

## Part I: Introduction

In modern times, the taking of hostage has usually been seen as an act of negative significance. According to the definition of the *Chambers Dictionary*, a hostage is: ‘a person kept prisoner by an enemy as security’.<sup>1</sup> In other cases, the taking of hostage is perceived as a purely criminal act, the purpose of which is to extort money from people or the society, as described in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*: ‘a person who is captured and held prisoner by a person or group, and who may be injured or killed if people do not do what the person or group is asking’.<sup>2</sup> In ancient times, this was not the purpose of a hostage. Quite to the contrary, it was a tool for reaching and securing peace. The use of hostages was thus formalised in a way that was different from what it is today, and in the formalisation a ritualization was embedded.

In previous studies, research on hostages has primarily dealt with studies of the culture of ancient Rome and what can be characterized as the medieval study of Ancient Rome, of Continental Germanic history, and of Anglo-Saxon history. Recently, historians have been interested in the concept of the hostage in its socio-political contexts (see further below). Even in these cases, the studies have, for the most part, dealt with Continental Germanic and Anglo-Saxon traditions and conflicts, for example, in the Carolingian Empire; these studies have often concerned themes of Christian values and morality. Few studies have focused on hostages in the Scandinavian countries. These studies have often been based on the idea of a legal development that pertained to the ‘private’, civil, aspect of hostages – in German, *Borgensgeisel* – in

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### How to cite this book chapter:

Olsson, S. 2019. Introduction. In: Olsson, S. *The Hostages of Northmen: From the Viking Age to the Middle Ages*. Pp. 1–54. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bba.a> License: CC-BY.

which a person functioned as assurance that a commitment would be fulfilled. No extensive, systematic study has so far been carried out by the second aspect, about hostages in times of war and peace, which will be my point of departure in this study.

## Cornerstones

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the giving and taking of hostages in peace processes during the Viking Age and into the late Middle Ages (16th century) in Scandinavia with neighbouring areas. I understand the exchange of hostages as a ritual act in peace agreements, as an opportunity for both parties – the victors as well as the defeated – to influence their respective negotiating position, and as a way of exercising dominance over further relationships within and between communities.

During the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages, ceremonies and ritual acts were conducted during peace and negotiation processes that also included the giving and taking of hostages. The surrender of a hostage appears to have been partly formalised and loosely associated with ritual acts. The concept of the hostage also appears as a theme in myths and other stories.

Another purpose is to understand how and why Christian and non-Christian traditions in laws were related to each other in the peace processes, as well as the norms and attitudes formed by these processes towards hostages and people in similar situations. Therefore, in the study of hostages in peace processes, it is possible to establish politico-legal perspectives in addition to the perspectives of the history of religions. I will also take into account the power structures that existed between the hostage takers and the hostages. In some cases, the hostage was killed or severely punished; in other cases the hostage was treated well. I will discuss the structural similarities and differences between hostages and phenomena such as the institutions of foster children and marriages.

These purposes can be summarised in the following questions:

- (1) How and why can the giving and taking of hostages be understood as a ritual act in peace processes during the

Viking era through the late Middle Ages (16th century) in Scandinavia? How did the hostages function as objectives of negotiations?

- (2) Were there similarities and differences between hostage traditions in different parts of Scandinavia and continuities from the Iron Age into medieval Scandinavian societies?
- (3) What were the relationships, or social bonds, between hostages and hostage takers?
- (4) What methodological concerns does one encounter if one examines the phenomenon of the hostage? How can the hostage be understood theoretically against the background of peace processes in communities where Scandinavians acted?
- (5) What were the similarities and differences between Christian and non-Christian traditions and values in peace and negotiation processes that involved hostages? What were the attitudes to the agreements that were established?

These questions will be answered through an analysis of different source categories with information about hostages, mainly texts, but also other sources such as personal names, place names and archaeological material. As the study will specifically describe phenomena during the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages, a period of religious change that also involved major politico-legal changes, it has been important to choose methodological and theoretical strategies with particular care. These points of departure will be described and discussed below.

## **Outline of the book**

Part I of the book deals with previous research on the giving and taking of hostages in the Viking Age and early medieval traditions, and I provide a summary of earlier research on hostages in Roman, Continental Germanic, and Anglo-Saxon traditions. Research on hostages in Old Scandinavian traditions has not been extensive and is basically non-existent in the history of religions.

A methodological discussion is also conducted. In order to get a perspective on hostages in relation to war and peace, the phenomena is put in relation to a theoretical model of peace processes, as well as different perspectives of ritual theory, where I, among other things, define my use of the concept of ritual action (or rather ‘acts’).

In Part II, the myth of the Æsir–Vanir War (or Peace) is analysed, and in Part III, the theoretical perspectives I presented in Part I are applied to various cases of hostages in the Scandinavian societies as well as societies outside Scandinavia, including the Danelaw in England and in the meetings between Scandinavians and Franks in the Merovingian kingdom and the later Carolingian Empire (800–888).

Part IV focuses on who became hostages, their legal rights and social value. Here, the relationship between law and tradition is discussed by referring to examples from different parts of Scandinavia and adjacent areas. When analysing the examples taken from different contexts, it is relevant to understand the writers’ intentions when they are reporting about various conflicts. This applies not least to the question of ancillary relationships, such as questions about who was the subordinate in a conflict – something that was not always obvious. Furthermore, the role of female hostages is discussed. Medieval Scandinavian contexts with regulations against violence towards hostages are analysed. Finally, two major case studies involving massacres of hostages and their ethical and moral consequences are presented.

In Part V, I further develop an idea of an available hostage: the disposable hostage. This phenomenon can be found in place names that suggest organisational forms around hostages. Also, the Swedish place name *Gyslamarchia*, mentioned in *Gesta Danorum* is discussed. This place name is then compared to other place names with a similar meanings in Finland, Estonia, and Ireland.

In Part VI, everything in the book is put together by an analysis of the *Older Westrogothic Law* in relation to previous analyses. The focus is on two hostage cases in connection with the traditional journey of the Swedish king to the provinces before his coronation: the so-called Eriksgata. This part is concluded with an analysis of Christian II’s Eriksgata in the early 16th century. This

part brings the observations of the book together and answers to the objectives mentioned in Part I.

## Earlier research on hostages

The concept of the hostage has been dealt with in several monographs and articles, mainly in disciplines with a focus on the cultures of Antiquity, and of the Anglo-Saxon and Continental Germanic areas, but a more comprehensive, general study of the phenomenon is still lacking for Scandinavia.<sup>3</sup>

The works that deal with Antiquity, Anglo-Saxon, and Continental Germanic cultures are mainly written from the perspective of legal history or from historical viewpoints. They therefore emphasize the social relations, power ideology, and international law. At the same time some of the authors of these works consistently point out religious aspects when describing hostages.<sup>4</sup> In the Roman Empire, society was touched at all levels of religious practice, which was not bound only to sacred places or festivals. The religions of the Empire included many socio-political activities, such as hostage taking. Nevertheless, studies on hostages in the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire do not explicitly deal with the history of religion. As the Romans came into contact with other cultures during their expansion, hostages were used to regulate or control other peoples, and it is therefore inevitable to take up the meeting between Romans and Germans. The legal historian Stephan Elbern has investigated hostages based on medieval Christian law (*jus gentium*).<sup>5</sup> Elbern also pays attention to some social and religious factors, and his investigation is one of few studies on hostages in which legal and religious elements are not seen as separate from each other.

Some studies have been devoted to hostages in the Old Irish society. The historian Robin Chapman Stacey has shown how hostage taking was a part of the legal practice of the Irish Iron Age Society.<sup>6</sup> The Old Irish material is mainly outside the scope of this study, but I will address some cases as comparisons.

The studies on hostages mentioned in this book are primarily based on legal historical perspectives. Recently, however, some historians have applied social and ideological viewpoints from the

perspectives of social history and the history of ideas on hostages. The historian Ryan Lavelle has investigated hostages in Anglo-Saxon societies. He perceives the hostage as a kind of symbolic 'security' during peace processes. Even more important, he shows how the hostage could function as a symbolic representation of power.<sup>7</sup> He also addresses legal contexts and agreements that included hostages and the consequences if these agreements were broken.<sup>8</sup>

The historian Adam J. Kosto has written about Continental Germanic traditions and, in particular, the Carolingian Empire. The taking of hostages was a way to secure the peace between the Christian Franks and the heathen Saxons. Kosto describe ritual actions in connection with the use of hostages and points out the need to understand its mechanics.<sup>9</sup> He has also thoroughly discussed definitions of the term 'hostage', which is something that will be addressed later in this book.

The interest in hostages within Old Scandinavian studies has so far been limited. There are mainly a few historians that dealt with hostages in Scandinavia. Gabriele von Olberg has related to Scandinavian examples in an article about hostages in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, but she mainly focuses on Continental Germanic cultures and legal issues.

Another researcher who devoted some attention to Scandinavian material was the legal historian Karl von Amira. His *Nordgermanisches Obligationenrecht 1: Altschwedisches Obligationenrecht* (1882) and *Nordgermanisches Obligationenrecht 2: Westnordisches Obligatierecht* (1895) also included medieval, Scandinavian legal history. He devoted a chapter in each volume to the study of hostage, which he primarily related to Scandinavian civil law: the hostage became a kind of pledge which remained with the debtor until the debt was paid (i.e. *Borgensgeisel*).<sup>10</sup> He did not focus on the contexts of martial law.

A civil law perspective was also applied by the legal historian Ascan Lutteroth (1922). Lutteroth made a general examination of the 'hostage settlement' in the context of martial law, including examples from Scandinavia. According to Lutteroth, it is obvious that the martial tradition occurred in parallel with the civil law that he exemplified with cases from Antiquity to World War I.<sup>11</sup> However,

the differences between war and peace may not always have been so clear that such a distinction can be made. Nevertheless, Lutteroth's listing is important because he made a distinction between hostages as an instrument of power relations between individuals (rulers, warlords) and collectives (groupings).

A desire to contextualize hostages in the different Scandinavian communities and to characterize the geographical and cultural conditions in which hostage occurred does not appear to be explicit in any study so far, although the historian Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has a brief note about the hostage taking at Olaf Tryggvason's *bird* (retinue).<sup>12</sup>

In investigations, hostage taking is seen as a single phenomenon apart from myths and rituals. For example, the historian of religions Andreas Nordberg mentions hostages in connection with the mythical Æsir–Vanir War in his thesis, *Krigarna i Odins sal* ('The Warriors in Othin's hall'), but it is only mentioned in a brief passage where Nordberg concludes that it was common use to exchange hostages in ancient societies.<sup>13</sup>

Hostages have been seen as part of – or a prerequisite for – 'friendship' during the Viking Age or the early Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> This latter theme has been the subject of intense discussion and research. Studies by the historians Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Lars Hermanson have been significant.<sup>15</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has shown that social bonds – as a part of 'friendship' – were as important as family ties for loyalty during the Saga Age (c. 870–1056) and the Sturlunga Era (c. 1180–1264) in Iceland. He also shows how friendships were part of traditional Scandinavian mentality and related to the religious sphere.<sup>16</sup> The historian Ian Miller has investigated the blood feud and the peace makings during the Saga Age. He also addresses traditions regarding fostering and foster children, which may have been an institution of a similar nature to the hostage.<sup>17</sup>

It is evident that the hostage has been described in many different studies, mainly by researchers investigating Roman culture and Continental Germanic cultures. These studies are essentially done from historical or legal historical perspectives, although the perspectives of social history can also be seen in recent studies. The

hostage has been seen as something related to religion in only a few studies. There is a need for a study that addresses examples from the Viking Age and early Middle Ages in Scandinavia, Iceland, and the colonies of the Scandinavians that (A) relates hostages to peace processes, (B) puts this in relation to myths, rituals, and ethics, and (C) analyses several source categories: personal names, place names, and archaeological material in addition to texts.

