What was the centre of the crusading movement? Some Scandinavian examples of the Concept Crusader State

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Scandinavia was in the periphery of Europe in the Middle Ages, as is directly expressed in a number of medieval sources. The master of the Hospitallers wrote in the middle of the fourteenth century to brethrens in the province of Dacia - i.e. Scandinavia - that they were living at the uttermost edge of the world. He had heard nothing from them for years, and he had not - and that is the main point in the letter - he had not received any money from them for years. The inhabitants of Scandinavia were also depicted as backwards, primitive, rural. Legates from bishop Otto of Bamberg in Northern Germany described in the early twelfth century the Danish archbishop as dressed in coarse, home-made peasants' clothes in spite of his high status and his learning. And the Scandinavians had strange habits. In the 1240s, the pope had to intervene when he was told that the Norwegians baptised in beer, and in a letter to the Norwegian archbishop, he had to stress, that according to the Gospel, man is saved by water and the Holy Spirit, not by beer and the Holy Spirit.

Such references are easy to find and funny to quote, and they have had a profound and lasting influence upon modern studies of medieval history. What I would like to do now is to discuss this idea of periphery in a crusading context. And that is of course a dangerous thing to do if you come from a country in the present day periphery of Europe, as I do, because it can easily look like an attempt to claim that one's own country was not peripheral, but the main centre of every thing in the Middle Ages. This is not the intention here, but it is rather to contemplate or meditate upon the concepts of centre and periphery themselves. I think, namely, that from a crusading perspective, these concepts do not make very much sense. Instead of a division between important and less important areas, we should rather speak of a common European effort or a common project, to which all contributed.

I would like to argue from three case studies to illustrate the interdependency of crusading initiatives in different areas of Europe.

The first example is the second crusade, and the perspective I am proposing has been well known since the article by Giles Constable in 1953 on The Second Crusade as seen by contemporaries. But I will shortly summarize some of the important events.

In 1144, Christian Edessa fell to the Muslim ruler Zenghi. When news of this catastrophe reached the papal curia, measures were taken to launch a crusade, but it immediately developed into a multifaceted crusade and not only a Middle Eastern. Present at the curia, when the news of Edessa arrived, were delegates from the Emperor Alfonso VII of Spain, king of Castille-León, and they procured a crusading bull granting indulgence to those fighting Muslims in Spain. With this in his hand, Alfonso in 1145-48 conquered the Ebro basin with important cities such as Tortosa in what can only be called a proper crusade. Also, in 1147 King Afonso Henriques of Portugal succeeded in taking Lissabon from the Muslims, seemingly without any papal official bull, but with the help of Flemish and English crusaders on their way to the Holy Land.

Meanwhile, the crusade had been preached in France and Germany with two results. One was a massive support for the Middle Easter crusade; King Louis of France took the cross, King Conrad III of Germany did also after a ceremony, in which he had his ancestor Henry II canonised as a ruler that had fought against infidels and worked for the spreading of Christianity, and a ceremony in which he also had his young son Henry crowned as king, should Conrad not return from the crusade. Louis and Conrad both left for the Holy Land in a crusade that became a military catastrophe and the reason for much criticism afterwards.

The second result of the preaching, however, was the launching of a Northern crusade against the pagan Slavs. Some of the German princes had argued that they could not leave their frontiers undefended for going to the Holy Land, and in March 1147 they were granted permission by Bernard of Clairvaux to fulfil their crusading obligation by fighting the Slavs East of the river Elbe. The duke of Saxony, Henry the Lion, and the count of Brandenburg, Albert the Bear, together with other German princes attached the Slavs at Dobin and further Eastwards, at Steczin.

In Denmark, a parallel development took place, In 1146, a papal legate had preached the crusade to the Danish king, who immediately abdicated, entered a monastery, and died. His successor, however, did what Conrad of Germany had done: He attempted to have a member of the royal family canonized - duke Canute - who had been known exactly for his attempts to spread Christianity among the Slavs, and he did so together with his young nephew who might have been designated to succeed him, if the king did not return from the crusade. The canonisation was prevented by the archbishop for technical reasons - there was no papal approval - but the intention of the king was clearly to get ideological support from a crusader saint within the family. This might have been a preparation for going to the Holy Land, but was in the following year turned into a crusade against the Slavs. In 1147, the Danish king attacked, together with a rival king, the city of Dobin with a Danish fleet to support the Saxon army on land. It was militarily a very limited success and the Danes soon left for home, according to Danish sources because of mutual suspicion between the two rivalling Danish kings, but according to the German chronicler Helmold of Bosau because "Danes are mighty fighters at home, but totally useless in real battles".

