christian missionary might border on the absurd. Yet Scandinavians must have been aware of the situation in Frisia and Saxony, where Christianity was explicitly connected with political domination by the Franks. Scandinavian leaders of the eighth and ninth centuries would have had good reason to view Christianity with the same suspicion that the Frisians and Saxons had, a situation which hardly can have encouraged conversion. Attacking Christian Europe's ideological centres—both political and religious, insofar as there was a meaningful difference—would have been a logical response to the threat. It may be noted that the earliest Scandinavian

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*sockennamn: Studier i äldre territoriell indelning i Norden*, Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi, 57, Studier till en svensk ortnamnsatlas, 14 (Uppsala: Gustav Adolfs akademien, 1990), pp. 17-67; Gro Steinsland, 'Pagan Myth in Confrontation with Christianity: Skírnismál and Genesis', in *ONaFRaCPN*, pp. 316-28. See also Premysław Urbańczyk, 'The Meaning of Christianization for Medieval Pagan Societies', in *Early Christianity in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Premysław Urbańczyk, Christianity in East Central Europe and its Relations with the West and the East, 1 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 1997), pp. 31-37 (pp. 32, 33, 35).

<sup>208</sup>On various aspects of conversion in Scandinavia, see the essays in *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium Held at Kungälv, Sweden, 4-9 August 1985*, ed. by Birgit Sawyer, Peter Sawyer, and Ian Wood (Alingsås: Viktoria, 1987).

<sup>209</sup>*Landnámabók*, pp. 250-53.

<sup>210</sup>Widukind, *Widukindi monachi Corbeiensis rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres*, ed. by H.-E. Lohmann and Paul Hirsch, 5th edn, MGH: SRG in usum scholarum separatim editi, 60 (Hannover: Hahn, 1935), p. 140 (Book 3, Chapter 65).

<sup>211</sup>Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, *Under the Cloak: The Acceptance of Christianity in Iceland with Particular Reference to the Religious Attitudes Prevailing at the Time*, Studia Ethnologica Upsaliensia, 4 (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), pp. 74-75.

<sup>212</sup>Adam of Bremen, pp. 118-19, 122 (Book 2, Chapters 58 & 62).

attacks were on the British Isles rather than Francia. The Irish and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms can have posed no political or military threat to Scandinavia, but their ecclesiastical centres might have been seen in a different light. It had been primarily English missionaries who had been active among the Frisians and Saxons—Willibrord, the first missionary to Scandinavia, had been English. Even Irish ecclesiastical centres had played a role in this process as, according to Bede, one of the first to conceive the idea of evangelising the continental Germanic peoples was Ecgberct, an English cleric in Ireland.<sup>213</sup> Ecgberct did not personally undertake missionary work, but one of the missionaries he dispatched to the Continent was Willibrord. Perhaps the Scandinavians considered attacks on English, and even Irish, ecclesiastical centres to be useful blows against an opposing ideology, while carrying less risk of retaliation than would similar attacks against Frankish centres. As the Franks' military power waned, it became safe to direct attacks against them, too; Francia seems to have borne the brunt of the raiding until the invasion of England by the 'Great Army' in 865. Not every Viking raid could have resulted from merely ideological motives, but to dismiss the possibility may be to give insufficient credit to the Scandinavian leaders' grasp of their situation's realities—a grasp which all the evidence suggests they had. Perhaps they were even able to harness the abilities of existing pirates and *sækonungar* to serve as 'privateers', directing them towards the economic opportunities available overseas.

Though Scandinavia's material culture was distinct from that of Merovingian Francia, Scandinavians were also aware of Frankish trends and willing to adopt those which suited them (§2.5.4 & §3.1.5). An ideological contrast between Francia and Scandinavia may have been recognised and used by the seventh-century East Anglians—or the eighth-century court of the Northumbrian king Aed̥elred whom Alcuin accused of aping fashions of the 'pagans', almost certainly meaning 'Scandinavians'—yet there is no certainty that LGIA Scandinavians felt themselves to be ideologically opposed to the Franks.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, the political environment of the eighth and ninth centuries, with the threat of Frankish conquest and Christian conversion, easily might have transformed an existing sense of Scandinavian ethnicity into an ideological rallying point.

### 3.4.5 CHRISTIANITY & THE SCANDINAVIAN ÉLITE

The immediate Frankish military threat to Scandinavia faded after the partition of Charlemagne's empire, but Frankish rulers in the form of 'Saxon emperors' would again

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<sup>213</sup>*HE*, pp. 296-99 (Book 5, Chapter 9-10).