## Definitions of hostages

The most comprehensive survey of hostages in medieval Europe between about 400 and 1400 has been conducted by Kosto. He takes his starting point in the Carolingian and Post-Carolingian Empires.

In addition, his ambition has been to review each hostage situation during the period 500–1000 AD (a total of 325 cases), in ‘Regions from Russia to Central Asia in the east to the Celtic and Scandinavian borderlands in the west and the north’.<sup>18</sup> Kosto is careful about pointing out the variety of forms of hostages.<sup>19</sup> During the 11th century, different forms of hostages appeared, and women were appointed as hostages.<sup>20</sup> The hostages became more important from this period as representatives of larger groups rather than individuals. Kosto explains several variants of the situations in which hostage exchanges could occur.<sup>21</sup>

Kosto believes that, in addition to variations over time, other factors may have influenced how the hostage was used. This may have included, for example, the view of religion, law, and justice. Kosto sees European Christianity as a unit of common values, which can be problematic, not least in terms of perception of law and morality. He does not go in depth to justify this point of view. How should the researcher, for example, regard Viking rulers such as Eric Bloodaxe (ON *Eiríkr blóðøx*) or Haakon the Good (OI *Hákon góði*), who had their feet in both heathen and Christian traditions?<sup>22</sup>

According to Kosto, the hostage in the Middle Ages could be seen in relation to changing power structures.<sup>23</sup> However, he does not always notice the varying social contexts. To get further clues to the understanding of hostages, it is crucial to analyse and create



a comprehensive picture of the political situation where the phenomenon occurred and functioned.

A point of departure for this book is the historian Paul Kershaw's point of view that hostage exchanges, together with oaths, represented the most central moments of peace processes. In addition, the specificities of Scandinavian power relations in the context of peace processes is pointed out in this survey.<sup>24</sup>

Kosto points out the lack of sources to Scandinavian conditions. He mostly leans towards continental chronicles, but also uses some Scandinavian material, such as legal texts, Danish and Norwegian royal annals, and some of the kings' sagas.<sup>25</sup> He seems to regard these sources as valid only for describing medieval conditions, thus eliminating other sources such as Ancient sagas, Icelandic sagas, and even other kings' sagas. Certainly, the Old Norse source material has shortcomings in terms of details compared to the continental sources of the 12th and 13th centuries, but the lack of information can be turned into an advantage. By subdividing Old Norse texts into smaller parts, isolating key concepts, and correlating these with other sources, such as runic stones, skaldic and eddic poetry, place names, iconography, and other types of archaeological material, the texts can provide important information. I relate to the two main forms of hostages Kosto refers to – the bilateral and unilateral – and also to his more specific categories of hostages (outlined below). I do not deny that the power aspect is important, nor that the balance of power between different parties has been uneven, but my intention is also to analyse the situations where a hostage could be an opportunity for the weaker party. In this book, therefore, a main focus is that the hostage was an opportunity for influences under conditions where peace and war presupposed one another in the balance of power between groupings and individuals.

In Part I will rely on Kosto's definition of hostages. This definition – which concerns Continental Germanic and medieval communities – differs to a large extent from our modern perception. Kosto tones down the violence and instead emphasises a contractual role for the hostage: it was essentially a security by temporarily depriving a person of his or her liberty by another person to guarantee a third party's undertaking. The hostage thus

has the following characteristics: both one person (the hostage), who was not a prisoner but who was detained for deprivation, and another person for whom the hostage was the security and who was not deprived of his or her liberty.<sup>26</sup> There are also some further characteristics:

- (1) A hostage was a person who served as a guarantee for a number of people, and is thus to be distinguished from a prisoner of war or a common prisoner.
- (2) The hostage was not the subject of a ransom, but its function was to guarantee that, for example, prisoners were released.
- (3) The hostage was a third party – not one of the individuals whose security was guaranteed by the person or the persons who were being hostage.
- (4) The hostage was in fact subject to the loss of physical freedom and thus different from other forms of guarantor obligations.
- (5) The hostage was given rather than taken. A person might be given as a hostage, but without acknowledgment from both sides (hostage-giver and hostage-taker), the hostage could not be a guarantee that (peace) terms or agreements were being fulfilled.

As a condition, it differs significantly from being a prisoner. Prisoners were taken, but hostages were given.<sup>27</sup> The hostages could, however, be prisoners: the Kurdish ruler Saladin's hostage, for example, became prisoners after the massacre of Ayyadieh in 1192.<sup>28</sup> The hostage could also be exchanged for prisoners. This happened to, for example, the Swedish nobleman – later king – Gustav Vasa and the other hostages in connection with the negotiations between Sten Sture the Younger and Christian II of Denmark in 1518.<sup>29</sup>

Kosto makes a division of different types of hostages that could be considered to be a security:<sup>30</sup>

- (A) A conditional hostage, which is transferred as security after violence had been committed in violation of an agreement.<sup>31</sup>

- (B) A judicial or procedural hostage, which involves a legal aspect.<sup>32</sup>
- (C) True hostages, which are given from both sides as a security: when a (peace) agreement is signed.<sup>33</sup>
- (D) A custodial hostage, when a prisoner could chose a hostage as a security prior to his or her release.<sup>34</sup>

In my opinion, a fifth type of hostage could be distinguished: (E) the ‘available hostage’ or the ‘disposable hostage’, which we will return to later.

According to Kosto, the above-mentioned types of hostages (aside from the last one) may probably be linked to the 11th century. He is also careful to point out that the characteristics of these forms are not entirely clear but vary in both time and space:

[W]e cannot be certain, as we can in some cases, that the sureties in question conform to the definition of hostage used in this study; on the other hand, we cannot be certain, as we can in some cases, that they do not conform to that definition. Given the geographical and chronological range as well as the generic variety of the sources examined in this study, there is no fixed rule to follow when attempting to move from the words used in the sources to an understanding of historical practice.<sup>35</sup>

When Latin verbs like *dare*, ‘give’, *accipere*, ‘accept, receive’, or *recipere*, ‘receive’, are used about hostages in Carolingian sources, this could indicate the unilateral hostage form. Kosto believes that hostages were given in different power situations rather than by force.<sup>36</sup>

Basically, there were two types of hostage agreements: unilateral and bilateral. In the former case, one side gave a hostage, in the latter the two sides exchanged hostages.<sup>37</sup> Unilateral contractual forms arose mainly when someone was defeated and the hostage guaranteed that no violent acts should be directed against the victor.<sup>38</sup> The bilateral forms of hostage appear to have been far more common. In that type of agreement, it is much easier to identify an implicit purpose. In these contexts a treaty about a time-limited ceasefire was usually found. Afterwards, the hostage was returned. In this way, a formal ceasefire could be maintained between armies,<sup>39</sup> and – I would add – land areas. Another way in which both bilateral and

unilateral hostages could work was by guaranteeing free passage. It could take place in order to protect individuals who were envoys in negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

There were also other types of hostages, both in unilateral and bilateral forms, in different negotiation situations where they were given in exchange for prisoners or on bail.<sup>41</sup> But these forms can be difficult to distinguish in my material. With regard to the unilateral form of hostages, the examples appear to be mainly from the Middle Ages, and in this variant it was often about the settlement of debts, which could happen, for example, between kings and knights, and they belonged rather to ‘private’ companies,<sup>42</sup> even though that distinction is not entirely clear.

In the present material, I focus mainly on hostages as a part (an element) in peace processes. I discuss the opportunities for influence between competitive parties during conflicts and focus on those who became hostages, from a perspective of the history of religions.

## Sources

### Old West Norse

My main sources are texts. Of the texts in Old West Norse (Old Icelandic, Old Norwegian, Old Faroese, and Greenlandic Norse), the most important are the skaldic poems.<sup>43</sup> These are the oldest texts that can be dated to the Viking era. Although they only mention hostages sporadically, the skaldic poems are important because they can confirm later depictions of wars and peaces, to the extent that they mention triumphal events such as victories and the taking of hostages as well as prisoners of war. Some of the skaldic poems are tendentious. This may have been the case with the poems composed at the court of the heathen Earls of Lade (ON *Hlaðir*) in Trøndelag and was possibly a reaction to the Christian kings of Vestfold, and this served as a propaganda instrument for the Earls.<sup>44</sup> Some skalds, however, participated in different field campaigns and raids, and their poems, though composed as honours to various rulers, are direct sources of old Scandinavian traditions of pre-Christian customs and warfare.<sup>45</sup>

Another important text source – regarding war and peace – is the Eddic poetry, predominantly preserved in Icelandic manuscripts from the Middle Ages, such as the main manuscript of the Poetic Edda, *Codex Regius*, but also fragmentary in manuscripts containing *Snorra Edda* and *Hauksbók*.<sup>46</sup> These texts are more detailed than the skaldic poetry. But the Eddic poetry is questioned as a historical source to pre-Christian traditions. The author of the latest handbook in Old Scandinavian religion, the professor of English Christopher Abram, considers them to be overrated as sources of old traditions and dates the *Poetic Edda* to about 1270 (the date of *Codex Regius*).<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, some scholars argue that there is palaeographic evidence that the *Poetic Edda* has had a predecessor; Snorri, for example, quotes Eddic poems in his Edda dated to about 1225.<sup>48</sup>

Others claim that there was an oral tradition before the fixation in writing of the Eddic Poems.<sup>49</sup> The historian of religions Jens Peter Schjødt points out that it is hardly possible to determine the age of the Eddic poems based on objective criteria; there are just too few of them.<sup>50</sup> Schjødt also considers it less important for the researcher whether the poems were fixed in writing in the 12th or 13th centuries.<sup>51</sup> However, the difference between these centuries is important for understanding the relationship with other literary works that are central to the understanding of Old Scandinavian myths, such as *Snorra Edda*. It can also be important for analysing different versions of Eddic poems.

Schjødt poses an interesting question in his discussion of the Eddic poems: why would Christian skalds be interested in composing poems about heathen gods? He concludes:

We may talk as much as we like about a ‘Renaissance’ in the twelfth century, but it is one thing to collect old material together, something different to compose new poems, and in the twelfth and, for that matter, also in the thirteenth century, paganism was still relatively close, probably so close that it would have been difficult to compose whole poems about pagan gods.<sup>52</sup>

Schjødt’s point of view can be compared with that of the philologist Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, who has claimed that in individual Eddic poems we can find remains that survived from an

oral tradition into their preserved forms.<sup>53</sup> For the researcher, in an analysis of the Eddic poems, the Christian and contemporary material has to be peeled away in order to reach the remnants of the old traditions.