The three theatres of war, in the Baltic, on the Iberian Peninsula, and in the Middle East, were clearly seen by contemporaries as three fronts of the same war against the enemies of the church, as has been demonstrated by Giles Constable. This feeling was given theological expression by Bernard of Clairvaux. He wrote that the devil was getting nervous and feared because of the Christian success in the Holy Land - and this must be a pious but intellectually almost affronting circumvention of facts by Bernard - but the devil feared and therefore attached in the North. To fight against the Slavs was therefore to support Jerusalem, he concluded. And in this perspective, there was no centre and no periphery in crusading; all the said wars were of equal importance. The question is now whether this was also the case in other times than during the Second Crusade.

I will turn to my second example now, some twenty years later. In 1169, the rising power of Sultan Saladin had become such an obvious threat to the Latin settlers in the Holy Land that serious measures had to be taken. A high status diplomatic delegation including the archbishop Frederic of Tyre was send to Western Europe to seek help and persuade pope Alexander III to launch a new, general crusade. They reached Italy in July and got full papal support and began a

preaching and diplomatic tour to the rulers of Western Europe. In September, they were in Paris and offered the keys to Jerusalem to King Louis.

Earlier the same year, long and hard negotiations to settle the disputes between King Louis of France and King Henry of England had begun to show some results, and the creation of peace between France and England was now linked to the two rulers' personal participation in at crusade to the Holy Land. A part of the negotiations was the reconciliation between King Henry and Archbishop Thomas Beckett of Canterbury. It was decided to launch the crusade in Easter 1171.

While the delegation from Jerusalem was moving northwards through Europe, another delegation was travelling southwards all the way to the pope in Benevent. It has never been mentioned in the modern literature, and there is no medieval source to confirm it, but the two delegations must have met, probably somewhere south of Paris or in Northern Italy, and they must have discussed the necessity of crusading. This other delegation consisted of Scandinavian bishops and representatives of the Danish King Valdemar, who should inform the pope that the last pagan stronghold of the West Slavs had been conquered. In 15th June 1169, the strong fortress of Arkona on the island of Rügen fell, the pagan idols were burned, and the inhabitants converted to Christianity. The immediate response of pope Alexander to this news was two bulls issued in November, one in which he acknowledged the Danish conquest of Rügen and placed it ecclesiastically under the Danish diocese of Roskilde, and a second in which he formally allowed the canonization of king Valdemar's father, Canute, the duke mentioned above who had fought against Slavs and attempted to convert them.

But the papal response did not end with there two bulls. I think it can be argued that Alexander decided to launch a crusade on two fronts, in the Middle East and in the Baltic, and to coordinate them closely. And preparations began. In the summer of 1170, Henry of England had his son, young Henry, crowned as king to ensure the succession if he did not himself return from the Holy Land. This happened in the presence of Archbishop Frederic of Tyre and in spite of the raving protests of Thomas Beckett that he did not participate. In the same summer, King Valdemar had his son, young Canute, crowned, while his father, Duke Canute, was solemnly canonised.

These two rulers, Henry and Valdemar, and a great number of others should now, according to the earlier agreement, set out in Easter 1171. But five days after Christmas in 1170, the men of King Henry killed Thomas Beckett before the high altar in the cathedral of Canterbury. The plan of a general crusade came to nothing. Henry could not leave, and so King Louis of France would not. Some did actually fulfil their vows to go to Jerusalem such as Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony, who left in 1171, but they were too few to make any significant contribution to the defence against Saladin. In the Baltic, however, things proceeded as already decided. King Valdemar launched a new crusade to Pommerania, the conquest of Rügen was followed in 1171 by the founding of Cistercian monasteries further East, in Vorpommeren, and in September 1171 Alexander issued several bulls expanding the Baltic crusade as far as to Finland. So again, rather than talking about a centre and a periphery in crusading, the Baltic and the Middle Easter expeditions seem to have been closely coordinated, and only the unfortunate killing of Thomas Becket's prevented the plans from being fully realised.

