DET HUMANISTISKE FAKULTET
KØBENHAVNS UNIVERSITET
SAXO-instituttet

# Kandidatspeciale

Andreas Kjeldsen

# “Kærr kaisara, klúss Pétrúsi”

## Personal and dynastic relations during the reigns of Conrad II and Cnut the Great, reassessed in the framework of International Relations theory

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## Abstract

Med udgangspunkt i teoretisk materiale fra udenrigspolitisk videnskab (International Relations) undersøger opgaven forholdet mellem Knud den Store og kejser Konrad 2. og deres efterfølgere i perioden ca. 1026-42, samt drager bredere konklusioner omkring den udenrigspolitiske teoris anvendelighed for middelalder-forskningen.

På grundlag af et varieret kildemateriale koncentrerer undersøgelsen sig omkring to begivenheder: Knuds rejse til Rom i 1026-27 og hans deltagelse i kejser Konrad's kroning, samt ægteskabet mellem Knuds datter Gunhilde og Konrads søn Henrik i 1035-36.

På baggrund af undersøgelsens resultater påvises det, at den hidtidige fremstilling af forholdet mellem Knud og Konrad i både mere generelle Danmarkshistoriske værker og i værket *Dansk udenrigspolitisk historie* er utilfredstillende. Det sandsynliggøres, at der fandtes en venskabsalliance mellem de to herskere fra 1025 indtil Knuds død, og at forlovelsen mellem Gunhilde og Henrik i 1035 skal ses dels som en forlængelse heraf, og dels i lyset af den militære konflikt med liuticerne samme år.

Bryluppet mellem de to, der først fandt sted i 1036, efter Knuds død, skal imidertid snarere ses som et forsøg fra Saliernes side på at hævde et arvekrav på den danske trone. Dette sandsynliggøres blandt andet af en lignende situation i forhold til kongeriget Burgund i 1032.

Endvidere konkluderes det, at den udenrigspolitiske teori har gode perspektiver for middelalderforskningen, men at flere af dens teoretiske retninger lider af meget grundlæggende mangler eller forkerte antagelser. Især den realistiske retning, der gør krav på universel og objektiv gyldighed, findes utilfredsstillende. Blandt de undersøgte teoretiske retninger giver konstruktivismen de bedste værktøjer til at forklare den politiske virkelighed i såvel det 11. århundrede som i den moderne verden.

## Abbreviations

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| AB | - | Adam of Bremen, 'Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum', in Werner Trillmich and Rudolf Buchner (eds.), *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*(Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1961) |
| ASC | - | Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker (eds.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961) |
| EHD | - | Dorothy Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents. Vol. 1, c. 500–1042* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979) |
| *Encomium* | - | Alistair Campbell (ed.), *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (reprint edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) |
| Letter 1027 | - | 'Cnut's Second Letter to the English 1027', in Felix Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (vol. 1; Halle), pp. 276-77 |
| MGH DD K II | - | H. Bresslau (ed.), *Die Urkunden der deutschen Könige und Kaiser. Vierter Band. Die Urkunden Konrads II. mit Nachträgen zu den Urkunden Heinrichs II.*, MGH DD K II (Hannover u. Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1909) |
| Thietmar, *Chron.* | - | Thietmar von Merseburg, *Die Chronik des Bishofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S., 9 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1935) |
| Wipo | - | Wipo, 'Gesta Chuonradi II. Imperatoris', in Werner Trillmich and Rudolf Buchner (eds.), Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1961) |

# 1 – Introduction

*"…et ibi filio imperatoris Heinrico regi venit regina Cunihild nomine, quae ibidem in natali apostolorum regalem coronam accepit et mutato nomine in benedictione Cunigund dicta est."*

On the 29th of June, 1036, a grand imperial marriage ceremony took place in the cathedral of the Imperial City of Nijmegen. Prince Henry, the only son and crowned heir of Emperor Conrad II, who a few years later would succeed his father as Emperor Henry III, was marrying Princess Gunhilde, the daughter of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway.

This marriage marked an incredible achievement for Cnut and his dynasty. He, whose forebears only a few generations past had just been minor kings in Jutland, was now not only a powerful king in his own right, but also united by marriage with the Salians, the strongest ruling dynasty in the Catholic world.

It was the culmination of a long relationship between Conrad and himself, a relationship that had begun over ten years earlier with a friendship alliance between them in 1025 and been strengthened by Cnut's participation in Conrad's imperial coronation in Rome in 1027.

But ironically, it also happened at a time when the decline of this dynasty had already begun. Cnut himself had died six months earlier, on or around November 11th, 1035, and was long buried in Winchester Cathedral. Gunhilde followed him

soon after, as she died of an illness in 1038, just two years after her marriage whilst accompanying her husband on a campaign in Italy.

Nor did Cnut's great "empire of three kingdoms"[1] survive him for long. Even before his death, the Norwegian crown had been seized by Magnus the Good, and his remaining lands were divided between his two sons, Harald in England and Harthacnut in Denmark. The two brothers immediately came to blows over their inheritance, but they too soon followed their father and sister to the grave: Harald in 1040 and Harthacnut in 1042. After the latter's death, Magnus came to reign over Denmark as well as Norway, and the old house of Wessex was restored to the English throne in the person of King Edward the Confessor. Within just seven years, all of Cnut's descendants had died, his empire been torn apart, and the Danish royal line passed to his sister's son Sweyn Estrithson.

In many ways, this is a truly medieval story; a story of a dynasty's rapid rise, a brief moment of greatness, and an equally rapid fall into oblivion – *"…and thus does Fortune's wheel turn treacherously / and out of happiness bring men to sorrow."* But it is also a story that raises very interesting questions about the relations between medieval kingdoms and the exercise of influence and power.

Regrettably, it has generally been overlooked by Danish historians. Amongst the major works of general history, John Danstrup & Hal Koch's *Danmarks historie* makes no mention whatsoever of the marriage or of most other aspects of the complicated relationships between Cnut and Conrad, save for a somewhat barebones account of Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome and the imperial coronation in 1027.[2] The slightly newer *Danmarks historie* by Inge Skovgaard-Petersen et al. does mention the marriage, although only briefly:

*"Indeed, marriage politics was an instrument that Cnut used frequently to form political alliances. His greatest triumph was his daughter's wedding to Henry, the son of the German emperor Conrad, who later became emperor. Just like Cnut's participation in Conrad's imperial coronation in 1027, the marriage alliance between his own and the German imperial house was a sign that the Viking king was now accepted amongst Europe's most prominent princes."*[3]

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[1] There is some debate about whether and in which sense Cnut's domains constituted an "empire", whether contemporaries did or would have seen them as such, and whether he himself laid claim to such a title. Although this of course does have significant implications for his relations with the recognised Emperor Conrad, it would be too far beyond scope to consider it in any detail in this paper. See Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great. Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) for an in-depth discussion of this question.

[2] See Thorkild Ramskou, *Danmarks historie. Bind 2. Normannertiden 600–1060*, ed. John Danstrup & Hal Koch (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1969), pp. 437ff, for Cnut in Rome esp. pp. 461–464

[3] *"Ægteskabspolitik benyttede Knud i det hele taget flittigt til at danne politiske alliancer. Hans største triumf var hans datters giftermål med den tyske kejser Konrads søn Henrik der senere blev kejser. Ligesom Knuds deltagelse i Konrads kejserkroning i 1027 var den ægteskabelige forbindelse mellem hans eget og det tyske kejserhus et udtryk for at vikingekongen nu var accepteret blandt Europas fornemste fyrster."* Inge Skovgaard-

And even the most recent academic standard work on the history of Danish foreign policy, *Dansk udenrigspolitiks historie,* dedicates only a couple of lines to this question, noting practically in passing that,

*"Cnut arranged for his daughter to marry Henry, the son of the German Emperor Conrad, and in this way achieved European recognition, which is also seen by his personal participation in the imperial coronation of Conrad 2. in Rome 1027."*[4]

But these explanations are not adequate; this marriage was about much more than just 'acceptance' or 'recognition'. Far from being a minor 'Viking king' in need of such things, Cnut had been undisputed king of the prosperous England since 1016 and by 1027, he was one of the strongest monarchs in Europe. Nor was this marriage some minor event: Henry was the heir to the imperial crown, as would any son of his be in turn, and the question of his marriage – and not least the resulting marriage alliance – was one of the most important political decisions of the generation. This was medieval politics at the highest possible level, and a situation that is far more complex than these simple explanations allow.

Because we have an important question to ask ourselves: Why did Emperor Conrad decide to marry his son and heir to the Danish princess? Certainly Gunhilde in the summer of 1035, as the daughter of Cnut, the ruler of three kingdoms, was without question a worthy match for the Salian crown prince, uniting the two strongest dynasties in contemporary Europe in a common alliance. But it was only the betrothal that took place in 1035; the marriage itself did not happen until the year after, in the summer 1036, six months after Cnut died. By then, Gunhilde was the sister of two squabbling young kings whose futures on their respective thrones were anything but certain.

In order to answer this question of "Why?", we should first ask ourselves another question: What if Gunhilde had not died so soon after the marriage, what if there had been a son and an heir, not just to the imperial crown, but also potentially to Cnut's inheritance? As it turns out, a very similar situation had played out just a few years earlier, when the Salians had successfully pressed an inheritance claim to the Kingdom of Burgundy and added it to their possessions. Is it possible that a similar ambition on Denmark, or even England, was the reason behind proceeding with the marriage in 1036? Peter Sawyer believes so, writing in *Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie* that,

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Petersen, Aksel E. Christensen, and Helge Paludan, *Danmarks historie. Bind 1. Tiden indtil 1340* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977), p. 187

[4] "Knud fik sin datter gift med den tyske kejser Konrads søn Henrik og opnåede derved europæisk anerkendelse, som det også fremgår af, at han personligt i Rom 1027 deltog i Conrad 2.s kejserkroning." Esben et al. Albrechtsen, *Konger og krige, 700–1648*, Dansk udenrigspolitiks historie, 1 (Copenhagen: Danmarks Nationalleksikon, 2001), p. 42

*"A few years later [after 1027], Cnut had his daughter Gunhild married to the Emperor's son Henry. It was a prestigious alliance, but it could also have caused problems for Denmark in the long term. However, since Gunhild only had a daughter before her early death in 1038, the risk that an heir of Henry could claim the Danish throne disappeared."*[5]

This explanation is closer to the true nature of the situation, but it still leaves much to be desired. It still frames the alliance and the marriage primarily in terms of prestige, which, whilst certainly an important part of most dynastic alliances, cannot fully explain the marriage.

Behind these questions lies a still greater "Why?" Why do these historians resort to explanations that simplify or even trivialise these very complicated issues? Certainly, with the exception of *Dansk udenrigspolitiks historie*, we are talking about works of general history, which must of course paint with somewhat broad strokes. But Cnut's relationship with the Emperor, from the coronation to the marriage, is one of the most important matters of early 11th century Danish history, and deserves a better treatment even in these broader works.

The common factor seems to be that they generally – even, ironically, in the case of *Dansk udenrigspolitisk historie* – fail to consider the full foreign political picture and to view these historical figures as political actors who conduct policy in a specific environment and on the basis of distinct interests.

This paper will seek to reassess the relationship between Cnut and Conrad II., with a special focus on the two events that 'bookended' the relationship: Cnut's journey to Rome in 1027, and the betrothal and marriage between Gunhilde and Henry in 1035/6. Further, in order to better understand the deeply political aspects of this relationship, it will do so within a framework of International Relations theory.

This approach is not without its problems. International Relations is a product of the modern world, and very much focused on relations between *states*, in a sense that is rather foreign[6] to the medieval world. Hence, chapter 1 of the paper will first present a brief overview of International Relations, its major theoretical schools, and a couple of important concepts. Then it will discuss in greater detail whether this theoretical matter is even applicable to the medieval world at all, and if so, which of the particular theoretical schools in the field would be most appropriate or advantageous use.

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[5] "*Nogle år senere [efter 1027] sørgede Knud for at få sin datter Gunhild gift med kejserens søn Henrik. Det var en alliance, der gav prestige, man den kunne også have voldt problemer for Danmark på længere sigt. Da Gunhild imidlertid før sin død allerede i 1038 kun fik en datter, forsvandt risikoen for at en arving af Henrik ville kunne gøre krav på den danske trone.*" Peter Sawyer, *Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie. Bind 3. Da Danmark blev Danmark. Fra ca. år 700 til ca. år 1050.*, ed. Olaf Olsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendal & Politiken, 1988), p. 277

[6] Pun intended.

Chapters 2 and 3 will consider the two events that form the historical part of the investigation. In chapter 2, we will look at the journey to Rome, including Cnut's reasons for undertaking it at that particular time, the implications of his participation at the coronation, and the outcome and benefits that he derived from it. This will give us an idea of the character of the relationship between the two monarchs at the beginning of Conrad's reign.

Chapter 3 will then continue with Gunhilde's marriage, first considering the political background, especially relating to Emperor Conrad's military conflict with the Liuticians at the time. Then it will look at a situation surrounding the Salian inheritance of Burgundy in 1032, and lastly present a brief counterfactual of how things could have turned out if Gunhilde and Henry had had an heir who could have laid claim to Cnut's domains.

Finally, Chapter 4 will once again take up the question of the International Relations theory and try to answer the questions that were raised in chapter 1, continuing the discussions about its usefulness for medieval history and the differences between the various schools.

# 2 – International Relations Theory

International relations (in the following 'IR') is a sub-field of political science that studies the "*relationships and interactions between countries, including the activities and policies of national governments, international organizations (IGOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and multinational corporations (MNCs).*"[7] Like political science in general, IR exists at an intersection between academics and public policy, between the theoretical and empirical study on the one hand, and the practical planning and conduct of foreign policy by governments, diplomatic services, and international organisations on the other.

Although many writers through history have examined the nature of relations between states – including ancient ones such as Thucydides, Herodotus and Sun Tzu, as well as more recent ones such as Machiavelli and Kant – IR as an academic field is of a quite modern date. It emerged after the First World War, in particular the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920, as political scholars grappled with the causes of the war and the question of how to prevent its recurrence. Some of the first major institutions in the field appeared in the early 1920s, such as Chatham House (London, 1920), the Council on Foreign Relations (New York, 1922) and the Institut für Auswärtige Politik (Hamburg, 1922).

[7] Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations. Theories and Approaches* 5th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 4

The classical IR theories came to maturity in the bipolar world of the Cold War, but the early 21st century has brought a new theoretical diversity as the field seeks to address the complexities and challenges of a multipolar post-Cold War world.

In order to introduce the theoretical trends within IR, we will begin this chapter with a brief overview of some of its major schools of thought, then examine two theoretical concepts that will be of particular importance for the analysis going forward. Following that, we will examine in greater detail how IR can be applied to the medieval world and some of the challenges and obstacles involved.

## 2.1 The Four IR Schools

### 2.1.1 Realism and Neo-realism

As the intellectual descendants of Machiavelli and Hobbes, the Realist school believe that relations between states are fundamentally characterised by competing interests and conflict: States interact with other similar states in an anarchic and non-hierarchic "state-system" or "international system", engaging in alliances and rivalries with each other based on their different strategic and political interests. Ultimately, states always act strictly in accordance with their own interests, rather than trying to encompass any other considerations and obligations, such as morality and ethics.

Whilst proponents of "classical" realism such as E. H. Carr[8] and Hans Morgenthau[9] built their analyses primarily on a combination of general observations of the practice of foreign policy and certain assumptions regarding human nature and its propensity towards conflict, the "behavioural revolution" in the social sciences during the 1950s and 1960s[10] introduced a greater emphasis on a natural scientific and positivist methodology. This led many realists – most prominently Kenneth Waltz in 1979[11] – to adopt a strongly structuralist and behaviouralist approach, thus forming the "neorealist" school. Although in many ways similar to the classical realists, neorealists argue that the competitive nature of international politics is determined by the structure of the international state system itself – because states are sovereign actors in an anarchic system, they are compelled by necessity to oppose each other where their interests diverge. Thus, conflict in IR becomes a result of objective and universally applicable laws, rather than of human nature.[12]

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[8] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939. An introduction to the study of international relations* 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1946)

[9] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace* 4th edn. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967)

[10] Karen A. Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations* 3rd edn. (London: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 9

[11] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979)

[12] John and Steve Smith (eds.) Baylis, *The Globalization of World Politics. An introduction to international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 141ff

Although supporters of the realist school often appear to be (and to a certain extent are) proponents of a Realpolitik that may seem cynical to most, they themselves would say that it is crucial to view the international system not as one would wish it to be, as the Liberalists do, but as it actually is; and to accept that conflicts are a fundamentally inherent part of relations between states. Thus, the aim of foreign policy must not be to attempt to prevent conflicts altogether, which is impossible, but rather to contain and manage them in order to prevent them from escalating into war.

### 2.1.2 Liberalism and Neo-liberalism

Whereas the realist school builds on Machiavelli and Hobbes, the opposing liberalist (also sometimes known as "idealist") school of IR has its roots in the thoughts of John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, and Immanuel Kant. However, it first emerged as a formal school of thought in the aftermath of the First World War, when it found an early formulation in President Wilson's "Fourteen Points" doctrine, which envisioned an international system based on free trade, transparent diplomacy, and the self-determination of peoples.

Liberalism generally agrees with (neo-)realism that states exist in a system that tends towards competitiveness and conflict, but unlike realism, it maintains that effective mechanisms exist that can reduce tensions and the likelihood of war.[13]

Certainly, liberals say, states have different interests, which can bring them into conflict with one another. But they also have many *mutual* interests, especially the desire to promote progress and prosperity for their citizens. Hence, the aim of international politics is to ensure that still more states come to recognise these mutual interests and the resulting need to cooperate with one another, and to promote use human rationality and the existence of international structures to reduce the risk of conflicts.

Modern liberalism is divided into several different strands of thinking,[14] such as institutional liberalism, which focuses on the role of international organisations as forums for resolving conflicts peacefully; interdependence liberalism, which emphasises the importance of economic and commercial ties; and republican liberalism, which argues that promoting democracy will reduce conflicts because "democracies do not go to war with one another".[15]

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[13] Ibid., pp. 163ff; Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations.*, pp. 100ff

[14] Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations.*, p. 102

[15] Cf. e.g. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992)

### 2.1.3 International Society ("English School")

The third major classical school of thought in IR is "International Society", also sometimes known as the "English School" due to its association with academics from the United Kingdom. International Society theorists seek a middle ground between what they see as the excessive cynicism of the realists and the idealism of the liberal school.

Like the liberalists, they tend to agree with the realists about the fundamental nature of the state system, but do not see this system as a necessarily Hobbesian, uncontrolled anarchy where each state fends for itself and only deals with its neighbours on the basis of instrumental self-interests. Nor do they agree with the liberal view that the international system is inevitably moving in the direction of progress and greater cooperation.[16]

Instead they see it as a society in which the emphasis is on the human actors – politicians, diplomats, academics, businesspeople, etc. They believe that all interactions between states are essentially founded on personal relations, and in particular they reject the neo-realist attempts to reduce the operation of its to the result of a set of positivistic laws.

Further, they see this international society as founded on a set of values, which, although they are not necessarily always observed, nevertheless shape the interaction between states to an important degree. An important part of these values is the concept of international order and justice, which at least in principle obliges states to observe signed treaties, respect each other's sovereignty, abstain from illegitimate uses of force, and observe generally accepted tenets of international law.[17]

### 2.1.4 Constructivism

In addition to the other three theoretical schools described above, which may be considered the theories of "classical" IR, the changes in international politics that were brought about by the end of the Cold War have inspired a number of new and sometimes radically different interpretations to the field. One of these is the constructivist school.

Where the other three classical theories tend to agree on a number of points – especially that the basic object of analysis is the state and its position and relationships within a larger system of other states, and that this system influences the way that states behave in certain objective ways – constructivists argue that the

[16] Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations.*, pp. 133ff
[17] Ibid., pp. 145ff

state system does not have an material existence of its own, but is fundamentally constituted by the ideas of its participants.[18]

Thus, constructivists argue that if states act competitively, that is not because they are compelled to do so by any objective characteristic of the state system, but rather because that is how the actors and decision makers who operate within the system perceive it to work; the theory becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. On this point, constructivists are fairly close to the International System school, but take a much radical approach: Whilst International System primarily sees the system as influencing the human actors in certain ways, constructivists argue that the system is directly shaped by the thoughts and ideals that go into it.[19]

Unlike especially the realist school, which posits that foreign policy is conducted according to scientific laws that are universally applicable, the constructivist approach thus allows for the possibility that the state system can change in very fundamental ways – and, rather relevant for this study, it follows that international systems in other historical periods may have functioned very differently from the modern state system.[20] In recent years, constructivist scholars have been some of the most active with regard to introducing historical and sociological analyses to the theoretical toolbox of IR.

## 2.2 Balance of Power and the Security Dilemma

In addition to the schools themselves, there are two concepts in IR theory that will be of particular interest in the analysis: *balance of power* and the *security dilemma*. Whilst these two concepts are particularly important in the realist school, they are considered somewhat less relevant by the other schools.