<sup>214</sup>Martin Carver, 'Conversion and Politics on the Eastern Seaboard of Britain: Some Archaeological Indicators', in *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World*, ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, St John's House Papers, 8 (St Andrews: Committee for Dark Age Studies, University of St Andrews, 1998), pp. 11-41; Carver, *Sutton Hoo*, pp. 104-05; Hines, *Scandinavian*, pp. 293-94; Alcuin, *Alcuini Epistolae*, in *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach, Ernestus Dümmler, and Karl Hampe, MGH: *Epistolae*, 3-7, 5 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892-1928), II, ed. by Ernestus Dümmler (1895), 18-481 (p. 43, Letter 16).

menace southern Scandinavian independence in the tenth century. Haraldr blátǫnn might have converted specifically in order to stave off the threat of German invasion.<sup>215</sup> A second, discrete phase of ideological conflict may have arisen as Scandinavia's leaders began to embrace the more powerful model of vertical government offered by Christian kingship. Such models had been available since Roman times, but seldom had there been such an incentive in Scandinavia to adopt them. The Old Saxons' fate at Charlemagne's hands provided a dramatic example of the consequences to be faced by societies falling foul of an increasingly militant Christianity. The situation may be directly comparable with the development of chieftain-*comitatus* structures among Germanic societies as a response to the Roman threat in the RIA (§1.2.3). Post-conversion Scandinavians would themselves play a prominent role in crusades against their pagan Baltic neighbours during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries;<sup>216</sup> clearly it had become obvious to Scandinavians that it was better to give crusades than to receive them.

The role of the Scandinavian élite in facilitating the conversion process can scarcely be underestimated,<sup>217</sup> though their comparative willingness to accept Christianity may disguise this process's traumatic effect on society's lower echelons. If the Scandinavian élite wished to increase their power at home, adopting the model of European lordship was one obvious solution. This model's successful implementation required that subjects accept both a strong central political authority and the new religion which accompanied it. The new kingship found—eventually—a firm foothold. Such was the story's 'end', seen from hindsight, but it was not a simple process. True conversion to Christianity can only have represented a significant social and ideological break with mainstream heathen society. Perhaps even more so than the Old Saxon conversion, the forcible conversion of the Finns exemplifies the kind of long-term social trauma which accompanied Christianity's imposition through political domination.<sup>218</sup> Scandinavian leaders must have become aware that attempts to introduce Christianity could undermine their popular support.<sup>219</sup> Popular resistance may have forced Hákon góði to abandon attempts at Christianising Norway and instead to come to an accommodation with his heathen subjects. As we are told he received a heathen burial and a heathen eulogy, he may have found it advisable to mitigate his personal Christianity as well.<sup>220</sup>

Signs of religious strife within Scandinavia, beyond the level of doing away with overzealous missionaries, were usually accompanied by conflicts over wider political issues.

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<sup>215</sup>Fletcher, pp. 404-07.

<sup>216</sup>Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier, 1100-1525*, New Studies in Medieval History (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>217</sup>Birgit Sawyer, 'Scandinavian Conversion Histories' in *CoS*, pp. 88-110 (pp. 107-09)

<sup>218</sup>Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hildander, 'The Conversion of the Finns in Western Finland', in *CoS*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>219</sup>Though conversion's social trauma probably in some ways facilitated imposing the new governmental model.

<sup>220</sup>*Heimskringla*, 1, 166-73, 192-97; *Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum*, in *Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna, Noregs konunga tal*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1982), pp. 1-54 (pp. 8, 11).

Accounts of Iceland's conversion emphasise the importance placed on having one law and one set of customs: *hǫfum allir ein lög ok einn sið*.<sup>221</sup> It seems that Christians were effectively unable to take part in Icelandic public affairs, so bound up were these with heathen life.<sup>222</sup> With the heathen and Christian parties about to come to blows at the Alþingi, constitutional acceptance of Christianity was the only way to accommodate Iceland's Christian population.<sup>223</sup> Icelanders probably benefited from having no king to declare and enforce conversion to Christianity, but they later claimed that the threat of such from Óláfr Tryggvason played a key role in the decision to convert. In the campaigns of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr helgi, the efforts to win political control of Norway and to Christianise its population were effectively inseparable—and resistance to one constituted resistance to the other. We may perhaps imagine something similar in Denmark as, on the same monument on which he claimed to have Christianised the Danes, Haraldr blátǫnn claimed to be *sa haraltr [:] ias : sar · uan · tanmaurk*.<sup>224</sup> Information about Swedish politics is hard to come by, but the Swedes' deposition c. 1080 of *vel kristinn* Ingi Steinkelsson in favour of his brother-in-law, Blót-Sveinn, so that they could continue their *átrúnaðr á heiðnum goðum* and *forn siðr* suggests that religion had come to serve as a political symbol in Sweden, too.<sup>225</sup>

