

# **Valdemar the Victorious - the wildcard in pope Innocent's Northern policy**

**Paper read at the conference Innocent III : Urbs et Orbis**

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**(To be published in a full version together with the proceedings from the conference)**

In early Christmas in the year 1201, count Adolf of Schaunburg in Northern Germany entered the city of Hamburg which had for some years been an important strategic goal in the wars between the Danish king and German princes. But on Christmas day itself, Hamburg was surrounded by a major Danish force led by the duke of Southern Jutland; Adolf had to surrender and was taken prisoner and brought to Denmark. Adolf had been totally taken by surprise because he had firmly believed that the Danes would - as usually - spend the whole Christmas back in Denmark by drinking heavily.

The duke that fought in this efficient but sober and very un-Danish way was Valdemar, brother to the reigning king Canute. Exactly one year later, on Christmas day 1202, Valdemar was crowned king of the Danes and came to reign for 39 years. In the first half of this period, Denmark saw a great expansion in Northern Germany and the Baltic, militarily but even more ecclesiastically. Denmark became for a short while a superpower, and therefore also an important element in the northern policy of pope Innocent III, who actively intervened in the area on many different levels. It is the aim of this paper to present, from a Danish perspective, the key figures in this policy or in these policies. These figures have all been well known since the thirteenth century, so there is nothing new in this, but I still think it might be worth while to present them together, to get an overview of those involved but also maybe a better understanding of their interaction.

Valdemar himself came from a crusading dynasty. His father had regularly launched expeditions against the heathen Vends in Northern Germany. In 1169, the father of Valdemar eventually conquered the strong island of Rygen in Northern Germany. As a result of this, the grandfather was officially canonized by pope Alexander III, papal bulls were issued to initiate a mission further eastwards in the Baltic - as far as to Finland - and a number of Cistercian monasteries were founded from Denmark in the areas around

Rygen. This missionary policy was continued by Valdemar's brother, Canute, who reigned from 1182-1202, and who also continued the royal selfrepresentation - on coins and seals - as a crusade king. So Valdemar was brought up in a crusading tradition, and he obviously felt himself to be bound to this tradition which rendered him an important king to pope Innocent. The general impression in the years from 1202 till the death of pope Innocent is one of cooperation between pope and king and also one of a general papal support of king Valdemar.

One explanation for this is the mediating figure of the Danish archbishop Andrew Sunesen - archbishop of Lund. Andrew Sunesen was closely connected to the king, he was an unwavering supporter of the royal policy, he was very active in the Baltic mission both on his own initiative and by papal concessions. Andrew Sunesen was also in totally consonance with pope Innocent as regarded ecclesiastical policy in general and specifically as regarded papal supremacy, as professor Torben Nielsen has shown in a number of studies. It is even most likely that Andrew Sunesen and pope Innocent knew each other personally from Innocent's early years of study although it is not possible to point to any exact time and place for such an acquaintance. So Valdemar was through archbishop Andrew Sunesen connected to a larger network with pope Innocent in the centre which facilitated communication and the solving of matters of political delicacy. I shall turn now to some examples of this.

When Valdemar inherited the throne, he also inherited two problems in which pope Innocent was already deeply involved. One concerned Valdemar's sister, Ingeborg, who had been married to the French king Phillip August in 1193, but was repudiated the morning after the wedding and was then held almost as prisoner far away from her husband for years. Phillip August demanded a divorce on the claim that the couple was too closely related, and he installed himself with a new wife, Agnes, who bore him two children and then died.

Innocent had, immediately after his ascension to the papal throne, written to Phillip August and demanded that he send away Agnes and resumed the marriage with Ingeborg. In August 1198 and again in October 1199, he repeated his letter and also threatened to put France under interdict; this he actually did in the spring 1200. That, at last, made Phillip August move and made him promise in September October 1200 to send Agnes away and to participate in a formal legal process about the marriage, whenever Ingeborg's brother king Canute had finished his wars in Northern Germany and could also take part in the process. Danish lawyers were sent to France, but then Phillip August protested against the papal legates to judge in the case and claimed that they favoured the Danish party. And then Phillip August brought a new element into the case: He claimed now, almost ten years after the wedding, that Ingeborg was a witch and had cast a spell upon him on the wedding night so that he had not been able to consummate the marriage. This is as far as that case had gone when Valdemar succeeded Canute as king.