### 2.2.1 Balance of Power[21]

The concept of balance of power emerges from the belief that states have two paramount interests: Preserving their own sovereignty and survival, and exerting power over other states.[22] Because these two objectives are, on a systemic level, diametrically opposed – one state trying to project power is a threat to another one's sovereignty – states will generally seek to limit the relative power level of their neighbours and establish a "balance" between the actors in the system, thus

[18] Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations.*, pp. 211ff
[19] Ibid., pp. 218ff
[20] Ibid., p. 226
[21] See Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations.*, pp. 88ff
[22] The realist school is sometimes divided into "offensive realists", who believe that maximising power is most important to states, and "defensive realists", who place the emphasis on maximising security. However, this is more a difference in degrees rather than in fundamental outlook.

ensuring that no single state gains a disproportionately strong position and becomes a hegemon in the region.[23]

Alliances are the most common instrument for creating such a balance: Stronger states join together to pursue mutual interests, whilst weaker states either seek alliances directly with states that they consider immediate threats to their security, or with other strong states that can act as their protectors. In this manner, distinct blocs or coalitions tend to form in opposition to one another.

The most important implication of the concept of balance of power is that strong states tend to oppose each other, and mutual, peaceful coexistence is very difficult to achieve. Because of the threat that a disparity in power constitutes, a state will generally consider it safer to adopt a policy of opposition against a strong neighbour, rather than cooperate and possibly allow it to grow into an existential threat at a later point in time.

### 2.2.2 The Security Dilemma

The concept of the 'security dilemma' is closely related to balance of power.[24] It refers to the idea that a state that takes steps to heighten its own level of security, whether by increasing its own military strength or entering into alliances, may in fact end up in a more insecure situation: Because few if any military assets are purely defensive in nature, and can just as well be used for offensive operations, the neighbours of the now stronger state will feel that their security has been compromised and take similar steps to increase their own strength. This will result in an arms race and heightened international tensions, and in turn lead to greater insecurity for all states within the given system. Alliances can also contribute to the security dilemma, especially if international tensions are already high, important interests are thought to be at stake, and the alliances involved are inflexible.[25]

As on most other points, the theoretical schools differ both on the relevance of the security dilemma as a concept and on how to approach or 'solve' it. Realists generally consider it an inherent part of the anarchy of the state systems, and argue that the balance of power mechanism itself is usually sufficient to prevent the security dilemma from spiralling out of control: Because states value security and their own survival above all, they have an inherent interest in reducing threats to

[23] Examples include the growth of ancient Rome to its dominating position in the Mediterranean world; or the expansion of the kingdom of Qin during the Warring States Period, which eventually allowed it to dominate its neighbours and establish the first Empire of China.

[24] Baylis, *The Globalization of World Politics*, pp. 257f; Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations.*, pp. 71f

[25] A classic and very serious example of this is the outbreak of the First World War. Although the immediate cause was a relatively minor conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, the precarious balance of the two rigid alliance systems, the Central Powers and the Entente, led to its escalation into a conflict of a much greater scope.

their security, and this will usually affect their behaviour accordingly.[26] Liberalists, meanwhile, argue that other mechanisms exist that can reduce the insecurity spiral, such as greater political and economic interdependence – states that are closely related economically and/or politically are less likely to feel threatened by each other's military decisions.

## 2.3 IR Theory and the Medieval Period

As the previous overview suggests, there are certain problems with applying the "classical" IR theories to the Middle Ages. Each of the three classical schools approach foreign policy primarily as a question of relations between "states", typically more or less explicitly defined in a Weberian sense, i.e. territorially-based polities with full sovereignty and monopoly of power within their jurisdiction, and typically governed by means of some form of bureaucratic institutions.

The fundamental obstacle to using IR theory to the Middle Ages is the absence of such states during most of the medieval period. Even though medieval political thinkers certainly were very well familiar with the idea of kingdoms as entities that were distinct from each other,[27] these were hardly 'states' in the sense that IR uses the term.

An investigation of precisely when and why the 'state' emerged as a political reality lies well outside the bounds of this study, but most of the landmarks on the path towards the modern state lie in the later parts of the Middle Ages: The development of the doctrine of *rex imperator in regno suo*[28] and the emerging recognition in for instance John of Salisbury of the *res publica* as an entity that had an existence of its own separately from the individuals that governed it;[29] more practical elements such as the codification of laws and the appearance of genuine bureaucratic institutions such as the Exchequer in England or the Chambres des Comptes in France; and certain social dynamics, such as the increasing wealth and complexity of the economy and commercial networks, and the need for larger and more professional standing armies to wage the wars of the late medieval and renaissance periods[30] all combined to form what we might call a "proto-state" during the 13th or 14th centuries at the earliest.

In contrast, the realms of the early 11th century were characterised to a far higher degree by bonds between individuals and group of individuals, and rather than

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[26] The SALT agreements between the US and the Soviet Union during the 1970s can be seen as an example of such self-correcting behaviour.

[27] Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 256ff

[28] Per Andersen, *Rex imperator in regno suo. Dansk kongemagt og rigslovgivning i 1200-tallets Europa* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2005)

[29] Cary J. Nedermann, *John of Salisbury*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

[30] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992)

being a unified state with a monopoly on authority within a certain territory, they consisted of a multitude of magnates who were often only more or less nominally subject to royal authority. Broadly speaking, we can see political entities in the early 11th century as enjoying various degrees of *autonomy* and being structured around *interpersonal relationships*, in contrast to the full *sovereignty* and impersonal bureaucracy-driven government of the (early) modern Westphalian state.

Even so, many IR analyses do draw on history in general, and on the Middle Ages specifically, to a lesser or greater degree. As we briefly touched upon in the previous section, the different theoretical schools differ on their conception of the role of history in IR.

The realist position can be stated simply: It argues, and especially so the behaviouralist neorealist school, that international systems have certain universal characteristics that compels their actors to always behave in similar patterns, regardless of geography or time period. There is no material difference between e.g. the Greek city states described by Thucydides, the absolutist states in Europe of the 17th century, or the bipolar states system during the Cold War. As Kenneth Waltz puts it:

*"The texture of international politics remains highly constant, patterns recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly. … The enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia, a statement that will meet with wide assent."*[31]

Or Hans Morgenthau:

*"…the struggle for power is universal in time and space and is an undeniable fact of experience. It cannot be denied that throughout historic time, regardless of social, economic, and political conditions, states have met each other in contests of power."*[32]

The liberal school takes a relatively similar position to the realists on this point. However, generally speaking, history does not factor into the liberal analysis to any significant degree, since it is very dependent on concepts such as large-scale international trade, globalisation, democratisation, and the emergence of international organisations, all of which belong to a relatively modern era.

Of the three classical schools, the International Society school is the one that is most interested in historiography, and also the one that has dedicated the greatest

[31] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 66
[32] Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 31

efforts to integrating it into their theoretical framework, often combined with an approach specifically derived from world history.

Amongst these efforts, two works deserve special mention: Adam Watson's *The Evolution of International Society* from 1992[33] is a seminal book that essentially introduced the cohesive study of historical state systems into the field of IR. And more recently, Barry Buzan and Richard Little have published *International Systems in World History*, which attempts with some success to apply IR theory to historical societies as far back as the Stone Age.[34] But even then, these works have struggled greatly with fitting the medieval period into their theoretical frameworks. Watson argues that,

*"…medieval government was too diffused, and mostly too local, for us to consider it as divided into separate states. […] and the rules and institutions of Christendom were not devised to manage the pressures of a system, which is how we have described a society of states. Towards the end of the period central administration of territorially defined states begin to crystallise out; but the vertical division of Europe marks the dissolution of the medieval pattern."*[35]

Buzan and Little likewise choose to mostly bypass the medieval period, noting that,

*"IR theorists increasingly acknowledge that their existing concepts simply cannot begin to capture the complexity of medieval political organization. We lack the space to enter into a detailed discussion of this period. And to do so, moreover, would divert us from our main intention in this chapter which is to discuss the units which have come to play a crucial role in the global international system. From our perspective, the medieval period is interesting theoretically as a challenge to IR concepts of political structure, and historically as the precursor to what became the world-spanning Westphalian international system. We do not, however, see it as a world historical era in its own right…*[36]

These two quotations express a general attitude to the Middle Ages: The absence of states and the high complexity of the period render it unsuitable as an object of study for IR.

However, other theorists have criticised the focus of classical IR on the state as too narrow and anachronistic, and have observed that even though 'states' as such

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[33] Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society. A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992)

[34] Barry and Richard Little Buzan, *International Systems in World History. Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

[35] Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, p. 151, n. 6

[36] Buzan, *International Systems in World History*, p. 244

may not have existed in the Middle Ages, rulers of the period still behave in ways that *mutatis mutandis* are consistent with the principles of IR.

One of the IR experts who have attempted to examine the medieval period in terms of IR theory is John Ruggie, who in a 1983 article used the example of medieval feudalism to criticise the absence of a "dimension of change" in Waltz's neorealist theory.[37] The complicated nature of lord-vassal relationships and conflicting titles to land that characterises feudalism, so Ruggie argued, presents an example of a system in which sovereignty is much less important than the realists claim is universally the case. This means that the fundamental characteristics of the international system have changed at least once – from the "heteronomity" of the medieval period to the sovereignty of the early modern – and having changed once, it is conceivable that it will change again; a possibility not permitted by the universality upon which the realist theory insists.

But criticising this argument from a realist standpoint, Markus Fisher has argued[38] that Ruggie overemphasises the normative aspects of feudalism, and that in reality, feudal magnates essentially operated in an anarchic system and behaved accordingly; making alliances and pacts, fighting over resources and power imbalances, etc. For Fischer, this means that the universality of the realist theory is not just preserved, but also easily applicable to the medieval period with only minor modifications:

*"The fact that neorealism employs the state as its unit therefore does not limit its analysis in principle to the state-centered politics of the modern and ancient periods. Since it is not the particular character of the state which engenders power politics but the absence of central authority, the "anarchic actors" of any historical period … can be expected to behave in accordance with the neorealist logic. However, to explain stateless politics in a more consistent manner, neorealism might want to reformulate its unit of analysis in a way that represents the historical reality of anarchic actors at levels of organization below that of the state."*[39]

But the problem with analyses in this vein is that they tend to be high-level and generalising. They draw theoretical conclusions based on an understanding of the medieval period expressed in terms of vague constructs, such as "feudalism" or "the medieval system", or they may use isolated historical events simply as examples to illustrate theoretical points that have been made *a priori*, but without placing them in their proper context.

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[37] John Gerard Ruggie, 'Territoriality and beyond. Problematizing modernity in international relations', *International Organization,* 47/1 (1993), p. 139-74

[38] Markus Fischer, 'Feudal Europe, 800-1300. Communal discourse and conflictual practices', ibid.46/2 (1992), p. 427-66

[39] Ibid., pp. 463f

This has been particularly criticised by Andrew Latham, who identifies four problems with the approach of IR theorists to historical examples, and particularly the medieval period in their studies.[40] Specifically, they 1) frequently use cherry-picked examples that illustrate or prove the conclusions they are trying to draw, rather than considering the subject in its entirety; 2) they tend to build their arguments on secondary works by other IR authors rather than primary sources and secondary works by historians; 3) to the extent that they do use the historiographical literature, it is often with reference to older authors that are no longer considered authoritative (such as Ullman, Ganshof, or Bloch), rather than more recent scholarship; and 4) they often fall prey to presentism, i.e. considering the medieval period not in its own right, but primarily in terms of a precursor to the early modern period in which recognisably modern states emerge.

Latham's own work, *Theorizing Medieval Geopolitics*, "*…seeks to address these shortcomings by providing a theoretically guided and historically sensitive account of the geopolitical relations of late medieval Latin Christendom…*" with a focus on the phenomenon of 'war' and its causes and historical context.[41]

Drawing its inspiration partly from Latham, this study will attempt to do something similar for the relations between King Cnut and Emperor Conrad II and their immediate successors. Specifically, we will attempt to answer the following three questions:

**1) Can IR theory be applied to the 11th century, or is Watson correct to say that the absence of states makes the medieval period irrelevant for IR?**

**2) If we can answer 1) in the affirmative, do our findings support the neorealist claim to universality, or does medieval foreign policy follow different rules from those that characterise the modern state systems?**

**3) If the theoretical framework of the neorealist school is not adequate, do any of the other three schools we have examined offer a better framework for explaining the medieval period?**

In order to provide a practical foundation on which to answer these questions, we will now leave the theory behind for a while and proceed to examine the two case studies that we set out in the Introduction. Afterwards we will return to the theoretical issues in Chapter 4 and consider the findings from the case studies in the light of IR theory.

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[40] Andrew Latham, *Theorizing Medieval Geopolitics. War and World Order in the Age of the Crusades* (London/New York: Routledge, 2012)

[41] Ibid., p. 16

# 3 – Pilgrimage and Coronation

## 3.1 – The Journey

We will begin by investigating Cnut's journey to Rome, and for this, three questions in particular need to be answered: When did the journey take place, which particular route did Cnut follow, and what happened when he arrived?

### 3.1.1 Date: "Her for Cnut cyng to Rome."

Not even determining the precise year of the journey is entirely a simple matter. There is no doubt that Conrad II's coronation as emperor happened in 1027, and Cnut's presence on this occasion is established by several sources, including Wipo.

However, already here we encounter our first contradiction, because the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle informs us that the journey actually happened in 1031.[42] One possible explanation that has been suggested for this discrepancy is that Cnut went on at least two different journeys to Rome, one in 1027, and then another one in 1031.[43] However, this idea is not particularly convincing, since the entry in the ASC would be the only evidence we have for such a hypothetical second journey. Further, in 1031 Cnut was engaged in affairs in both Norway and Scotland – the Battle of Stiklestad had just been fought the year before, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS A says that he "came back to England", whilst MSS D and E mention conflicts with

[42] ASC MSS D/E, s.a. 1031: "*In this year King Cnut went to Rome." ("Her for Cnut cyng to Rome")*

[43] M. K. Lawson, *Cnut. England's Viking King 1016–35* 2. edn. (Stroud: The History Press, 2011), p. 99

certain Scottish kings. Given this situation, it seems unlikely that Cnut would have undertaken a second lengthy journey to Rome, and this time absent any particular compelling reason similar to the imperial coronation in 1027.

An alternative explanation, proposed by Dorothy Whitelock, suggests that the chronicler knew that the journey happened after a major battle in Scandinavia, but mistakenly identified it as the Battle at Stiklestad in 1030,[44] rather than the actual Battle of Holy River in 1026. Finally, a third and even simpler explanation could be that the discrepancy is the result of a scribal copying error in the year, as MXXVI may at one point have been mistakenly written as MXXXI.[45] In any event, in the absence of other supporting evidence for a second journey, we should consider it firmly established that Cnut was in Rome in 1027, and that this was the only journey of this kind that he made.

Moving on, we can attempt a closer reconstruction of the journey, including the specific dates, the travel route(s), and the events during the journey. However, it must be said that this is a very difficult task due to the considerable scarcity of sources. Again, the only completely fixed point of reference available to us is Emperor Conrad's coronation ceremony itself, which was on Easter Sunday, or March 28th, 1027. But how long did it take for Cnut and his entourage to travel from Denmark to Rome? Measured as the crow flies roughly from Ribe, this is a distance of approximately 1600 km. However, Cnut's travel route is not likely to have been direct, partly due to any detours he may have made en route, and partly due to the great challenge of crossing the Alps, both of which we shall consider more closely as part of the below.

Estimates of speeds of travel during the Middle Ages vary considerably, depending on a long range of factors, including terrain, infrastructure, weather, political circumstances, and so forth. For example, we know from the diplomatic evidence that Conrad was in Trier on January 11th, 1026, then in Augsburg on February 14th, then crossed the Alps in time to be in Milan by March 23rd.[46] However, since the monarchs were typically travelling with large armies and may have made longer stops for political, military or other reasons, this is not necessarily a useful measure for a group of travellers in Cnut's situation.

On the other hand, the estimates for individual travellers are not particularly useful, either, since a single person can often travel faster and for longer hours than a larger group – and although we do not know the details of Cnut's entourage on the journey, he certainly travelled *honorifice et nobiliter*, i.e. with a larger party, including

[44] Whitelock (ed.) *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 101 n. 5
[45] Lawson, *Cnut. England's Viking King 1016–35*, p. 99
[46] MGH DD K II, nos. 48, 59–51, 58

advisors and courtiers, servants, soldiers, etc. probably amounting to as much as several hundred people.[47]

For an example of a situation that somewhat closer matches ours, Peter Spufford calculates that the Archbishop Eudes Rogit of Rouen, when travelling with a retinue from Paris to Dijon in 1254, averaged some 33 km per day.[48] However, this represents conditions in the heartlands of France in the mid–13th century, and may be somewhat too high for Germany in the early 11th century, not to mention the Alpine passes, where travel would have been even slower. In the end, this must be no more than a rough estimate, but adjusting it down to 25 km per day seems a sound average.

At this speed, the journey from Denmark to Rome would have taken approximately 80 days. Thus, in order to arrive at Rome in time for Easter on the 28th of March, or preferably a little earlier, Cnut would have had to leave Denmark no later than the first week of January 1027.

Estimating the earliest possible departure point is a little harder, but a passage from the Letter to the English People, which Cnut wrote and dispatched during his return journey from Rome,[49] can give us an important indication. In the Letter, Cnut mentions that upon retuning to Denmark, he intends to,

*"…pacem et firmum pactum omnium Danorum consilio cum eis gentibus et populis compositurus, qui nos et regno et vita privare, si eis possibile esset, volebant, sed non poterant, Deo scilicet virtutem eorum destruente…"*[50]

This passage almost certainly refers to the Battle of the Holy River, which Cnut fought against the combined forces of Kings Olaf of Norway and Jacob Anund of Sweden. The precise date of this battle is not entirely clear, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS E dates it to 1025, but the context of the Letter suggests that it took place not very long before setting out for Rome, as otherwise he could have settled the conflict before his departure.[51]

Further, Ove Moberg has estimated that it must have occurred in the summer of 1026[52], which most likely means sometime between June and August, i.e. the typical medieval campaigning season. This means that, given the assumptions above, Cnut

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[47] Heinrich Fichtenau, *Lebensordnungen des 10. Jahrhunderts. Studien über Denkart und Existenz im einstigen Karolingerreich*, 2 vols., Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 30 (Stuttgart: Antom Hiersemann, 1984), p. 82

[48] Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit. The Merchant in Medieval Europe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 200

[49] "*Notifico vobis me noviter isse Romam…*", Letter 1027, c. 1

[50] Letter 1027, c. 13

[51] Lawson, *Cnut. England's Viking King 1016–35*, pp. 94–96

[52] Ove Moberg, 'Knut den stores motståndare i slaget vid Helgeå', *Scandia,* 51/1 (1985), p. 7–17

would have departed from Denmark probably sometime between the beginning of September and the first week of January.

However, a late departure is unlikely, in particular due to the necessity of the Alpine crossing. Even if Cnut had left at the latest possible time in January, he and his retinue would still have reached – and would have had to cross – the Alps, which are approximately a thousand kilometres from Denmark, by the beginning or middle of February.

Precisely the months from December to February are the worst time of the year to attempt an Alpine crossing, and such an attempt would have been highly inconvenient at best, and dangerous or even deadly at worst. This was particularly the case in the early 11th century, when many of the important hospices that would later be available to travellers had not yet been founded.[53]

Several vivid accounts of attempted crossings from the 11th and 12th centuries illustrate the troubles that faced Alpines travellers in the winter months. Rudolph of St. Trond and Archdeacon Alexander of Liége had this experience of the village of St. Remy whilst crossing the Great St. Bernhard in December 1128:

*"In quo loco tamquam in mortis faucibus coagulati, manebant nocte et die sub periculo mortis. Angustia villulae tota completa erat peregrinorum multitudine. Ex altissimis et scopulosis rupibus ruebant frequenter a intolerabiles omni opposito nivium aggeres, ita ut aliis iam collocatis, aliis adhuc supersedentibus mensis domos iuxta, eos prorsus obruerent, et inventos in eis quosdam suffocarent, quosdam contritos inutiles redderent. Sub hac iugi morte aliquot dies in infausta villula illa fecerunt. […] nam marones[54] per ordinem de villa egressos subito lapsus rupibus instar montis densissimus nivis globus decem involvit, et usque ad inferni locum visus est extulisse. Qui huius infausti mysterii aliquando conscii fuerant, precipiti cursu ad hunc homicidam locum velocissime ruerant, et effossos marones, alios exanimes in contis referebant, alios semivivos, alios contritis ossibus in manibus trahebant, illa maritum, illa fratrem, ille et ille illum et illum se amisisse clamitabant…"*[55]

And for an example of the challenges a larger army could face, Lampert of Hersfeld described Henry IV's passage of the Mount Cenis pass in January 1077:

*"Igitur quosdam ex indigenis locorum peritos et preruptis Alpium iugis assuetos mercede conduxit, qui comitatum eius per abruptum montem et moles nivium precederent et subsequentibus quaqua possent arte itineris asperitatem levigarent. His ductoribus cum in verticem montis magna cum difficultate evasissent, nulla ulterius progrediendi copia erat, eo quod preceps montis latus et, ut dictum est, glaciali frigore lubricum omnem penitus decessum negare videretur. Ibi viri periculum omne viribus evincere conantes, nunc manibus*

[53] J. E. Tyler, *The Alpine Passes. The Middle Ages (962–1250)* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930)

[54] Local guides, see Spufford, *Power and Profit*, pp. 161–2

[55] Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Annales et chronica aevi Salici. Vitae aevi Carolini et Saxonici*; MGH SS 10 (Hannover, 1852), p. 307

*et pedibus reptando, nunc ductorum suorum humeris innitendo, interdum quoque titubante per lubricum gressu cadendo et longius volutando, vix tandem aliquando cum gravi salutis suae periculo ad campestria pervenerunt. Reginam et alias, quae in obsequio eius erant, mulieres boum coriis impositas duces itineris conductu preeuntes deorsum trahebant. Equorum alios per machinas quasdam summittebant, alios colligatis pedibus trahebant, ex quibus multi, dum traherentur, mortui, plures debilitati, pauci admodum integri incolumesque periculum evadere potuerunt".*[56]

As the accounts suggest, it was certainly possible to attempt a crossing during the winter months, but only at a very high risk and cost. Political or military demands could make it necessary, but it seems that if Cnut had the opportunity to make an early crossing, this would have been the obvious choice – even more so because a delay in the Alpine passes due to snow or similar impediments would have entailed the risk of arriving late to the coronation ceremony, the political consequences of which one can well imagine.

