

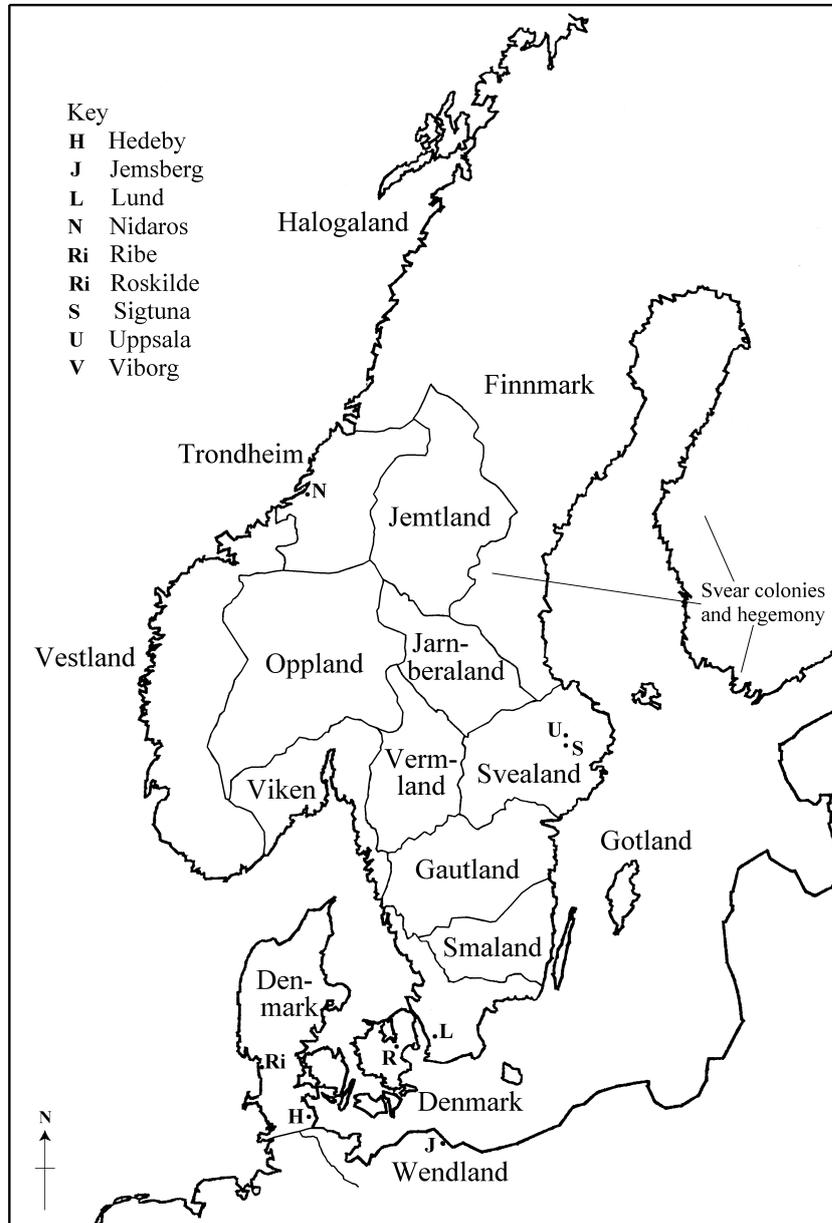
THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD: JÄMTLAND AND THE NORWEGIAN KINGS

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For students of the Viking Age in Scotland the dominant paradigm has been that of the Norwegian expansion into the North Atlantic. The twin phenomena of colonisation ‘west over sea’ by Norwegian farmers and the subsequent efforts by the Norwegian crown to exert authority over these colonies, culminating in the annexation of Iceland in 1262 and the surrender of claims to hegemony over the Western Isles to the Scottish crown in 1266, have provided the narratives within which we have sought to contextualise our understanding of the Scottish experience. This western colonisation, however, was not the only Norwegian expansion in the early and central middle ages. Both archaeological and narrative sources bear witness to an expansion east, over Kjölen, into Jämtland and the adjacent provinces of what is now the Swedish Norrland (Illus 15).

