

# *Vikings* *and their* *Enemies*

*Proceedings of a Symposium held in  
Melbourne*

*24 November 2007*

Edited by Katrina L. Burge

Viking Research Network

Melbourne

2008

Published by the Viking Research Network, Melbourne

The Viking Research Network is a research cluster affiliated  
with the Network for Early European Research  
(<http://confluence.arts.uwa.edu.au/display/VIKINGS/Home>)

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Printed in Australia

ISBN: 978-0-646-50559-6

*2nd impression*

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# CONTENTS

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Foreword by Inga Árnadóttir: Opening Address to the Symposium	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
KATRINA BURGE	
Introduction	1
SHANE MCLEOD	
Know Thine Enemy: Scandinavian Identity in the Viking Age	3
HOLLIE THOMAS	
Contemporary Representations of the Vikings 787–937	17
MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS	
Did the Vikings Have Enemies?	30
LEON WILD	
The Raven Banner at Clontarf: The Context of an Old Norse Legendary Symbol	37
HELEN YOUNG	
Remembering, Forgetting, and Rewriting the Vikings in <i>Guy of Warwick</i> .	49
IAN ROGERS	
Berserkir: Myths and Misconceptions about Bear (bare) Skins and Wolf-Coats	60
LISA BENNETT	
Conquering Viking Enemies in Icelandic Cultural Memory	70
KATRINA BURGE	
The Greatest Enemy? Climate and Weather in the Viking Age	82
BERNARD MEES	
From Romanticism to Radicalism: Vikings and the War against Bolshevism	96
JOHN KENNEDY	
“Viking” Coins of the Twentieth Century	113
Afterword by John Martin: Old Norse and Viking Studies in Melbourne, 1944–2007	125
Contributors	139

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# KNOW THINE ENEMY

## SCANDINAVIAN IDENTITY IN THE VIKING AGE

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Shane McLeod

In speaking of Viking attacks and settlements, the primary historical records often employ national identities like Dane, Northman and Swede to identify their foe. Unsurprisingly such terminology has also often been used by scholars examining these events. Yet such a notion has been questioned, and it is argued that the enemies of the Vikings were not in a position to know how Vikings identified themselves, and that it was not to kingdoms but smaller regional identities that the Vikings related. This paper will examine the notion of Viking Age identity in the few primary written sources by Scandinavians of the ninth to eleventh centuries, to see if the terminology used by outsiders was also employed within Scandinavia.

The issue of personal Scandinavian identity during the Viking Age is problematical. At a time when the peoples occupying Viking Age Scandinavia left few written records, attempting to investigate their contemporary notions of identity, especially in relation to the present day national identities of Danes, Swedes and Norwegians, is daunting.<sup>1</sup> Those coming into contact with Scandinavians used a number of terms to describe them, including some that suggest Scandinavian supra-regional identities, but it is not clear how these terms came to be used, and if they would have meant anything to those being so described. Furthermore, some scholars have suggested that during the Viking Age, Scandinavians would have been more likely to view their identity as relating to small local districts rather than larger regional identities.<sup>2</sup> This notion has been taken further in a thought-provoking work by Fredrik Svanberg, *Deconstructing the Viking Age*. Svanberg's study focuses almost exclusively on archaeological material to argue in favour of small regional identities, and virtually ignores the historical record. This present work will attempt to redress this imbalance by considering the Scandinavian primary historical sources that deal with the issue. Although this corpus of evidence is relatively meagre, it does provide a useful insight into notions of Viking Age identity.

Any investigation of Scandinavian supra-regional identities in the Viking Age is initially confronted with what criteria were being used by those naming peoples as Danes, Norwegians and Swedes. Regino of Prüm, writing c. 900 in what would become modern-day Germany, wrote that “the various nations differ in descent, customs, language and law.”<sup>3</sup> It is not known if Scandinavians would have agreed with these four

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this essay, Viking Age Scandinavia does not include the large areas then controlled by the Samis, and the Samis are not included in my use of the term “Scandinavian.” Also, regardless of how contentious the designation may be, it is also assumed for ease of discussion that Scandinavia did have a Viking Age.

<sup>2</sup> For example P.H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), p. 2; Julian D. Richards, *Viking Age England* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 197.

categories, and at the very least it would have been difficult to use language, as opposed to dialect, as a major point of difference during the Viking Age. When the Scandinavians quoted in this paper use the terms “Dane,” “Denmark,” “Norwegian,” “Norway,” “Swede,” “Sweden,” and “Northman,” it is not known how each individual was using them, although there is often evidence of correlation between the people name and a supra-regional geographic entity. For the purposes of the current work, the very use of such terms by some Scandinavians in the Viking Age demonstrates that these concepts did indeed exist for some members of the local population.