On the other hand, leaving e.g. in late September or early October, at what must have been rather soon after the Battle of Holy River, would have meant a crossing in early November, when the passes would not yet have been so difficult to negotiate. This would, on the other hand, have meant spending several months in Italy, but given the circumstances, it seems the more likely scenario. It also has very interesting implications for the relations with Conrad, which we shall return to below.

### 3.1.2 The Route: "…eadem via qua exivi regrediens…"

With the time of the journey fixed, if rather tentatively, to the late autumn and early winter of 1026, this brings us to the even harder question of determining the specific route that Cnut could have taken to Rome. Again, there is only a small handful of sources that can help us, but along with some circumstantial evidence and logical assumptions, we can use that as a basis for at least a rough sketch of his itinerary.

The only source that directly provides any geographic information about the route is the *Encomium Emma Reginae*, which mentions that Cnut travelled to Rome through "*Italia*", "*Gallia*" and "*Flandria*", and particularly emphasises a visit to the Monastery of Saint Bertin in Saint-Omer in Flanders near Calais.[57] If we were to

[56] Oswald Holder-Egger, *Lamperti Monachi Hersfeldensis Opera*, MGH SS rer. Germ., 38 (Hannover, 1894), pp. 286–7. Tyler, *The Alpine Passes*, p. 30, notes that even though the authors here may be prone to literary exaggeration, and Lampert in particular is *"generally untrustworthy"*, this and the preceding two accounts still *"…may be regarded as first-hand accounts of the dangers of Alpine travel; though it should be remembered that all refer to winter months, the worst possible season especially for the high Great St. Bernard."*

[57] *Encomium*, II:20, p. 37

accept this statement, it would be probable that Cnut followed the same route as Archbishop Sigeric had previously used in 990 – i.e. by way of Flanders, Rheims, Besançon, and the Great Saint Bernard pass to Northern Italy.

Unfortunately, this is very difficult to reconcile with the Letter to the English People, which Cnut apparently wrote and sent during his journey back from Rome. In the Letter, he says specifically that, "*Ego itaque vobis notum fieri volo, quod eadem via qua exivi regrediens, Danemarciam eo, pacem et firmum pactum…*"[58], and although going by the route described in the Encomium would be the obvious choice if travelling from England, it would be very circuitous indeed if travelling from Denmark.

It is of course possible that Cnut first visited England before setting out for Rome, but we have no evidence that suggests this, and if we maintain our earlier assumption that the Battle of Holy River immediately preceded the journey, there would have been very little time to do so in any case, if the intention was to cross the Alps before winter.

Another source that might provide a little more information is the *Leidarvisir ok borga-skipan*, an Icelandic itinerary and guidebook for pilgrims from the mid-12th century. The work was produced on the basis of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that Nikulás Bergsson, the first abbot of the Benedictine monastery Munkaþverá, undertook ca. 1149–1154,[59] and it very conveniently lists several typical routes that pilgrims could take from Denmark to Rome, including the cities and important places one would pass along the way.

The primary route described in the *Leidarvisir* departs Denmark at Hedeby, passes Itzehoe, Stade, Verden, Nienburg, Minden and Paderborn to Mainz, then proceeds along the Rhine as far as Basel. Abbot Nikulás also describes a secondary route further to the east, through Harsefeld, Walsrode, Hannover, Hildesheim, Gandersheim, Fritzlar, and Arneburg, then on to Mainz and the Rhine. The monasteries of Gandersheim and Corvey would have been particularly important places to visit along this route.

Indeed, when considering these routes, we should keep in mind that whereas the typical pilgrims would normally prefer such established pilgrim routes for the sake of both ease of travel and safety, a king travelling with his entourage was not a typical pilgrim, and that Cnut could have deviated from either of these routes if he wished. But still, they are at least known and established, and as such they can serve as a useful departure point.

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[58] Felix Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* 3 vols.; (Halle, 1903–1916), vol. 1, p. 277, c. 13

[59] Janus Møller Jensen, 'Vejen til Jerusalem. Danmark og pilgrimsvejen til det hellige land i det 12. århundrede. En islandsk vejviser.', in Peter Carelli, Lars Hermanson & Hanne Sanders (ed.), *Ett annat 1100-tal. Individ, kollektiv och kulturella mönster i medeltidens Danmark* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2004), 284–337, esp. pp. 291–4

One source that at least circumstantially suggests that Cnut did take a substantial detour is the miracle collection *Miraculi Sancti Heriberti*, which was written around 1050 by the Benedictine monk and later abbot of Saint-Laurent in Liege, Lantbert von Deutz (d. 1069). One of the accounts – an otherwise fairly typical miraculous healing performed by the saint – mentions in closing that,

*"Chnut rex Anglorum huic mirando spectaculo intererat, et fidele sit, quod ob hoc dominus eum direxerat, ut Heribertus prędicaretur etiam per reges, qui in diebus suis placens deo et inventus iustus fideliter observavit regis sui dei leges. Rex ipse in venerationem sancti humiliter conversus regia dona ingentia et honorifica transmisit ipsi reversus."*[60]

This account is particularly interesting, since Lantbert was not only more or less contemporary with Cnut, but he also had close connections to Cologne and the Deutz Abbey, which Heribert himself had founded in 1003 during his tenure as Archbishop of Cologne.[61] According to William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani*, Cnut visited the shrine of St. Heribert, and he may also have donated a psalter and a sacramentary to the Deutz Abbey,[62] making it very probable that Lantbert was writing on the basis of first-hand information from witnesses to such a visit.

So to sum up what we have concluded so far, the circumstantial evidence for the timing of Cnut's journey, combined with the information in the Letter, the descriptions of typical pilgrims' routes in the *Leidarvisir*, and the mention in the *Miraculi Sancti Heriberti* all very strongly suggest that Cnut departed from Denmark, rather than England, and that he passed through northern Germany probably along more or less the same route as the one described in the *Leidarvisir*, i.e. from Hedeby to Mainz, although with at least one detour to Cologne.

From Mainz, he most likely travelled along the Rhine, which would have taken him directly past not just the archiepiscopal sees of Mainz and Worms, but also the new Salian power centre at Speyer, where Conrad had recently laid the foundation stones for both the Speyer Cathedral and the nearby Kloster Limburg – the same monastery where Cnut's own daughter Gunhilde would be buried eleven years later. But we shall return to that later.

Continuing up along the Rhine, this brings us to the question of the Alpine passage, where Cnut would have been faced with a choice of, broadly speaking, three different routes: A western route through the Great St. Bernhard Pass; a central

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[60] Bernhard Vogel (ed.), *Lantbert von Deutz, Vita Heriberti. Miracula Heriberti. Gedichte. Liturgische Texte*; SS rer. Germ, 73 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2001), p. 238

[61] Bernhard Vogel, 'Das hagiographische Werk Lantberts von Deutz über Heribert von Köln', in Klaus Herbers and Dieter R. Bauer (ed.), *Hagiographie im Kontext. Möglichkeiten und Wirkungsweisen historischer Auswertung* (Beiträge zur Hagiographie, 1; Stuttgart, 2000), 117-29.

[62] Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 103

route through the Septimer Pass or another nearby pass, such as the Julier or the Majola; or an eastern route through the Brenner system.[63]

The typical and most direct choice for a pilgrim following the Rhine would have been to turn south at Basel and cross through the Great Saint Bernhard, but we should also consider the possibility that Cnut may have continued along the Rhine to Lake Constance in order to visit the two very prominent monasteries in the area, St. Gallen and Reichenau.

From the region around Lake Constance, the more direct route to Italy would have been to turn south through one of the passes of the Central System, most likely the Septimer Pass.[64] However, it should be noted that the route through the Septimer was characterised by a number of lakes that had to be crossed, which made it somewhat inconvenient for larger groups.[65] An alternative would have been to go through the Brenner System, which is located even further to the east and would have made for a rather significant detour, but is easier and more convenient to cross than the other two options.[66] (Indeed, Conrad II himself had used the Brenner when travelling to Italy in 1026 and would use the same route again on his return later in 1027.[67])

### 3.1.3 Arrival in Italy: "…comitem habens itineris Chnud regem…"

Having crossed the Alps by one of these routes, Cnut and his entourage would have found themselves on the North Italian plains probably sometime by mid-December at the latest. At this time, Conrad was still engaged in subduing several rebellious cities in the same region. Although his precise movements are not entirely clear, we do know that he was at Ivrea by late December, as he issued a diploma there on December 20th,[68] and that according to Wipo, he also celebrated Christmas there.[69]

If Cnut arrived in northern Italy around this time, it is almost given that a formal meeting between the two kings took place at some point. Again, there are no records or accounts of such a meeting, but under the circumstances, even with the previous peace agreement and all previous negotiations and arrangements concerning the journey in place, it would still have been a very delicate and complicated diplomatic affair.

We can at least get an idea of how such a meeting between two monarchs would have transpired from the 10th century Treaty of Bonn. In November 921, King Henry

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[63] Tyler, *The Alpine Passes*

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Herwig Wolfram, *Conrad II, 990–1039. Emperor of Three Kingdoms*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 96–7, 111–2

[68] MGH DD K II, no. 70

[69] Wipo, c. 15

the Fowler of the Eastern Franks and King Charles III the Simple of the Western Franks met on the Rhine, which formed the border between their domains, near present-day Bonn in order to enter a treaty of *amicitia*. The arenga of the treaty describes their meeting:

*"Convenerunt enim ambo illustres reges, sicut inter se discurrentibus legatis convenerant, II. Nonas Novembris, feria prima; domnus enim Karolus super Rhenum flumen ad Bonnam castrum et strenuus Heinricus ex altera parte Rheni. Et ea tantum die mutuis se visibus intuentes super ripas eiusdem fluminis huc et ultra, ut sui fierent fideles innoxii sacramento, quo hanc eorum conventionem fuerant polliciti. Verum feria quarta, VII. Idus Novembris, in medio Rheni fluminis saepius dicti principes de navibus quisque suis in tertiam ascenderunt, quae ancorata in fluminis medio gratia eorum colloquii fixa erat, ibique in primo hanc sibi vicissim convenientiam ob statum pacis iuramento sanxerunt ita: …"*[70]

The description reflects the care, even bordering on anxiety, that accompanied a meeting such as this. The entire procedure – each king first appearing on either side of the river, then only on the next day meeting on boats on the river itself – appears highly ritualised, and for good reason. The purpose of such a ritual was not only to protect the honour and status of each participant[71], but also on a more practical level minimise the risks inherent in a situation where large numbers of armed warriors were involved, and a simple mistake or miscommunication could have fatal consequences.[72]

As Julia Barrow observes, this particular procedure of letting two parties of similar rank meet in a sort of *terra nullius,* in which neither enjoyed an advantage over the other, was well established both within the old Carolingian realms and in Anglo-Saxon England.[73] Thus, both Conrad and Cnut would have been familiar with its use and would have employed it in their situation.

Of course, the specific circumstances surrounding the Treaty of Bonn were somewhat different than those for our hypothetical meeting in Northern Italy – particularly as the former consisted in two neighbouring kings meeting on the

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[70] Ludwig Weiland (ed.), *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum inde ab anno DCCCXI usque ad annum MCXCVII (911–1197)*; MGH Const. I (Hannover, 1893), p. 1

[71] Cf. Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellshaft, 2003a), pp. 19f

[72] Cf. Orderic Vitalis's account of William the Conqueror's coronation, during which Norman soldiers mistook the acclamation shouts for an insurrection and set fire to a number of building at Westminster. *Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 2, pp. 184–5

[73] When England was temporarily divided between Cnut and Edmund in 1016, *"…recurrentibus internuntiis et obsidibus ad inuicem datis, ambo reges at locum qui Deorhyrst nominatur in unum conuenerunt; Eadmundus cum suis in occidentali ripa Sabrine, Canutus uero in orientali cum suis consedit. Dein uterque rex in insulam que Olanege appellatur et est in ipsius fluminis medio sita, trabariis aduehitur, ubi pace, amicitia, fraternitate et pacto et sacramentiis confirmata regnum diuiditur."* John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 492. See also Julia Barrow, 'Demonstrative behaviour and political communication in later Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 36 (2007), p. 127-50, p. 141

border between their realms, whilst the meeting between Cnut and Conrad would have taken place within the latter's territory – but it is nevertheless safe to assume that the principles observed would have been the same.

With the two kings now both in northern Italy and having met sometime in December, this leaves the remaining three months between Christmas 1026 and the coronation on Easter 1027. We do not know very much about the Emperor's activities in early 1027, beyond a single diploma from Lucca, which must have been issued sometime before the coronation, since Conrad still titles himself as "rex".[74] Nor do we have any knowledge of what Cnut did during this time, if he had already arrived in Italy. He may have remained with the Emperor during the winter months, or he may have made his way to Rome independently to await Easter, possibly visiting other important holy places in the region as suggested by a passage from the Letter:

*"Nunc autem ipsi Deo meo omnipotenti valde humiliter gratias ago, quod mihi concessit in vita mea sanctos apostolos suos Petrum et Paulum et omne sanctuarium quod intra urbem Romam aut extra addiscere potui, expetere et secundum desiderium meum presentialiter venerari et adorare."*

However, certain other sources suggests that he may have not just remained with Conrad for a period of time, but may even have taken an active part in Conrad's campaigns in northern Italy. In particular, this passage from Adam of Bremen:

*"Tempore illo Conradus imperator filiam Chnud regis Heinrico filio accepit in matrimonium. Cum quibus statim regiu fastu Italiam ingressus est ad faciendam regno iusticiam, comitem habens itineris Chnud regem, potentia trium regnorum barbaris gentibus valde terribilem."*[75]

It seems that Adam tends to conflate the marriage between Henry and Gunhilde with the growing relationship between Cnut and Conrad as a whole, but it is very unlikely that this marriage had been arranged as early as 1026/7.[76] But what is more interesting here is the notion that Cnut was a "*comes itineris*" for Conrad on the latter's campaigns in Italy, a term that – especially when seen in conjunction with the rather martial description of Cnut as "*potentia … valde terribilem*" – perhaps suggests some form of military involvement. A brief passage in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* appears to support a similar conclusion:

[74] MGH DD K II, no. 71
[75] AB, II 65 (63)
[76] See below, sec. 3.1.1

*"Igitur Kanutus sex prepollentium regnorum possessor effectus eximio sui fulgore etiam Romanum illustrauit imperium. Enimuero eius principi Henrico filiam Gunnildam nuptum tradidit, eundemque paulo post Italica consternatione perculsum auxilio prosecutus pristine fortune pressa rebellium conspiratione restituit."*[77]

Since it is placed in Saxo's narrative immediately following an account of the Battle of the Holy River, this account is probably an echo of Cnut's journey to Rome, which he otherwise completely ignores. It must be said that Saxo is entirely unreliable for this period, and the idea of a strong king of Denmark coming to the help of a weak emperor and helping him to restore his "*pristine fortune*" should be seen as an expression of Saxo's strong anti-Imperial bias, which usually leads him to portray the emperors in as poor a light as possible. However, seen in conjunction with the circumstances and with Adam's previously quoted account, this particular passage does sound somewhat plausible in the sense that Cnut may in fact have contributed to the North Italian campaigns in late 1026 and early 1027 to some degree.

## 3.2 – Cnut in Rome

With Cnut having arrived safely in northern Italy, we can now proceed to the purpose and centrepiece of the whole journey, the Imperial coronation in Rome in late March 1027.

### 3.2.1 Preparations: "Her for Ælfric biscop to Rome & onfeng pallium…"

Before we turn our attention to the ceremony itself, we should first briefly consider the nature of the event that we are about to discuss.

The Imperial coronation was one of the most important events of the generation, signifying the elevation of the, at least in dignity if not in political fact, universal ruler of all Christendom. And Conrad's coronation in 1027 was even more momentous than usual, marking as it did the transition of power from the Ottonian to the new Salian dynasty.

Like many important political rituals, it was also a thoroughly choreographed event, in which – at least ideally – nothing would have been left to random chance or happenstance. Gert Alhoff speaks of "die 'Gemachtheit' der Rituale", that the

[77] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum – Danmarkshistorien*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Zeeberg (Copenhagen: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Gads Forlag, 2005), book X:17. It is not clear which "*sex prepollentium regnorum*" Saxo is referring to, but he may have included Ireland and Scotland amongst Cnut's dominions in addition to England, Denmark, Norway and presumably Sweden. The hyperbolic phrase "*eximio sui fulgore etiam Romanum illustrauit imperium*" is a classic example of Saxo's anti-Imperial bias.

purpose of such rituals was to communicate important and carefully-composed messages by means of symbolic, performative acts.[78]

A prior example of this Gemachtheit could be seen at Conrad's royal coronation in 1024, when the procession to the Cathedral of Mainz, where the coronation was to take place, was interrupted by, in turn, a tenant farmer of the archbishopric of Mainz, an orphan, a widow, and an innocent victim of miscarriage of justice. Each of these appeared before the king to present their complaints, and in each case, the king stopped the procession to hear the petition and render judgement.

As the almost allegorical selection of individuals here suggests – Church tenant, orphan, widow, and innocent – these were not just random people who happened to make their way to the king and draw his attention. As Althoff notes, "*[e]s wäre ein grober Anachronismus, sie als Spontanhandlungen verzweifelter Menschen zu interpretieren*"; rather, they were ritualised and quite obviously planned opportunities for Conrad to demonstrate his worthiness and willingness to render justice and defend the weak.[79] Since they happened on the way to the coronation, they were also meant to emphasise the point that Conrad was not dependent on the coronation for his position, but that he could act as king by virtue of the prior election, even before the coronation had taken place.[80] Such instances of "political spectacle" speak to the degree of planning and negotiation that had gone into the occasion, and the imperial coronation would be no different.[81]

Since Cnut had a very important part in the ceremony, as we shall see below, he would likely have been involved in such negotiations from a very early date. Precisely when his participation was agreed upon is unknown, but it most likely formed a part, at least in principle, of the peace agreement between him and Conrad that Archbishop Unwan had brokered in 1025. Further, the new Archbishop Ælfric Puttoc of York, who had been consecrated in 1023 after Wulfstan's death, had travelled to Rome in late 1026 to receive his pallium from the Pope.[82] Whilst in Rome, it is very likely that he also negotiated with the Holy See and perhaps imperial officials over the preparations for Cnut's pilgrimage and participation in the coronation.

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[78] Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale*, pp. 189ff

[79] Ibid., p. 88

[80] Wolfram, *Conrad II*, pp. 49–50

[81] Which is of course not to say that unexpected events did not happen during these important ceremonies. One such event indeed happened precisely on the day of Conrad's coronation, when a struggle broke out between the Archbishops of Milan and Ravenna over who should have the honour of escorting the Emperor-Elect into the St. Peter Basilica for the coronation (see Wolfram, pp. 102–6). But that was the result of a subset of participants engaging in what we might call "oppositional planning" to promote a certain agenda, rather than a lack of planning as such. See also Gerd Althoff, 'Die Veränderbarkeit von Ritualen im Mittelalter', in Gerd Althoff (ed.), *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2001), 157-76

[82] William Hunt, 'Ælfric (d. 1051)', rev. Marios Costambeys, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/191, accessed 13 March 2014]

Might Ælfric have had *amici* or acquaintances in Rome that would have benefited him during such negotiations? Unfortunately, we know nothing about his education and only very little of his career before his consecration as Archbishop, except that he was a monastic dean at Winchester Cathedral.[83] But at least Cnut certainly knew him well enough and had sufficient trust in him to elevate him to the second-highest office in the English church – and indeed to make him the successor of the renowned Archbishop Wulfstan, one of Cnut's earliest and strongest supporters. Given Cnut's close connections to Winchester, it is very possible that Ælfric was a member of the royal court as well.[84]

The timeframe is worth noting here – according to the ASC[85], the Archbishop "*…received the pallium from Pope John [XIX] on 12 November.*" Taken at face value, this would mean that (remembering again the challenging Alpine crossings in the winter) there would have been very little time or opportunity to communicate the progress or results of such negotiations to Cnut if he was still in Denmark in November. On the other hand, if Cnut was already half-way to Italy at the time, communications between him and Ælfric would of course have been much easier.

In addition to the specifics of Cnut's participation in the coronation rituals, another important subject for negotiation would have been the terms of his free and safe passage through Conrad's territories on the journey to Rome, including most likely details such as the size of his retinue and the specific route.

In the end, though, the years of planning of course culminated in the "main event", as it were, the arrival of the Emperor-Elect in Rome and the imperial coronation itself.