This procedure is something that, for example, the historian of religions Anders Hultgård has recently shown is possible in an analysis of the Eddic poem *Völuspá* through a comparative analysis.<sup>54</sup> Thus, there appears to be a certain consensus about the Eddic poems so far that they convey a message with pre-Christian content but with possible later Christian additions. The Eddic poetry cannot serve as direct historical sources of war and peace, because it does not describe direct historical events like the skaldic poetry does. Instead, the Eddic poems focus on myths about different beings and cosmological events or various hero poems that mostly are set in prehistoric times. However, in the myths of the Eddic poetry there are actions that can be prototypical to the human being and related to various ritual acts. To get information about historical events, the researcher must turn to other Old West Norse texts. Of these, the Icelandic family sagas (OI *Íslendingasögur*) are of course most well-known. They mention hostages very rarely, even though they refer to many conflicts at the micro level.<sup>55</sup> However, they are my main sources of the Old Icelandic Society from the settlement of Iceland (c. 874–930) to the Sturlung Era and the dissolution of the Free State (c. 1188–1264). Many times, interpreters of the sagas have emphasized the discrepancy between the fixation in writing (mainly in the 12th–13th centuries) and the time the texts describe. Likewise, the relationship between oral tradition and the influence of Christian learned traditions has been pointed out. In addition, it has been emphasized that the Icelandic writers strive to describe their ancestors as ‘good Christians’ or in a glorious light.<sup>56</sup>

In this investigation, I mainly use the *Landnámabók* as the source of the older periods in Iceland, about 870–930. It is considered, along with *Íslendingabók*, written by Ari Þorgilsson (OI *Ari Þorgilsson*) about 1130, to be the oldest of the Icelandic family sagas.<sup>57</sup> The *Landnámabók* appears in surviving copies of the original manuscripts from the 13th century. A possible original of the *Landnámabók* may have been written down in the first half

of the 12th century.<sup>58</sup> It can be seen as a matrix for the Icelandic family sagas, even though it is not always credible when it comes to non-Christian traditions. Its value lies in describing traditions that can be confirmed by both Icelandic and Norwegian early medieval laws.<sup>59</sup> Social norms such as attitudes towards prisoners, gender relations, and the bonds between chieftains and their retinues are also important information.

The *Sturlunga* saga contains, like the *Íslendingabók*, several books (or parts); it is a source of medieval conditions in Iceland. *Sturlunga* saga describes conflicts on the micro-level that are limited in time and space, thus providing information on conflicts and solutions to these conflicts in a realistic way.<sup>60</sup>

The kings' sagas (OI *konungasögur*) contain very valuable information as they mention campaigns that involved both the taking and the giving of hostages.<sup>61</sup> This is unique material in relation to skaldic and Eddic poetry, as well as Icelandic sagas, since the stories are written by both Icelandic and Norwegian writers. The oldest of these sagas is from the beginning of the 12th century. Some of the stories can be based on older written and oral sources. This is, for example, noted in *Heimskringla* (c. 1230), traditionally attributed to the Icelandic chieftain and skald Snorri Sturluson (OI *Snorri Sturluson*). Snorri worked like a historian, albeit not in a modern sense, and was able to use skaldic and Eddic poetry as well as other kings' sagas. He also used sources that are unknown or have been lost, for example, the skaldic poem *Hryggjarstykki*.<sup>62</sup> What may be problematic with much of the Old West Norse literature is that it can be highly biased in favour of the Norwegian kings in the descriptions of war, peace, and other socio-political events. It can make it difficult to fully understand the purpose, background, and results of different conflict lines between the kings and their opponents.

Legendary sagas (*fornaldar sögur*) are stories about ancient times, created in Iceland in the 14th and early 15th centuries; the manuscripts were collected in Denmark in the 17th century. These are stories with fictional themes that are set in semi-mythical landscapes of the Older Iron Age (about 500 BC–550 AD), sometimes later, and influenced by continental, romantic and heroic legends.<sup>63</sup> Traditionally within research, the uncertainties of the Legendary

sagas have caused them to be attributed to a low source value.<sup>64</sup> Some interpreters of the Legendary sagas have recently wanted to revise them as sources. It has been pointed out, among other things, that the authors did not necessarily have to disregard pre-Christian traditions in the same way as the authors of the family sagas, as they are set in a distant, ancient age.<sup>65</sup> Other interpreters have attempted to apply comparative methods or isolate pre-Christian elements transmitted in a literary context.<sup>66</sup>

It is given that the details of battles and peace processes are greatly exaggerated in romanticising stories of the distant past. The excesses and, above all, the time discrepancy give the Legendary sagas a low source value, and they cannot stand alone as sources of the Viking Age, but must be seen in relation to other sources. They can primarily provide information about details that are not mentioned in the other text sources. For example, the story of King Vikar (OI *Vikarr*) in *Gautreks* saga gives details about fosterage and hostages, details that can be confirmed by the skaldic poem *Vikarbalkr* (OI *Vikarsbalkr*), which is quoted in the saga.

### Old East Norse literature

In Old East Norse languages – Runic Swedish, Old Swedish, Runic Danish and Old Danish – there is actually no purely literary work of saga character. However, there are some Danish chronicles in Latin such as *Brevis Historia Regum Dacie* (c. 1186), covering the history of Denmark from the early centuries AD up to the 1100s and *Chronicon Roskildense* (c. 1140). The most important feature of these works is that they legitimise medieval Danish royal dynasties.

The source that interpreters of Old Scandinavian religion usually relate to is Saxo Grammaticus *Gesta Danorum*, ‘The Deeds of the Danes’, by Saxo Grammaticus, from about 1200. Like Snorri, Saxo worked as a collector of material (both oral and written), which he then structured and reinterpreted according to his learned principles. He moralises, however, more than Snorri, and idealises the Danish kingdoms. In addition, he interpreted myths differently than in the Old West Norse literature: the gods are described as human kings and heroes. He may also have known



other versions of the myths.<sup>67</sup> The Danish sources are interesting to compare to the Old West Norse literature in terms of politics, war, and peace.

## Names

Place names are particularly important for the interpreter of Old Scandinavian religion because they can confirm institutionalised traditions and social activities. During the first half of the 20th century, the theophoric place names were used as a historical source of religion. But with articles in 1924 and as late as 1950, the place-name researcher Jöran Sahlgren strongly questioned the methods used by former place-name research, implying that the sacred place names could be discarded on a linguistic basis as sources for pre-Christian traditions.<sup>68</sup>

Sahlgren's criticism of the interpretation of certain place names as sacred lasted until 1986 when the place-name researcher Lars Hellberg published an article where he could show that there is sustainable evidence for the interpretation of several place names as being related to a heathen cult. With this article, place names made a comeback in the study of Old Scandinavian religion. A new orientation has been taken by place-name researchers such as Thorsten Andersson, Lennart Elmevik, Stefan Brink, and Per Vikstrand.<sup>69</sup> When I use place names, I basically focus on the analyses of these place-name researchers. There is, however, little evidence of the giving and taking of hostages in the place-name material. In Scandinavia, one can only make certain assumptions about the insecure place name Gyslamarchia (Da. *Gislemark*).

Another important source are the old personal names that are primarily found in runic inscriptions. The philologist Lena Peterson's *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon* ('Dictionary of proper names in [Scandinavian Viking Age] runic inscriptions') has been central to me as a source of knowledge. The basic meaning of different personal names can provide information about structures lost to the name holders in their lifetime.

The main part of the Futhark runic inscriptions with 16 characters occurs on the runic stones in the Swedish Mälaren Valley and the province of Uppland. These stones have been created in

a society that was in transition to Christianity, but still there was the will to maintain the older names. Futhark runic inscriptions with 24 characters are from periods before the 7th century AD. These inscriptions can be hard to interpret but can still provide very valuable information about ‘hostage’ as a word.

### Medieval laws

Medieval laws are important mainly as a source of early medieval Scandinavia and Iceland. Interpreters of Old Scandinavian religion have pointed out that the prohibition of heathen cults in the medieval laws can be interpreted indirectly as a source of customs of ancient times.<sup>70</sup> The latter could be seen in the *Elder Westrogothic law* (Swe. *Äldre västgötalagen*, 12th century) – for this study one of the most important sources – describing the hostage giving between the Swedes (OWN *Svíar*) and the Geats (OWN *Gautar*), which should have been performed during the king’s ritual journey, the Eriksgata, in connection with his coronation.<sup>71</sup> The Eriksgata is also mentioned in other provincial laws, such as *Magnus Erikssons landslag* (ca. 1350). For me, the Swedish provincial laws<sup>72</sup> are mainly a source of early medieval traditions.

Norwegian medieval laws can also provide information about both hostages and assembly places. These are traditions created in the transition to an early medieval state society, either retaining or distancing from older, pre-Christian traditions.

The *Gulaping law* (OI *Gulapingsløg*) is the oldest of Norway’s provincial laws and probably originates from the 10th century. The law mentions hostages but also different traditions of the organisation of the thing,<sup>73</sup> which may be a legacy of older times.

The later *Frostatings law* (ON *Frostapingsløg*) from the Norwegian province of Trøndelag was fixed in writing around 1260, but some of the materials are older than that. The law is most interesting when it comes to medieval conditions because it mentions hostages as a part of the regulations between the king, his followers, and other rulers, such as dukes and earls.

The Icelandic *Grágás*, written around 1117, can provide information about the organization around the Icelandic parliament,

the Althing (OI *Alþingi*), and is important especially in terms of legal terminology that may have survived from before Christianity. *Grágás* was the legislation created at the foundation of the Althing in 930.

### Continental chronicles and annals

Continental Germanic and Old English chronicles, royal annals, and bishop chronicles are important sources for the study of Old Scandinavian religion and culture. It has been pointed out that these types of texts fulfil a time criterion; they were written in the time period they describe. Examples of such chronicles are Adam of Bremen's historical overview of the archbishops in the Archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* ('Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg' (ca. 1070), and Rimbert of Hamburg's description of the mission of the monk Ansgar in Scandinavia, *Vita Ansgarii* (ca. 875). However, these texts can politically be unreliable when it comes to the criterion of proximity. This may be missing because the chroniclers had to rely on secondary information.

Continental bishop chronicles, such as *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, are, along with place names and archaeological findings, my main source of conflicts involving hostages in the East Scandinavian areas. Among other things, they disclose conflicts between the Danes and Vends as well as between Swedes and people from the Baltic region.

Other important sources are Anglo-Saxon chronicles of the 10th century. These are not native texts, but some of them are still recorded in Old English, others in Latin. Through the Anglo-Saxon texts, it is possible in various descriptions involving hostages to isolate a terminology that is linguistically closely related to Old Norse. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* consists of annals from about year 1 to the mid-1100s, but the Chronicle was created in the late ninth century.

The Old English *Beowulf* poem depicts conflicts between people called Danes (OE *Dene*), Geats (OE *Ġēatas*), and Sweons (OE *Swēon*). It is a matter of debate whether these conflicts took place between these peoples in the Scandinavian Peninsula or in

Denmark, but for my analysis it is important that this literary work describes the interaction between groupings and individuals in an Iron Age society that commuted between war and peace. It is disputed whether *Beowulf* was created in the 8th century or in the 11th century.<sup>74</sup>

There are also chronicles that depict conflicts between the Carolingian Empire and Vikings (mostly from present Denmark). Here, among other things, the Frankish Royal annals are important (*Annales regni Francorum*) because they depict the strife between Frankish, Saxon, and Danish rulers covering the years 741–829. Most important is the monk Einhart's biography of the life of Charlemagne (*Vita Karoli Magni*). It is considered to have a high source value because Einhart was close to Charlemagne.

### Classical sources

Classical sources such as Tacitus's *Germania* (98 AD) and Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic Wars (*Commentarii De Bello Gallico*, 58–49 BC) are imperative because they mention hostages as words without ambiguities. In these sources, sometimes misunderstandings of situations about how the hostage would be perceived might occur. There is also a time discrepancy of hundreds of years between the pre-Roman Age (about 500 BC–1 AD), the Roman Iron Age (1–400 AD) and the Viking Age (about 750–1100 AD). In spite of these reservations, it is possible to compare the traditions of the Romans with later traditions.

### Archaeological material

Archaeological material cannot by itself provide the interpreter with information about hostages. However, it can provide evidence of the existence of social and religious activities at things, burial grounds, cultic places, and other locations by the findings of artefacts and by the mapping of the terrain.