Svanberg argues that the traditional view of Viking Age history, as the histories of Denmark, Sweden and Norway and their three peoples, needs to be deconstructed in order to allow smaller regional places more prominence.<sup>4</sup> In the specific area of his study, south Scania from 800–1000, he argues that the general view of there being two main peoples, Swedes and Danes, “must be refuted” as there “were clearly many different collectives of peoples with a more or less strong sense of collective identity.”<sup>5</sup> Svanberg’s examination of death rituals is impressive and raises many valid issues. However, no matter how much one theorises over the various levels of meaning that may be contained within a specific burial ritual, it cannot categorically tell how the person or those burying them perceived their personal or collective identity. Did the person in Möre being cremated during the tenth century see themselves as very different from the person being inhumed on Möre at the same time,<sup>6</sup> or did they still acknowledge a shared regional identity of belonging to Möre and did they also perhaps have a supra-regional consciousness of being in a supra-regional area known as Sweden?

Although it is true that Svanberg’s study of burial rituals does suggest a number of regional identities, this does not imply that small groups could not also be aware of belonging to a larger regional identity. He is reluctant to describe such supra-regional traditions as belonging to kingdoms, despite noting that the aristocracy probably “saw themselves as members of more or less well defined supra-regional communities.”<sup>7</sup> However other authors do not share Svanberg’s qualms about the concept of kingdoms,<sup>8</sup> and I will argue here that the written sources demonstrate that at least some Scandinavians were aware of belonging to and identified themselves by the three larger regions, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, that became kingdoms during the Viking Age.

Viking Age sources from outside Scandinavia often refer to peoples from the present day nations as though these nations existed at the time. The Anglo-Saxons refer to “Danes,”<sup>9</sup> and the Franks to “Northmen” and “Danes,”<sup>10</sup> as well as making reference

<sup>4</sup> Fredrik Svanberg, *Decolonizing The Viking Age Vol. 1* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003), p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Svanberg, *Death Rituals in South-East Scandinavia AD 800-1000: Decolonizing The Viking Age Vol. 2*. (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2003), p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Svanberg, *Death Rituals in South-East Scandinavia*, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Svanberg, *Decolonizing The Viking Age 1*, p. 186. The present work is a complement to Svanberg’s, not a refutation, but it aims to redress a perceived imbalance in the evidence presented.

<sup>8</sup> See Stefan Brink, “Territory and Territoriality,” *Tor* 29 (1997), pp. 389-437 (pp. 402-4); John Callmer, “Territory and Dominion in the Late Iron Age in Southern Scandinavia,” in *Regions and Reflections: In Honour of Märta Strömberg*, ed. K. Jennbert et al, pp. 257-7 (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991), pp. 265-6.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Janet Bately, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. 3 MS A*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986) : “þa Deniscan ahton wēlstowe gewald” (the Danes held the place of slaughter; s.a. 871, p. 49).

to “Swedes.”<sup>11</sup> However having an outsider refer to someone as a Dane does not necessarily mean that those referred to considered themselves as Danish. Indeed the concepts of “Denmark,” “Sweden” and “Norway” are problematical as it is unclear when these areas became unified and large enough to be considered kingdoms. Large building works such as the Kanhave canal in 726 and the first portion of the Danevirk in 737 suggest that Denmark had a strong central authority by the early eighth century.<sup>12</sup> For Sweden and Norway, the evidence is slighter. The minting of coins in Sweden in c. 995 and in Norway during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason (c. 964–1000) have been suggested as useful starting points.<sup>13</sup> Yet regardless of what outsiders thought and what examples of central authority existed, the only way to reach any form of understanding of how Scandinavians identified themselves during the Viking Age is to examine their own sources. These sources include runic inscriptions and a traveller’s account in the Old English text *Orosius*. I shall make reference to all these sources in the following discussion.

Perhaps the most the most remarkable indication of a Scandinavian’s sense of community and identity during the Viking Age is the account of a voyage by Ohthere, as told to King Alfred of Wessex sometime before the king’s death in 899 and recorded in *The Old English Orosius*.<sup>14</sup> The description of Ohthere’s journey was not written by Ohthere himself and therefore some scribal and transcription errors may exist,<sup>15</sup> but nonetheless the detailed information that it contains does appear to come from first hand knowledge. Bearing this in mind, it is somewhat surprising that Svanberg makes no use of it, although Ohthere refers to the specific area of Svanberg’s study.<sup>16</sup>

As well as giving a geographical and vegetative account of Norway that largely remains accurate today, Ohthere says “þæt he earla Norðmonna norþmest bude” (that he

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Janet L. Nelson, ed. and trans., *The Annals of St-Bertin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) : “Danish pirates sailed down the Channel,” s.a. 841, p. 50; “The Northmen sailed up the Garonne,” s.a. 844, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson, *Annals of St-Bertin*, s.a. 839, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, rev. ed, trans. Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 73. Brink, “Territory and Territoriality,” p. 402, believes that the Danevirk was the kingdom border. For an argument that Denmark was already a kingdom before the Viking Age, see Ulf Näsman, “Raids, Migrations, and Kingdoms – the Danish Case,” *Acta Archaeologica*, 71 (2000), pp. 1-7. For the existence of a Danish kingdom in the ninth century, see Søren Sindbæk, “The Lands of *Denemearce*: Cultural Differences and Social Networks of the Viking Age in South Scandinavia,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008), forthcoming.