### 3.2.2 Adventus & Coronation: "…imperialem benedictionem a papa suscepit…"

Our main source for the coronation and the events surrounding it is Wipo's account, which is rather short and can be quoted in full:[86]

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[83] Janet M. Cooper, *The Last Four Anglo-Saxon Archbishops of York* (York: St Anthony's Press, 1970)

[84] Ibid.

[85] "*Her for Ælfric biscop to Rome 7 onfeng pallium æt Iohanne papan on .ii. Idus Nouembris.*" ASC MS D s.a. 1026

[86] It is rather remarkable that Wipo's account of the coronation and the surrounding events is so concise, amounting to only some twenty-five lines – especially compared to his very extensive account of the Fürstentag in 1024 and Konrad's subsequent election and coronation as King of the Germans, which all together takes up a full three chapters (Wipo, chs. 1–3). As Achim Thomas Hack observes, "*[d]ie feierliche Einholung in Rom, der ideellen Hauptstadt des Imperiums, bei der dem künftigen Kaiser die gebührende Ehre erwiesen wurde, konnte als eines der würdevollsten Ereignissen in der Vita des jeweiligen Herrschers betrachtet werden.*" Achim Thomas Hack, *Das Empfangszeremoniell bei mittelalterlichen Papst-Kaiser-Treffen*, Forschungen zur Kaiser- und Papstgeschichte des Mittelalters, 18 (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), p. 373

One possible explanation is that Wipo may not even have been present at the Imperial coronation in person, but based his account on second-hand information, which may have mentioned

"*Igitur rex Chuonradus Romam ingressus eodem anno ut supra, id est a nativitate Salvatoris MXXVII, indictione decima, a papa Iohanne et universis Romanis regio honore mirifice receptus est et in die sancto paschae, qui eo anno VII. kalendas Aprilis terminabatur, a Romanis ad imperatorem electus imperialem benedictionem a papa suscepit, Caesar et augustus Romano nomine dictus. Quin etiam regina Gisela imperatricis consecrationem et nomen ibidem accepit. His ita peractis in duorum regum praesentia, Ruodolfi regis Burgundiae et Chnutonis regis Anglorum, divino officio finito imperator duorum regum medius ad cubiculum suum honorifice ductus est. […]*"[87]

A few other sources contribute some further details. In particular, the *Wolfherii Vita Godehardi Episcopi* adds that,

"*Rex autem natalis Domini festum Yporeae iniciavit. Inde ad limina apostolorum tendens, feria tertia ante coenam Domini*[88] *Romam felici prosperitate gaudens intravit, et in sancto resurrectionis Domini die coronam imperialis honoris a beato Iohanne apostolorum vicario gloriose percepit.*"[89]

In addition to the narrative sources, another set of sources for the details of the ceremony itself are the coronation *ordines* that laid out the liturgical and ceremonial guidelines for the coronation, in particular the ordo 'Censius II' from the Liber Censuum, which (so E. Eichmann) was first used for the coronation of Henry II in 1014, and would have formed a natural basis for Conrad's coronation as well.[90]

Here it is important to note that a coronation *ordo* is a normative source, one that describes how the ceremony would ideally take place, rather than a description of what actually happened, and again, the actual proceedings would have been the result of specific negotiations and planning. All the same, since the *ordo* built on the precedence of previous coronations, it still most likely formed the basis for such planning, and the ceremony as it happened probably stayed reasonably close to the ideal.

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Cnut's role in the post-ceremony procession, but not otherwise have gone into any particular details regarding the ceremony.

It may seem surprising that the Imperial Chaplain would have been absent from what was arguably the single most important sacral event in the Emperor's life, but on the other hand, Wipo himself states in the introductory Epistola that, "*Quodsi hinc plus vel minus vel aliter, quam se integritas rerum habet, scribo vel dixero, non erit culpa scribentis, sed narrantis, quoniam, cum plurimum tempus infirmavi, non potui in capella senioris mei Chuonradi frequenter adesse.*"(Wipo, p. 522, l. 15–18) It might be that the coronation in Rome was one of those occasions.

[87] Wipo, c. 16

[88] Tuesday before Easter, i.e. March 21st, 1027

[89] Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Historiae aevi Salici*; MGH SS 11 (Hannover, 1854), p. 208

[90] Eduard Eichmann, *Die Kaiserkrönung im Abendland. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters.* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1942), vol. I, p. 155

The arrival of the King (and soon-to-be Emperor) in Rome was an entire ceremony in itself, variously referred to as "*adventus*", "*occursio*" or "*ingressus*", which in the time of the Salian Emperors drew heavily on the symbolism and precedent of the ancient Roman imperators.[91] In what we may call its "ideal form",[92] the King was received outside the city by the prominent orders of the city, including the clergy and the members of the Senate, possibly carrying palm leaves, torches, crucifixes, banners and other adornments. The procession into the city stopped several times en route for the King to receive the *laudes* of the people and to make oaths to them, before eventually making its way to St. Peter's Basilica, where the Pope received the King and his entourage. The *adventus* concluded with an entrance into the Basilica, including a Mass and prayers at the tomb of the Apostle.

As noted in the *Vita Godehardi*, Conrad arrived in Rome "…*feria tertia ante coenam*…", i.e. the Tuesday before Easter, which in 1027 was Tuesday, March 21st. If Cnut was in Rome at this point – and it is almost certain that he was – he would have participated in this ceremony amongst the highest–ranking of the guests, probably as a part of Conrad's entourage.

The solemnities on Easter Sunday started with a procession on foot from the Lateran Palace through the city of Rome to the St. Peter Basilica, where the coronation itself would take place. Along the way, the soon-to-be-Emperor again made oaths to the Roman people to protect and observe their good customs. During the actual coronation ceremony in the Basilica, the Emperor was first anointed by the Bishop of Ostia with sacred oil on the right arm and between the shoulders, then bestowed by the Pope personally with the insignia of rulership: the imperial crown, sword, sceptre, and ring. The Empress was likewise anointed and received the crown from the seven participating bishops in common. This ceremony was followed by the coronation mass, the *laudes*, during which the Emperor was acclaimed as a *Deo coronatus magnus et pacificus imperator*, and the *immantatio*, where he was clad in the imperial mantle and shoes.[93]

All of this was (according to Wipo) "…*peractis in duorum regum praesentia, Ruodolfi regis Burgundiorum et Chnutonis regis Anglorum*…", which does not suggest that the two kings actively participated in the ceremony proper, but they very much did so in the subsequent part of the event, the procession, which we shall turn to now.

### 3.2.3 Procession: "…duorum regum medius…"

At the conclusion of the mass, the newly-crowned Emperor went in a procession from the St. Peter Basilica back to the Lateran Palace, and this brings us to the part of

[91] Hack, *Das Empfangszeremoniell bei mittelalterlichen Papst-Kaiser-Treffen,* pp. 280ff

[92] Ibid., pp. 293ff

[93]

the event that is of the most interest to us: Wipo's specific mention that the Emperor "*…duorum regum medius ad cubiculum suum honorifice ductus est.*"[94]

This short phrase is of the utmost importance: The two kings are not just participating in a procession, they are literally escorting the newly-crowned Emperor through the transition from the religious sphere and back into the secular sphere; perhaps even initiating him into his new station, as it were.

But what does it say about the relationship between Cnut and Conrad? It is natural to think of this event as perhaps a form of *Ehrendienst*, the various ritualistic services that vassals frequently rendered to their liege lords as signs of their submission. These could take many different forms. Widukind of Corvey relates how Otto the Great, after his royal coronation in 936, the king descended to the palace for a celebratory feast "*…cum pontificibus et omni populo; duces vero ministrabant…*", as Duke Giselbert of the Lotharingians arranged the feast, Eberhardt of the Franks oversaw the table servers, and so forth.[95]

Another form of ritualised Ehrendienst was the *officium stratoris*, the act of leading the the lord's horse and holding his stirrup when mounting or dismounting, which King Pepin rendered to Pope Stephen II in 754,[96] which was referred to in the *Constitutio Constantini*[97], and which was later to be a point of contention between Frederick I and Hadrian IV.[98]

And likewise, Thietmar of Merseburg gives the following account of how the Polish king Bolesław Chroby acted as a sword-carrier for Emperor Henry II after their peace agreement at Merseburg in 1013:

*"In cuius vigilia*[99] *Bolizlavus cum securitate obsidum apud se relictorum venit et optime suscipitur. In die sancto manibus applicatis miles efficitur et post sacramenta regi ad aecclesiam ornato incedenti armiger habetur. In II. feria regem magnis muneribus a se et a contectali sua oblatis placavit deindeque regia largitate his meliora ac multa maiora cum benefitio diu desiderato suscepit et obsides suos honore et laeticia remisit."*[100]

On a similar note, Richer of Saint-Remy relates in an anecdote how Emperor Otto II during negotiations with the French King Hugo Capet pretended to forget his sword in the negotiation chambers in an attempt to trick the King into bringing it to

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[94] Wipo, c. 16

[95] Paul Hirsch and Hans-Eberhard Lohmann (eds.), *Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvei*; MGH SS rer. Germ., 60 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1935), pp. 66–7; Althoff, *Macht der Rituale*, p. 94

[96] Jörg Träger, *Der reitende Papst – Ein Beitrag zur Ikonographie des Papsttums* (Munich/Zurich: Verlag Schnell u. Steiner, 1970)

[97] "*…et tenentes frenum equi ipsius pro reverentia beati Petri stratoris officium illi exhibuimus…*", *Constitutum Constantini*, c. XVI

[98] Horst Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages, c. 1050–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 143f.

[99] I.e. Pentecost

[100] Thietmar, *Chron.*, VI, 91 (55), pp. 338–40

him, thus implicitly accepting a subservient position under the Emperor. This is almost certainly a literary invention on Richer's part, but illustrative of the principles behind the idea of the Ehrendiensten.[101]

Considering these examples, we could well imagine that the act of escorting the newly-crowned Emperor on his coronation procession might likewise be interpreted as a symbol of submission or even vassalage, similar to serving as a sword-carrier or holding a stirrup.

But there is a crucial difference in that Wipo mentions how the Emperor walked "*…duorum regum medius…*", *between* the two kings rather by himself ahead or behind them. While this is another thing that may at first seem like a minor detail, it very strongly suggests a certain measure of equality between the people participating in this ritual, rather than any significant degree of subservience; in other words, if a hierarchy existed among them, we would expect to see a visual representation of it, whereas this situation on the contrary indicates an absence of hierarchy.[102]

Indeed, with the curious ambiguity that can be observed in many similar medieval rituals of this type, all of its participants are honoured each in their own way: The Emperor is honoured by being attended to and guarded by by two sovereign kings rendering this service voluntarily – but the kings would also derive no small degree of honour from being selected for this service by the newly-crowned Imperator Augustus. In this way, the Emperor "*…konnte sich als Herr über die christlichen Könige fühlen…*",[103] whilst these still retained their sovereignty and honour – much like at ritual meeting such as the one mentioned in the Treaty of Bonn discussed previously, the preservation of their individual royal ranks and dignities would have been a primary concern for each of the monarchs involved.

Following the coronation ceremonies, Conrad remained in Rome at least until April 7th, during which time he issued a number of charters and in particular presided over a synod together with the Pope on April 6th.[104] During the remainder of April, he appears to have campaigned in Apulia near Benevento and Capua,[105] then moved north and reached Ravenna by May 1st.[106]

We do not know how long Cnut remained in Rome. He does mention in the Letter that he visited "*…omne sanctuarium, quod intra urbem Romam aut extra addiscere potui…*", but it is not clear whether this happened before or after the coronation. Regardless, he was presumably anxious to return to his realms after the long

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[101] Quote and analysis in Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale*, p. 96

[102] Cf. the Roman *adventus* of Sigismund II in 1433, in which the ruler rode towards the end of the procession, followed only by the papal knights, Hack, *Das Empfangszeremoniell bei mittelalterlichen Papst-Kaiser-Treffen*, pp. 343f

[103] Eichmann, *Die Kaiserkrönung im Abendland*, vol. 1, p. 218, cf. p. 115

[104] MGH DD K II, no. 38, p. 82

[105] Wipo, c. 17

[106] MGH DD K II, nos. 89–91, pp. 121–4

absence, so it seems reasonable to assume that he did not tarry in Rome for very long.

## 3.3 Cnut's Motivations and the Outcome

Even for a private person, embarking on a pilgrimage in the 11th century was a major endeavour, requiring not just a great expense of time, energy and resources, but also – as we have seen previously – significant inconvenience or even danger. But for a ruler, it also carried the additional risk of travelling abroad and leaving the administration of the realm in the hands of perhaps less able or trustworthy deputies.

Thus, it is clear that Cnut must have had very persuasive reasons, as well as expectations of concrete results, in order to leave his realms and spend perhaps as much as nine months abroad, especially amidst a very tense political situation regarding Norway and Sweden.

In the following section, we will consider what some of Cnut's primary reasons for going to Rome may have been, religious as well political, and on that basis subsequently try to draw some conclusions about his relationship with Emperor Conrad.

### 3.3.1 A Royal Pilgrimage: "…et pro salute regnorum…"

Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome was not just that of a private person, but also of a ruler. The pilgrimage was of course considered a very desirable expression of piety; one of Cnut's contemporaries, Duke William V of Aquitaine,[107] was particularly renowned for his frequent pilgrimages, as described by Ademar of Chabannes:

"*Cui a iuventute consuetudo fuit, ut semper omni anno ad limina apostolorum Romam properaret, et eo quo Romam non properabat anno, ad Sanctum Iacobum Galliciae reconpensaret iter devotum. Et quocumque iter ageret, vel conventum publicum exerceret, potius rex quam esse dux putabatur, honestate et claritudine qua affluebat honoris.*[108]

[…]

"*Immo Hispaniae regem Adefonsum, regemque Navarrae Santium, necnon et regem Danamarchorum et Anglorum nomine Canotum, ita sibi summo favore devinxerat, ut*

[107] Incidentally, William V had been offered and eventually declined the Italian (or properly, Longobardian) crown by a group of North Italian magnates in 1025. Conrad was crowned King of Italy by Archbishop Aribert of Milan in 1026. See Wolfram, *Conrad II*, pp. 95–6.

[108] Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Annales, chronica et historiae aevi Carolini et Saxonici*; MGH SS 4 (Hannover, 1841), p. 134, l. 23–27. Ademar was a notorious literary forger, and his writings need to be treated with the utmost care. (See Richard Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History. Ademar of Chabannes, 989–1034* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)). However, there seems to be no reason to doubt that the Duke was a frequent pilgrim, much less the general sentiment that pilgrimages was a desirable undertaking for a ruler.

*singulis annis legationes eorum exciperet pretiosis cum muneribus, ipseque pretiosiora eis remitteret munera."*[109]

Similar sentiments are found in one of the Icelandic skald Sigvatr Þorðarson's *Knútsdrápa*, which were written c. 1038,[110] and which praised Cnut for having undertaken his pilgrimage, saying, *"There came to the ruler a longing for travel bearing a [pilgrim's] staff, he who previously had battle in mind…"* and remarking on how "*…[s]o few generous princes will have measured with their feet the southward path.*"[111]

However, beyond being just a display of piety, when a ruler went on pilgrimage, it took on another political and religious dimension. As mentioned above, Cnut states as one of his reasons for going to Rome the desire to pray, "*…pro salute regnorum quique meo subiacent regimini populorum.*"[112] This phrase is typically translated as "*…for the **safety** of the kingdoms and of the peoples which are subjected to my rule…*",[113] but "*pro salute*" could just as well mean "*for the **salvation***"[114] – or we might indeed say that the two meanings are coterminous, since of course no people that lacked divine grace would ever enjoy safety.

The early 11th century was still a period of the *rex et sacerdos*, the idea of the king being a liturgical as much as a political figure, or what Ernst Kantorowicz identified as the period of "Christ-centered kingship", with the later "law-centered kingship" only developing in the course of the late 12th and 13th centuries.[115] This Christ-centered kingship is for instance seen in Wipo, who has the Archbishop of Mainz address Conrad II at his coronation as King of Germany in 1024, saying: "*Ad summam dignitati pervenisti, vicarius es Christi. Nemo nisi illius imitator, verus est dominator.*"[116]

But the idea was particularly strong in Anglo-Saxon England, especially during the reign of King Edgar. The clearest expression of the idea can be seen in Edgar's

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[109] Pertz (ed.), *Annales, chronica et historiae aevi Carolini et Saxonici* , l. 29–32

[110] Finnur (ed.) Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 4 vols. (Copenhagen/Kristiania, 1912-15), vol. A1, p. 251. On the community of skaldic poets at the court of Cnut and his successors in general, see Matthew Townend, 'Cnut's Poets: An Old Norse Literary Community in Eleventh-Century England', in Elizabeth M. Tyler (ed.), *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England, c. 800–1250* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 197–217.

[111] "*Kómu fylki / farlystir, 's bar / hervig í hug / hafanda staf: / rauf ræsir af / Rúms veg suman / kærr kaisara / klúss Pétrúsi. // Svá mun fár feril / fetum suðr metinn / hringdrífr hafa.*" Quoted in Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 295, with Bolton's translation: "*There came to the ruler a longing for travel bearing a (pilgrim's) staff, he who previously had battle in mind. The ruler, dear to the emperor and close to the Pope, halted on his journey to Rome. So few generous princes will have measured with their feet the southward path.*"

[112] Letter 1027, c. 1

[113] Cf. EHD, p. 417

[114] Cf. e.g. Hebrews 5:9 "*…et consummatus factus est omnibus obtemperantibus sibi causa salutis aeternae…*"; 2 Cor 1:6 "*…sive autem tribulamur pro vestra exhortatione et salute…*"

[115] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957)

[116] Wipo, c. 3

coronation in 973. Edgar had acceded to the throne already in 959 at the age of sixteen, but it appears that no coronation ceremony was performed at that time, or at least it was not mentioned specifically in the sources.[117]

The coronation in 973, on the other hand, was a highly significant event, and it appears that it was specifically postponed until the King's thirtieth year of age; not just the same age required for a sacerdotal consecration[118], but also around the age at which Christ was baptised and began his ministry.[119] Adding to the theme of *christomimesis*, the coronation was performed on the holiday of Pentecost, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle even draws specific parallels to the millennial Second Coming of Christ, saying that,

"*…then had passed from the birth of the glorious King, the Guardian of Light, ten hundred years reckoned in numbers, except that there yet remained, by what documents say seven and twenty of the number of years, so nearly had passed away a thousand years of the Lord of Victories, when this took place.*"[120]

The example of Edgar is relevant not just because it formed a part of the English tradition of the time, but also because of the ideological use that Cnut made of Edgar's reign – on several occasions, he made reference to Edgar as a "golden age ruler", whose laws and traditions he would restore and uphold.[121] Thus §13 in his first Letter to the People of England of 1019x20: "*And it is my will that all the nation, ecclesiastical and lay, shall steadfastly observe Edgar's laws, which all men have chosen and sworn to at Oxford,*"[122] and similarly in Cnut's Winchester law code of 1020x21: "*In the*

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[117] Simon Keynes, 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', in Donald Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975. New Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 3-60

[118] Mercedes Salvador-Bello, 'The Edgar Panegyrics in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', ibid., 252-72, p. 254

[119] Luke 3:23 "*Et ipse Iesus erat incipiens quasi annorum triginta…*"; See esp.Robert Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 213

[120] Original in alliterative verse:

| | |
|---|---|
| " | *7 þa agangen wæs* |
| *tyn hund wintra* | *geteled rimes* |
| *fram gebyrdtide* | *bremes cinges,* |
| *leohta hirdes,* | *butan þær to lafe ða get* |
| *wæs wintergetæles,* | *þæs ðe gewritu secgað,* |
| *seofan 7 .xx.,* | *swa neah wæs sigora frean* |
| *þusend aurnen,* | *þa ða þis gelamp."* |

ASC MS C (A, B), s.a. 973.

[121] In almost exactly the same manner as William the Conqueror a couple of generations later promised to uphold the 'golden' laws and status quo of Edward the Confessor: "*This also I command and will, that all shall have and hold the law of the king Edward in respect of their lands and all their possessions, with the addition of those decrees I have ordained for the welfare of the English people.*" Richard Huscroft, *Ruling England, 1042-1217* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 111

[122] EHD, no. 49, original in Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* , vol. 1, pp. 273-75. See also ASC MS D s.a. 1018: "*…and the Danes and the English reached an agreement at Oxford according to Edgar's laws.*" *("7 Dene 7 Engle wurdon sammæle æt Oxanaforda to Eadgares lage")*

*first place, the councillors determined that above all things they would ever honour one God and steadfastly hold one Christian faith, and would love King Cnut with due loyalty and zealously observe Edgar's laws."*[123]

The primary connecting link between Edgar and Cnut was Archbishop Wulfstan of York, who was an early and major supporter of Cnut, and also a very prominent scholar and statesman until his death in 1023. The Winchester Code was most likely compiled by Wulfstan himself[124] and is to a significant extent a codification of previous legislation, partly from the time of Edgar. Cnut's close relationship with the city of Winchester, which he made his capital city, is another connecting point; Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester was a driving force behind Edgar's religious programmes and the visions of his kingship, and it may well have survived in its strongest form precisely in that city.

Thus, the idea of the sacral kingship still existed during Cnut's reign, and even if its expressions were not quite as pronounced under Cnut as they had been under Edgar, we still find several references to instances of the King acting personally in a sacral or semi-liturgical role.