The second problem that Valdemar inherited, concerned the Danish bishop of Schleswig, who was also named Valdemar. He was a grand cousin of king Valdemar and thus belonging to one of the competing lines of the Danish royal dynasty. In 1193, this bishop Valdemar had been elected archbishop of Bremen by the chapter there. Instead of entering his archbishopric, he went to Norway and Sweden to gain support to invade Denmark with the open intent of making himself king. Had he succeeded, he would have been a very rare example of a true Melchizedek, a priest and a king in one person; but the bishop lost a battle and

was caught by the Danish king and brought in prison in Denmark. Bishop Valdemar was, because of his royal descent and because of his support in Norway, Sweden and Northern Germany, a serious political threat to the Danish king; but the imprisonment of a bishop and an elected archbishop was at the same time an intolerable thing to the pope and especially to pope Innocent. He had written to king Canute and demanded him to release bishop Valdemar, and when king Valdemar was crowned in Christmas 1202, Innocent wrote to him the next year and repeated this demand.

The bishop had then been in prison for ten years, queen Ingeborg had been neglected and ill treated by Phillip August for ten years. Besides this, Valdemar became king in a year, when two different persons claimed to be king of the Germans, Otto of the Welsh family and Phillip of Hohenstaufen. And also, Valdemar became king in the year, when the missionary and military order of the Sword Brothers was founded by Albert of Riga, as Elly Truitt talked about on the session here on Friday afternoon. Albert worked in co-operation - or maybe in competition - with the Danish archbishop Andrew Sunesen. The question is then, what did Innocent actually do to manoeuvre around and influence all these problems and persons? And the answer is, that he began to link them together.

Immediately after the coronation of her brother, Ingeborg wrote to Innocent. In this moving letter, she described the prison she had been kept in, without enough food, without medical care, without a bath, without any confessor, without access to hear the word of God, and without proper evening dresses fitting for a queen. This was really not true, professor John Baldwin told me a couple of days ago; account books from the French king show that he actually spend more money on Ingeborg and her dresses than on Agnes, but the complaints of Ingeborg worked. The response of Innocent was a harsh letter to king Phillip August written in the summer 1203, in which the king is addressed neither as special friend nor as most Christian king, such as he used to be in Innocentian letters, as John Baldwin told in his opening lecture on Thursday [thursday] morning. Instead, the king learns that the created must fear the Creator and not offense the divine majesty, and that Phillip August must now turn towards God. But Innocent also decided, maybe in the same summer, to use the case of Ingeborg to solve the problem with the imprisonment of the Danish bishop Valdemar and to attach the Danish king closer to the popes imperial policy. This led to a series of papal letters in December 1203.

The first letter, from 5. December, concerns the bishop, and Innocent opens with the words *Utinam non fuisset homo ille, videlicet Waldemarus Slewsvicensis episcopus qui postposita pontificalis officii gravitate, ut in se regnum sacerdotio cuniret ...*; "I wish that this man had never been, this Valdemar bishop of Schleswig, who left behind him the burden of the episcopal duty in an attempt to unite in himself regnum and sacerdotium". Innocent continued that it had been easier to bear, had the bishop perished by his own sword when he drew the material sword, so that he had not stained the king's hands by being caught by them. But Innocent then twisted the argumentation around: God had not allowed the rebellion of the bishop to succeed, the kingdom was now quiet and in peace, so the king ought now to show his gratitude towards the Lord by releasing the bishop, so that no other ruler should refer to the example of Valdemar and use it as an excuse to imprison a bishop. Innocent suggested that the bishop be excommunicated and safely guarded sent to Rome.

As part of this plan, we must understand it, a new letter was send to Phillip August only four days later, 9.

December. Innocent repeated his admonitions to the king and again urged him to treat Ingeborg with marital affection, and he described the miserable life of the queen whose face is watered by rivers of tears, and whom he compared to a lonely sparrow and to a tugurium in cucumerario, to an isolated little cottage in a cucumber field [Isaiah 1,8].

A third letter was sent to king Valdemar three days later, 12. December. It is short and direct: Innocent wanted king Valdemar to support king Otto of Germany, so that he by the help of Valdemar could become emperor. And six days later, 18. December, pope Innocent confirmed an agreement and some letters exchanged between king Valdemar and Otto, which we know nothing about except from this confirmation.

Between these four letters were edited three others from pope Innocent to the Danish archbishop Andrew Sunesen, on 10. and 17. December 1203, concerning the extent of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

It took some time before this multifaceted initiative of pope Innocent's produced a result, and we do not know what negotiations and what discussions have furthered the case, but there must have been some, and we can guess about their content from the next series of letters from pope Innocent to Denmark.