### 3.4.6 LATE HEATHEN 'RENAISSANCE'

Problems offered by outright conversion may have encouraged Scandinavian efforts to remodel heathen society and culture, consciously or unconsciously, in response to the example and challenge of Christian culture.<sup>226</sup> Christian sacral kingship may have been imitated by late-heathen kings at Uppsala.<sup>227</sup> There seem to have been similar examples in late-pagan Slavic societies,<sup>228</sup> and analogous situations are known from the introduction of

<sup>221</sup> *Íslendingabók*, p. 17.

<sup>222</sup> Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, pp. 72-74, 88-89. Wood has suggested that in earlier continental Germanic areas, Christianity primarily replaced the public aspects of heathen belief and practice, while private aspects lived on as 'superstitions', many of which are still familiar to us; Wood, 'Pagan Religion', pp. 261-64. Christians were discouraged from having dealings with heathens: thus the practice of the *prima signatio* (adapted into ON as the verb *prímsigna*), a pre-baptismal rite making heathens technically Christian catechumens with whom commerce was permitted; Foote and Wilson, p. 415; Fletcher, pp. 372-74.

<sup>223</sup> Strömbäck, *Conversion*, pp. 28-29, 31-37.

<sup>224</sup> DR, I, col. 79 (DR 79).

<sup>225</sup> *Hervarar saga*, p. 62; *Flateyjarbók*, III, 23-26; *Heimskringla*, III, 263.

<sup>226</sup> Bjørn Myhre, 'Beginning', p. 198; Mundal, 'Kristinga', pp. 159-60.

<sup>227</sup> It is, however, argued that actual Christian kingship in Sweden's medieval period probably cannot be linked back directly to such a heathen kingship; Thomas Lindkvist, 'Kungmakt, kristnande, statsbildning' in *Kristnandet i Sverige: Gamla Källor och nya perspektiv*, ed. by Bertil Nilsson (Uppsala: Lunne, 1996), pp. 217-41 (pp. 224-25, 235-37).

<sup>228</sup> Christian Lübke, 'Heidentum und Widerstand: Elbslawen und Christliche Staaten im 10.-12. Jahrhundert', in *Early Christianity in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Premyslaw Urbańczyk, *Christianity in East Central Europe and its Relations with the West and the East*, 1 (Warsaw: Semper, 1997), pp. 123-28.

Christianity in nineteenth-century colonial contexts.<sup>229</sup> Within Scandinavia, Odner noted Sámi efforts to incorporate Christian symbols of power into their own culture, as by doing so they could access the sources of that power but within a familiar Sámi context.<sup>230</sup>

Likewise, Christian culture may have been a primary catalyst contributing to Viking-Age Scandinavia's apparently vigorous heathen culture.<sup>231</sup> Poems like *Vǫluspá*, *Rígsþula*, and *Skírnismál* may represent heathen creations informed by an awareness of Christian concepts.<sup>232</sup> Óðinn's ordeal upon Yggdrasill to gain the runes may be compared with the Passion of Christ,<sup>233</sup> and Þórr's 'recyclable' goats (after being eaten, then revived through hallowing with Mjöllnir) may reflect an understanding of the Christian Eucharist.<sup>234</sup> Amulets of various types had long been popular in Scandinavia, but the marked fashion for so-called 'Þórr's hammers' in the tenth century may have been inspired by Christian cross amulets.<sup>235</sup> Influence need not have been limited to the strictly religious sphere. There is evidence suggesting that English culture—including Roman Christian

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<sup>229</sup>Fletcher, pp. 126-29.

<sup>230</sup>Odner, p. 65.

<sup>231</sup>Christianity seems to have played a similar role inspiring a revitalization of late Sámi religious culture; Håkon Rydving, *The End of Drum-Time: Religious Change among the Lule Saami, 1670s-1740s*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Historia religionum, 12 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), p. 83.