A very significant source is iconographic material, especially Gotlandic picture stones. The motifs on these stones can confirm that myths and legends of the Old West Norse texts also appeared in Eastern Scandinavia. The stones also depict events that are probably unique to Gotland. One problem with Gotlandic picture

stones is that they can be misinterpreted. They can reproduce a message that was alive during the time they were created, but that we are shielded from today. Another problem is that the picture stones are eroding, especially those that are outdoors. Picture stones were often restored and painted in the first half of the 20th century. Recently, the Scandinavianist Sigmund Oehrl has shown how a new photographic method – Digital Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) – can illuminate completely different figures and formations on the picture stones than those previously restored.<sup>75</sup>

The above review is intended as a summary of the source material and its characteristics. Some text sources and other sources have been omitted, but we shall return to these sources later. I do not claim to cover all the material regarding hostages. I will now present some methodological considerations.

## Methodological considerations

In this investigation, I relate the text material primarily to the time and place the different sources describe. I do not regard these descriptions of traditions as relevant for all the Scandinavian societies.<sup>76</sup> There is, for example, a geographical and cultural division which becomes evident in the Icelandic family sagas that occur in the Icelandic society of the Viking Age or the Middle Ages, compared to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the Royal Frankish Annals' descriptions of confrontations between the Carolingian Empire, the Saxons, and the Danes. At the same time, the sources sometimes have cross-cultural references: they describe places, situations, and times the writers have been less familiar with. It is therefore important to pay attention to the writers' attitudes towards the foreign geographic and cultural conditions that they describe, especially in a study that claims to investigate contacts and interactions at the micro level.

Because different sources have different characteristics, several different methods must be used. Preferably, a statement in a source should be supported by at least two other sources, texts, or other types of material (archaeology, etc.). Sometimes it is not

possible to confirm the information in an Old Norse source. Then, the information can be compared to analogies in Continental Germanic sources. This method can be fruitful when it primarily concerns comparing medieval societies based on canon law, which had much in common through Christianity. However, the earlier domestic religions across the area of present-day Europe may have differed in many ways, and such a method must be used with caution and can primarily point out what are possible and probable assumptions.

Another method used by some interpreters of Old Scandinavian myths, such as Georges Dumézil,<sup>77</sup> is to try to trace a common Indo-European cultural ‘heritage’ based on comparative language studies. It has also been attempted to trace a ‘Pan-Germanic’ legacy in various old legal texts. I do not want to take a stand for or against these methodological approaches. I primarily use analogies to communities that are closest in time, space, and culture to the societies I investigate.<sup>78</sup> Such societies are the early medieval English societies, where the authorities used hostages as security against other people, as in the case of Wales. In 1063, for example, Englishmen came to Wales (OE *Brytland*), took many people as hostages, and killed their King Griffin.<sup>79</sup>

The communities with similar traditions can be exemplified by the Carolingian Empire in its confrontations with the Saxons during the Saxon mission. These societies were contemporary with the Viking Age in Scandinavia. Secondly, I use analogies to societies such as the Old Irish, the Old Finnish, and the Baltic cultures. These cultures did not have the same language as the Scandinavians but were still contemporary, or almost contemporary. Thirdly, I use analogies to societies such as the Roman Empire that differed in terms of time, language, and geographical scope, but which may also have had some cultural impact on Germanic societies.

In some cases, it is necessary to go deeper into individual texts. It may be a word that differs in different text editions. Sometimes the word hostage is not mentioned, for various reasons, in the texts or appears implicit; then I ‘observe within the sources’. This way of approaching a text is partly inspired by the historian of mentalities Carlo Ginzburg. I thereby analyse certain specific details that can be understood as what Ginzburg refers to as

‘clues’ in a specific text. It may, for example, concern information that appears to be untrue to the writer and recorded without reflection. Several such clues can be combined into a pattern that can be combined into a larger structure.<sup>80</sup> The investigation of the underlying details can be summarized in the following points:

- (A) Unnoticed details that were not important to the writers and chronicles. Some events during the taking and giving of hostages were never recorded. It may have been about a kind of behaviour and obligations that were not pronounced and perhaps misunderstood by both sides. An example of such an event is the misconception of the hostage exchange that took place between Romans and Gauls during the Gallic War in the first century BC.<sup>81</sup>
- (B) Writers may hint at some details without registering them. Some procedures might be considered so obvious that they were not written down. An example may be seen in the appendix of the Elder Westrogothic Law by the scholar Lars Djäkn (‘The priest of Vidhem’) who mentions that King Ragnvald Knaphövde of Sweden rode into the province of Västergötland without giving a hostage before crossing the border.<sup>82</sup>
- (C) Power structures that underlie the textual tradition. Who is assigned the greatest benefits in the text? This may not be obvious because the writers usually sympathized with the Christian side. Other issues may be: How was the violence motivated by both sides? Are there exaggerations or understatements?
- (D) Criticism against certain types of behaviour in the texts, a critique that can be implicit as well as explicit. For example, medieval laws can provide us with information about mentalities in relation to taboos as well as the breaking of oaths. This can, in turn, give us some clues regarding the attitudes towards ethics and morals.

Another method that is used was developed by the philologist and historian of religions Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. It gives the interpreter an opportunity to analyse both Christian influences

and remnants of myths and ritual actions in the saga literature. According to Meulengracht Sørensen, survivals of the old traditions exist in the saga literature, but they have not been transmitted in an unaffected form. When the writers refer to pre-Christian cult rituals, they mention, in addition to social institutions, things like ‘heritage’, ‘weddings’, and ‘relationships regarding property’, institutions that did not lose their functions after the Christianisation.<sup>83</sup>

I will also use etymologies, especially of personal names and place names. But etymologies, ‘derivations of words’, have a small source value for, for example, the 10th-century society. Etymologies are created by syntheses of words and sound changes that underlie the origin of a word, not the specific meaning of the 10th century. Sometimes the changes have taken place very quickly, sometimes they have been slower. These changes can be so fundamental that it might not be possible to understand the original meaning of a word. The word, as well as name elements, may have been situational, developed in contexts that cannot be traced through available sources. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to interpret the ‘hostageship’ using different elements in personal names and place names, which may give some indications of what contexts – including cultic and martial – they originated in.

The methods I use for text interpretation can be summarized:

1. Collection of all empirical data from the examined texts.
2. Contextualization of collected data.
3. Comparisons with other sources.

This also includes analysis of other types of sources such as place names and archaeological findings. We will now turn to the theoretical framework.

### **A model of peace processes: Territorial boundaries, consensus, and communicative acts<sup>84</sup>**

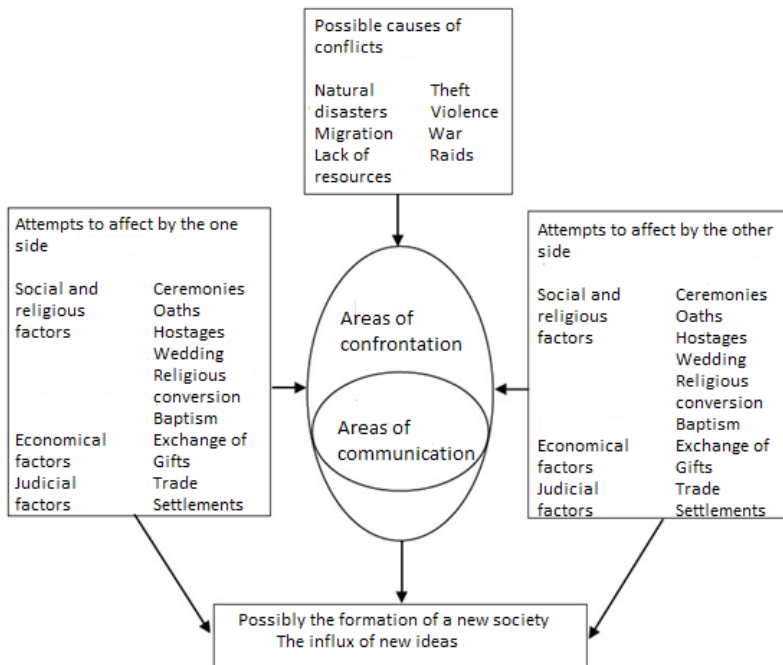
A conflict may occur either (a) across borders or (b) within a society. In this investigation my concern is with the former, even if the distinction between the two may be difficult to discern. I define these boundaries as areas of confrontation.



If a border, or territorial boundary, was the subject of low-level warfare and temporary peace agreements, it must, contrary to the stable *Limes Germanicus* in the Roman Age, have been maintained by certain instrumental means. The historian Eva Österberg describes such means in an article about householders (or farmers) and central powers in border societies (Småland) in early modern Sweden.<sup>85</sup> Although Österberg describes conflicts within border societies in the 16th and 17th centuries controlled by a feudal state, she emphasises the mutual agreements in certain communicative spaces. She is influenced by the Marxist consensus concept, but she uses it at the microlevel. The concept of consensus is understood as a solution of mutual agreements through a willingness to negotiate and communicate, where the level of interaction is important. Österberg's understanding of conflicts in border societies is crucial for my own understanding of peace processes across areas of conflict. Borders and boundaries are understood as areas that must be upheld communicatively in the areas of confrontation.<sup>86</sup> These existed both within and outside a society. An example of an area of confrontation is the present-day Southern Göteborg Archipelago, which was the venue for various meetings involving trade, but also peace conferences, during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages.<sup>87</sup> The ideas of Österberg might therefore be used to analyse the conflict and consensus of border societies during the Viking Age.<sup>88</sup> In my opinion, her principle of agreements can also be used in analysing Viking Age society.

Certain communicative spaces existed in the areas of confrontation. Österberg mentions the assembly places in Småland, still referred to in the 16th century as the (Swe.) *tingsplatser*, 'things', as such communicative spaces. It seems likely that ritual places, things, and other kinds of gathering places also had this communicative function in the areas of confrontation during the Viking Age. In recent years it has been suggested, for example by the Scandinavist Stefan Brink, that both cult places and things were multifunctional, but this idea has been disputed.<sup>89</sup> I will not discuss this here, but would like to add another aspect: the mobile features of both cult places and things. The mobile cult place might be compared to the traditional practices of nomadic peoples such as the Sami, but also to lifestances and religions such as Islam.<sup>90</sup> A

mobile feature of a cult place is mentioned in the *Landnámabók*, when stocks from high seats or coffins were brought from the homelands and discarded off the Icelandic coast.<sup>91</sup> This might be compared to Sundqvist, who claims that the cultic object *seiðhjallr* was used only in times of need and not permanently.<sup>92</sup> The mobile feature could also be a characteristic of things. Torsten Blomkvist touches on the mobile feature of the thing in stressing the distinction between gatherings and places which were fixed in the landscape.<sup>93</sup> The *Hirdskraa* (*Hirdloven* ca. 1273) describes how the spoils of war were divided: they tied a *vébönd* and shared the spoils within that area.<sup>94</sup> *Saxo Grammaticus* (Book 8) also mentions this custom. I will not further outline the mobility theme here. It seems, however, that times such as during war, plague, or drought have had some impact on the nature of ceremonies and rituals, which may also have influenced where people met and how they interacted.



**Figure I.1.** A schematic description of conflicts and conflict solutions in the late Viking Age and the early Middle Ages.

I will describe the functions of those communicative spaces and in areas of confrontation later in this book. First, it is necessary to describe the society in which the communicative spaces and areas of confrontation occurred.