In 1205, probably late in 1205, king Valdemar agreed to release the bishop from prison on the condition that he should be brought to the pope by a guard that could guarantee that the bishop was not liberated by one of king Valdemar's enemies, Philip August or king Phillip Hohenstaufen. King Valdemar also paved the way for Innocent's removal of the bishop from his see by writing that the bishop had been born in an illegitimate marriage.

Innocent responded in January 1206. In one letter, from 20. January, he thanked king Valdemar for his cooperation and promised to send his personal trustee to bring the bishop to Rome, but Innocent added, that he could not confirm the election of a new bishop to Schleswig - as the messengers of Valdemar had asked for - before the old bishop had in Rome been formally deprived of his episcopal dignity.

Together with this letter, pope Innocent issued seven other letters in January 1206, to the Danish archbishop. Some were answers to questions about intricacies in Canon law, some granted to Andrew Sunesen privileges that were normally reserved the pope, but one letter is different. It permitted Andrew Sunesen to appoint and ordinate a new bishop in such areas that he might convert and bring into Christianity. The initiative to this mission had come, so the letter says, from Andrew himself, who "had decided to go forth against the pagans"; but it is still a far-reaching privilege that officially bestowed upon the Danish archbishop a leading role in the Baltic mission. The inclusion of this letter in Innocent's writings to Denmark shows, that the pope in January 1206 in some way had combined the case of the bishop of Schleswig with his crusading policy in the Baltic, which - on the other hand - was accepted and supported from the Danish side.

This plan was immediately carried out. Chronicles report that a Danish crusading army set out in the summer of 1206 and conquered the island of Øsel in the Eastern Baltic off the Estonian coast. A wooden fortress was built, but when the winter began, the Danish army had to give up the island, burned down the fortress and went back home. Except for archbishop Andrew Sunesen, who spent the winter in Riga, lecturing on theology according to the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia, but he must certainly also have discussed the future of the Baltic crusades. The reference in the chronicle is interesting in this context for two reasons. First, it indicates a close cooperation between the Danish archbishop and the missionary see of Riga which must have been supported and maybe initiated by Innocent. Second, Henry of Livonia wrote that Andrew was accompanied by Nicolaus, Danish royal chancellor and bishop of Schleswig. This is a clear mistake because the bishop of Schleswig was on his way to Rome, and Nicolaus only succeeded him later, but it shows that the new candidate to the see in Schleswig was - even before election and confirmation - closely attached to the Baltic crusade. So a part of the Danish deal with Innocent was, that bishop Valdemar was let out of prison, if Innocent would depose him from Schleswig, and Innocent might do so more willingly, if the new Danish bishop actively took part in the crusading. This must have been the message, that the Danish king had brought to Rome early in 1207. We do not know the message itself, but Innocent's answers were recorded in his register. It was a difficult situation for Innocent who needed Danish support also for his candidate as German king, Otto, who had been hardly pressed by Phillip Hohenstaufen during the year 1206, but the case of bishop Valdemar had not been legally solved yet.

Innocent wrote therefore on 2. April 1207 to king Valdemar, informed him about the latest development in the Ingeborg case, assured the king of his gratitude for having let bishop Valdemar out of prison, but as he could not make any decision yet in the case of the bishop, he had decided to let archbishop Andrew Sunesen install a provisional bishop in Schleswig to take care of both temporal and spiritual matters. It was, Innocent admitted himself, not a very satisfying solution, but the best he could find at the time. The same day, he wrote to Phillip August and advice him again to show full marital affection for Ingeborg and to treat her, who by descent and marriage was a royal person, with all royal dignity. Innocent added a new argument to all the former ones, namely that Phillip August not only affronted God, whom he could satisfy with penitence, but also man, and his ill treatment of Ingeborg might set up man against him. This second letter is clearly an attempt to answer the wish of king Valdemar, but it did not make much of a change for Ingeborg.

Later in 1207, the Northern situation changed rapidly. The archbishop of Bremen had died on 3. November, the chapter in Bremen elected bishop Valdemar of Schleswig to new archbishop, the election was supported by king Philip Hohenstaufen who asked pope Innocent to confirm the election, and bishop Valdemar felt so secure that he fled from Rome to Bremen. But the chapter in the Danish controlled city of Hamburg which nominally had the right to elect the archbishop of Bremen, protested and elected a candidate of the Danish king Valdemar's.

Innocent flatly refused to confirm the election of the escaped bishop Valdemar, immediately excommunicated him and announced it to king Phillip Hohenstaufen and to German ecclesiastics. This happened in February 1208, and the next month king Valdemar led an army into Northern Germany, but was not strong enough to attack Bremen or king Phillip Hohenstaufen.