In his famous compendium of kings’ sagas, *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson, writing in the mid-thirteenth century, tells of the settlement of Jämtland:

Eysteinn *Upplendingakonungr*, whom some call the Powerful, and some the Evil, harried in Trondheim and laid under himself Eynafylki and Sparbyggvafylki... King Eysteinn committed many other atrocities against the Trønder. On account of this harrying and hostility many chieftains fled and many folk abandoned their patrimony. Ketill *jamtí*, the son of Earl Önundr from Sparabú, travelled east over the Keel accompanied by a great many people, and they took their livestock with them. They cleared the forests and settled there many great districts. That [land] was afterwards called Jämtland. Ketill’s paternal grandson was called Thórir *helsingr*. He went east over the forest from Jämtland, on account of a killing, so that it came to pass that he settled there and many men followed him thither. And that [land] is called Hälsingland, going all the way to the sea. The Swedes settled the east of Hälsingland, by the coast. But when Haraldr Finehair extended his power [over Norway], then many men fled the land before him, Trønder and Namdaler alike, and they made their settlements in Jämtland and some went all the way to Hälsingland. (*Hálgóð* XII, my translation)



Illus 15 Map of Scandinavia showing (Jemtland/Jämtland) (not to scale).

Jämtland covers a vast area, approximately 37, 500 sq. km (Benedictow 2003, 240), but mostly comprises coniferous forest and heathland and at its height, shortly before the Black Death, the medieval population seems to have occupied only 1,130 farms (Salvesen 1979, 158). This is about a quarter of the number of farms found in Iceland (which has nearly three times the surface area of Jämtland) in this period. Estimates as to the population of medieval Scandinavian farms fluctuate wildly, but if each farm supported only a nuclear family then we might imagine a total population of about six thousand and doubling that would probably give us an upper limit for a realistic population estimate. Place-name evidence on the island of Frösön, in the centre of the province, suggests that the number of farms may have doubled between primary settlement (in the Viking Age or shortly before) and the demographic peak *c.* 1300 (Salvesen 1979, 144). It is not clear to what extent one might extrapolate such expansion across the region but it is suggestive.

Dating the Scandinavian settlement is less easy. Snorri's account of Ketill *jamtí*'s flight before Eysteinn the Evil is a retrospective aside, and not located chronologically, but elsewhere Snorri places Eysteinn six generations above Haraldr Finehair (*Yng* XLIV). By dead reckoning this should put his *floruit* between 120 and 180 years before that of Haraldr (who is reckoned to have died *c.* 935), and thus in the mid- to late-eighth century, but it is unlikely that this is a reliable methodology and the details of the account are almost certainly legendary. Suffice to say that medieval Norwegians and Icelanders believed that the primary settlement of Jämtland pre-dated the Viking Age or, at the latest, belonged to its earliest phase. The claim that the settlers originated in Sparbyggvafylki seems credible. This remains the only Norwegian district which extends, territorially, across Kjölen, comprising as it does the headwaters of a number of rivers which ultimately drain into the Gulf of Bothnia. This peculiarity can be explained by a relatively low stretch of Kjölen at this point, dropping to below 500 metres above sea-level between Sandsjöen (on the Norwegian side of the watershed) and Kvesjöen (on the Bothnian side). The bulk of Sparbyggvafylki, however, lay along the north-eastern shores of Trondheimsfjord, and contained the important chieftaincy sites of Egg, Steinker and Mærin, as well as Sparabú itself.

The low stretch of Kjölen allows moderating Atlantic weather systems to exert some influence on Jämtland and these combined with the

regionally atypical lime-rich Cambro-Silurian bed rock covering much of the province produce an unusually mild and fertile environment when compared with other provinces of Norrland (Anderson 1985, 39). Indeed it is just possible that the name Jämtland (ON *Jamtaland*) originally meant ‘Mild Land’ or, more likely, ‘Flat Land’, in contrast to the mountainous regions which surround the basin of Storsjön (for a variety of alternative hypotheses see Ståhl 1970, 138 ff. and Flemström 1983, 11–12). At the centre of the province lies Storsjön, ‘the Great Lake’, and the vast majority of early Scandinavian settlement lay around the shores of this lake. By the end of the Viking Age a provincial assembly, or *Alþing*, known as the *Jamtamot* or ‘Jämt Moot’, had been established on the largest island in Storsjön, Frösön (‘The Island of Freyr’). It was here, not far from the thing site, that Sweden’s most northerly rune stone was erected. Its inscription reads:

Austmaðr, Guðfast’s son, had this stone raised and this bridge built and he had the whole of Jämtland Christianized. Ásbjorn made the bridge. Tryn and Sten carved these runes. (Sawyer 2000, 133)

Opinion differs as to whether Guðfast was a local chieftain, a lawman at the *Alþing* or an agent of some external power, such as the Swedish or Norwegian king (see the various contributions in Brink 1996).