A primary example is the frontispiece of the Winchester New Minster *Liber Vitae* from c. 1031, which shows Cnut and Queen Emma presenting a golden cross to the altar of the church (see illustration 1). Above them, two angels hold a crown over the head of Cnut and a veil over Emma whilst gesturing upwards to the Christ in Majesty, who is flanked by the Holy Virgin and Saint Peter. At the bottom of the picture is a group of monks and laypeople looking upwards.

This again is a reference to King Edgar, as it was modelled on the earlier frontispiece of the New Minster foundation charter from c. 966, which similarly shows Edgar, flanked by Mary and Peter, presenting the charter to the Christ in Majesty surrounded by angels (see illustration 2).

In both illustrations, we see the King appearing before Christ in his own person and making an offering directly, without any intermediaries in the form of clergy – indeed, the clergy appears in an entirely subordinate position as part of the people beneath the King and Queen, who rather act as intermediaries to the divine on their behalf.

Another example of the king appearing in such a sacral context happens in 1024, when we find Cnut condoning and subsequently overseeing the solemn translation from London to Canterbury of the relics of Saint Ælfheah, Archbishop of Canterbury

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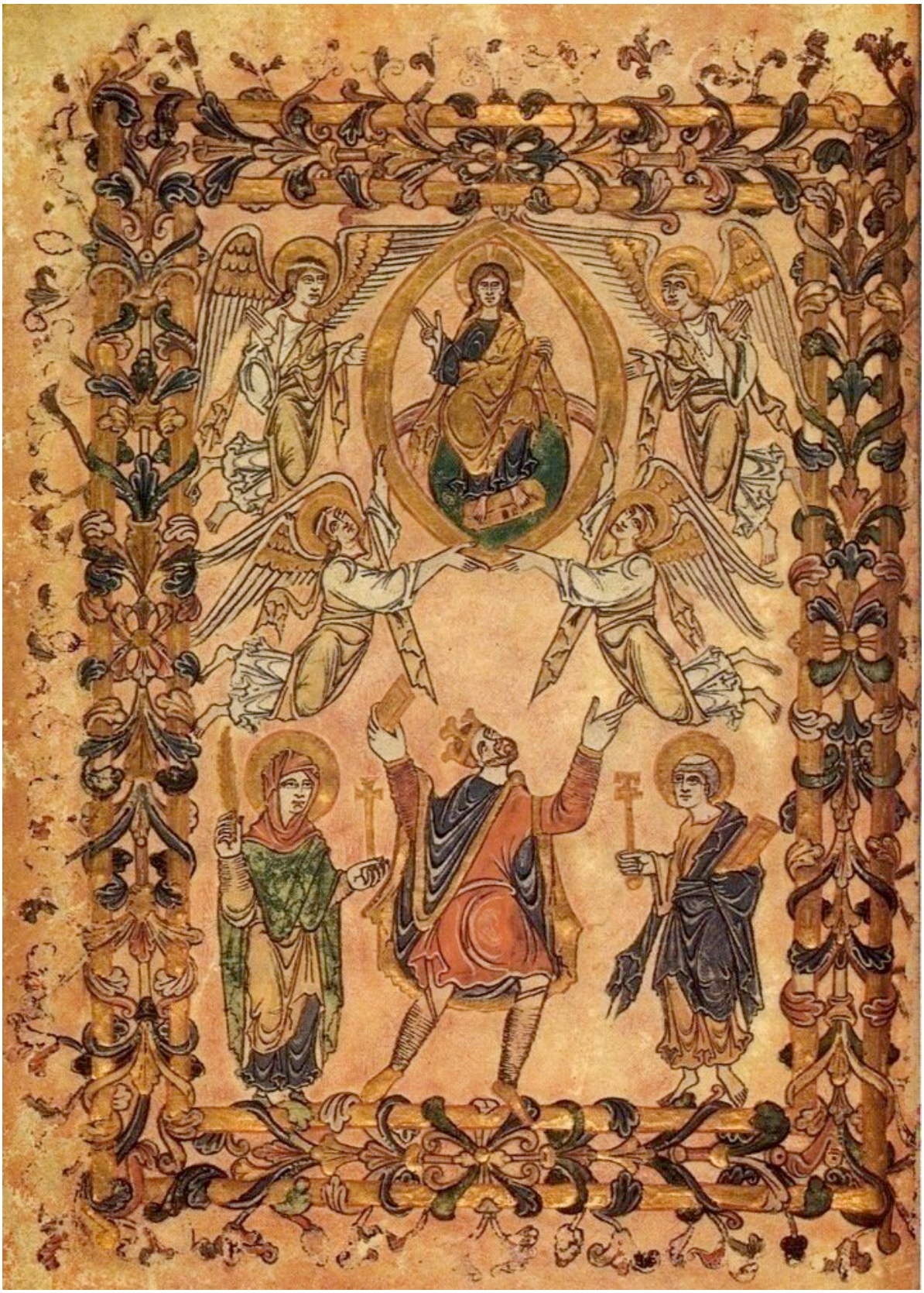
[123] "*Þonne is þæt ærest, þæt witan gerædan, þæt hi ofer ealle oþre þingc ænne god æfre wurðodon 7 ænne Cristendom anrædlice healdan 7 Cnut cyngc lufian mid rihtan 7 mid trywðan 7 Eadgares lagan geornlice folgian.*" EHD, no. 47. Original in Liebermann, *Gesetze*, vol. 1, p. 278

[124] Dorothy Whitelock, 'Archbishop Wulfstan, Homilist and Statesman', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fourth Series,* 24 (1942), p. 25-45


(Illustration 1. Winchester New Minster *Liber Vitae*, c. 1031. British Library, Stowe 944, f. 6r)



(Illustration 2. Winchester New Minster foundation charter, c. 966. British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian A VIII, f. 2v)

(1006–12), who had been killed by Danish raiders and was revered as a martyr.[125] The Anglo Saxon Chronicle says of this that,

*"…the illustrious king, and the archbishop and the diocesan bishops, and the earls, and very many ecclesiastics and also lay-folk, conveyed his holy body on a ship across the Thames to Southwark, and there entrusted the holy martyr to the archbishop [Æthelnoth of Canterbury] and his companions. […] Then on the third day Queen Emma came with her royal child Hardacnut, and they then all conveyed the holy archbishop with much glory and joy and songs of praise into Canterbury, and thus brought him with due ceremony into Christ Church on 11 June."*[126]

Finally, a charter of Cnut dated to 1023 again references a representation of the King acting in an independently sacral role, ritually appearing before and dedicating his kingdom to God, stating that,

*"…licet mortalis uitae pondere pressi et labentibus huius saeculi possessionibus simul infoecati, tamen miserationis eius largitate caducis opibus aeterna coelestis uitae praemia mercari queamus. Quapropter ego Cnut … propriis manibus meis capitis mei coronam pono super altare Christi in Dorobernia ad opus eiusdem ecclesie et concedo eidem ecclesie ad victum monachorum portum de Sandvvic…"*[127]

This idea resembles almost a reversal of the English coronation ritual, during which the royal crown was kept precisely on the altar before the coronation of the king, and in Deshman's words, "*We can hardly escape the conclusion that Cnut was returning his crown to Christ by much the same means he had received it.*"[128] This tradition

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[125] Although apart from the religious aspect, we must also recognise several entirely political motives on Cnut's part, partly in recognising and to an extent atoning for the martyrdom of the Archbishop, and partly in depriving his opponents in London of the income from pilgrimages to the popular saint, and instead diverting them to his supporters in Canterbury.

[126] *"7 se brema cyng 7 se arcebiscop 7 leodbiscopas 7 eorlas 7 swiðe manege hadode 7 eac læwede feredon on scype his þone halgan lichaman ofer Temese to Suðgeweorke, 7 þær þone halgan martyr þan arcebiscope 7 his geferum betæhton, 7 hi þa mid weorðlican weorode 7 wynsaman dreame hine to Hrofesceastre feredan. Ða on þam þryddan dæge com Imma seo hlæfdie mid hire cynelican bearne Hardacnute, 7 hi þa ealle mid mycclan þrymme 7 blisse 7 lofsange þone halgan arcebiscop into Cantwarebyri feredon, 7 swa wurðlice into Cristes cyrcan brohton on .iii. Idus Iunii."* ASC, MS D, s.a. 1012.

[127] S959. The authenticity of this charter is generally considered suspect, possibly a post-Conquest forgery (see M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: the Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 66; Simon Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in Alexander Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway* (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 43-88), but it may have been based on a previous, similar charter from c. 1023 (See Frank M. Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (London: Clarendon, 1955), p. 17; N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), pp. 292-4, 388 n. 140). If this is the case, it seems likely that the phrase quoted here was present in the original document as well, since it fits the early 11th century better than the emergence of a less theological conception of kingship in the 12th century. Cf. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, esp. chs. III, IV

[128] Robert Deshman, '*Christus rex et magi reges*: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien,* 10 (2010), p. 367-405, p. 404

of the donation of crowns or other regalia existed as far back as the seventh century, and also carried with it a strong element of *christomimesis*: Through the king's humility in surrendering his crown to Christ, he also imitated the humility of Christ himself on the cross; a temporary humility leading to even greater exaltation.[129]

### 3.3.2 Politics: "…lex equior et pax securior…"

Finally, it should not be overlooked that the journey also had a very clear political objective, and that Cnut was able to negotiate a number of substantial results. Two of these are outlined in his Letter:

*"Locutus sum igitur cum ipso imperatore et domino papa et principibus qui ibi erant de necessitatibus totius populi universi regni mei, tam Anglorum quam Danorum, ut eis concederetur lex equior et pax securior in via Romam adeundi, et ne tot clausuris per viam artentur et propter thelon iniustum fatigentur; annuitque postulatis imperator et Rodulfus rex, qui maxime ipsarum clausurarum dominatur; cunctique principes edictis firmaverunt, ut homines mei, tam mercatores quam alii orandi causa viatores, absque omni angaria clausurarum et thelonеariorum firma pace et iusta lege securi Romam eant et redeant.*

*"Conquestus sum interim coram domine papa et mihi valde displicere causabar, quod mei archiepiscopi in tantum angaribantur immensitate pecuniarum, quae ab eis expetebatur, dum pro pallio accipiendo secundum morem apostolicam sedem expeterent; decretumque est, ne id deinceps fiat."*[130]

The first benefit mentioned here is freedom from "*clausurarum et thelonеariorum*" and a guarantee of "*firma pace et iusta lege securi*" for the English and Danish pilgrims and merchants passing through the territories of the Empire and Burgundy to Rome – probably especially referring to the Alpine passes, where the limited number of routes would make it easy to collect tolls from travellers. However, tolls could also be imposed on major bridges and particular stretches of highways, as well as customs dues and duties on various goods for import or export.[131]

Such protection and tax exemptions would normally have been expected for pilgrims, but the mention in the Letter suggests that this was not always the case in practice, and it is in any event quite remarkable that it was extended to merchants as well.

Cnut's second major victory was an exemption from the gratuity that archbishops were expected to pay when they went to Rome to receive the *pallium*,

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[129] Ibid., p. 405
[130] Letter 1027, c. 6–7
[131] Spufford, *Power and Profit*, pp. 157–61, 223–6

the special liturgical vestment that represented the metropolitan dignity and without which the archbishop would not be able to exercise the authority of his office.[132]

Precisely how large this customary "*immensitate pecuniarum*" was when Cnut visited Rome is not known, but the custom of paying a gratuity for papal recognition of an ordination or appointment, often referred to as "*servitia*", was well established as early as the reign of Justinian, and had been officially recognised by Gregory the Great in 595.[133] By the time of the late 13th century, the *servitia* had become formalised as a direct tax, assessed at the income from the benefice in question for anywhere from one third to a whole year. If the expected contribution in the beginning of the 11th century was in a similar range, the sum to be paid for large metropolitan sees like York or Canterbury could be very substantial, and the benefit from obtaining an exemption from it equally considerable.[134]

Of course, these concessions from the Emperor and the Pope did not come without a price. Cnut makes no mention of what he might have to do or give up in return, probably for political reasons, but we can make a few educated guesses. Firstly, towards the end of the Letter is a reference to the Peter's Penny:

"*Nunc igitur precipio et obtestor omnes meos episcopos et regni prepositos pr fidem, quam Deo et mihi debetis, quatinus faciatis, ut, antequam ego Angliam veniam, omnia debita, que Deo secundum legem antiquam debemus … et denarii quos Rome ad Sanctum Petrum debemus…*"[135]

The Peter's Pence was fairly well-established in England at Cnut's time, and may in fact have existed as early as the reign of Ine of Wessex (r. c. 688–725), who supposedly for the maintenance of the then recently-established *Schola Anglorum*, a hostel for English pilgrims in Rome. But from specific mention of the Peter's Pence in this context, it may be supposed that past payments had not been as regular as expected – particularly likely considering the political upheavals in England during Æthelred's reign – and it would be natural for the Pope to ask Cnut to ensure more regular payments; especially to make up for the lost revenues from the English archiepiscopal *servitiae*.

Apart form the financial issues, a more politically significant concession from Cnut appears to have been the end of his conflict with the see of Hamburg-Bremen, in particular over the question of the investiture of English-consecrated bishops in Denmark and the attempts to separate the realm from Hamburg's authority.[136] This

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[132] As mentioned above, Ælfric Puttoc had gone to Rome in November 1026 for this reason.

[133] Sylvia Thrupp, *Change in medieval society, Europe north of the Alps, 1050-1500* (London: Peter Owen, 1965), p. 79

[134] Curt Bogislav Graf von Hacke, *Die Palliumverleihungen bis 1143: eine diplomatisch-historische Untersuchung* (Göttingen, 1898)

[135] Letter 1027, c. 16

[136] Cf. Niels Lund, 'Ville Knud den Store gøre Roskilde til ærkesæde?', *Historisk Årbog fra Roskilde Amt,* (1994), p. 3-12

conflict appears to have ceased entirely after the mid-1020s, and although Adam of Bremen says that after making peace with Unwan, Cnut "followed the Archbishop's will in all regards",[137] this should probably be seen in the context of the negotiations in Rome, i.e. that Cnut agreed to abandon his attempts at gaining greater independence for the Danish church, rather than as a result of Unwan's persuasive abilities in 1025.

But aside from the concrete political gains on either side, probably the best indication of the good relations between Cnut and Conrad is found in the fact that the eight years following Cnut's Roman pilgrimage were characterised by a complete peace between the two rulers whilst they each looked after their interests elsewhere – Conrad waging wars against Hungary and defending the inheritance of Burgundy against the rival contender Count Odo of Blois,[138] whilst Cnut on his part carried out his invasion of Norway in 1028 and attempted to further secure his position in the British Isle with activities against Scotland.[139] Thus, this period of stable peace was very much in the interest of both monarchs, and should be seen as the natural extension of the process that started with the peace agreement in 1025 and was furthered by Cnut's presence in Rome in 1027.

### 3.3.3 Amicitia: "…kærr kaisara, klúss Pétrúsi…"

As we have seen above, Cnut gained a number of benefits from the event, both religious and more concretely political. But reflecting on a broader political level, how can we interpret the events and their significance for the relationship between the Emperor and Cnut?

Based on the evidence, I would propose that the coronation in 1027 is a sign of an existing friendship alliance, or an *amicitia*, between Cnut and Conrad, probably dating back to their peace agreement in 1025.

The amicitia as a political tool had deep historical roots. The Romans had used it to regulate both domestic and foreign political relationships, such as domestically by awarding the title of *amicus Augusti* to high office-holders and other magnates, or forming friendship alliances with those neighbouring peoples and client states who were considered *amici populi Romani*.[140]

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[137] AB, II, 55 (53)

[138] For the wars against Hungary, see Wipo c. 26. For the inheritance of Burgundy, see Wipo c. 29–32, and below, sec. 3.4

[139] *"In this year, Cnut went to Rome, and as soon as he came home he went to Scotland, and the king of the Scots surrendered to him, but he observed it but little time." ("7 sona swa he ham com, þa for he to Scotlande, 7 Scotta cyng eode him on hand, 7 wearð his man, ac he þæt lytle hwile heold.")* ASC MS D (E, F) s.a. 1031 (cf. the discussion above under pt. 2.1.1 about the date of Cnut's journey). Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, pp. 132–50

[140] Gerd Althoff, '"Amicitiae" [Friendships] as Relationships Between States and People', in Lester K. And Barbara H. Rosenwein Little (ed.), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 191-210

Similar practices were later employed throughout the Merovingian and Carolingian period, as the Frankish kings likewise formed amicitiae with other rulers – such as the previously mentioned Treaty of Bonn between Henry the Fowler and Charles the Simple – as well as with prominent nobles and ecclesiastics in their own realms. The latter practice of forming intra-realm royal amicitiae declined during the 10th and 11th centuries, but the amicitiae with foreign rulers remained in practice until at least the 12th century when it was gradually displaced by more formal written alliances and contracts.[141]

Although we should be careful with giving too much weight to terminology,[142] we should first examine whether any contemporary writers actually describe anything similar to amicitia to describe Cnut's relationship with Conrad. The only source that expressly does so is Adam of Bremen, who states that the Emperor "*…dedit [ei] Sliaswig [civitatem] cum marcha. quae trans Egdoram est, in fedus amicitiae, et ex eo tempore fuit regnum Daniae.*"[143]

However, this is a somewhat problematic, for two reasons. Firstly, Adam tends to be a little confused concerning the chronology of the relations between Conrad and Cnut. In this instance, even if he is correct that the cession of the march of Schleswig was as a part of the marriage agreement for Gunhilde and Henry, that most likely did not occur until 1035, and under much different circumstances (as we shall see in the next chapter.)

And secondly, we should keep in mind that one of Adam's primary sources was King Sweyn Estrithson, who would have had an obvious interest in presenting the Schleswig march having been transferred to his realm as a *fedus amicitiae*, whether that was true or not. Thus, taken on its own merit, it is not certain whether Adam's statement can be accepted as true.

However, there is one other and more contemporary source that uses a very similar terms, namely the previously mentioned Knútsdrápa[144] by Sigvatr Þorðarson, in which Cnut is praised for being, *"kærr kaisara, klúss Pétrúsi"* – "dear to the Emperor, close to Peter [i.e. the Pope]". It is not much of a stretch to read *kærr kaisara* here as signifying very much the same thing as "*amicus imperatoris*" or similar expressions.[145]

Further, Cnut himself describes in the Letter of 1027 how he was honourably received by the Pope and the Emperor and other princes, and how they,

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[141] Ibid., p. 194

[142] Ibid., p. 192

[143] AB, II 56 (54)

[144] Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, vol. A1, p. 251; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great*, p. 295; see n. 111 above

[145] Cf. Hirsch and Lohmann (eds.), *Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvei* , pp. 143f: "*…cum Sclavis qui dicuntur Vuloini, quomodo Misacam amicum imperatoris bello lascesserent…*"; Georg Waitz et al. (eds.), *Ex rerum Danicarum scriptoribus saec. XII. et XIII, etc.*; MGH SS 29 (Hannover, 1892), p. 397: "*Einn hertogi i Saxlandi het Otto … hann var baeði frændi ok fostri Saxlandz keisara ok hinn kærasti vin.*"

"*…omnes me et honorifice suscepere et donis pretiosis honorauere: maxime autem ab imperatore donis uariis et muneribus pretiosis honoratus sum, tam in uasis aureis et argenteis quam in paliis et uestibus ualde pretiosis.*"[146]

Much of this could of course partly be an attempt to impress an English "domestic audience", as it were, but an exchange of gifts between the new amici would be entirely expected as part of an amicitia alliance.[147]

Perhaps the best sign of the existence of an amicitiae is the political developments in the wake of 1027. It is remarkable that when Conrad II attacked Miezko II of Poland in 1029 and again in 1031,[148] Cnut's friendly relations with the Emperor remained intact, even though Cnut was a close relative of Miezko – Cnut's mother was most likely a sister of Bolesław I Chroby and aunt of Miezko[149] – and would normally have been expected to lend support to his relative.

However, since an important part of a typical amicitiae alliance was a pledge not to maintain friendly relations with or give aid to the enemies of the amicus,[150] Cnut's inactivity in this situation strongly suggests the existence of precisely such an alliance, and that it may have included a pledge not to support Miezko against Conrad.

Finally, Cnut's role during the Imperial coronation ceremony and in particular the act of escorting the Emperor from the St. Peter Basilica to the imperial palace likewise places him in a position of considerable honour, which also speaks to a very strong relationship between the two rulers.

On the present basis, it seems reasonable to conclude that after Easter 1027, Cnut had improved his relationship with the newly-crowned Emperor from the peace treaty of 1025 to a full *amicitia* alliance, which secured their mutual borders and left Cnut free to focus his attentions on the conquest of Norway the following year. Meanwhile, Conrad could secure his domestic position and wage wars in Poland, Hungary and later Burgundy.

However, the pinnacle of this relationship – and perhaps the most interesting part of it as well – came in 1035 with the betrothal of Cnut's daughter Gunhild to

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[146] One of these gifts may have been a cloak richly decorated with peacock feathers. In 1032, Cnut donated this same cloak to the tomb of his erstwhile opponent, Edmund Ironside, whom he was widely believed to have had murdered in 1016. M. J. Trow, *Cnut. Emperor of the North* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p. 125

[147] Florin Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum,* 81/3 (2006), p. 671-99

[148] Wipo c. 29, p. 589

[149] Thus Thietmar, *Chron*., VII:39 "*…et de geniminis viperatorum, id est filiis Suenni persecutoris, pauca edissero. Hos peperit ei Miseconis [I] filia ducis, soror Bolizlavi [I] successoris eius et nati…*"; *Encomium* II:2 "*Pariter uero Sclauoniam adierunt, et matrem suam, quae illic morabatur, reduxerunt.*" The mention of a "*Santslaue soror CNUTI regis nostri*" in the Winchester New Minster Liber Vitae (British Library, Stowe 944, f. 26v) likewise strongly suggests a Slavic dynastic connection,

[150] Althoff, '"Amicitiae" [Friendships] as Relationships Between States and People', p. 193

Conrad's son and heir Henry. It is to this betrothal, its background, and subsequent developments that we shall turn our attention in the following chapter.