My third example rest on an even weaker basis in the sources, it consists of six words telling that something did not happen. The background is, that in the decades following 1171, there seem to have been regular Danish expeditions into the Baltic, year after year, and many of these were shortly mentioned in the lapidaric style of the yearbooks, the annals. And then, suddenly, in 1213, the annals read "This year, there was no crusade in Denmark" - "hoc anno, expedicio quieuit in Dacia". It has puzzled Danish historians, what it meant and why it was important to note down, but I think is can be explained by looking at the general crusading history. The immediate cause of these six words was the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, in which a Spanish and French crusader army gained an important victory over the Muslims. These were no longer an immediate danger to the Christian kingdoms in Spain, and therefore pope Innocent III could now proceed with the plan that he had probably had since the fall of Constantinople in 1204: To concentrate all crusading efforts in one single, general crusade to Jerusalem, which since 1187 had been in Muslim hands. One step towards this was to call back all granting of indulgence from all other crusades, and this Innocent actually did after Las Navas de Tolosa. That there was no crusade from Denmark in the following year could be, because there was no longer any indulgence to be gained from fighting in the Baltic. If so, it shows how integrated the periphery was in the general movement, when the pope could not only support and launch crusading initiatives, but also prevent them.

The revokal of indulgence was, however, not to last for long. During the Lateran council in 1215, bishop Albert of Riga persuaded Innocent that he could not leave unprotected the land of the mother - that was the Baltic areas dedicated to St. Mary - to defend solely the land of the Son, that is Palestine. And Innocent did again grant indulgence to Baltic crusades, and the missionizing efforts here became correlated with the main project of Innocent, the Fifth crusade. In 1217, the first crusaders left for the Holy Land from Austria, Hungary, and France; some Frisian and German crusaders went to Portugal and fought Muslims there before they came to Acre in the Holy Land in 1218, and later that year, the Christians attacked Damietta in Egypt which was conquered in 1219. In Denmark and Sweden, preparations for a Baltic crusade were intensive; in 1218 the new king, Valdemar II, had his son, Valdemar the Young, crowned as co-ruler, and early in 1219, 1500 Danish ships sailed to Estonia and conquered Tallinn, while a Swedish fleet attacked Finland.

The lasting results of these two crusades, the Egyptian and the Baltic, were very different. The Christians of Damietta lost and had to withdraw having gained nothing, while in Estonia the first conquest developed into a permanent Christian presence. The point is, however, that when they were launched, both crusades were part of the same attempt to expand all frontiers of Latin Christianity.

The examples I have pointed to could be supplemented with a number of others from different areas. Details can be discussed in each case, but the overall impression is one of co-operation and a very high level of communication. And it is on this background, I think, that we must discus some of the basic assumptions behind the modern distinction between centre and periphery. There are more assumptions, but I will confine myself to two here. One is ideology; the other is numbers of participants.

It is easy to point to medieval sources that express a German and especially a French ideology in the high Middle Ages, that the French king or the successors of Emperor Charlemagne had a special obligation to protect Christianity and to support crusading. This argument refers to a tradition stretching back in time to the early establishing of the Christian church in Western Europe. As the countries at the fringe of the Ocean did not have such a long, Christian history, modern historians often assume that they had no tradition for crusading. But we are then ignoring the fact that the eleventh and twelfth centuries were the great period of "invention of tradition". The figure of Charlemagne is a good example. In reality - if such a thing exists in history - he functioned as a mercenary for the Muslim ruler of Zaragossa in a battle that he lost,

but with the Song of Roland in the late eleventh century, he became a protocrusader to be imitated and referred to by later crusader leaders who could claim descent from him. Another example is the invention of the Spanish Reconquista tradition. After 711, Spain was not a Christian area, and the petty Christian kings in the Northern pars of the Peninsula survived only as vassals to Muslim rulers. But in the eleventh century, around the conquest of Toledo in 1085, was invented the tradition of a continuous Christian struggle against Islam since the battle of Covadunga in 722. A third example is the Danish historian Saxo who wrote around 1200, some 200 years after the christianisation of Denmark. He described how Danish kings back in pre-historic times, even before Christ, had fought against the Slavs and the Estonians and other peoples in the Baltic and attempted to create peace and justice. The Danish transition to Christianity and participation in crusading was then a natural continuation of an age-old tradition.