Archaeology would seem to indicate that Scandinavian penetration into the region began in the fifth or sixth centuries although it must be emphasised that this interpretation is based entirely upon funerary remains and may be open to other readings (Anderson 1985, 39; Zachrisson 1976). Unlike Iceland, the Færoes or even Greenland, this was not an uninhabited landscape and Saami peoples had been exploiting the forests of Norrland for centuries. These people were for the most part hunter-gatherers but may have engaged in some pastoralism and agriculture (there are dangers of methodological circularity here since indications of agricultural practice in the archaeological record have frequently been taken as markers of Scandinavian ethnicity (Zachrisson, 1985)). By the eleventh century, at the latest, the territories to the north-east of Jämtland, around the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, were occupied by the powerful Kainulaiset nation, whom Adam of Bremen famously mistook for Amazons (in ON the Kainulaiset were known as *Kvenir* easily confused with the ON word for ‘women’), and who were powerful enough to defeat a Swedish army and kill Önundr son of King Emundr (Adam of Bremen, IV. 19). By analogy with more recent colonial experiences we might imagine that the rise of

the Kainulaiset as a formidable and aggressive force may have been a response to Scandinavian encroachment. What the nature of early contact between Jämtland and their Finnic neighbours may have been is open to speculation.

The earliest archaeological evidence that has been interpreted as indicative of Scandinavian settlement comprises burial mounds containing artefacts deriving from both Trøndelag and the Bothnian coast. In the fifth century a fort was built at Mjälleborg, also known as Öneberget, on Frösön. It was burnt down almost immediately and then rebuilt. It was constructed with earth embankments surmounted by a three-metre high dry-stone wall which, the excavators speculate, was surmounted by a wooden palisade. This fort is the only one of its kind in Jämtland but belongs to a class of hill-fort of which seventeen examples are known from the Bothnian coast, to the east, and somewhere in the region of thirty from Trøndelag, to the west. About a dozen of the Trønder examples are located in Sparbyggvafylki. What is not clear is how long Mjälleborg was occupied (Hemmendorff 1985, 1992). The possible link with Sparbyggvafylki recalls the story of Ketill *janti* but the chronology places that link far earlier than the saga would seem to. What is in broad agreement with *Heimskringla's* account is the intensification of Norwegian settlement in the ninth and tenth centuries. Some burials from this period around Storsjön were particularly wealthy including sleighs (complete with their horses), scales, silver fittings, weapons and crampons (Kjellmark 1905, Gräslund 1996, 28–33).

While Scandinavian settlement was focused, as elsewhere, on mixed farms it is unlikely that any of these farms would have been sufficiently rich to do more than satisfy the basic subsistence needs of its occupants and it is generally believed that the principal motivation for the colonisation of Jämtland was the desire to exploit, or control the exploitation of, the province's non-agrarian resources. These included fur-bearing animals, from beavers to bears, elk (*Alces alces*) (for leather and meat), and bog iron. The settlement of Jämtland also went hand in hand with the opening up of the trade route which linked the Mälars region of central Sweden, with its successive *emporium* at Birka and Sigtuna, with Hálogaland, the Norwegian colonial territory north of Namdal. The fort at Frösön may have been deliberately built to secure control for this trade and it is likely that Hálogaland, Jämtland and Birka developed together as part of a systematic exploitation of the boreal zone. The great lakes and rivers of Jämtland and the surrounding provinces doubtless provided the highways along which sleighs, in winter, or boats,

in summer, could transport furs and hides southwards and silver and exotic eastern goods northwards.