# 4 – Gunhilde's Marriage

## 4.1 Betrothal and Marriage

On June 29th, 1036, Cnut's young daughter Gunhilde was married to Henry, Conrad II's only son and heir, in the cathedral in Nijmegen. Archbishop Pilgrim of Cologne officiated at a magnificent ceremony that was more than just a wedding: Henry had been crowned king of Germany in 1028 in order to safeguard his position as heir apparent to the Empire, and Gunhilde was now also crowned and anointed as queen.

In addition, in what appears to have been a conscious attempt to establish a continuity between the new Salian dynasty and the previous Ottonians, Gunhilde changed her name to Kunigunde – in this way, there would again be a Henry and a Kunigunde on the Imperial throne, just as there had been twenty years earlier.[151]

### 4.1.1 A Dynastic Union

In this wedding, the children of the two perhaps most powerful dynasties in Europe at the time were united: Gunhilde was of course Cnut's daughter, now the king of England, Denmark, Norway and "parts of Sweden", and through him a descendant of not just the Danish royal dynasty, but probably also the Polish Piasts

[151] "*Ascensionem Domini imperator Paderbrunne peregit; pentecostem vero nativitatemque sancti Iohannis Niumago, et ibi filio imperatoris Heinrico regi venit regina Cunihild nomine, quae ibidem in natali apostolorum regalem coronam accepit et mutato nomine in benedictione Cunigund dicta est.*" Georg Waitz (ed.), *Annales Hildesheimenses*; SS rer. Germ., 8 (Hannover, 1878), p. 40

through Cnut's mother.[152] In addition, through her mother Emma she descended from the powerful ducal house of Normandy and was related to several of the Æthelings of the former English royal house of Wessex.

Thus, at least from the point of view of dynastic politics, the marriage of the two was highly advantageous to all parties, but that does not necessarily mean that the decision had been an easy one. According to Adam of Bremen, the marriage had been decided upon as early as the peace agreement between Conrad and Cnut in 1025,[153] but this seems doubtful. At the time, Conrad had only very recently come to power, and one of his first and most important priorities would have been to secure the legitimacy of his rule and of the new dynasty. Marriage alliances and dynastic politics in general were important instruments towards that end, and needed to be used carefully and with deliberation, especially as concerned the selection of a match for his own son.

Although Cnut had mostly secured his rule in England and Denmark by 1025, he still faced challenges, and the threat from in particular Sweden and Norway was still very real, as the invasion and the subsequent battle at Holy River just two years later was to prove. Thus, Cnut could not be said to be at the height of his power, and an alliance with his – also very new – dynasty would not yet be as obviously desirable as it came to be just a few years later.

In addition, as we see for instance in the works of Thietmar of Merseburg, the perception of the Danes in Imperial educated circles, and of Cnut in particular, was not necessarily very positive in the early-to-mid-1020's. For that reason alone, a marriage agreement might not have been very politically viable.[154]

Under the circumstances, it would not have been reasonable for Conrad to tie himself to a firm agreement with Cnut this early, and nor does he appear to have done so: Shortly after his coronation in Rome, he dispatched an embassy to the East Roman court in Constantinople, apparently precisely in an attempt to secure a marriage between the young Henry and an Imperial princess.[155]

In the event, Conrad's East Roman initiative failed. None of the three daughters of the ageing Emperor Constantine VIII were appropriate matches for the young Prince Henry, and Constantine's death on November 11, 1028, relatively soon after the embassy's arrival, put the final nail in the coffin of the idea: His daughter and successor Zoe had herself married and apparently did not see any need to marry any of her sisters off to the Salians.[156]

However, Conrad does not appear to have made any other attempts to secure a marriage alliance for his son, and this does suggest that at least some sort of informal

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[152] See n. 149 above

[153] AB, II 65 (63). See also at n. 76 above.

[154] See Thietmar, *Chron.*, VII:40ff, VIII:7 on Cnut's invasion of England.

[155] Again, this suggests a deliberate reference to the Ottonians and their dynastic policies, as Otto II. in his time had been married to the East Roman princess Theophanu, a niece of Emperor John I. Tzimiskes.

[156] Wolfram, *Conrad II*, pp. 197ff

agreement or understanding had been made between Cnut and Conrad after c. 1030 on the subject of their children's marriage.

### 4.1.2 The Liuticians: "…multosque nostrorum occidunt…"

However, dynastic politics were not the only motivation behind the agreement when it was finally made, and the circumstances surrounding the eventual formal engagement suggest as much: The engagement was made at an Imperial diet in Bamberg on May 18th, 1035, which had been called in response to the recent conflict between the Empire and the and a Slavic confederacy of tribes, known as the *Liutici* or Liuticians.[157]

The lands of the Liuticians were located in modern-day Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and northern Brandenburg, and appear to have been rather active in the politics of the region in the late 10th century, mostly in opposition to the Ottonian Emperors: Along with the Obotrites, they formed the core of the Slav Uprising in 983 against the Ottonian expansion of the Empire towards the east.[158]

In the first decades of the 11th century, they were temporarily allied with the Empire under Henry II. against the emerging Polish kingdom of Bolesław Chroby,[159] but by the mid-1030's, they had returned to their original opposition, and again launched attacks into the Empire, notably attacking the fortress at Werben on the Elbe on at least two occasions, in 1033 and again in 1035.[160]

In 1033, the Emperor was engaged in a war against Count Odo of Blois over the Kingdom of Burgundy (as we will discuss more closely below), but in 1035, he was free to take action against the Liuticians and initiated a military response by calling the previously-mentioned diet at Bamberg.

Thus, in addition to the more general advantages in terms of dynastic politics, the marriage was also motivated more specifically to effect an alliance against the Liuticians. In a similar manner, at the same diet in Bamberg, Otto von Schweinfurt – the future Duke of Swabia and at the time the most powerful secular magnate in Eastern Franconia – was engaged to Mathilda, a daughter of the Polish King Bolesław Chroby. Unlike the one between Gunhilde and Henry, this other

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[157] *"Inperator […] Pentecosten vero Babenberh egit; unde expeditionem suam in Liuticios serio mandavit. Ibi etiam Heinrico regi, filio inperatoris, filia Chnut regis Danorum iuramentis desponsatur; et Otto de Suinvorde, filius Heinrici marchionis de Gerberga matre genitus, Machtildem, filiam Bolizlai Polanorum ducis, sibi desponsavit."* Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Chronica et annales aevi Salici*; MGH SS 6 (Hannover, 1844b), p. 679

[158] Joachim Herrmann, *Die Slawen in Deutschland. Geschichte und Kultur der schlawischen Stämme westlich von Oder und Neisse vom 6. bis 12. Jahrhundert. Ein Handbuch* 2. edn. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), pp. 345ff; For perspectives on the Liuticians and the Emipre, cf. Hans-Dietrich Kahl, *Heidenfrage und Slawenfrage im deutschen Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Studien, 1953-2008* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 500ff

[159] Herrmann, *Die Slawen in Deutschland*, pp. 356ff

[160] *"Leutizi Wirbinam castellum clam proditum capiunt, multosque nostrorum occidunt vel captivos abducunt."* Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), *Annales et chronica aevi Salici*; MGH SS 5 (Hannover, 1844a), p.122

engagement never actually resulted in a marriage, but was annulled at a synod the year after due to consanguinity, and Otto instead married a daughter of the Margrave of Turin and Susa.[161]

But looking at these agreements, one gets the general sense that a network of marriage alliances was being established between the Imperial and the Danish royal houses, the Dukes of Poland, as well as other powerful nobles in the region, all in preparation for a military conflict with the Liuticians.

The participation of the Danish ruler in this alliance network was critical, and explains why this was the precise moment chosen to make the engagement between Gunhilde and Henry formal. As discussed previously, the Danish royal house enjoyed very close relations at least with the Polish Piast rulers and with the inhabitants of the city of Wolin, and it is likely that this extended to other Slavic peoples as well, such as the Liuticians.

In that case, if the Emperor had launched an attack against the Liuticians without first conferring with the Danish king and gaining his support in advance could very well have constituted a breach of the *amicitia* that existed between them. On the other hand, in exactly the same manner, Cnut could hardly expect to remain friendly with a people that had directly attacked his *amicus* – this, too, would have violated the *amicitia*.

### 4.1.3 Cnut's Death: "Her forðferde Cnut cyng æt Sceaftesbyrig…"

Such was the situation at the time of the engagement in 1035. But much changed in the year between then and the actual marriage in 1036.

Firstly, the war against the Liuticians, which appears to have formed the immediate background for the marriage alliance, had mostly ended with an Imperial victory earlier in 1036, and the Liuticians were again relatively peaceful and at least in theory paying tribute to the Emperor.[162]

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Cnut himself had died just six months earlier on November 11, 1035, and his realm had in the meantime been divided: Cnut's oldest son Harold had been elected king of England, whilst the younger son Harthacnut had taken the throne in Denmark, and the two half-brothers[163] were now fighting each other over their inheritance. Meanwhile, in all of their father's kingdoms, pretenders were appearing and preparing to challenge their rule: Magnus the Good had already come to power in Norway several months before Cnut's death and was now eyeing the crown of Denmark as well, and the older Wessex royal

[161] Stälin, P. Fr., „ Otto III., Herzog von Schwaben", in: Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (1887), S. [Onlinefassung]; URL: http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd136732607.html

[162] Wipo. c. 36

[163] Harthacnut was the son of Emma of Normandy, whilst the mother of Harald was Cnut's first wife, Ælfgifu of Northampton.

dynasty still stood on the sidelines in England, eager to make a return to their former realm.

This political chaos of course meant that the political advantages of the marriage between Gunhilde and Henry suddenly had been greatly diminished: As the daughter of the powerful Cnut, "ruler of three kingdoms", Gunhilde was a very attractive match for the heir to the imperial throne; as the sister of two inexperienced and warring royal brothers whose future seemed more than doubtful, she must have been considerably less so.

Considering this situation, it is quite remarkable that Conrad went ahead with the marriage regardless. As the example of Otto von Schweinfurt and Mathilda shows, an annulment of an engagement could have been arranged relatively easily if desired, even if it was for political reasons. And if the military alliance against the Luiticians was no longer relevant, and the short-term benefits of a dynastic union with Cnut's descendants were no longer present, why did Conrad still decide to marry his only son and heir to Gunhilde?

Perhaps the answer is to be found in dynastic politics on a somewhat grander scale – and indeed, something had happened in the Kingdom of Burgundy just a few years previously that may help us throw some light on the decisions of the Emperor and of the Imperial court.

## 4.2 The Burgundian Succession

In order to understand how the situation relating to the Kingdom of Burgundy (or sometimes known as the Kingdom of Arelate) was relevant for the marriage between Henry and Gunhilde, we first need to unravel the somewhat complicated dynastic and legal state of affairs following the death of King Rudolph 3. of Burgundy in 1032.

A Kingdom of the Burgundians had emerged in the region along the Rhône River in the 5th century and briefly expanded to dominate southeastern Gaul during the collapse of the western part of the Roman Empire. It enjoyed only a relatively short existence, and was absorbed into the emerging Frankish kingdom after the Battle of Auton in the mid-530s.[164]

But even after it became a possession of the Merovingians, Burgundy retained a separate identity from the Frankish Kingdom, and during the political chaos after the death of Louis the Stammerer in 879, it was re-established – first separately as the Kingdom of Lower Burgundy (occasionally known as the Kingdom of Provence) by Count Boso in 879 and the Kingdom of Upper (or Transjurane) Burgundy by Count Rudolph I of Auxerre in 888, respectively. These two separate kingdoms were

[164] Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 300–4

eventually united in 933 under Rudolph's son, Rudolph II. Known as the House of Burgundian Welfs, this family ruled Burgundy for the next century, the majority of that time under King Conrad the Peaceful (r. 937–993).

However, under Conrad's son Rudolph III (r. 993–1032), the stability of Burgundy deteriorated, and the power of the local magnates grew at the expense of the crown. Rudolph is referred to in the Annales Sangallenses as a "*regulus*"[165], and likewise, Thietmar describes him as a "*rex mollis et effeminatus*" who is wholly at the mercy of his magnates: "*nomen tantum et coronam habet et episcopatus hiis dat qui a principibus eliguntur … Unde hii manibus complicatis cunctis primatibus velut regi suo serviunt et sic pace fruuntur … Willehelmus comes, de quo predixi, miles est regis in nomine et dominus in re.*"[166]

Making matters worse was King Rudolph's inability to sire an heir, and whilst Conrad the Peaceful had generally enjoyed favourable relations with the Ottonian emperors, Rudolph's childlessness now provided a pretext for Emperor Henry II to make a play of dynastic politics: Through the Treaty of Strassbourg of 1016, he imposed an agreement that named him as Rudolph's heir to the Burgundian crown.[167] This was not without some legitimacy, as Henry was a grandson of Conrad the Peaceful and a nephew of Rudolph – through his mother Gisela, who was Conrad's daughter (see Illustration 3) – but as it would mean the end of Burgundy's existence as an independent realm, one can imagine the arrangement was hardly to Rudolph's liking.

As it happened, Henry II died prematurely in 1024, but Conrad II soon raised a similar claim on behalf of his son and heir Prince Henry (the later Emperor Henry III). This was a somewhat weaker claim than that of Henry II had been, as the young Prince Henry was the great-grandson (through his mother, the Queen Gisela) of Conrad the Peaceful, and thus somewhat more distantly related. And Rudolph was in fact not willing to recognise this claim at first – in Wipo's opinion, "*sed defuncto imperatore Heinrico Rudolphus rex promissa sua irrita fieri voluit*"[168] – but through the mediation of Queen Gisela, he eventually acceded, and must have done so no later than around Christmas of 1026 when he agreed to participate in the coronation.[169] The agreement was formally made at Muttenz near Basel in August 1027[170] and the crown and other royal insignia were soon after delivered to Conrad.[171]

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[165] Ann. Sangall. maiores s.a. 995; Carlrichard Brühl, *Deutschland – Frankreich. Die Geburt zweier Völker* 2nd edn. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1995), p. 659

[166] Thietmar, *Chron.*, VII, c. 30

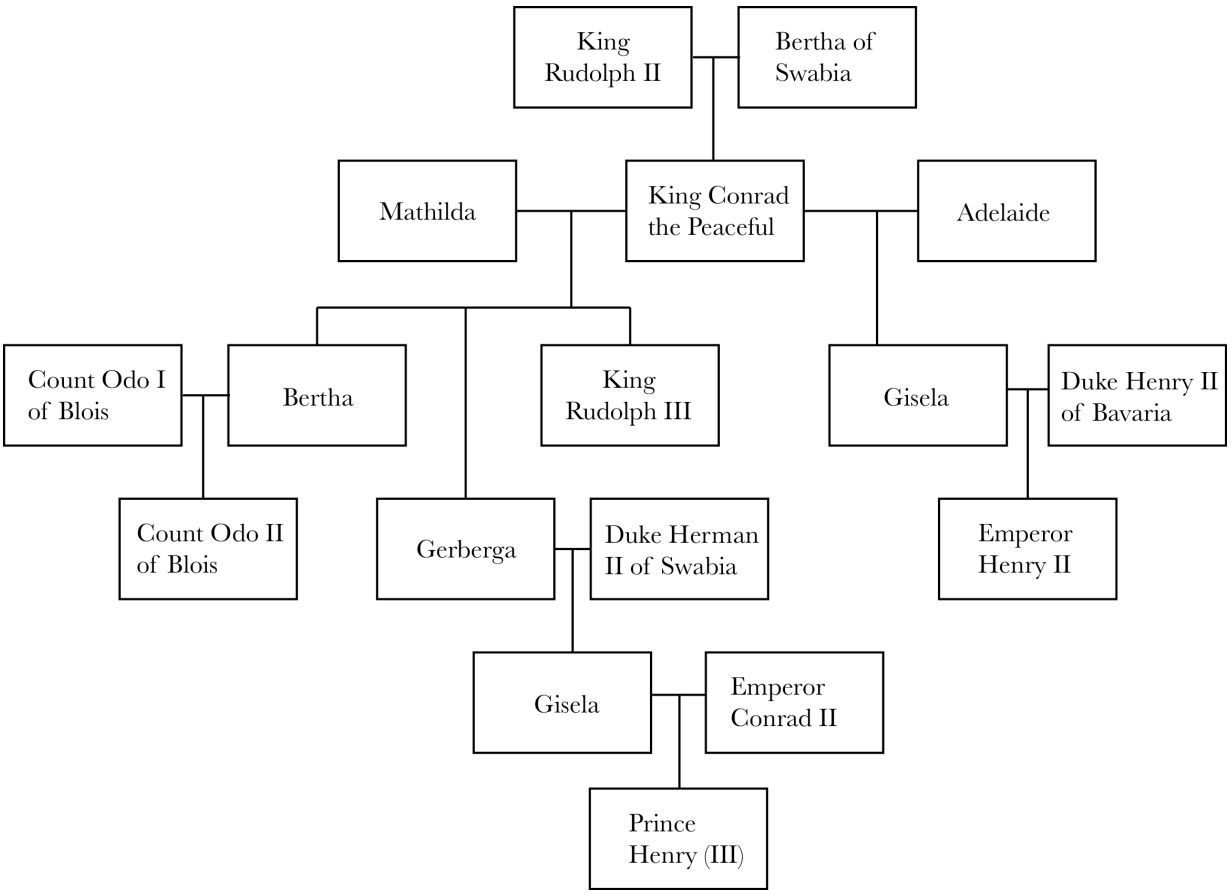
[167] Thietmar, *Chron.*, VII, 28

[168] Wipo, c. 8

[169] *"Illuc Ruodolfi regis Burgundiae legati venerant promittentes illum Romam venturum ad electionem et consecrationem imperatoriam regis Chuonradi, quod rex gratanter accepit, et remissis legatis cum muneribus…"* Wipo, c. 15; Also Brühl, *Deutschland – Frankreich. Die Geburt zweier Völker* pp. 683f, n. 442

[170] *"Imperator […] et perveniens usque ad Basileam Ruodolfum regem Burgundiae alloquitur, qui illic sibi occurebat extra urbem iuxta vicum qui Mittenza dicitur, et habito familiari colloquio imperator regem secum duxit in urbem. Confirmata inter eos pace Gisela imperatrice haec omnia mediante regnoque Burgundiae*

However, Prince Henry was not the only potential heir to the crown of Burgundy, as the powerful French nobleman Count Odo II of Blois had also raised a claim based on his kinship with Rudolph: Just like Henry II, Odo's mother Bertha was a daughter of Conrad the Peaceful.




(Illustration 3. Descendants of Rudolph II of Burgundy)

Rudolph III eventually died in September 1032. Conrad and Henry were not able to move immediately to defend their claim, however, as they were engaged in military actions in the eastern part of the Empire against Mieszko of Poland,[172] and although they must have set out for Burgundy as soon as possible, they did not reach Basel until sometime in January 1033. This gave Odo time to enter Lower Burgundy and seize a number of towns and castles and raise support amongst the Provençal magnates in the region.

The turning point in the war that followed was a carefully-negotiated compact between the Emperor and the recently-crowned King Henry I of France, who agreed to recognise the Salian claim to Burgundy and to lend support in the conflict with

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*imperatori tradito eodem pacto, quemadmodum prius antecessori suo Heinrico imperatori datum fuerat, rex iterum donis ampliatus cum suis reversus est in Burgundiam."* Wipo, c. 21

[171] Wolfram, *Conrad II*, p. 239

[172] Wipo, c. 29

Odo, an agreement that was sealed by a marriage alliance between King Henry and Conrad's young daughter Mathilda.[173] With this treaty in place, Conrad was able to attack Odo's domains directly, and in June 1033, Odo sought reconciliation "*necessitate compulsus*" with the Emperor.[174] However, the conflict soon flared up again, and only by the end of summer 1034 – by which time the war had become as much an internal civil war amongst the Burgundian magnates as it was a succession struggle – had Burgundy finally come under Imperial control.[175]

But before we discuss how this situation relates to Denmark in 1036, let us first return to the young Queen Gunhilde as she entered her marriage to Henry and her new life at the Imperial court.

## 4.3 Queen Gunhilde

As mentioned above, Henry and Gunhilde had been married in Nijmegen Cathedral on June 29th, 1036, in the presence of the entire imperial family and court, and they remained there for a few months.

According to Adam of Bremen,[176] she was accompanied to the Empire by the priest Thietmar or Tymmo, who served as her chaplain, and who was additionally granted the position as bishop of Hildesheim at her request, an early indication that she had some influence at the Imperial court. Since Thietmar was "*…a Dania orindus…*"[177], and Gunhilde's brother Harthacnut had assumed the crown of Denmark at this point, it may be that Thietmar also served as his envoy to the Imperial court, at least unofficially.