The point is, that with this sort of history writing, all Christian rulers in the Middle Ages believed to be part of a tradition that bound them closely to crusading.

It is difficult to estimate how whole-heartedly crusader kings believed in this tradition, but they have probably been sincerely convinced of its truth. Crusading became, namely, an accepted and necessary way for a king to legitimise and strengthen his rule in opposition to rivalling elements within his own family, and probably also to gain authority vis-à-vis the nobility. This is the case in France and other central, European kingdoms, but it was even much more so in the countries at the fringe of Europe with a direct border to the infidels that they had to expand by continuous crusading. Crusader ideology seems to have had a greater influence upon the whole organization of society in these countries than in for example France, and in that respect they were the primary crusader states of Western Europe. This could be exemplified with the case of Denmark in the twelfth century, which I will not do here, partly because of lack of time, but especially because Janus Møller Jensen will touch upon that in his paper in the next session in this room.

The conclusion as concerns crusader traditions is then, that there was not felt to be a division between centre and periphery in the Middle ages, because all had their own tradition to live up to.

As concerns the other criteria, numbers, it is extremely difficult to say anything for certain about the Middle Ages. It is undisputable that we have far more sources referring to crusaders from France, Germany and England than from any other country, but we will never know anything about the percentage of the population that participated. It is, however, important to point to some weaknesses in the source material. One is the simple fact that there are lamentably few sources left at all from the Northern countries. Another is that Germans and French would walk

on a crusade and then pass through cities where their presence would be noted down and can be established today, while the peoples at the fringe of the Ocean would sail and meet much fewer persons on their way, and few have written about them.

With this uneven distribution of sources in mind, it is difficult to claim that participation in crusading was less common in the periphery than in the centre. Why is this then the impression we often get from modern scholarly literature?

I will, in conclusion, point to two possible explanations. One is the local historical tradition in these countries which has been characterized by social and economic history more than religious and military history, and it has also often been narrowly defined to national history, published in the local language and avoiding a comparison with general European history. This is, to varying extent, the case in Scandinavian countries, on the Iberian Peninsula, and in many of the Eastern European countries.

The other explanation is theological. Crusading history began with the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, and we know about it primarily from a limited group of historians who wrote in the first twenty years after the conquest. They were in the very unpleasant situation of being both theologically trained ecclesiastics and employed by French, high standing crusader leaders. On the one hand, they had their primary impressions of the First Crusade from French informants or from their own participation together with a French contingent. On the other hand, the crusade could for theological reasons only be understood as the work of God through the whole body of Christians. How can you reconcile or mediate two such opposing views? In practise, it was done by falling back upon a common literary genre in the Middle Ages: The barbarisation of the others.

The crusade historians from 1099 to c. 1120 created a distinction, that became increasingly elaborated and refined, between the proper French fighters who conquered Jerusalem, and all the Barbarians who were useless in military terms, but who gave spiritual support through their prayers, and whose participation ensured that the crusade was a common Christian enterprise. Guibert of Nogent in 1108 described the barelegged Scots with their hopelessly outdated weapons but added, that they prayed. William of Malmesbury continued this tradition by letting pope Urban II at Clermont tell the audience, that in the south it is to hot for people to fight. In the north, it is cold and the people there are brave fighters, but not very clever. "But you", Urban told the French knights present, "you live in temperate climate and are both brave and clever and can conquer Jerusalem". With this scenario set, William could continue and describe the crusade

as an undertaking of the centre of Europe, while it was at the same time a common European expedition attracting followers from the periphery. "The Welsh left their poaching", he wrote, "the Scots their familiarity with flies, the Norwegians their gorging in fish, and the Danes their continuous drinking" to go to Jerusalem.

And then we are back at the beginning of this paper. It is easy to find quotations from medieval sources that operate with an idea of a centre and a barbaric periphery. What I have tried to argue is, that from a crusading perspective, this idea must be considered a construction and has been given far to much credence by later historians.