If all these cases were as closely interlinked as I would like to present them, we should now expect Innocent to write to king Phillip August again to support king Valdemar. Innocent actually wrote letters to the French king between the summers of 1207 and 1208, but they are less harsher than they had been before. One explanation for this might be that Innocent was worried about the accusation against Ingeborg for sorcery, which has a prominent role in these letters. An agreement was reached so that Phillip August sincerely should attempt to know Ingeborg carnally, if this proved impossible because of maleficium, the pope would proceed to pass a sentence in the divorce case.

On June 21, 1208, the political situation again changed unexpectedly and dramatically. King Otto had his rival, Phillip Hohenstaufen, murdered and was now undisputed ruler of the Germans for the next couple of years. He immediately promised Northern German princes - as Adolf of Schauenburg - help against king Valdemar, but he also strongly opposed bishop Valdemar in Bremen. At the same time, he was the ruler that pope Innocent had backed up behind, and this might partly explain why Innocent in the following months seems to have neglected Danish claims. Bishop Valdemar was deprived of Schleswig and archbishop Andrew Sunesen ordered to begin a canonical election of a new bishop. There is no mentioning of the crusader candidate Nicolaus who was the favourite of the Danish king. And as new archbishop in Bremen, Innocent decided to accept the candidate of Otto, not of king Valdemar. And the case of Ingeborg took an important turn when Innocent in December 1208 actually conceded to his legate in France the power to dissolve the marriage, although he did so under many conditions and with a long series of warnings and exhortations to Phillip August, who was now again addressed as karissime filii and as catholissimus princeps et christianissimus rex.

It is difficult to know because of the few sources how closely the Danish king's policy reacted to the policy of Innocent's, but it is striking that Innocent's comparable neglect of Danish affairs in 1208 was followed the next year by a Danish intensification of the crusading in the Baltic. In October 1209, Innocent acknowledged the proposal of king Valdemar to launch a crusade, supported him fully, promised all the faithful in Denmark eternal reward if they followed Valdemar, and he also wrote to king Otto that he should not attack Denmark when Valdemar was away. In January 1210, the kingdom of Denmark was then taken under papal protection because of this crusade; this promise of protection was repeated May 7th 1210, and on that same day, Innocent wrote a comforting letter to Ingeborg and assured her of his support and appealed to her endurance in her time of troubles.

But then, after 1210, Innocent stopped linking Danish cases together. Something changed. The Danes had went on crusade in 1210 in the Baltic, Innocent regularly edited letters in the following years with crusading privileges in general and to the Danish archbishop, but they were not connected - explicitly or by their date - to any other Danish cases. The case of Ingeborg remained unsolved, and Innocent continued to write to her and to Phillip August, but there is no indication - explicitly or in the dating of the letters - that Innocent used this in negotiating with Danes or vice versa, that the Danish king mentioned Ingeborg in his letters to Innocent. As concerns the German empire, Otto was excommunicated in November 1210, and Frederick 2. was elected king in 1211. King Valdemar seems to have been extremely cautious for the next two years till he decided after the battle of Bovines in 1214 to support Frederick and as a result of this got Frederick's acknowledgment of the Danish claim on the lands north of the river Elbe in Northern Germany.

To sum up: There seems to have been some changes in Innocent's policy towards king Valdemar. At times, he had supported Valdemar by supporting Ingeborg while he in exchange seems to have demanded Valdemars cooperation in his German policy and in the case of bishop Valdemar. At other times, king Valdemar tried to make Innocent do something in the case of Ingeborg and tried to influence Innocent's election of bishops, but with no result. In both instances, Innocent and Valdemar clearly saw all these different cases as interrelated. After 1210, there are no direct evidence from any of them of such a linking cases together. Why not?

When I should give a title for this paper, I chose to call king Valdemar the Victorious a wildcard - one that Innocent could play when he really needed to in his French, German, and Northern policy. This is the impression we get until 1210. The change after then can be explained in many ways. Some of the cases simply hardened, petrified, and could not be brought any further, as that of Ingeborg's. Some were solved as that of the bishops. But one last explanation might also be, that Valdemar in connection with the archbishop Andrew Sunesen had chosen the successful solution of gambling on crusading, which made Valdemar even more important to Innocent and thus also more independent; a position that was reinforced by Valdemars connection to Frederick. Valdemar became more firmly installed in the Northern policy, and the privileges he and the Danish church got, no longer needed to be negotiated and linked to other cases. From having been a wildcard, Valdemar became a king.