### Development of society, spacial and temporal variation

Some historians have pointed out the importance of temporal variations and societal changes during the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages. Sverre Bagge and Nils Blomkvist, for example, have described a process of change for early medieval Norway and Gotland, respectively.<sup>95</sup> Bagge portrays the pre-state society as decentralised, dominated by a ruler and competitive ‘great men’ (Swe. *stormän*; OI *mikill maðr*), and a societal web that relied upon personal bondage. The state society was dominated by a king with a dependent aristocracy, ground rents, and a fixed societal hierarchy.<sup>96</sup> The means to achieve this fundamental societal change can be seen in the directed mission in late Iron Age societies such as Saxony (ninth century) and Norway (late 10th century). Archaeologists such as Alexandra Sanmark have also drawn attention to this change.<sup>97</sup>

By ‘society’ I mean a society in the early stages of state formation. It was characterised by periods of peace and violence. In this period there was also a horizontal division of what Brink,<sup>98</sup> in a study of aspects of space and territoriality in Early Scandinavia, calls the administrative divisions of the Old Swedish *rike*, *land*, and *hundrade*. It is my purpose to distinguish the personal bonds occurring among groups and individuals in and between such administrative divisions.

I will present a model as a tool for understanding the relationships between society, areas of confrontation, and communicative spaces. Its purpose is to describe the dynamic processes before, during, and after a conflict. It is almost a truism among political scientists that a society reshapes after pandemics, war, natural disasters, or other crises. Historians such as Thomas Lindkvist have pointed out that the main reason for war or raids during the Viking Age was plunder.<sup>99</sup> But crises such as drought or plague seem also to have caused migrations and, therefore, engagements (Figure I.1).

Interest – mutual or unilateral – in creating peace may arise during conflicts. In the Viking Age and early Middle Ages such interest was located in communicative spaces at various levels. There were at least three steps in these peace processes.

1. The first step was establishing social relations through ceremonies involving rituals including oaths, gift-giving, banquets, and perhaps a decision to exchange hostages and tributes (ON *geld*) and to intermarry. These ritual performances often (but not always) occurred in communicative spaces such as things and halls. The symbolic expressions of these ritualistic performances varied and depended on the situation in which they occurred.
2. The next step was stabilising economic relations, such as trade or cooperation between crafts and access to resources. This might mean admission to fertile lands, pastures, woods, and coastal areas with harbours and fishing rights, and so on. These trade cooperations or land sharings between opposing sides might be implemented through ritual.
3. Finally, the peace agreement needed to gain legal force. It might be written, but in most cases it was oral. The agreement had then to be accepted by both sides.

These steps were not necessarily communicated at assembly places; they might also be communicated at market or other societal spaces, which were sometimes temporary. These spaces were flexible in their function but existed within the areas of confrontation. An important aspect was the societal consequences of the peace processes. Conflicts may have brought an influx of new ideas that might be seen within the society at the judicial, societal, and economic levels, and these were reflected in the sources that described the events.

The model may help us in our analysis of the opposing sides, their symbolic actions in peace agreements, and their adaption to the society after the conflict. Clearly, as a model it is merely a simplification of reality. It is also important to stress that peace processes during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages were never straightforward. If, for example, one side was stronger, the weaker had to submit. To underline these differing conditions and to exemplify

how the model can be used, two case studies are briefly presented. The first deals with the peace processes between Alfred the Great (OE *Ælfrēd*) and the Viking ruler Guthrum (OE *Guðrum*) in late ninth-century England. The second addresses the various conflicts and solutions described in the Icelandic *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*. These include conflicts at both the macro and micro levels.

## The peace processes between Alfred and Guthrum

In the second half of the ninth century, Wessex (OE *Westseaxna rīce*) and East Anglia (*Ēast Engla Rīce*) were societies in the midst of dynamic changes that were sometimes at war but also enjoyed periods of peace. After Alfred the Great, the Christian ruler of Wessex, had defeated Guthrum, the heathen ruler of East Anglia, at the Battle of Edington (OE *Eðandune*) in Wiltshire between 6 and 12 May 878,<sup>100</sup> Christianity gradually gained a foothold in the Danelaw.<sup>101</sup> According to Alfred's biographer, Asser (d. 909), the Danes fled to a fortification after the battle. The Danes were besieged for two weeks, enduring much hardship, until they surrendered to Alfred. The peace treaty was much to Alfred's advantage. The written treaties cannot be trusted as neutral documents because they are written from the Anglo-Saxon perspective. However, from the perspective of power balance it is important to note that Guthrum was not completely subjugated: he kept his lands and thus the ability to raise more troops.

### Ritual performances

The rituals performed during the peace conferences between Alfred and Guthrum exemplify the activities in areas of confrontation that can be analysed with the help of the model. When the first peace conference was held after the Battle of Edington, the Danes sent hostages to the Anglo-Saxons to guarantee the peace. This is an example of the establishment of communication, as envoys were probably also sent.

Asser claims that the 'heathen' swore to leave Alfred's realm, which implies that oaths were taken within a ritualistic framework.<sup>102</sup>

From other Old English sources we know that these could be ring oaths for the heathens, and an example of what I refer to as the mobile feature of the ritual place, i.e. ritual objects, were moved to a place in the area of confrontation that became a communicative space where the oaths were sworn.<sup>103</sup> Guthrum, however, vowed to let himself be baptised.

Seven weeks later, Guthrum arrived with a retinue of thirty men for a second peace conference at the royal estate of Wedmore. Guthrum was baptised and Alfred became Guthrum's godfather.<sup>104</sup>

There is only a brief explanation of the rituals performed when Alfred and Guthrum negotiated and agreed on peace terms. These ceremonies and rituals are similar to those of Continental Germanic peoples.<sup>105</sup> An understanding of something of its contextual character might be obtained from the theoretical perspective of performance suggested by the historian of religions Catherine Bell.<sup>106</sup> Performance models suggest active rather than passive roles for ritual participants, who reinterpret symbols as they communicate them. Cultural life has come to be seen as the dynamic generation and modification of symbolic systems, as something constantly being created by the community. In performances, actions are important. The exchange of hostages was a performance in the sense that it aimed to reach something beyond itself.

As a description the treaty cannot be considered a neutral text recorded by only one side. Furthermore, it was perhaps written some decades after the peace building. The notion of an Alfred who took pity and chose a limited number of hostages may be a Christian interpolation. Despite this, the treaty must be considered contemporary in its original setting. As the peace processes were very much on the terms of the Anglo-Saxons, one can assume that the symbolism in the account, as well as in reality, expressed the symbolism of the victor. However, the heathen Danes and the Christian Anglo-Saxons seem to have understood the rituals in a similar way, which indicates that the Danes shared similar knowledge of, and presumptions about, peace processes with the Anglo-Saxons. If we accept the accuracy of the gesture of limiting the number of hostages, it may have been a signal of goodwill in an early form of chivalry.

Oath-taking was involved in the peace processes, combined with the giving and taking of hostages; it constituted the essential element of rituals.<sup>107</sup> Formally, the oaths taken by both heathens and Christians were considered equal. This may confirm some of my assumptions of a temporary communicative space, or spaces, if the rituals were performed not only in one location but also on separate occasions. The Danes may have brought sacred objects such as rings and sworn on them.

This ritual probably gave the impression that Guthrum (OE *Guðrum*) had formally submitted to Alfred, and it might be understood as consonant with the ideology of a Christian ruler who had no rival but relied on his own *auctoritas*, 'authority'. However, Alfred also had to give up something to secure this agreement. According to Asser, Alfred gave 'many fine houses', probably estates, to Guthrum.<sup>108</sup>

Guthrum may have seen Alfred as an ally. East Anglia was hardly a unified realm, but was rather several separate territories under earls and chieftains, and successive wars weakened Guthrum. The history of the Danelaw has neglected the importance of ecclesiastical power, but alongside royal power it might also have proved useful to Guthrum as a source of alignment for the control and defence of his territory (cf. Figure I.1) against internal enemies. What is important, however, is that these rituals were performed in communicative spaces, even if the Anglo-Saxons and Danes may have differed in their interpretation of the rituals' significance. The rituals' performances illustrate the first part of the model: the establishment of social relations.

### Economic and judicial matters

When Alfred and Guthrum signed a treaty at Wedmore, the border between Wessex and the Danelaw was constituted. Several years later, between 886 and 890, Alfred and Guthrum signed a new treaty, the *Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum*, which is preserved in two manuscripts in a body of legislation from the late 11th century.<sup>109</sup> This agreement included the division of the Thames but also some judicial matters and trade relations, which were to some extent ritualised.<sup>110</sup>

The treaty constituted: (1) the land boundaries asserted through waterflows up the Thames and some tributaries (the Lea, to Bedford, up the Ouse, to Watling Street); (2) the assertion that if a man were killed, whether English or Danish, there should be a fine of eight half marks; and (3) the assertion that if one of the king's thanes was accused of murdering, he should take an oath in the presence of twelve of the thanes, and a man of lower degree in the presence of eleven men, but if he refused he should pay threefold.<sup>111</sup> The swearing of oaths probably occurred in some sort of communicative space, for example, a thing.

The treaty covered some trade issues, including also some rituals. According to the treaty: (4) a guarantor well-known (to both sides) should guarantee the acquisition of slaves, horses, and oxen; and (5) in the oathswearing, it was ordained that neither slaves nor freemen should go to the other side for commerce with cattle and goods without hostages given to show goodwill.<sup>112</sup> These are examples of how rituals or ritual actions connected with commercial interests functioned as an access to effect or regulate the area of confrontation. Hostages were a vital strategy in this regulation to avoid conflict and could be used as a tool by both sides and were not necessarily themselves subordinated. It is also important to note both the degree of subordination in cases like these but also the ability to affect the peaceful relations.

The *Treaty of Wedmore* suggests violence occurred in the area of confrontation. If this were not the case, the regulations would have been unnecessary. It therefore exemplifies the third step in the peace process, in which the agreement became lawful and was accepted by both sides. On this occasion, it appears to have been the end of a lengthy process. Almost a decade elapsed between *The Treaty of Wedmore* and *The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum*. The latter was probably the result of the experience gained during this interim period.

In this section, examples have been given from larger areas, realms, which might be analysed with the help of this model. Next, we will turn to how the model can be used as an analytical tool for understanding feuds and personal disagreements, with examples from the Icelandic *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*.



## Conflicts and conflict solutions in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*

The *Íslendingabók* and the *Landnámabók* are problematic sources, because there is a time discrepancy of between 130 and 300 years from when they were written to the period they describe, the colonisation and Christianisation of Iceland. I will not address here the extensive debate about their source value. It is enough to note that the conflicts probably originated in the struggle for resources during the Landnám era, during which Iceland was settled.<sup>113</sup>

In early Icelandic society, conflicts often occurred at the levels of kin-based groupings and individuals. There were no rulers with the rank of the Earls of Lade (ON *Hlaðir*) in Trøndelag in Norway, for example. The Icelandic *goðar* had political and judicial as well as religious functions, but their influence was probably limited and their dominance largely depended on their lands in attractive coastal regions with fertile soils, woods, and access to fishing grounds, harbours, and driftwood. Land disputes were the main cause of the 126 conflicts that I have noted in the *Íslendingabók* and the *Landnámabók* (Figure I.2). The blood feud was a special mechanism of violence. In Figure I.2 I have noted the blood feuds that immediately escalated into conflicts where revenge was the single motive. An insult beneath the surface may have caused these feuds.

Other causes of conflict were accusations of witchcraft, heritage disputes, theft, molestation, and murder. The periods of agreement between the conflicts, for which there was some kind of consent, are important here. Naturally the reason for the consent varied. But I would like to emphasise this consent as an attempt at consensus. These are examples of conflict and solutions relieving each other within areas of confrontation.

In the longer perspective the main result of the conflicts during the Landnám era (the time of settlement) was the creation of the Althing, the general assembly, in 930 and the later organisation of legislative districts, *fjórðungar*, which resulted in territorial strengthening. This is not new information; I merely wish to point out that the experiences drawn from the areas of confrontation strengthened the communicative spaces.

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Land disputes	35
Blood feud	18
Murder	17
Insult	11
Witchcraft	9
Duel	5
Lawsuit	5
Heritage disputes	5
Theft	4
Molestation	4
Riot of thralls	2
Suicide	1

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**Figure 1.2.** Causes of conflict reported in the *Íslendingabók* and the *Landnámabók*.