<sup>232</sup>*Poetic Edda*, Dronke, II, 93-98, 202; Steinsland, 'Pagan Myth', 316-28; McKinnell, *Both*, pp. 120-27; Ursula Dronke, 'Pagan Beliefs and Christian Impact: The Contribution of Eddic Studies', in *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium, 14-15 May 1992*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1993), pp. 121-27; Helmut de Boor, 'Die religiöse Sprache der *Vǫluspá* und verwandter Denkmäler' in Helmut de Boor, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. by Roswitha Wisniewski and Herbert Kolb, *Kleinere Schriften zur Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte*, 2 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964-66), 1: *Mittelhochdeutsch Literatur*, 209-83 (pp. 281-83) [originally published in *Deutsche Islandforschung 1930, mit unterstützung der Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft*, ed. by Walther Heinrich Vogt and Hans Spethmann, Veröffentlichungen der Schleswig-Holsteinischen Universitätsgesellschaft, 28, 2 vols (Breslau: Hirt, 1930), 1: *Kultur*, ed. by W.H. Vogt, 68-142]. See also Anders Hultgård, 'Old Scandinavian and Christian Eschatology' in *ONaFRaCPN*, pp. 344-57.

<sup>233</sup>Konstantin Reichardt, 'Odin am galgen', in *Wächter und Hüter: Festschrift für Hermann J. Weigand zum 17. November 1957*, ed. by Curt von Faber du Faur, Konstantin Reichardt, and Heinz Bluhm (New Haven: Department of Germanic Languages, Yale University, 1957), pp. 15-28; Elard Hugo Meyer, *Germanische Mythologie*, Lehrbucher der germanischen Philologie, 1 (Berlin, Mayer & Müller, 1891), pp. 250-51; Wolfgang Golther, *Handbuch der germanischen mythologie*, von Wolfgang Golther (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1895; repr. Essen: Phaidon, 1996), pp. 348-50; Sophus Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, 2 vols (Christiania: Cammermeyer, 1881-89; Copenhagen: Gad, 1896), 1, 289-541. [the first volume was translated into German as Sophus Bugge, *Studien über die Entstehung der nordischen Götter- und Heldensagen*, trans. by Oscar Brenner (Munich: Kaiser, 1881-89)]. Bugge suggested the depiction of Óðinn's ordeal was dependent on learned Christian and classical influences. An attempt to shift attention to influence from popular Christianity was made by Ferdinand Ohrt, 'Odin paa træet', *Acta Philologica Scandinavia*, 4 (1929-30), 273-86 (pp. 273-79). Attention has also been directed to parallels with shamanic practice amongst the Sámi and other circumpolar groups; Rolf Pipping, *Oden i galgen*, *Studier i nordisk filologi*, 18.2, *Skifter utgivna av Svenska litteratur sällskapet i Finland*, 197 (Helsinki: Mercator, 1926); A.G. van Hamel, 'Óðinn Hanging on the Tree', *Acta Philologica Scandinavia*, 7 (1932-33), 260-88; see discussion in *Hávamál*, ed. by David A.H. Evans with Anthony Faulkes, Viking Society for Northern Research: Text Series, 7, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1986-87), 1, ed. by David A.H. Evans, 29-34.

<sup>234</sup>Paul Bibire, 'Myth and Belief in Norse Paganism', *Northern Studies*, 29 (1992), 1-23 (p. 13).

<sup>235</sup>Lotte Motz, 'The Germanic Thunderweapon', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 24 (1997), 329-50 (pp. 338-340); Peter Paulsen, *Axt und Kreuz in Nord- und Osteuropa* (Bonn: Halbert, 1956), pp. 190-221. A soapstone mould capable of casting both 'Þórr's hammer' and cross amulets was found in Trendgarden, Jutland, Denmark; James Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts: A Select Catalogue* (London: British Museum Publications, 1980), pp. 128, 282 (Plate 429).

learning—may have exercised a strong influence on the evolution of skaldic styles.<sup>236</sup> It is even possible that the wording of some heathen legal formulas was influenced by Christian contacts.<sup>237</sup> The runic system's sudden reform at the beginning of the Viking Age, followed by an apparent renaissance in rune-use, also might have resulted from renewed interest in ethnically Scandinavian cultural expression. Likewise, the emergence of skaldic court poetry might represent a self-conscious expression of Scandinavian identity, as well as marking the Scandinavian élite's special culture.

It is also clear that Scandinavians were willing to 'naturalise' borrowed foreign elements in a legendary context. As noted (§2.5.4), the *Vǫlsung* cycle stems from Burgundian sources, though eventually proving popular throughout the Germanic world. The Scandinavians went a long way towards 'naturalising' it, however.<sup>238</sup> *Vǫlsunga saga* identified Sigmundur Vǫlsungsson as a king *á Frakklandi*, but had him spend a long while in Denmark and, after his death, portrayed his wife remarrying Álfr, son of the Danish king, so that her son by Sigmundur, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, grew up in Scandinavia.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, Sigurðr and Brynhildr's daughter, Áslaug, is said to have married the legendary Ragnarr loðbrók, from whom various Scandinavian royal genealogies were sometimes traced.<sup>240</sup> Jesse Byock has suggested that medieval Norwegian kings promoted Sigurðr as not only their own supposed dynastic ancestor, but as a Scandinavian analogue to St Michael in a form of political and ecclesiastical resistance to both the Danes and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>241</sup>

As discussed in §2.5.4, periods of political upheaval and social reorganisation are highly conducive to the replacement of bodies of traditional narrative; Viking-Age

<sup>236</sup>See Frank, 'Skaldic Poetry', p. 179, and references there.