### 4.3.1 The Struggle for England: "…ealra witena gemot on Oxnaforda…"

A letter dated to July or early August 1036 from the royal chaplain Immo (or Irmenfred) to Bishop Azecho of Worms gives us a small insight into the early months at the Imperial court:

"*Porro autem nec illud vos latere volo, quod legati Anglorum nostrę iuniori dominę, nuper infirmę, nunc autem Deo gratias valenti missi sunt. Qui vero dixerunt sibi hęc: 'Infelix ergo, inquiunt, et iniusta noverca vestra Arduichcnut germano vestro regnum fraude subripere cupiens universis primatibus nostris convivia maxima celebravit et nunc eos prece,*

[173] Wolfram, *Conrad II*, p. 243f
Wipo passes over this otherwise very important meeting entirely – possibly to make it seem as if the Emperor defeated Odo and secured Burgundy wholly on his own.

[174] Wipo, c. 31

[175] Wolfram, *Conrad II*, p. 244f. Conrad kept the Burgundian crown for himself until the autumn of 1038, when he bestowed it upon his son Henry (Wipo, c. 38)

[176] AB II 79 (75), pp. 318–20

[177] Ibid.

*nunc precio corrumpere satagens, iuramentis sibi suoque nato subiugare temptavit. Qui vero non solum ei in aliquo huiusmodi non consenserunt, verum etiam nuntios prefato germano vestro, quatenus ad eos cito redeat, unanimes transmiserunt.' Sed illi quidem talia."*[178]

Apart from the illness, which Immo mentions but does not specify further, it is clear that Gunhilde's life from the outset was defined by politics. In the summer of 1036, the question of the succession in England following Cnut's death was still unresolved, and the politicking and intrigues surrounding it were intense. The primary contenders were Cnut's two sons, the half-brothers Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut.

Even though Cnut may have been ill for some time, even for a couple of years before his death, it is not clear whether he made any arrangements for his succession.[179] But in any case, any such arrangements were soon surpassed by reality, as whilst Harthacnut had become king of Denmark, Harold soon made a play for the English throne – causing a division between Cnut's realms within months of his death.

However, Harold seems to have had some difficulties in gaining support for his claim, even though he was physically in England, whilst Harthacnut was forced to remain in Denmark to protect it against the threat of an invasion from Magnus the Good in Norway. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says:

*"And immediately after [Cnut's] death there was an assembly of all the councillors at Oxford. And Earl Leofric and almost all of the thegns north of the Thames and the shipmen in London chose Harold to the regency of all England, for himself and for his brother Hardacnut, who was then in Denmark. And Earl Godwine and all the chief men in Wessex opposed it as long as they could, but they could not contrive anything against it."*[180]

It was not until 1037 that *"…Harold was chosen as king everywhere, and Hardacnut was deserted because he was too long in Denmark…",*[181] and this long opposition to Harold suggests that many English magnates considered Harthacnut the more legitimate heir, whether because he was the son of Cnut's queen, or because it had been Cnut's intention that he should inherit both kingdoms.

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[178] Walther Bulst (ed.), *Die ältere Wormser Briefsammlung*; MGH Briefe d. dt. Kaiserzeit, 3 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1949)

[179] Lawson, *Cnut. England's Viking King 1016–35*, 108

[180] "7 sona æfter his forsiðe wæs ealra witena gemot on Oxnaforda. 7 Leofric eorl 7 mæst ealle þa þegenas benorðan Temese. 7 þa liðsmen on Lunden. gecuron Harold to healdes ealles Englalandes. him 7 his broðor Hardacnute þe wæs on Denemearcon. 7 Godwine eorl. 7 ealle þa yldestan menn on West Seaxon. lagon ongean swa hi lengost mihton. ac hi ne mihton nan þing ongean wealcan." ASC, MS E (F), s.a. 1035

[181] *"Her man geceas Harold ofer eall to kyninge, 7 forsoc Harðacnut, for þam he wæs to lange on Denmarcon."* ASC, MS C (D), s.a. 1037

Some of this struggle seems to have spilled over to the Imperial court, as can be seen in Immo's letter above. It is not clear exactly who sent the mentioned *legati Anglorum*, but one possibility could have been Harthacnut's and Gunhilde's mother, Queen Emma, who was still in Winchester in 1036, trying to keep Harold from the throne. In that case, she may have sent the envoys in an attempt to gain the Emperor's support for Harthacnut.

### 4.3.2 The Italian Expedition: "…atque Cunigundę nostrę karissimę…"

However, developing events in northern Italy meant the Emperor had no opportunity to involve himself in Anglo-Scandinavian politics for the moment, even if he had desired to. Simmering discontent and even rebellion amongst the North Italian nobles soon required the Emperor's presence to deal with a conflict that centred in particular around Archbishop Aribert of Milan.

After a period of his heavy-handed rule, an army of *valvassores* – "lesser" subvassals under the great ecclesiastic and temporal magnates – had risen in rebellion against the nobility, and especially Aribert.[182] The citizens of Milan, on the other hand, who generally supported the Archbishop and opposed the valvassores, had also taken up arms, and the different sides now threatened to throw all of northern Italy into open conflict.

The entire Imperial family participated in the consecration of the new cathedral of Mainz on November 11, 1036,[183] but then, whilst the rest of the Imperial family celebrated Christmas in Regensburg, the Emperor pressed on to Italy and reached Milan in January or February 1037.[184] Finding the city in more or less open rebellion, however, he withdrew to Pavia in late March, where he called a court diet that eventually ended with Archbishop Aribert's arrest on charges of high treason against the Emperor.

However, the situation soon escalated even further – Aribert escaped from custody and returned to his forces in Milan, and the Emperor on his part placed the Archbishop under Imperial ban and issued a call to arms across the Empire.[185] It was at this point that Henry left for Italy with his mother and new wife and crossed the Alps "with a great many heavily armed mounted warriors",[186] a journey that would last a year and a half for Gunhilde and end with her very early death.

They reached Milan roughly at the same time as the Emperor's army and prepared to besiege the city, but an event on May 29th, Whitsunday, caused the plans to change: The Emperor and his retinue celebrated the day in a small chapel near Corbetta, but during the mass celebrated by the newly-consecrated Bishop

[182] Wolfram, *Conrad II*, 120ff
[183] Ibid., p. 122
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., p. 124
[186] Ibid.

Bruno of Minden, a terrible thunderstorm broke out, and an enraged figure of Saint Ambrose was said to be seem amongst the lightning.[187]

Whether because of this (perhaps legendary) vision, or for more temporal reasons, such as the approaching heat summer, the Emperor decided to lift the siege and withdraw to Verona. From there, he eventually proceeded to Parma where, "[a]fter being greeted with the usual civic violence"[188] that attended the arrival of an Imperial army, he celebrated Christmas with the rest of the Imperial family and court.

In early 1038, rather than return to the siege of Milan, the Imperial army – still accompanied by Queen Gunhilde and the rest of the Imperial family – now headed southwards. In early April, as they passed Rome, Empress Gisela made a detour there to pray at the graves of the Apostles, and although this is not recorded, Gunhilde may have accompanied her, visiting the city almost precisely eleven years after her father had attended Conrad's coronation there.[189]

During the next couple of months, Conrad remained in southern Italy, which at the time remained a patchwork of different principalities and conflicting loyalties: The Prince of Capua, some remaining East Roman strongholds, the Saracens in Sicily, and a number of emerging Norman domains.

The most noteworthy event for Gunhilde during this time was a visit to the monastery at Monte Cassino with the rest of the Imperial family, where the Emperor secured that institution's independence from Capua, as well as installed a new abbot.

At the time that the Imperial army finally made its way back up the coast of the Adriatic towards Ravenna, Gunhilde is – for the first and only time – listed as an intercessor on a diploma, alongside her husband and the Empress. The diploma, which was issued at Perano on June 14th, confirmed the possessions of the Benedictine monastery of Saint Mary on the Tremiti Islands off the Apulian coast, as well as extended to it the privilege of Imperial immediacy.[190] It is not clear why Gunhilde was an intercessor on this particular document, but there may be a connection to the visit to Monte Cassino earlier in the year.

### 4.3.3 Queen Gunhilde's Death: "…in limine vitae ingressu mortis occubuit…"

The Imperial army continued northwards, probably intending to resume hostilities against Aribert and the city of Milan, which was still in rebellion. But the heat of summer, most likely combined with the unsanitary terrain around Ravenna,

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[187] Ibid.

[188] Ibid., p. 132

[189] Ibid., p. 133

[190] *"…ac ob interventum ac petitionem Gisle imperatricis nostre scilicet dilectę contectalis ac Heinrici regis nostrę amantissime prolis atque Cunigundę nostrę karissimę…"* MGH DD K II 272, pp. 377–8

caused an epidemic to sweep through the army and forced the Emperor to begin a march home to Germany instead. However, the greatest blow to the Imperial family came just a few days later, when the disease claimed the life of Queen Gunhilde:

*"Eo tempore propter nimium calorem nimia contagio pestilentiae exercitum invasit neque aetatibus neque personis pepercit. Ibi regina Chunelindis, coniunx Heinrici regis, XV. kal. Augusti*[191] *quasi in limine vitae ingressu mortis occubuit, relinquens tantummodo solam filiolam de rege, quam postea pater Christo desponsans in abbatissam consecram fecit."*[192]

Since a diploma was issued at Viadana, between Mantua and Parma, five days later on July 23th,[193] Gunhilde must have died somewhere on the plains between Modena and Ferrara. Nor was she the only one to die during this epidemic – amongst the other prominent victims was Duke Herman IV of Swabia, Empress Gisela's son from her first marriage:

*"Filius imperaticis Herimannus dux Alamannorum, iuvenis bonae indolis et in rebus bellicis strenuus, eadem peste gravatus inter manus peritissimorum medicorum V. kal. Augusti*[194] *non sine magno detrimento imperii obiit. Eodem mense atque sequenti maxima multitudo exercitus morbo contacta periit."*[195]

The Queen's body was preserved as well as possible and prepared for a return to Kloster Limburg outside Speyer, where she was to be buried. Special care and attention seems to have been taken with Gunhilde's corpse in order to enable its return to Germany; Duke Herman's body, in contrast, had to be buried in Trento, even though his intended resting place in Constance was much closer than Speyer:

*"Corpus reginae tenerum et delicatum aromatibus conditum cum rege et imperatrice ductum ad Germaniam in praepositura Lintburg sepultum est. De duce statutum erat, ut in Constantiam civitatem Alamanniae duceretur, sed calore nimio obstante in Triento sepelitur."*[196]

### 4.3.4 Burial and Legacy: "…in praepositura Lintburg sepultum est…"

Queen Gunhilde's burial must have happened in the autumn on 1038, certainly after August 11th, when the Emperor passed Brixen and issued a diploma there,[197] but probably in September or early October.

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[191] July 18th
[192] Wipo, c. 37.
[193] MGH DD K II, no. 273, pp. 378–9
[194] July 28th
[195] Wipo, c. 37.
[196] Ibid.
[197] MGH DD K II, no. 277, pp. 383

Kloster Limburg was chosen for the purpose. Limburg had been a castle in the possession of the Salian dynasty since the 9th century, but beginning in 1024, the site was rebuilt into a Benedictine monastery, forming a part of the Salian religious and political power centre that Conrad was creating around Speyer. Although the Imperial Cathedral in Speyer, on which construction was begun in 1030, was intended to form the centrepiece of this complex, the new Kloster Limburg also had important roles: The Imperial regalia had been kept there from ca. 1034,[198] and now it was also to be the burial place of the young Queen.[199]

Gunhilde's legacy after her death was limited. Henry became Emperor upon Conrad's death in 1039, and married again in 1042, this time to Agnes of Poitou, a daughter of Duke William V of Aquitaine.

Her chaplain Thietmar remained in the Empire and, as Gunhilde had arranged before her death, was consecrated as Bishop of Hildesheim in August 1038. He appears to have retained some connections to the clerical circles surrounding the Imperial court, as he participated in a synod in December 1038, along with Bishop Azecho of Worms and other bishops, concerning Bishop William of Strassbourg's irregular dating of Advent Sunday.[200] In addition, he was a part of the retinue when Archbishop Adalbert met with Magnus the Good in Schleswig, probably in 1043.[201] Thietmar died in office in 1044.[202]

Finally, as mentioned by Wipo above, Gunhilde left one child with Henry, her daughter Beatrice. She was made abbess of the monastery at Gandersheim in 1043 at the age of six, and additionally of the monastery at Quedlinburg in 1044. She died in 1061 at the age of only 24,[203] as the last surviving descendant of Cnut the Great.

But things could have gone very differently, and in the next and final section, we will take a look at how.

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[198] Alexander Thon, 'Vom Mittelrhein in die Pfalz. Zur Vorgeschichte des Transfers der Reichsinsignien von Burg Hammerstein nach Burg Trifels im Jahre 1125', *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte,* 32 (2006), p. 35-74

[199] It is notable that Gunhilde was not buried in the the Speyer Cathedral itself, which was otherwise intended to be the dynastic burial place of the Salier, but perhaps Kloster Limburg was chosen instead because she was not a crowned Empress yet; or perhaps simply because the cathedral was not ready for burials.

[200] RI III,1 n. 292b, in: Regesta Imperii Online, URI: http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1038-12-03_1_0_3_1_0_521_292b (Abgerufen am 19.06.2014).

[201] AB II, 79 (75)

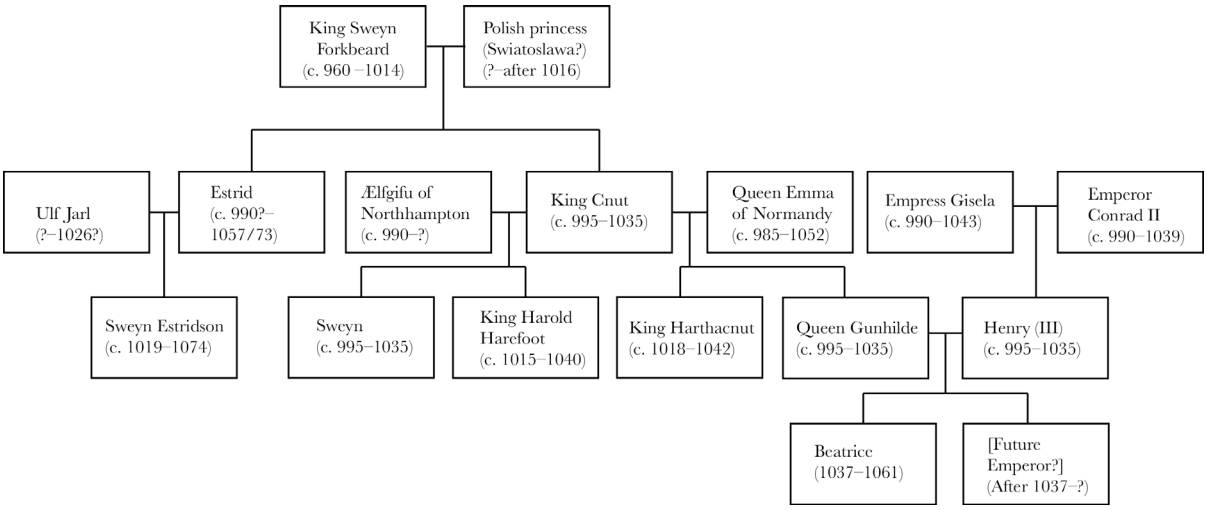
[202] Waitz (ed.), *Annales Hildesheimenses* , p. 46

[203] Even for an age characterised by high mortality, it is notable that all four of Cnut's children died before the age of 25, and that Cnut himself probably was not much older than 40 at his time of death. This is not the place for medical speculation, but it could suggest an inherited condition of some sort, such as an immune system disorder.

## 4.4 Royal Claims, and a Counterfactual

Now let us briefly revisit the situation as it appeared in early 1036. King Cnut had died in November 1036, leaving behind the two half-brothers Harold and Harthacnut. The latter appears to have been his father's preferred heir, but Harold had the advantage of being physically present in England, and immediately set about raising support for his claim. The two seemed headed for an inevitable conflict. Meanwhile, on the sidelines was Sweyn Estridson, although he was still a young man of only about seventeen, and in any case more distantly related to Cnut.

And then there was Queen Gunhilde, Cnut's daughter. If it should happen that the two brothers destroyed each other in the course of their conflict, a future son of Gunhilde, a grandson of Cnut, would be next in line for the crowns of both England and Denmark, and with a very strong claim.




(Illustration 3. Descendants of Sweyn Forkbeard)

This is a scenario that must have been very obvious to Conrad and the Imperial court. As noted, the war over Burgundy ended successfully in the summer of 1034, and as such was still fresh in their memories when they must have made the decision to marry Henry to Gunhilde in late 1035 or early 1036. In Burgundy, Conrad had added a new and very prestigious possession to the Imperial domains – a third royal title in addition to the German and Italian ones – and given that almost exactly the same dynastic situation now seemed about to appear again in the North, the opportunity to acquire a fourth, Denmark… and perhaps even a fifth: England, must have been very tempting.

In addition to this dynastic situation, there were a number of parallels between Burgundy in 1032 and the situation of Denmark (and to a lesser extent England) in 1036. Just like Burgundy, Denmark had been a part of the Imperial periphery and

sphere of interest for many years,[204] and turning this sometimes-theoretical lordship into an actual one may have seemed a natural progression, at least at the Imperial court.

This was true to a much lesser extent for England,[205] although it too had been a part of the Empire – granted, that had been the *Roman* Empire rather than the Carolingian, but as everything surrounding the Imperial coronation showed, they were ideologically considered one and the same.[206] But the exercise of actual Imperial power or authority in England was a thing of the very distant past, and establishing it there was probably much less obvious than for Denmark.

In reality, of course, Gunhilde did not have a son. She died a far too early death on the plains of northern Italy, and all dynastic ambitions the Salians may have had came to nothing. Considering the situation outlined previously, and assuming such thoughts were in the collective minds of the Imperial court in early 1036, we can engage in a small exercise of counterfactual history and imagine – taking as our "point of departure", as it were – that Emperor Henry III and Empress Gunhilde did in fact have a son, and that by 1042, both Harold and Harthacnut had died, and the situation in Cnut's old realms had evolved to the point where a claim could be raised. What would have happened then?

As in reality, the main pretenders to the crown of Denmark would have been King Magnus the Good of Norway, who in fact won the crown at least for a few years in real history, and Sweyn Estridson, who claimed royal blood through his mother Estrid, the daughter of Sweyn Forkbeard. Magnus on his part claimed the crown by virtue of an inheritance agreement with Harthacnut that is mentioned in the Chronicon Roskildense:

*"Tunc Harthe Cnut et Magnus, rex Norvegie, talem condicionem inter se fecerunt et super reliquias cum iuramento firmaverunt, ut, qui diutius viveret, superstes regnum defuncti acciperet duoque regna quasi hereditario iure possideret…"*[207]

The same agreement is mentioned in the Heimskringla's Saga of Magnus the Good, which in addition mentions that:

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[204] See Section 1.2 above.

[205] Section 1.1 above.

[206] One could even see a claim on England as a continuation of Otto III's Renovatio ideal, cf. Ernst Percy Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio. Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des Karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962); but see the discussion of the concept in Gerd Althoff, *Otto III.* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellshaft, 1996), pp. 114ff

[207] M. Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Scriptores minores historiæ Danicæ medii ævi*; (Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1917), p. 22

*"As the highest of the chiefs of the country were bound by oath to King Magnus, and were desirous of keeping their word and oath, they endeavoured zealously to promote the cause with the people. It contributed also that King Canute the Great, and all his descendants, were dead; and a third assistance was, that [Magnus's] father King Olaf's sanctity and miracles were become celebrated in all countries."*[208]

This account is contradicted by Adam of Bremen, according to whom Magnus simply invaded Denmark whilst Harthacnut was in England, and who mentions nothing about any treaty between them.[209] But on the other hand, one of Adam's main sources was King Sweyn Estrithson, who himself fought with Magnus over the Danish throne for several years and could hardly be expected to mention that his opponent had actually had a legitimate claim!

Regardless of whether this agreement existed or not, the passage in Heimskringla suggests a more important point: That it was observed in the absence of living descendants of Cnut. But if, as in our alternate timeline, such a descendant did exist, his claim to the crown would have been considerably stronger than those of Magnus, who was not related to Cnut at all, but primarily based his claim on the inheritance agreement with Harthacnut, and for that matter of Sweyn, who although of royal blood was a more distant relative of Cnut.

Perhaps a greater problem would be the fact that our hypothetical claimant was a future Emperor, and that his inheriting would mean at least an Imperial suzerainty over the Kingdom of Denmark. This would certainly have caused opposition from some magnates, but perhaps not all. The potential prestige of being a vassal of the Emperor should not be underestimated, and some Danish nobles might in fact have preferred that to the alternatives, which were either Magnus the Good or Sweyn Estridson on the throne.

Thus, when he made his move to enforce his son's claim, Emperor Henry III could at the very least expect a divided opposition in Denmark: Some magnates supporting the Imperial claim, others supporting either Magnus or Sweyn. In other words, much the same situation as in Burgundy in 1032, where the conflict as mentioned also was as much an internal civil war amongst the nobility as it was a straight war of succession. And also as in Burgundy, facing a divided opposition and with the military might of the Empire behind him, it seems reasonable that Henry could have prevailed and claimed the Danish crown on behalf of his son, at least for a while.