### Areas of confrontation and communicative spaces

A lack of information makes it difficult to define areas of confrontation. Naturally, this is true of the conflicts in the *Íslendingabók* and the *Landnámabók*, where descriptions are cryptic. The locations of the disputes limited the significance of the areas of confrontation: the texts describe how clashes took place on high ground, in valleys, or in the backwoods between farmsteads. These became boundaries when periods of collaboration followed conflict.

In these contexts there are examples of how communicative spaces such as things and farms could be transformed into areas of confrontation. The *Íslendingabók* (Ch. 5) tells of the chieftains Hænsna-Pórir (OI *Hænsa-Pórir*) and Tungu-Odd (OI *Tungu-Oddr*), who fought the lawman Thord Gellir (OI *Pórðr gellir*) several times at the Althing (OI *Alþingi*).

Another narrative in the *Landnámabók* tells how Erik the Red (OI *Eiríkr Porvaldsson hinn rauði*) broke into the house of Thorgest (OI *Porgestr*) at Breidabolstead (OI *Breiðabólstaðr*) to retake his high-seat pillars, which he had entrusted to Thorgest. It is not clear if Breidabolstead functioned as a *hof*, a cultic building, but perhaps

there were some ritual restrictions linked to this place. The break-in was a crime in any case, and Erik was summoned to the thing. This escalated into a blood feud between Erik and Thorgest.

The feud between Erik and Thorgest is an example of cooperation involving trust from its outset, and it can be compared to the examples given concerning the swearing of oaths. In this case, however, each side may have blamed the other and differed about the nature of Erik's offence. This is another example of regulation in areas of confrontation, because they were both able to affect the result of the feud. Erik and Thorgest met several times at the Thorsness Assembly (OI *Pórsnesþingi*), a communicative space.

The model makes possible an analysis of the details of narratives such as the one about Erik and Thorgest, which assists in understanding the confrontations and communicative spaces, with a focus on various concessions, demands, and compromises. From a broader perspective, mediation between different areas such as hostages, intermarriage, and fostering might then be explained in a wider setting. These were tools to regulate borders or boundaries at different levels and in different contexts in different parts of Scandinavia as well as in the Viking diaspora. The actions could also be seen within a framework in which economy, laws, and social issues belong together and depend on one another.

The story of the issue of Thorsness illustrates the need for balancing structures like the thing and the presence of negotiators.

## Ritual definitions

According to the cultural anthropologist Melford E. Spiro and the historian of religions Håkan Rydving, the concept of 'rite' can be used for the smallest meaningful unit in a ritual complex.<sup>114</sup> Several rites forms a unit called 'a ceremony', while a 'ceremonial' are all the ceremonies performed on one occasion.

The rituals could then be categorized according to the subdivision by the folklorist Lauri Honko, Spiro, and Rydving, into (1) calendrical rituals, (2) crisis rituals, and (3) transition rituals.

According to Honko, the first category is group oriented, the second individual oriented, and the last category is both individual

and group oriented.<sup>115</sup> Spiro's system is based on a distinction between recurring and non-recurring rituals.

As for the crisis rituals, Honko saw them as recurring, which Spiro did not. Honko claimed that disasters and the like are unique events and the rituals occur in accordance with them.<sup>116</sup>

Rydving points out that the characteristics must apply to all the ritual types, and crisis rituals should be regarded as recurrent: the same ritual pattern can be carried out every time one meets with a certain type of crisis. The same ritual pattern is performed as usual, even if the disaster is a unique event.<sup>117</sup>

It can be difficult to determine the character of different ritual acts if the point of departure is the distinction between the events to which they relate and not to ritual acts themselves. For example, initiations may concern a group as well as an individual. In connection with calendrical rituals, individual-centred elements may occur.<sup>118</sup> This may have consequences for an analysis of peace processes where, for example, recurring cyclical rituals occurred during festivities with the giving of gifts, which had the function of preventing further disputes. Wars are events similar to disasters, and if one categorises the following truce as part of a larger peace process, these rituals can be both individually and collectively oriented.

A leader can be integrated, for example, through honours, marriages, and gifts, and not least by the spontaneous actions of a cult leader – which we will return to in a section below. Settlements between opponents can ritually have consequences for a larger population through collaborations between people, and these may be manifested in trade (e.g. with festivities), as festivals, or in other recurring, common events of ritual character. These are just a few comments about the division and character of rituals.

In this book, I basically refer to Honko's, Spiro's, and Rydving's definitions of rituals as analytical categories. However, there is reason to discuss how the ritual could express itself in space and the division between the sacred and the profane.

## Rituals and space

Traditionally, in the research on religious history, one has been interested in where rituals take place. The research usually focus

on places with special characteristics and where ritual practices are performed, practices which distinguish them from other places. Such places are therefore often referred to with a special word. Such a special place for ritual acts can be exemplified by the Old Norse *vi* (OI *vé*), ‘holy place’. It is the term that is usually associated with cultures in Viking Age Scandinavia and Iceland. At the *vi* place, ‘ritual taboos’ and ‘ritual restrictions’ existed.<sup>119</sup>

The word *vi* can be derived from an Old Germanic adjective: *\*wīhaz*, ‘holy’. Other terms for ‘holiness’ were also used for cult places, such as Old Norse *heilagr* and *helgi*, ‘holy’. Words like these were later used by the church in Scandinavia as translations of *sacer* and *sanctus*.<sup>120</sup> The term *heilgar* has thus had the meaning of ‘sacred’ in the pre-Christian context, although Sundqvist argues that it merely refers to an ‘aspect’ of sacredness.<sup>121</sup>

However, the discussion of the concept of sacredness linked to certain places can be developed further. Recently, the concept of sacredness has made a sort of comeback within the research on religious history. For example, it can be seen in the historian of religions Veikko Anttonen’s study on the concept of sacred. He discusses the boundaries of the sacred by using a domestic term, the Finnish word *pyhä*, as an analytical category. The word *pyhä* can be defined as something authoritative that the cult performers do not question. Anttonen points out why the sacred (*pyhä*) and its ritual performativity has a ‘sacred’ character:

[...] it is important to conceptualize the sacred as a category-boundary which becomes actual only in social situations when the inviolability of such categories as person, gender, marriage, nation, or justice, liberty, purity, propriety, are threatened and are in danger of losing their legitimating authority as moral foundations of society and social life.<sup>122</sup>

In order for something to be perceived as sacred, it must be filled with content. This content usually occurs in the meeting of people who relate to each other, i.e., through interaction, rather than – as in a theological perspective – being a question about something separated from the social organization.<sup>123</sup> Instead, sacredness becomes a social construction that depends on the culture it occurs in. The sacredness is constantly undergoing (paradigmatic)

changes and is the subject of exchanges and negotiations about what should be included. Anttonen shows how the sacred can be perceived in relation to *pyhä*, which has had a double meaning:

Terms denoting the ‘sacred’ in various languages can be viewed as linguistic indices, the semantic scope of which has varied in time according to the systems of meanings whereby distinctions between persons, animals, things, objects, phenomena, topographical points in the landscape, events, experiences and so forth are made. In the Finnish language, the term *pyhä* (denoting the ‘sacred’) was originally used to designate both territorial borders and the intersections of waterways, allowing groups of settlers to separate themselves from one another and to mark the boundary between the shared inner domain of the territory claimed by them and the outer domain. In place names, *pyhä* signified the outer border of the inhabited area [...].<sup>124</sup>

Anttonen’s perception of the sacred in space is essential for my analysis. Rather than interpret *heilagr* as ‘holy, sacred’ in a modern understanding, I suggest that the term should be used as a unit of meaning within categories such as ‘ritual taboos’ and ‘ritual restrictions’, that is ‘a sanctioned protection’. I relate *heilagr* to these categories when I discuss the characteristics of the *vi*-place (or other places).<sup>125</sup> The indigenous concepts of *vé*, ‘sanctuary’, *heilagr*, ‘holy, sacred’ and *helgi* ‘holiness, sanctity’, can be used as analytical categories for ‘sanctioned protection’ at places of communication. But there is also reason to think that this protection (A) can be extended outside the ‘sacred places’ and (B) can be related to places that were temporarily established in times of war and crises.

In some cultures cult objects, or everyday objects, can be transported during movements. These cult objects can be used on special occasions – sometimes temporarily and in other cases permanently. On these occasions the objects may have cultic functions. The objects can then mark a place where specific restrictions (or a sanctioned protection) exist. This is evident among nomadic peoples like the Sami where the tent (or hut), *goahti*, is multifunctional and traditionally had a cosmological function. In Islam, the prayer rug (Arab. *sajjāda*) marks a cult place when a Muslim puts it down

before a prayer. We could define these cult places as ‘mobile’. The mobility of a cult place in the Old Scandinavian society can be seen from three different perspectives:

- (1) The Icelandic sagas mention how images of deities were brought along and thrown overboard. Where the images landed, a farm was built and – in some cases – the cult buildings called *hofs*. This relates to the establishment of a permanent cult place.
- (2) The Icelandic *Landnámabók* describes how the mould from a *hof* in Norway was brought to Iceland, and spread over a land area, which then was sanctified.<sup>126</sup> Thus, something material (the mould) could – when it was moved – be used to create a sanctioned area in a new land.
- (3) Cult objects were used to mark a temporarily established cult place, for example, by swearing an oath on a ring that was brought to a certain place; in this case the same sanctioned protection applied as in the case of a fixed cult place.

I would like to add some other features of mobile cult places that could be used in connection with peace processes:

- (1) The terms *vé*, *heilagr*, and *helgi* can be related to the place’s sanctioned protection. This meant that a person who sought sanctuary could do so in a *vi* place or in a church (during the Middle Ages). Peace meetings in hall buildings such as the *hof* may also have had this type of sanctioned protection.
- (2) An area of communications could be temporarily established between conflicting parties. These places were often chosen in the area of confrontations between the opposing sides. Such places may have been both temporary and fixed. Around some of the places, bands, so-called *vébonds*, were tied to mark a meeting place.
- (3) Peace meetings were often held in places referred to as ‘thing places’ in the written sources. The link between the thing place and the *vi* place is, however, not obvious.

However, in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, there is a *lausavísa* (a single stanza) that implies this connection since the thing place is referred to as a *vé* (or *vi*).<sup>127</sup> Anyhow, ritual acts were carried out at thing places, too.<sup>128</sup>

- (4) A cult object could be brought to a place that was not characterized as *vé*, *heilagr*, and *helgi*. This may have happened in connection with crisis rituals such as when the warriors met for negotiations after a war. Oaths were taken and the performers put their hands on an oath ring. Even crosses that were transported with the armies have had a similar function in the Viking Age as well as later in the Middle Ages.
- (5) It could be a matter of a ritual journey,<sup>129</sup> for example the journey of a cult leader such as the Uppsala ruler who moved between different places and received a form of flexible protection. This issue concerned recurring cyclical rites.
- (6) Also in the context of rites of passage such as weddings, the purpose may have been to strengthen peace agreements in the Scandinavian society, and in these cases there was a flexible protection. It is mentioned in *Hauksbók's* and *Sturlubók's* versions of the *Landnámabók* about Össur the White (*Ozzur hinn hvíti*), that he killed someone when he was in a bridal train in the *Opplands* (*Upplondum*) with the ruler of Hadafylki Sigurd hrísi (*Sigurðr hrísi*).<sup>130</sup> The wording *va víg i veum*, 'killed at the *vi*', suggests that there was the same sanctioned protection in the bridal train as at a fixed *vi* place, where violence was forbidden.
- (7) The division of war booty was important as a vertically directed ritual to maintain the social bonds within a war retinue. The division took place at temporary (thing) places, which is described in the Norwegian medieval *Hirdskraa*, where it is stated that the war booty could be divided within an area surrounded by a *vébönd*.<sup>131</sup>

To sum up: Indigenous denotations such as *vé*, *heilagr* and *helgi* may have been used to indicate sanctioned protection, taboo, etc. The sanctioned protection was applicable not only to permanent places but also to temporary places and sometimes outside of these areas.