<sup>237</sup>Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, pp. 34-36; Peter Foote, 'Observations on "Syncretism" in Early Icelandic Christianity', *Árbók Vísindafélags Íslendinga* (1974), 69-86 (pp. 79-81); *Landnámabók*, pp. 313, 315.

<sup>238</sup>Peter Foote has noted that the survival of the Sigurðr story within post-conversion Scandinavia is not evidence of Christian-heathen syncretism, as the primary importance of the Sigurðr story was not in its heathen religious aspects; Peter Foote, 'Observations', p. 71. This point is well made, but neglects the likelihood that the *Vǫlsung* cycle's heroes were originally based on Christian persons in continental Europe and that the heathen Scandinavian elements must have been added after the legends became known in a Scandinavian context. The medieval *Þátr Þorsteins skelks* places Sigurðr Fáfnisbani in hell—a harsh fate if he had indeed begun his legendary career as the Burgundian king St Sigismund (516-523); Hans Kuhn, 'Heldensage und Christentum', *Zur germanisch-deutschen Heldensage: Sechzehn Aufsätze zum neuen Forschungsstand*, ed. by Karl Hauck, *Wege der Forschung*, 14 (Bad Homburg: von der Hohe; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), pp. 416-26 (p. 419); *Þátr Þorsteins skelks*, in *Flateyjarbók*, 1, 462-64 (p. 463).

<sup>239</sup>*Saga of the Volsungs*, pp. 19-23. The 'Danish' king, however, had the name *Hjálprekr*, answering to Frankish *Chilperic*.

<sup>240</sup>Ragnarr was also at some point provided with a fictitious descent from the Skjöldungar; *Alfræði íslenzk*, III, 55-59. In the form in which he came to be known, Ragnarr was a composition of various mythological and legendary elements; see Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues*, *Medium Aevum Monographs, New Series*, 15 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1991), pp. 1-50.

<sup>241</sup>Jesse L. Byock, 'Sigurðr Fáfnisbani: An Eddic Hero Carved on Norwegian Stave Churches', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: The Seventh International Saga Conference, Atti del 120 Congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 4-10 settembre 1988*, ed. by Teresa Pàroli, *Atti dei congressi/Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 12 (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), pp. 619-28 (pp. 619-21).

Scandinavia certainly provided such conditions. Items like *Hlǫðsquiða* show that legends of considerable antiquity could survive, if in a highly mutated form,<sup>242</sup> while material such as that concerning Ragnarr loðbrók and his sons demonstrates that new legends were produced.<sup>243</sup> It must be assumed that a far larger body of traditional material existed during the Viking Age than survived to be recorded in later centuries.<sup>244</sup> The *Vǫlsung* cycle may in some ways be considered emblematic of the Viking-Age Scandinavian élite's interests. It took material from the world of the European Christian aristocracy and transformed it into an image of the Scandinavian past acceptable to the Scandinavian élite—an image which apparently could remain acceptable during the Christian period. The concluding sections of this study consider the function of the *Scylding-Skjöldung* cycle within the context of Viking-Age ideology. This group of legends has commonly been considered to bear largely historical information about pre-Viking Scandinavia. There is, however, reason to suppose that the *Scylding-Skjöldung* cycle in the form we know it is a complex creation of the Viking Age. In nature and formation it may be comparable perhaps to the legends of King Arthur or Robin Hood. Much of the *Scylding-Skjöldung* cycle's material may derive from diverse Scandinavian sources, though some of its form—and perhaps some of its content—may depend on Scandinavian contacts with Anglo-Saxon England and even on Christian learning.

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<sup>242</sup>Linguistic changes in North Germanic during the pre-Viking period, such as syncope, must have required the abandonment or substantial re-composition of poetic narratives. Similar effects would have been at work in the development of OE from West Germanic.

<sup>243</sup>On Ragnarr loðbrók generally, see McTurk, *Studies*; this figure is also discussed in Hemmingsen, pp. 232-40, 272-305.

<sup>244</sup>For example, the Rök rune-stone inscription references a variety of legendary (and mythological?) material now almost wholly inexplicable.