In many ways then Jämtland was not so different from Norway's Atlantic colonies. The cluster of farms around the shores of Storsjön that made up the bulk of the community were much like those which lay around the rims of the Atlantic islands. The trackless forest which surrounded the settled country of central Jämtland was both rich and dangerous like the ocean. Relations with the Norwegian kings were also similar to those of the islanders. Snorri follows his description of the establishment of Jämtland thus:

The Helsingjar had their trading journeys to the Swedish nation and were thus entirely their subjects, but the Jämmts were somewhat in between and none was concerned with them until Hákon established peace and trade relations with Jämtland and made friends with their chieftains. Then they came from the East to him and entered into agreement with him to be his subjects and to pay tribute and become his thegns because they perceived his goodness.' (*Hákgóð* XII).

This we can probably take with a pinch of salt. The earlier collection of kings' sagas *Fagrskinna*, Snorri's main source for *Heimskringla*, makes no mention of this episode, nor is it supported by any of the Skaldic verse. *Fagrskinna*, rather, attributes the establishment of Norwegian supremacy in Jämtland to King Eysteinn Magnusson (c. 1103–23) (§92). There the subjugation of Jämtland is simply stated as an accomplishment of Eysteinn but a more detailed account of his reign is found in the slightly earlier *Morkinskinna* (which does not cover the reign of Hákon the Good in the mid-tenth century):

He [Eysteinn] expanded the kingdom by communicating with the wise men of Jämtland and gaining their warm friendship. He honoured them with gifts and moved them to thoughts of friendship towards him. Then he circulated the idea of how easy it was for them to get what they needed here in Norway, and how difficult it was to look to the east. They understood that the king spoke in their interest, and each had frequent discussions with the other. They then returned east and obtained the agreement of the people in this matter, and were given sworn oaths. They went back to Norway and placed Jämtland under King Eysteinn's rule with wisdom and affection. That arrangement has since remained firm. Thus king Eysteinn was able to win Jämtland with prudent counsel rather than with hostility and aggression, like some of his ancestors. In this way he made peace with the Jämmts, and in the course of their negotiations all the district chieftains went to meet with king Eysteinn and transferred Jämtland, with its revenues, to him and became his thegns. In return he

promised them his support in the event of hostilities with the king of the Swedes, with the understanding that he was under the same obligation to aid them as the Norwegians or his other thegns. The revenues from that land still belong to the king of Norway. (*Morkinskinna* §64).

Snorri almost certainly lifted this account as the basis for his own narrative concerning Hákon the Good (c. 935–60) in order to project the Norwegian *imperium* back into the past. This reflects the agenda of Snorri and many of his contemporaries who wished to legitimise the claims for a Norwegian empire (modern Norwegian *Norgesveldet*) extending over all those places colonised from Norway in the Viking Age. This period of colonisation was usually ascribed to the reign of Haraldr Finehair.

The lengthy reign given by both saga writers and the Norwegian synoptic historians to Haraldr Fine-hair, the apical figure for the Norwegian dynasty, usually in the region of seventy years, seems to have been generated by the synchronising of Haraldr's reign with the settlement of Iceland, which was believed to have begun in the reign of Pope Adrian II (867–72). This synchronism first appears in *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 32–3), the first recension of which is believed to have been composed in the second quarter of the twelfth century, in which a number of rulers are listed as having ruled at the time of the Icelandic settlement; Adrian II (867–72) and John VIII (872–82), Louis the German (843–76), Leo VI (886–912) and his brother Alexander (912–13) of Byzantium, two Swedish kings Eiríkr Eymundarsonr and his son Björn (for whom no dates are available),¹ Gormr the Old of Denmark (died c.958?), Alfred the Great (871–99) and his son Edward (899–924), and Cerball of Dublin, usually identified with Cerball mac Dúnlainge of Osraige (847–88) but more likely Cerball mac Muirecáin of Leinster (885–909), who actually drove the Norse from Dublin in 902 (*AU* 902.2). Clearly not all of these rulers were contemporaries. No Frankish or German king is given after Louis, for example, nor any Pope after John, although Alexander, Edward and Gormr all began their reigns after the death of these rulers. This synchronism therefore does not allow us to identify a moment of *landnám* but simply a process

¹ Although according to *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* these kings were the grandfather and father, respectively, of Eiríkr the Victorious whose son Ólafr ruled c. 995–1022 (Guðni Jónsson 1976, 69). It should be noted, however, that here Eiríkr's father is given as Öundur.