### The performativity of rituals

In recent years, the research on rituals has focused on the dynamic and changeable aspects of rituals.<sup>132</sup> One way to approach the contextual character of ritual was suggested by the historian of religions Catherine Bell. Bell emphasized that performing ritual models point to active rather than passive roles for the participants in rituals.<sup>133</sup> She also meant that actions could be more or less ritualized. In order to further understand the ritualized action, Bell specified three different characteristics for how it should be analysed, something that could be related to how the individual acts and moves in a ritual context:<sup>134</sup>

- (1) The ritualized action must be understood within its context. Only then can one fully understand why the action is different from other actions.
- (2) The central feature of the ritual action is the primacy of the body. The body moves within a specifically designed space while at the same time the body both experiences and defines the norms that orders the surroundings. Participants do not understand how they themselves have contributed to the creation of the surroundings, which are perceived as being controlled by forces beyond the immediate situation.
- (3) The result is a situation where the ritualization tends to strengthen the authority of forces considered to be from the outside.

Ritualization therefore involves a number of practices that are 'flexible sets of schemes and strategies acquired and deployed by an agent who has embodied them'.<sup>135</sup> Through this kind of analysis, it is possible to determine the varying degrees of ritualization, the difference between different cultural systems, and what kind of ritualization it is about. Thus, the writing analyst can answer questions about what distinguishes the ritual action, why it is performed, and its results compared to non-ritual actions. Bell's way of defining ritualization means that it is possible to interpret spontaneous expressions as ritualized actions and that different – more or less ritualized actions – can be analysed.

The ritual action has also been discussed by Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw. Similar to Bell, they use the term ‘ritualization’, and like Bell, they mean that there is a basic connection between everyday activity, the ritual practitioner’s intentions and the identity of the ritual actions that is performed.<sup>136</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw argue that the ritual commitments of the ritual practitioner are not intentional, but stipulated through established rules, different archetypes, and that they constitute different named entities with their own history. Since the ritual action is perceived as external, it is understandable to the practitioner. Thus they determine a characteristic that is crucial to the way ritualization is to be considered.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, in Humphrey and Laidlaw’s analysis, one can see the same intent as with Bell: the concept of ritual is regarded as elastic.

The key to my analysis is that the use of the concept of ritualization is a help in a flexible analysis that tests the boundaries of what is considered to be a ritual action, focusing on the performativity of ritual actions. According to Bell’s definition, it means that the ritual action is an attempt to create an understanding of society since the ritual action constructs the perceptions and values of society. At the same time, the ritual act in society, which is constantly changing, becomes a way to get past the opposition between tradition and change.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, I choose to refer to ‘ritual act’ and not ‘ritual’.

Sundqvist has pointed out that performativity in Old Scandinavian religion could also contain violent elements. For example, might have been to harm the one who had power over the place where the ritual action was carried out. Sundqvist therefore points out that the performativity of rituals had the ‘capacity of change’ and that the practitioners could focus on the outcome of the actions and the attention was also turned to the intent of action, its utterance, and how it affected them as individuals.<sup>139</sup>

By means of two examples from Old Norse sources, I will show how the performativity could occur in ritual situations where both conflicts and consensus occur in ritual acts.

An example of performativity in an Old Icelandic context can be seen in the *Kristni saga* when the *gyðja* Friðgerðr speaks when she is sacrificing in the *hof*, probably at (or on) a *stalli*. Meanwhile

the bishop Friðrekr is preaching at the nearby thing of Hvammur. They can both hear each other. This event is reproduced in a *lausavísa* by Þórvaldr Koðránsón – who was present during these events according to the saga – from the 10th century:

<i>Fork með dóm enn dýra;</i>	I preached the precious faith;
<i>drengr hlýddi mér engi;</i>	no man;
<i>götum háð at breyti,</i>	we got scorn from the sprinkler
<i>hlautteins goða sveni,</i>	– priest’s son – of blood-dripped branch.
<i>en við enga svinnu</i>	And without any sense,
<i>aldin rýgr við skaldi</i>	old troll-wife against poet
<i>(þá kreppi goð gyðju)</i>	– may God crush the priestess –
<i>gall of heiðnum stalla.<sup>140</sup></i>	shrilled at the heathen altar.
	(Transl. Siân Grønlie) <sup>141</sup>

Sundqvist believes that the Christian Þórvaldr and the bishop upset the *gyðja* so much that she ‘screamed’ (or ‘shrilled’) to them from the sacrificial altar.<sup>142</sup> Friðgerðr was also sacrificing in the *hof* when the bishop made his visitation. This act can be interpreted as a protest or demonstration conducted by the *gyðja* towards the Christians in a place and in a time when there was room for doing such performances. In this way she wanted to claim her influence over the cult place threatened to be destroyed by external forces.<sup>143</sup>

There are also examples of ritual acts that demonstrated consensus during peace negotiations. In *Orkneyinga saga*, written around 1230 by an unknown Icelandic writer, a peace meeting between two great men of the Orkney Islands is mentioned. Earl (or *jarl*) Rögnvald Kali Kolsson (ON *Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson*) meets Sweyn Asleifsson (OI *Sveinn Ásleifarson*) at ‘Rognvald’s Island’ (ON *Rognvaldsey*, Eng. South Ronaldsay) in an initially aggressive way, but then a truce shield (ON *friðskjöldr*) is set to signify peace, and they meet on the island to discuss peace.<sup>144</sup> Then they see Sweyn’s enemy, Harald Earl Maddadsson (*Haraldr jarl Maddaðarson*), approaching, and Rögnvald advises Sweyn to seek shelter at the island of Struma (ON *Straumey*).<sup>145</sup> There lives a man named Amundi Hnevason (*Ámundi Hnefason*), who is a relative of Sweyn and a friend of Harald. He settles the feud

between Harald and Sweyn and claims that the settlement that was agreed upon last year should apply. Then Amundi puts them both in the same bed. After this settlement (*sætt*) on the peace, Harald and Sweyn return to their homes.<sup>146</sup>

The story contains much of what I mentioned earlier: in the area of confrontation between Harald and Sweyn an area of communication is established in Amundi's house, where the parties can meet and interact on peaceful terms. We cannot know if there were any particular form of peace in the house, but Amundi seems to act as a mediator between the parties, and some kind of mutual respect for the location must have existed. When Amundi puts Harald and Sweyn in the same bed, it can be perceived as a ritual act as it conveys a symbolic message of consensus. It was a good idea to do this act during this occasion because there was a storm and it was crowded in the house.

The fact that they were brought together was thus a ritual act with a demonstrative function regarding the position of the bodies – a performativity that was a result of external circumstances such as the storm and the hostility – as compared to Bell's discussion. But my main point is that the action can be related to the above discussion of what can be counted as a ritual act. The example can be compared with the theory of Humphrey and Laidlaw, pointing out that it is not a (performative) act, like bowing, which makes this ritualized action effective, it is the context:

If you bow during a state ritual you are by that very act constituting yourself as a subject, not just symbolizing a relation which 'really exists' elsewhere. However this observation does not tell us anything general about ritualized action, since a bow is a bow in ritual or outside it. It would be ethnocentric to assume that bowing is a necessarily 'a ritual' just because you yourself do it only in rituals.<sup>147</sup>

The results and expectations of what can be a ritual act in a particular cultural context are thus important aspects to pay attention to when a researcher analyses his or her material. The above discussed analyses of ritual acts are important in cases that include the hostages, since the giving and taking of hostages could appear in connection with – or as a result of – critical moments (like

during wartime conditions) where the performativity could be a part of a power demonstration, as well as a part of a power strategy and where it was a question about displaying the intentions of the practitioners.

## Concluding remarks

In this part it is presented how hostages in ancient cultures have been viewed in various research disciplines. Legal historians and historians have focused on the Roman Empire, Continental Germanic, and Old English cultures. In some cases, Scandinavia has also been touched upon, mainly with a focus on legal history issues.

Studies have been made within social-historical perspectives on hostages, for example by Adam J. Kosto and Ryan Lavelle, mainly with interests in the Carolingian Empire and the Anglo-Saxon societies. It has been argued that peace negotiations with hostages also involved ritual actions (not least in the Roman Empire); however, the connection between hostages and ritual acts has been discussed to a limited extent. In these studies, sources that are not texts, such as place names and archaeological material, are seldom used. Thus, there are several approaches and source categories that have not been used on the study of hostages in Scandinavia during the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages.

The starting point for the book is the assumption that there were two types of hostages: as a guarantor of business transaction or as a hostage given in war. The latter form is the focus in this survey. It is important to stress that the hostages were given in these contexts, which can be related to unilateral and bilateral contractual forms. The latter form is interesting because it concerned certain areas during negotiations between adversaries. The unilateral form is of interest in this case because it was about receiving people as hostages.

Because the use of hostages occurred during both war and peacetime activities, which at the same time could associated with religious aspects, a number of methodological considerations must be discussed. Each case that is referred to in this book should be studied based on its geographical and temporal conditions.

Understanding hostages in relation to peace processes is also relevant to the study. By ‘process’ is meant the times of war and peace and the time in between. There is also a native terminology with words for hostages and peace.

In accordance with scholars of medieval studies, the concept of ‘bounds of friendship’ is used, in this context with a focus on the horizontal rather the vertical longitude. The focus is on both the victorious and losing side of conflicts, that is, the recipients and givers of the hostage.

The conflicts were located in what I refer to as areas of confrontation and in areas communication. The negotiations were conducted at different levels, legally (peace agreements), religious (ring oaths), socially (festivities), and financially (trade agreements). The experiences of previous peace processes or the ongoing conflict could form the basis of a peace ending during the Viking Age and later in the Middle Ages. A theoretical model for these events is presented. The model describes how conflicts could be managed in border areas, at both macro and micro levels, that is, between larger land areas, such as the kingdoms as well as between land-owners at the local level. The model is, of course, a simplification of reality, but as an analytical tool it is relevant to this book.

By two case studies, of the peace between Alfred the Great and Guthrum (ON *Guðrum*), ruler of Northumbria in the late ninth century, and of conflicts in the *Landnámabók* (Sturlubók) and *Íslendingabók*, I exemplify how the model can be applied. The conflict between Alfred and Guthrum occurred in a society that was about to unite under a government, while the conflicts in Iceland preceded a society that was decentralized and without ruling power. Thus, the conditions were different in these two cases.

In this part, the concepts of ‘ritual’ and ‘holy place’ are applied. Scholars such as Lauri Honko, Melford Spiro, and Håkan Rydving have defined different types of rituals with the division into calendrical rituals, transitional rituals, and rites of passages that are regarded as basic analytical categories. In order to characterize the places where ritual acts were carried out, one can use indigenous terms as the Old Norse *heilagr* or *helgi*.

Although these concepts did not have had the same meaning, they could be related to the devoted, ‘sacred place’, where special

restrictions and taboos were established. This raises a discussion about the nature of the ‘sacredness’ of the ‘holy places’, which could be compared to Veikko Anttonen who discusses the concept of *pyhä*. Instead of talking about ‘sacredness’ domestic concepts such as *vé*, *heilagr*, and *helgi* can be used as analytical categories to denote ‘sanctioned protection’ at places.