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[208] *"En fyrir því at landshöfðingjar, þeir er ágætastir váru í Danmörk, váru eiðum bundnir við Magnús konung ok vildu halda orð sín ok eiða, þá fluttu þeir þetta mjök fyrir fólkinu; þat bar ok annat til, at þá var andaðr Knútr hinn ríki, ok dautt alt hans afkvæmi; hinn inn þriði hlutr, at þá var alkunnig orðin helgi Ólafs konungs um öll lönd ok jartegnagerð hans."* Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla eða Sögur Noregs Konunga Snorra Sturlusonar*, eds N. Linder and H. A. Haggson (Uppsala, 1870-72). English translation from Snorri Sturluson, *The Heimskringla; or Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Samuel Laing (London, 1844)

[209] *"Magnus statim invadens Daniam possedit duo regna…"* AB II 77, p. 318

The situation in England was made somewhat different by the presence of opposing pretenders from the Æthelings of the House of Wessex, especially Edward (later "the Confessor"), who had been welcomed into his half-brother Harthacnut's court in 1041 and positioned as his intended heir.[210] This opportunity to restore the old ruling house must have been very appealing to many amongst the English nobility, especially if the alternative was an England under the suzerainty of the Empire, and would most likely have made a claim against the English crown very difficult to enforce in practice at the time.

This is of course all speculation. But it is speculation that could be very similar to the sort of plans that the Emperor and his advisors might have been preparing in 1036, and it can explain why they decided to proceed with the marriage between Heinrich and Gunhilde in the situation after Cnut's death.

[210] ASC MS C(D), s.a. 1041

# 5 – Analysis

In the previous two chapters, we have seen two examples of medieval politics on a level and with a perspective that we can at least tentatively call 'international'. For instance, when Cnut leaves Denmark in the autumn of 1026 to undertake the long and perilous journey to Rome – and does so in the midst of a crisis, when he has just barely warded off an invasion from Sweden and Norway – speaks of a prioritisation that is almost geopolitical in perspective. The destination of his journey, the Imperial coronation in Rome, is as much a high-level international political summit as any modern UN meeting is, and he weighs the gains from his participation above the risk of another invasion during his absence.

Similarly, the betrothal between Gunhilde and Henry is (at least at first) not just a dynastic act, it is an important element in a broad coalition directed against the Luiticians. Although the methods differ considerably, much of what these rulers are doing is perfectly recognisable to modern eyes as the practice of foreign policy.

On this practical basis, we can now return to the theoretical discussion and attempt to answer the three questions that we posed back in chapter 1.

**1) Can IR theory be applied to the 11th century, or is Adam Watson correct to say that the absence of states makes the medieval period irrelevant for IR?**

As we recall from Chapter 1, Watson argued in his 1992 book *The Evolution of International Society* that,

*"…medieval government was too diffused, and mostly too local, for us to consider it as divided into separate states. […] and the rules and institutions of Christendom were not devised to manage the pressures of a system, which is how we have described a society of states. Towards the end of the period central administration of territorially defined states begin to crystallise out; but the vertical division of Europe marks the dissolution of the medieval pattern."*[211]

The three key terms in Watson's argument are "manage pressures", "central administration", and "territorially defined". As noted previously, we may speak of states, or at least emerging "proto-states" towards the end of the medieval period, but that is very much not the case in the first half of the 11th century. It is a time of realms and interpersonal relations, not bureaucratic and territorial states, and to an extent, the transition does mark the end of the medieval period and the beginning of the renaissance or the early modern period. In this sense, we can agree with Watson.

But is the existence of 'states' actually a *sine qua non* for IR? The neorealists disagree. Again, according to Waltz: "*The enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia…"*[212] And indeed, as we have just seen several examples of, the rulers and magnates of the period behave in ways that are recognisable in terms of foreign policy: They engage in both personal and long-distance diplomacy according to a set of accepted customs. They go to war, and they make peace. They enter into agreements and they build alliances. They negotiate for trade rights and political concessions. Even though their political organisations are quite different, are very much similar to that of modern state.

The other major difficulty is the absence of truly sovereign actors that characterise an 'anarchic system', which is very much a defining characteristic of the international system for most of the IR schools (with the exception of the constructivists). Most modern states are sovereign in the very absolute sense, having no higher authority to which they need to answer or obey. They may at times decide to transfer parts of their sovereignty to other institutions, such as the European Union, the United Nations, or the International Criminal Court, but this happens on a voluntary basis.

The picture is much more complicated when we look at the medieval system. Here, we rather see a broad spectrum of possible relationships ranging from the closest we come to modern sovereignty, such as a ruling monarch or independent prince, to on the other end subservient vassals, who may nevertheless still enjoy a certain freedom of action in their own right. In chapters 2 and 3, we saw the example of Rudolph of Burgundy, who was nominally a reigning monarch, yet in reality a vassal of the Empire – and on the other hand, we have the Billung Dukes of Saxony,

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[211] Watson, *Evolution of International Society*, p. 151, n. 6
[212] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 66

who were formally Imperial subjects, yet frequently acted more or less independently, even to the extent of making alliances against the Emperor.[213] Further complicating the issue are the purely moral authorities of the Emperor and the Pope, which other rulers may also recognise and to some degree be bound by.

These are just a couple of examples of the broad diversity in medieval politics that frequently requires us to speak of actors subject to varying degrees of suzerainty, rather than strict sovereignty. But as Markus Fischer argues, this should not exclude the medieval period from IR:

*"The fact that neorealism employs the state as its unit therefore does not limit its analysis in principle to the state-centered politics of the modern and ancient periods. […] However, to explain stateless politics in a more consistent manner, neorealism might want to reformulate its unit of analysis in a way that represents the historical reality of anarchic actors at levels of organization below that of the state."*[214]

And for that matter, even the modern international system is not as simple as the state-centered definition can make it seem: Although sovereign states are certainly the dominant type of actor, foreign policy is affected by many other non-traditional actors that play a still greater role in the international system. These can include *de facto* independent parts of other states, multinational corporations, transnational NGOs, and criminal/terrorist organisations; or for that matter entirely new creations such as the European Union, which has evolved to something that is at the same time something more than a traditional international organisation or association, yet not quite a true state. This plurality of actors has even led some theorists to speak of a "neo-medieval" state of international politics due to its resemblance to the complex political webs of the medieval world, making the distinction between modern and medieval seem even more artificial. It seems quite clear that there is no convincing reason why IR theory could not *mutatis mutandis* be applied to the medieval period.

**2) If we can answer 1) in the affirmative, do our findings support the neorealist claim to universality, or does medieval foreign policy follow different rules from those that characterise the modern state systems?**

Since we have just used an essentially realist position above to argue that IR theory can be used to analyse medieval politics, it may be reasonable to expect that the entire realist theoretical framework is perfectly adequate for the medieval period as a whole. Everything is universal, politics is the same across all historical periods, the Middle Ages are no different from the modern age. However, upon closer

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[213] Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages, c. 800-1056* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 200ff

[214] Fischer, 'Feudal Europe' pp. 163f

inspection, the realist notions of universality begin to break down. Let us take a closer look at why.

As discussed in chapter 1, the balance of power theory common within the realist school posits that strong neighbouring states will tend towards an equilibrium, seeking to counter each other's attempts at increasing their power, and that this is a significant source of conflict. Most significantly, it feeds into the security dilemma, which further serves to destabilise international relations and complicate the balance of power.

Following this theory, Cnut and Conrad, being the rulers of possibly the two strongest realms in Europe at the time, should have had a very antagonistic relationship. Important parts of the realms shared a common border, and each had the potential to be a serious threat to the other. Indeed, for most of the tenth century, the Ottonian emperors had adopted a rather expansionist policy towards Denmark, as they did towards most of the Imperial periphery, and Cnut's relations with Conrad's predecessor Henry II had likewise been characterised by a great deal of hostility.[215] It would have been reasonable to expect this state of affairs to continue.

But it clearly did not. Instead, as we have seen, they very quickly formed treaties of *amicitia* and later marriage alliances. At least from 1027 onwards, the relationship can almost be seen (in modern terms) as a treaty of non-aggression that allowed both of them to secure their positions and focus their efforts on other priorities: Cnut responded to the threat from Sweden and Norway, the latter of which he conquered in 1028, whilst Conrad waged wars in Poland and Hungary and pursued dynastic ambitions in Burgundy.

This is remarkable, because it is the exact opposite of what should have happened according to the balance of power theory: Rather than seeking a state of conflict with each other, they deliberately made an agreement that peacefully secured their common border and allowed both to expand their power in other areas. In short, there does not appear to be even a trace of the security dilemma present in their relationship.

This is completely at odds with the predictions of the realist school, according to which states should at most be able to manage or limit the security dilemma by various means, but under no circumstances be able to circumvent or avoid it entirely. And yet it appears that Cnut and Conrad's peaceful co-existence was entirely genuine; their actions suggest that neither considered the other a security risk at all.

The medieval period has frequently been used to criticise the realist school, although rarely very convincingly. We saw in chapter 1 how John Ruggie emphasised the norms of feudalism as an alternative to the realist balance of power

[215] Gerd Althoff, *Die Ottonen. Königsherrschaft ohne Staat* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000)

theory,[216] and also how Markus Fisher rejected this theory as being contradicted by the historical events. Fisher was right to do so. The concept of 'feudalism' as modern historians have constructed it is highly questionable – even its very existence in the medieval period has come under question,[217] and even to the extent that may have existed, perhaps in the form of literary and scholarly ideals, it seems unlikely to have had much impact on the everyday conduct of medieval magnates.

But the amicitia and other interpersonal relationships is something else entirely. The example of Cnut and Conrad shows that in the 11th century, treaties of amicitia and marriage – or indeed interpersonal networks as a whole – functioned as a crucial instrument of policy and statecraft for rulers and magnates. It was a means by which they could overcome the inherent security dilemma, allowing rulers to establish a framework within which they were able to de-escalate conflicts and realise common interests. It enabled them to form alliances, unite around shared interests, prepare for war and make peace; it provided a modicum of stability in a very unstable world.

This not only contradicts the realist theoretical assertions, but also serves as an answer to Fisher's objections, as it provides an alternative to Ruggie's normative interpretation of a medieval state system based upon the construct of feudalism – unlike feudalism, which at best may have been a more or less nebulous ideal, interpersonal relationships certainly existed as a very real and impactful political element, as Gerd Althoff has extensively shown.[218] At least as far as the early 11th century is concerned, it was not the highly problematic construct of 'feudalism' that caused a difference in the foreign political structure, but rather a highly sophisticated system of networks that tied magnates and decision-makers from different realms together in personal relations with one another.

Here we begin to see why the "*texture*" of international politics may not be as "*highly constant*" as Kenneth Waltz and the other realists argue. Because just a few centuries later, towards the end of the medieval period, the significance of interpersonal relations had been reduced significantly, due primarily to the emergence of what we previously referred to as the medieval "proto-state" – in particular the complexification of society and and the emergence of the more impersonal institutions of governance that emerged in the late medieval period, or in Weberian terms, a transition from a "traditional" to a "bureaucratic" social model.

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[216] Ruggie, 'Territoriality and beyond'

[217] Elizabeth Brown, 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe', *The American Historical Review*, 79/4 (1974), p. 1063-88, Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals. The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

[218] Gerd Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue, zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im früheren Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellshaft, 1990); Gerd Althoff, *Amicitiae und Pacta. Bündnis, Einung, Politik und Gebetsgedenken im beginnenden 10. Jahrhundert*, Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1992); Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale*

In the modern, or even early modern world, interpersonal relationships have had an even more limited role. Although they remain still very much relevant on the diplomatic scene, states are now (as the realist school continually reminds us) governed almost exclusively by more or less impersonal interests.[219] Foreign policy is likewise no longer formulated by individuals, but by government bureaucracies, foreign services, and legislative assemblies – large organisations that in turn are subject to even more complex outside influences from interest groups, NGOs, the news media, and the broader public opinion.

Just to note one example, even though George V of Great Britain, Nicolas II of Russia and William II of Germany were all first cousins, those family relationships did nothing to stop the breakout of World War I in 1914. Indeed, even though the European royal families of the late 19th and early 20th century were connected in what was more or less one large network of marriages, none of this amounted to anything near marriage *alliances* in the medieval sense, because at that time, foreign policy was governed by much broader and more impersonal forces – institutional policies and national interests. This means that contrary to the assertions of the realist school, the manner in which state systems and the actors within them operate does change over time.

We need to be clear: The realist school claims to make scientific predictions about how actors within an international system behave. It argues that their behaviour is caused by certain characteristics of the system itself, rather than anything relating to the actors themselves, including their historical or cultural background. But if, on the other hand, historical actors then behave in a manner that contradicts these predictions, then the realist theory and its understanding of IR must necessarily be rejected.

The contradiction becomes even more stark if we consider the theory we set out in chapter 2, that Cnut may have provided military assistance to his *amicus* Conrad during the latter's campaigns in northern Italy. If that theory is correct, we are looking at a situation which goes beyond mere peaceful coexistence; a situation in which one of two major powers in a system directly supporting the other and increasing its relative power. To draw a modern parallel that is fragile in its anachronism, but perhaps enlightening, this would be similar to the United States offering military support to the Soviet Union in its war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. It is anathema to the realist world view.

We of course do not know if this actually happened, but it would not be unusual within the framework of the amicus relationship. On the other hand, it would be completely inconceivable within the confines of realist theory, and the fact that it

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[219] Cf. de Gaulle's possibly apocryphal statement that "*les états n'ont pas d'amis, ils n'ont que des intérêts*", or Lord Palmerston's observation in 1848 that, "[*Britain has] no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.*" House of Commons Debates 01 March 1848, vol 97, col 122 http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1848/mar/01/treaty-of-adrianople-charges-against

even *may* have happened in the 11th century shows just how fundamentally different medieval international politics was from its modern counterpart. We are very far removed indeed from realism's universalist, unchanging understanding of the nature of relations between polities.

**3) If the theoretical framework of the neorealist school is not adequate, do any of the other three schools we have examined offer a better framework for explaining the medieval period?**

Having found that the position of the realist school is not only inadequate, but needs to be rejected outright, we finally need to look at the other three theoretical schools that were presented in chapter 1.

The **liberalist** school may seem like a promising candidate, due to its emphasis on measures that can serve to identify and realise mutual interests between international actors. As we have seen in the example of Cnut and Conrad, the amicus relationship frequently served as an instrument to do just that, so could it be seen as a form of international cooperation of the type that the liberalist school promotes as a solution for the security dilemma?

Ultimately, the answer must be 'no', because the benefits of the amicitia had very clear limits. It could be an extremely fragile relationship, and the developments after Cnut's death underline precisely this fragile, personal nature of the relationship. Although the amicitia kept the peace (or at least contributed significantly to it) between Cnut and Conrad for almost ten years, it did not offer any long-term prospects. The moment that it ended with Cnut's death, the past alliance did not carry with it any obligations on Conrad's part towards Cnut's sons, nor even necessarily any inclinations towards a positive relationship with them. On the contrary, Conrad and the Imperial court appear to have been perfectly willing to use the dynastic relationship for the opposite purpose: to raise a claim on the Danish throne and expand the power of his own realm and his dynasty at the expense of Cnut's heirs.

In the end, the essential interpersonal nature of the relationship means that it was an important tool that 11th century magnates could use to recognise and realise common interest, but it was not in any sense a form of "international cooperation" with any long-term permanence.

At first glance, the **International Society** school seems to correspond much closer to the medieval reality that we have described, since it rejects the strict impersonal structuralism of the realist and the liberalist school. Instead, it places a heavy emphasis precisely on the interpersonal dimension of international politics, and also recognises the importance of considering the cultural background of its actors. That is entirely in line with the medieval political system as we have described it so far.

However, as we have also seen, International Society has trouble accepting the medieval system as a proper object of study for IR theory. Unlike the realist school, which despite its other theoretical faults is very much open to looking beyond a purely state-centered system, the International Society school has so far not really managed to do so, and this insistence on retaining a state-focused conception of the international system remains a stumbling block. Much like the liberalists, International Society remains very much tied to the modern world, and it ultimately lacks the theoretical sophistication and flexibility that would be necessary for it to encompass more diverse manifestations of international politics.

Of the four schools we have considered, only the **constructivist** school seems able to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework that can account for both the similarities and the differences of medieval international politics.

Rather than attempting to fit everything into a theoretical straight-jacket extrapolated from the characteristics of modern politics, the constructivist theory recognises that the 'state system' is ultimately a product of its human participants, and that their conception of it and behaviour within it is shaped by the culture within which they exist. This position matches precisely the conclusions we reached in question 2 above, that medieval politics were profoundly different from modern politics in several respects, and that politico-cultural institutions such as the *amicitia* was an important cause of these differences.

Naturally, constructivism is not a perfect theory, and it can certainly be challenged. One of the major objections raised against it by other schools, especially the realists, is that it lacks theoretical rigour and the ability to predict future events. However, realism's ability to predict has frequently shown itself to be rather limited as well. We may think for instance of the inability of most scholars to predict the break-up of the Soviet Union, or John Mearsheimer's insistence that the (then) European Economic Community would fail and the only way to secure peace in Europe was to provide nuclear weapons to the newly-reunited Germany.[220] And there is good reason to be sceptical of a theory that attempts to reduce the incredible diversity and complexity of human societies to what more than anything resembles pseudo-scientific formulas.

But regardless, this debate matters little in the context of an historical analysis, where we do not seek to make predictions, but only to understand and explain. And as the previous analysis has shown, when examining politics in the Middle Ages – or, it would not be unreasonable to say, in any historical period that differs significantly from modern or early modern Europe – historians are best served by adopting constructivism as our theoretical framework, whilst at the same time

[220] John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future. Instability in Europe After the Cold War', *International Security*, 15/1 (1990), p. 5-56

avoiding a theoretical monism by looking to other schools and including their contributions where appropriate and beneficial.

The way forward for an IR-based study of the Middle Ages – or of any other historical period – is neither Ruggie's blind normativism nor Fischer's impoverished realism, but rather Latham's contextualisation and awareness of the characteristics of the period in question and their implications for the practice of politics at the time.

# 6 – Conclusion

In the previous chapters, we have followed to parallel tracks of inquiry. On the one hand, we have investigated how the relationship between Cnut and Conrad II evolved during their life times and for some years afterwards.

We have followed Cnut as he left Denmark after the Battle of Helgeå in the autumn of 1026, travelling south through Germany and crossing the Alps in the late autumn or very early winter. We saw how he arrived in northern Italy and possibly met Conrad, who was campaigning in that region at the time. And we saw how, in accordance with their amicitia, he may have contributed to his campaigns at the time.

In Rome, he participated in one of the most important political events of the generation, witnessing the imperial coronation on Easter Sunday, and escorting the newly-crowned Emperor from the Basilica to the imperial palace in a ceremony with a complex political subtext.

And we have seen that he not only gained a number of political advantages through his participation, but also performed a sacral duty on behalf of his people, in a tradition inherited from his Anglo-Saxon predecessors.

Moving on to the second part of our investigation, we have seen how the betrothal between Gunhilde and Henry was not just occasioned by Conrad's military conflict with the Liuticians, but also a natural result of the long amicitia between the two rulers.

We have seen how, after Cnut's death and the end of the Liutician threat, the Salian objectives may have shifted from alliance to raising an inheritance claim on Cnut's domains, and that they were most likely influenced by the similar situation in Burgundy a few years earlier.

And we have considered the possiblity that if an army had not been struck by an epidemic on the plains of northern Italy in 1038, the Danish crown could have passed not to Sweyn Estrithson, but to a Salian Emperor, changing the course of Danish history perhaps for ever.

Meanwhile, on the other track, we have examined a number of aspects of IR theory, examining a number of different schools and concepts, and looking into the complicated issue of IR's applicability to the medieval world. And the continuing awareness of IR theory has allowed us to identify the amicitia as not just a key element of the 11th century political process, but also a point where it diverges very strongly from the modern world in a manner that is completely alien to the realist world view.

This combination of historiography and IR theory, combining the historical investigation with a deep awareness of the historical characters as fundamentally foreign political actors within their political and cultural environment, has enabled

us to avoid both the universalist pretentions of the realist IR theorists and the unsatisfactory explanations of the authors of *Dansk udenrigspolitisk historie* and the other general works of Danish history. Far from being merely a question of "gaining acceptance" for Cnut, we have seen how he operated within a complex net of personal relations and political objectives at the very centre of European politics of his time.

Although this has primarily been a historical analysis, the conclusions of course have implications for the field of IR as well. On the one hand, it has shown that despite common beliefs to the contrary amongst certain schools, IR theory is a very useful tool for medieval political history, and that IR is not necessary dependent on the existence of states in a modern sense; on the contrary, it is able to encompass relations amongst a wide variety of societies and polities.

And on the other hand, it has shown how realism, probably still the most prominent school of thought in IR, is quite simply wrong on certain core assumptions. The medieval political system does not function according to the realist expectations.

Realism can of course still claim accuracy as regards international relations in the modern world, but even that seems doubtful. L. P. Hartley's aphorism, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there", can in a sense be inverted: Even in the modern world, many countries and cultures are characterised by social, cultural, and political norms differ significantly from what we may consider as the 'globalised, Western-inspired mainstream'. Is realism able to account for these differences?

Our previous conclusions suggest that the answer is 'no' – realism may well lay claim to a scientific theoretical rigour, but what use is theoretical rigour if the underlying theory does not actually reflect the real world? Altough one must lways be on guard against theoretical monism, it is apparent that the more flexible and open-minded constructivist school is infinitely better suited at least for historical inquiries – and probably also for the complexities of the modern world.

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