which was believed to have occurred somewhere in the years between 843 and 958. By extraordinarily good chance the association of the first Icelandic settlement with the death of St Edmund of East Anglia (c. 869–70) by Ári in his *Íslendingabók* (Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 4) seems to have been confirmed by the identification of the so-called *Landnáms* tephra, a layer of volcanic ash which underlies almost all the evidence for Norse settlement in Iceland save the alleged founding farm at Reykjavík (Magnús Stefansson 2003, 209–10), which can be dated to 870 (plus or minus two years). Haraldr's reign need not, therefore, have coincided with the beginning of the Icelandic settlement but merely with that of some of the rulers mentioned in the synchronism. An end date for his reign could be reached by recourse to the regnal years accorded to subsequent kings, and this gives a date in the 930s. Since Haraldr was thought to have been the first Norwegian king it was not possible to name his predecessor (in the way that Edward's father Alfred had been named), and thus one could infer that he had reigned throughout the *Landnámsöld*.

The tradition that the Icelanders descended from refugees from Harald's *riksamling* ('unification of the kingdom') allowed them the paradoxical conceit that they were both 'Independent People' and 'King's Men', a paradox that is explored time and again in both Icelandic literature and in the life of Snorri Sturluson himself. That such a conceit was shared by the Jämts, or, more likely, thrust upon them by the Icelanders, was hinted at in Snorri's account of the settlement of Jämtland, which made Ketill *jämti* himself a refugee from one of Haraldr's ancestors and which claimed that 'when Haraldr Finehair extended his power [over Norway], then many men fled the land before him, Trønder and Namdaler alike, and they made their settlements in Jämtland' (see above). *Landnámabók* is more explicit: 'Véþormr, son of Vémundr the Old, was a powerful chieftain; he fled before King Haraldr east into Jämtland and there cleared forest for settlements' (Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 387).

These various accounts have been challenged from time to time by the assertion that hegemony had originally lain with the kings of the Svear, the true Swedes, of the Mälars region. The evidence for this point of view is principally connected with the ecclesiastical situation of Jämtland and to two pieces of evidence in particular. These are the character of the rune stone from Frösön, which stylistically derives from the Mälars region rather than Norway, and the fact that Jämtland

emerged as a part of the diocese of Uppsala rather than Nidaros, despite the continuing claims and ever strengthening hold of the Norwegian kings on the region.

The rune stone certainly belongs to a distinct group, usually assigned to the mid-eleventh century, which is centred on Svealand proper. It is, however, at least in part a local product as the inscription seems to betray hints of a Jämtish dialect and at least one of the personal names, Tryn, is peculiarly Jämtish, and another, Austmaðr, may be (Williams 1996). The episcopal jurisdiction is more surprising. Both Jämtland's colonial origins and subsequent, later medieval and early modern, political affiliation might have encouraged one to expect that its diocesan affiliation would have lain with Nidaros (Trondheim), a bishop's seat since Ólafr Kyrre's time (1066–93) and an archbishopric from 1152. In fact it lay in the diocese of Uppsala, which had been founded in 1140 and elevated to archiepiscopal status as late as 1164. Uppsala's predecessor, Sigtuna, was only founded c.1060, probably after the erection of the Frösön rune stone (Sandnes 1996, 112). It thus seems unlikely that the mission itself was directed from a Swedish see. The earliest confirmation we have that Jämtland lay within Uppsala's jurisdiction comes from a letter sent to the people of Jämtland and Hälsingland by Archbishop Laurentius promising anyone who helps in the construction of the Cathedral church forty days indulgence. This letter is dated October 6, 1257 (Gunnes 1989, 284). This late date should not disturb us unduly. Sweden is practically prehistoric before the thirteenth century and surviving written documents from the twelfth century are extremely rare. It seems most likely that Uppsala or Sigtuna, while not actively involved in the conversion, had somehow managed to get recognition of their rights in Jämtland prior to the elevation of Nidaros to metropolitan status in 1152 when its jurisdiction was spelled out. Possibly the leading priests in Jämtland in the run up to 1152 had simply been ordained in Svealand and were thus regarded as personally bound to the bishop of Uppsala.