The discussion of ‘sacred places’ can also be related to a discussion about the performativity of the ritual, that is, its elasticity and change. Ritual theorists such as Catherine Bell, and Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, who pointed out what distinguished the ritual act from other acts. They meant that there is a connection between everyday activity, the intentions of the ritual practitioner, and the ritual actions performed. Performativity, according to Bell, expresses that ritual acts, among other things, contribute to creating hierarchies. The performativity could also contain violence, for example, when protecting a sacred place. Such performativity can be seen in the *Kristni saga* which describes how the *gyðja* Friðgerðr protects her *vé*-place against a missionary bishop in Iceland by shouting and thus ‘protesting’. In the *Orkneyinga saga*, from the later half of the 12th century, it is described how the house of Amundi Nevason transforms into an area of communication where two enemies shared the same bed signifying a symbolic unification.

These case studies are important because they exemplify how performativity in ritual acts could include demonstrations of power including the use of hostages during peace processes.

## Notes to Part I

1. CD 1998: 776.
2. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* 2010: 753.
3. Cf. Aymard 1961; Matthews 1989: 38.
4. See Phillipson 1911: 42, 399 ff.
5. Elbern 1990.
6. Chapman, Stacey 2007.

7. Lavelle 2006: 270 ff., 295.
8. Lavelle 2006: 290–296.
9. Kosto 2002: 142.
10. von Amira 1882: 691 ff.
11. Lutteroth 1922: 212.
12. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2001: 138 f.
13. Nordberg 2003: 118.
14. See Andrén 2014: 99.
15. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999; 2010; Hermanson 2000; 2009.
16. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2010: 12.
17. Miller 1990: 122 ff; 171 ff.
18. Kosto 2012: 20.
19. Kosto 2012: 92.
20. Kosto 2012: 21.
21. Kosto 2012: 24 ff.
22. See Hultgård 2011.
23. Kosto 2012: 8.
24. Kosto 2012: 132 ff.
25. Kosto 2012: 22.
26. Kosto 2012: 9 ff.
27. Kosto 2012: 13.
28. Kosto 2012: 104.
29. See Part VI.
30. Kosto 2012: 15 ff.
31. Kosto 2012: 15, 30.
32. Kosto 2012: 15 f.
33. Kosto 2012: 15.



34. Kosto 2012: 16 f.
35. Kosto 2012: 18.
36. Kosto 2012: 13.
37. Kosto 2012: 24.
38. Kosto 2012: 25.
39. Kosto 2012: 28.
40. Kosto 2012: 29.
41. Kosto 2012: 29 f.
42. See Kosto 2012: 30.
43. Simek 1993: 287.
44. See, for example, Schier 1981.
45. Simek 1993: 287.
46. *Edda* a–c (ed. Anthony Faulkes); *Landnámabók* II, Hauksbók ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson).
47. Abram 2011: 16 ff., 20.
48. See Steinsland 2005: 47 and Schjødt 2008: 89.
49. Meulengracht Sørensen 1993: 12. It is open to debate whether the Eddic poems originate from Iceland or Norway. However, the environmental descriptions may show Norway rather than Iceland. During the excavations of Bryggen, in the present city of Bergen, runic inscriptions from 1200 to 1400 were found with a similar content (Liestøl 1964: 25, 30 ff., 50 f.; Hultgård 1996: 27).
50. Schjødt 2008: 89.
51. Schjødt 2008: 89.
52. Schjødt 2008: 91.
53. Meulengracht Sørensen 1991.
54. Hultgård 2016.
55. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* ([ed.] Sigurður Nordal); *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Brands þáttur örva*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grœnlendinga saga*,

*Grœnlendinga þáttir* ([ed.] Einar Ól. Sveinsson & Matthías Þórðarson); *Orkneyinga saga* ([ed.] Finnbogi Guðmundsson).

56. See Abram 2011: 21.

57. *Landnámabók* I–III ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson).

58. Jakob Benediktsson 1969: 276 f., 282 f.; Sundqvist 2007: 26.

59. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2005: 613.

60. *Sturlunga Saga* ([ed.] Gudbrand Vigfusson).

61. For example in *Saga Ólafs hins helga, Heimskringla 2* ([ed.] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson).

62. Kristinn Jóhannessons preface in *Nordiska kungasagor* I ([ed.] Johansson): 14.

63. For example *Heidreks saga, Hervarar saga ok Heidreks konungs* ([ed.] Jón Helgason); *Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur* ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson).

64. See, for example, Hultgård 1993; Abram 2011: 24.

65. Clunies Ross 2010: 10.

66. Schjødt 1999: 35; Røthe 2010: 21 ff.

67. Steinsland 2005: 59.

68. Sahlgren 1924; See Hellberg 1986: 42 ff.

69. Andersson T. 1992a; 1992b; 1992c; 1993; Brink 1997; 1999; Elmevik 1999; 2003; 2013; Vikstrand 2001.

70. See Sundqvist 2002: 55.

71. Rättlösabalken, *Äldre västgötalagen* II ([ed.] Wiktorsson): 84 p. (text), 85 f. (transl.) (pages 211–214).

72. I mainly use Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén's translations, *Svenska landskapslagar* ('Swedish provincial laws'), published in the 1930s and 1940s. I also rely on Per-Axel Wiktorsson's new translation of the *Elder Westrogothic law*. To access the original Swedish text, I rely on Carl Johan Schlyter's editions of the original texts (1827–1877). Currently a project with new translations is being conducted by the Centre for Scandinavian Studies, Aberdeen. I am aware

that this project may change the view on the interpretations of the Swedish provincial laws.

73. In this book I use the word thing (ON *þing*) for the assembly.

74. For an overview see Kiernan 1981.

75. Oehrl 2017: 87–122.

76. I use the word ‘Old Scandinavian’ to characterize religion as well as society. This can be derived from the historian of religions Anders Hultgård’s (1991: 161 f.) term ‘Old Scandinavian religion’, which refers to the groups in the Nordic countries who spoke the Old Norse languages, but not those who spoke the Sami languages or Old Finnish.

77. Dumézil 1966.

78. See Rydving 1990: 172 p.

79. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 7 MS E (ed. Irvine): 86 (year 1063).

80. Ginzburg 1989: 96–125.

81. See Part IV, n. 131.

82. See Part VI, p. 252 ff.

83. Meulengracht Sørensen 1992.

84. Preliminary versions of the following sections has been published in Olsson 2017: 266–275 and 2018: 159–170.

85. Österberg 1989: 73 ff.

86. According to the OED ‘conflict’ means ‘strike together’, ‘clash’, ‘contend’ (OED 1989: 713). It may further be related to ‘collision’, ‘to clash’, ‘to be at variance’, ‘to be incompatible’ (OED 1989: 713). I will instead rely on the OED definition of ‘confrontation’ as ‘the bringing of persons face to face; esp. for examination of the truth’ (OED 1989: 719). It may also be related to ‘the coming of countries, parties, etc., face to face: used to a state of political tension with or without actual conflict’ (OED 1989: 719).

87. Several sources describe Brännö (*Brenneyja*) as an island where kings met every third year for festivities.

88. Österberg 1989: 74 ff.

89. Brink 1997: 403 ff. See also Sundqvist 2002: 101 ff. In a recent article the archaeologists Sarah Semple and Alexandra Sanmark (2008: 245–259) cast some doubt on the multifunctional thing. Andreas Nordberg (2011: 21) is cautious concerning the division between funeral place and cult place.

90. The *goabti* of the Sami could be multifunctional even if the construction differed depending on location. In Islam the prayer mat becomes a cultplace.

91. This custom can be intermingled with Christian imaginations, since Christians in the *Landámabók* practise the same custom.

92. Sundqvist 2012.

93. T. Blomkvist 2002: 104 ff.

94. *Hirdloven* Ch. 33: Um þat skipti et guð getær sigr [oc] hærfong.

95. Bagge 1986: 158 ff.; T. Blomkvist 2005: 265.

96. Bagge 1986: 81 ff., 92 f., 97 f.

97. Sanmark 2004: 43–53, 91–106.

98. Brink 1997: 403 f.

99. Lindkvist 1988: 32 f.; cf. Stylegar 1999: 116 f., 122 ff.

100. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MS F, 71 f.

101. The term ‘Danelaw’ (OE *Dena lagunema*) appears for the first time in the *Doom Book* (*Code of Alfred*) of 1008. The term was used more frequently in the 11th and 12th centuries, when the term denoted Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Buckinghamshire (Hadley 2000, 2 ff.).

102. *The Medieval Life of King Alfred the Great*, 33; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MS F, 71 f.

103. See Olsson 2012: 69.

104. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MS F, 72.

105. See Lundgreen 1995: 603–612; see also Olsson 2012. This could be compared to the reception and baptism of King Harald (Klak) at the court of Louis the Pious, recorded by Ermoldus Nigellus, which is taken up in Part III of the book.

106. Bell 1997: 159–162.

107. See Kershaw 2011: 17.

108. *The Medieval Life of King Alfred the Great*, Ch. 35; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MS F, 72.

109. The manuscripts (MS 383) are preserved at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Kershaw 2000: 44, 48). The treaty should not be confused with the 11th-century agreement *Laws of Edward and Guthrum*, written by Archbishop Wulfstan II.

110. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* 1, 126 f.

111. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* 1, 126 f.

112. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* 1, 126 f.

113. Orri Vésteinsson 1998: 8–9; Hayeur Smith 2004: 16–17; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 51.

114. Spiro 1982: 199 ff.; cf. Rydving 1993: 93 ff.

115. Honko 1975: 75; Rydving 1993: 94.

116. Honko 1979: 378; Rydving 1993: 95.

117. Rydving 1993: 95.

118. It can be seen during annual festivals such as the award of the Nobel Prizes in Sweden and Norway. In addition, the Nobel Peace Prize can be given to both groups (organizations) and individuals.

119. Sundqvist 2007: 182.

120. Sundqvist 2016.

121. Sundqvist 2016.

122. Anttonen 2000: 276 f.

123. Anttonen 2000: 277.

124. Anttonen 2000: 280.

125. Cf. Sundqvist 2015, where he argues that the ‘sacredness’ was designed and applied in the context of power relations.

126. Enligt *Landnámabók*, Hauksbók ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson): 94 (Ch. 258).

127. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* ([ed.] Sigurður Nordal): 163 (Ch. 56, stanza 28); see Sundqvist 2007: 189, n. 98.

128. Steinsland 2005: 371 f.

129. See Hultgård 2001: 438 f.

130. *Landnámabók*, Hauksbók ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson): 116 (Ch. 331); *Landnámabók*, Sturlubók ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson): 225 (ch. 376).

131. *Hirdloven* ([transl.] Steinar Imsen): (Ch. 33); see Olsson 2016.

132. See *Ritual, Performatives, and Political Order in Northern Europe, c. 650–1350*, [ed.] W. Jezierski *et al.*, for examples from the Old Scandinavian societies.

133. Bell 1997: 72 ff.

134. Bell 1997: 81 f.

135. Bell 1997: 82.

136. Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 260.

137. Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 263.

138. Bell 1997: 74 ff.

139. Sundqvist 2016.

140. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning A 1* ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson): 105.

141. *Íslendingabók – Kristni Saga*, Grønlie ([ed.] Faulkes & Finlay): 36 (Ch. 1).

142. Sundqvist 2007: 65.

143. *Kristnisaga* ([ed.] Kahle): 9 (Ch. 2, 11).

144. *Orkneyinga saga* ([ed.] Finnbogi Guðmundsson): 267 (Ch. 96).

145. *Orkneyinga saga* ([ed.] Finnbogi Guðmundsson): 267 (Ch. 97).

146. *Orkneyinga saga* ([ed.] Finnbogi Guðmundsson): 268 (Ch. 97).

147. Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 263.