Sandness has argued that the disputes about whether or when Norwegian or Swedish jurisdiction were imposed or exchanged are anachronistic (1996, 110). He argues that 'the most fruitful and reasonable perspective today must be to see Jämtland in the eleventh century as in most respects an autonomous "farmer republic", with its own law and rights, a great degree of political independence and its own ethnic identity' (*loc. cit.*, my translation). Jämtland's final incorporation into

the Norwegian kingdom belongs to the age of the *Sverre-ætta*, the new Norwegian dynasty that emerged in the decades around 1200 following the civil wars that had raged for much of the twelfth century.

The history of the *Sverre-ætta* was recorded almost contemporaneously in sagas written by men closely associated with the courts of their subjects. Unlike *Heimskringla* and the other compendia of kings' sagas, which were products of this same era and milieu, *Sverris saga* and *Håkons saga Hákonarsonar* are as close to eyewitness accounts as medieval narrative sources are likely to get, albeit with all the caveats regarding political and social interests. *Sverris saga* recounts two episodes involving its eponymous hero, both at the beginning of his bid for the kingship of Norway. In the first episode, set in 1177, (§14) he is attempting to enter Norway from Sweden and passes through Jämtland. He knows that King Magnus, his rival, has 'many *lendir*² there' although they subsequently make peace with Sverrir and sixty Jämt warriors join his band. The construction here is interesting. We are told not that Magnus ruled Jämtland, or that the Jämts supported him, but simply that he had many *lendir* there. This is a point worth noting.

The following year (§26), when Sverrir is slightly more established but still unable to get the upper hand in the struggle for Norway, he attempts to repeat his previous strategy and crossing out of Norway into Värmland he heads north, skirting the Swedish side of Kjölen. On this occasion the Jämts, perhaps disconcerted by the size of his following, allow him to billet his men among them and then make a surprise attack on him in the night. Although outnumbered Sverrir's hardened warriors defeat the Jämts. The saga continues:

In the morning the king sent for his other men [who had been billeted out], and all came. The Jämts now begged for peace, and brought hostages to the king, and were reconciled to him. He laid a heavy tribute on them. They agreed to become his subjects, and he appointed bailiffs to collect fines and other dues. The Jämts confirmed the agreement with many oaths, and when the tribute was paid, the king departed from them without more ado. (Sephton 1899, 33).

This would seem to have been the beginning of regular royal interference in Jämtish affairs and indeed *Håkons saga* (§10) states directly that King Sverrir had won Jämtland, with the sword, and laid it under

² Translated as 'barons' by Sephton (1899), but this is perhaps an uncomfortable rendering. 'King's men' or 'thegns' might be happier.

Norwegian rule (Mundt 1977, 11; Dasent 1997, 16). Elsewhere in *Hákons saga* (§216) there is mention of a man called Þórir twig-biter who was the steward over Jämtland for Duke Skúli in 1240 (Mundt 1977, 114; Dasent 1997, 207). The incorporation of the province into the kingdom may have been facilitated by royal encouragement of the development of a native nobility of a sort that had not existed before. One of the genealogical appendices to *Fagrskinna* tells us that Ingiríðr, the aunt of King Ingi Barðsson (1204–17) was married to Guþormr son of Austmaðr ‘from Jämtland’ (Finlay 2004, 300). Guþormr’s patronymic is suggestively the same name as that of the man who claimed to have converted the province on the Frösön stone. Chronology will not allow us to assume that the two ‘Austmenn’ are one, but the name is one of those thought to be peculiarly Jämtish so it would not be surprising if Ingiríð’s husband’s ancestors had not been products of the same environment as Austmaðr Guðfast’s son. King Ingi’s mother, Cecilia, King Sverrir’s sister, had been married at one time to Folkviðr, the Lawman of Värmland. Such marriages seem to have been aimed at drawing leading men in the ‘farmer republics’ into the aristocratic milieu that Scandinavian kings were attempting to create around themselves in this period. To this category of marriage we might add the slightly earlier alliance between Lopt Sæmundarsonr of Oddi, in Iceland, and Þóra the daughter of King Magnus Barelegs (Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 341). Folkviðr and Cecilia’s son, Hákon, bore the title of *jarl* (Finlay 2004, 301), Jón Loptsson became the most powerful Icelandic chieftain of his time (Jón Jóhannesen 1974, 231). In such a way ‘farmer republics’ became provinces of kingdoms.

Conclusions

There has not been a great deal in this paper which will have come as a surprise to historians of Jämtland. My excuse as an author is twofold. Firstly, I stand to be corrected, but I suspect that many of the readers of this book will not be historians of Jämtland and thus may find something new here. Understanding the growth and expansion of the Norwegian kingdom has become a subject of relatively wide interest amongst medievalists yet discussions have tended to focus upon the Atlantic provinces and not to have explored the eastern frontier. Doubtless there is more work to be done here. Värmland itself, mentioned briefly in passing above, could probably sustain similar studies

and as Swedish archaeologists uncover more about these regions so our appreciation of their importance will increase.

Secondly, for historians of Scandinavian Scotland, who follow in the footsteps of our honorand, the case of Jämtland may help to inspire new solutions to old problems. Jämtland seems finally to have been taken under the Norwegian crown by King Sverrir in the late twelfth century. Before this, however, some Jämtish chieftains seem to have been the thegns or *lendir* of some Norwegian kings. Some may also have been in similar relationships with kings of the Svear but sadly we have no compendia of kings' sagas relating their deeds, real or imagined. Patricia Boulhousa has recently (2005) reminded us of how many Icelandic chieftains and *stórbændir* had placed themselves in similar relationships to the Norwegian kings long before the 'annexation' of 1262. A similar explanation has been put forward for Cnut's curious style *rex... partis Suanorum*—'king of a part of the Swedes'—Birgit Sawyer (1994) arguing that individual Svear (and Gautar) had entered Cnut's service and recognised his lordship without giving him any direct claim to sovereignty in Svealand (or Gautland). We should also not forget that Othere, a farmer in Hálogaland, addressed Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, as his lord. Was he a king's thegn?

We should be careful not to underplay the role of personal bonds beyond the frontiers in the extension of royal power, nor indeed as perhaps the only meaningful way for ambitious kings to intrude their influence into regions which did not have a history of monarchical institutions. Snorri may have been playing fast and loose with tradition when he ascribed the winning of Jämtland to Hákon the Good, and the author of *Morkinskinna*, in praising King Eysteinn for winning Jämtland without leaving his kingdom, may have been making a sly dig at the fruitless crusading of his brother Sigurðr,³ but both authors understood the principle at work as it was still ongoing in their own time. This was how Duke Skúli and Hákon Hákonarson dealt with Icelanders and Islesmen. We might also wonder if it provides an interpretative framework for investigating earlier episodes in the history of Scandinavian Scotland.

Two examples immediately present themselves. The first relates to events in the third quarter of the tenth century. Two entries in the

³ *Morkinskinna* a thirteenth-century text was composed in a more cynical age after the fall of Jerusalem and the sack of Constantinople.

Annals of the Four Masters (O'Donovan 1848–51) dealing with events of 962 (*s.a.* 960) and 974 (*s.a.* 972) recount attacks on Ireland by named Viking leaders, the 'son of Amlaíb' and 'Maccus son of Aralt' respectively, who are said, in each case, to have been accompanied by the 'lawmen of the Isles'. These lawmen are only heard of in these two entries and by 989 Maccus's brother Gofraid was accounted the title *rí Innse Gall*, 'king of the Islands of the Gall' (AU 989.4). Might these lawmen have been the leaders of 'farmer republics' in the Scottish islands, in the process of being seduced into the service of kings from the Irish Sea World?

The second episode regards the sudden and inexplicable rise of Somerled and the Kingdom of Argyll in the mid-twelfth century. Might Argyll have been made up of a series of 'farmer republics'? Somerled, we know, was a man made by marriage. His wife was an illegitimate daughter of Ólafr Suðreyjakonungr (Broderick 1996, f.35v). Should we look to the law-speaker Folkviðr of Värmland, to Lopt Sæmundarson of Oddi or to Guþormr son of Austmaðr of Jämtland for appropriate parallels?

And finally, what of Orkney? Might the *gæðingar*, the 'men of property', with their attachment to their *óðal* rights have been the remnants of the big men of a farmer's republic?

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