<sup>13</sup> Helen Clarke, “Society, Kingship and Warfare,” in *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, pp. 38-57 (Oxford: Andromeda, 1994), p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Janet Bately, ed., *The Old English Orosius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). All Old English translations are my own, and quotations to this text will henceforth be referred to parenthetically as *Or*. The name “Ohthere” is probably an Anglicisation of ON *Ottar*, but the form from the text will be used in this work.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the probable language difficulties see Christine Fell, “Some Questions of Language,” in *Two Voyagers. Ohthere & Wulfstan at the Court Of King Alfred*, ed. N. Lund, trans. C. Fell (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), pp. 56-63. For a thorough investigation of the likelihood of mutual intelligibility, see Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> This omission is even more surprising as Svanberg does make use of the account of the voyage of Wulfstan, who was probably not a Scandinavian, which immediately follows the account of Ohthere’s voyage in the *Orosius*. Svanberg, *Decolonizing The Viking Age 1*, p. 156, lists Wulfstan amongst other unreliable “outsiders.” Ohthere’s account is mentioned once (p. 95) but is never actively used by Svanberg.

dwelt the furthest north of all the Northmen; *Or* p. 13),<sup>17</sup> and “sio scir hatte Halgoland þe he on bude” (the shire of Halgoland was where he lived; *Or* p. 16). Although it is unclear how the Old English *scir* (shire) would relate to settlement patterns in Norway, Ohthere’s identification of himself as coming from Hålogaland, which is still a district-name for the coast of northern Norway, confirms the notion of small regional identities. However Ohthere later explains that when he left home he sailed south on his journey to Sciringesheal, which is thought to be Kaupang,<sup>18</sup> “ealne weg on þæt bæcbord Norðweg,” (all the way on the port side was *Norðweg* [Northway/Norway]; *Or* p. 16). Ohthere seems to use two terms, *Norðmanna land*, the land where the Northmen live, and *Norðweg*, the land along the North way sailing route, to refer to the same geographic area, so in his mind the two terms may have become synonymous. Although it could perhaps be argued that only the sailing route is meant by *Norðweg*, from the context it is apparent that a land is being described.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that Ohthere considered Hålogaland to be part of, or at the northern end of, a larger territory that he knew of as Northway, which probably included all of the land along the “north way” sailing route to Kaupang.

Ohthere also describes himself as one of the “Northmen” (*Norðmonna*; *Or* p. 13). It is unlikely that this term “Northman” is a standard Anglo-Saxon usage. Whereas Frankish annals often refer to raids by “Northmen,” the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,<sup>20</sup> habitually refers to Scandinavians as “Danes.” The *ASC* was generated from Alfred’s court at a similar time to Ohthere’s visit and was possibly transcribed by the same person as the *Orosius*.<sup>21</sup> It features fifteen instances of “Dane” terms in the entries for the reign of Alfred, whereas “Northman” is not found once. The appearance of the term in the *Orosius* therefore strongly suggests that it reflects Ohthere’s own usage.<sup>22</sup>

Ohthere’s description of *Norðmanna land* (the land of the Northmen; *Or* 15) makes it clear that he is referring to an area roughly equivalent to modern Norway, so presumably for him the term “Northmen” was restricted specifically to Norwegians. Ohthere’s description of *Norðmanna land* is clearly different from his later description of Denmark so it should have been clear to his audience that Ohthere did not consider himself a Dane. This distinction is quite different from the conflation of Danes and Northmen found in Einhard’s early ninth century *Vita Karoli Magni*, as for instance in

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of where Ohthere lived see Inger Storli, “Ohthere and his World – A Contemporary Perspective,” in Janet Bately and Anton Englert, eds., *Ohthere’s Voyages: A Late 9-Century Account of Voyages along the Coasts of Norway and Denmark, and its Cultural Context*, pp. 76-99 (Roskilde: The Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, 2007), pp. 83-5. Unfortunately this work, including Janet Bately’s translation, was not available to me until after this article was almost complete.

<sup>18</sup> For the argument in favour of Kaupang, see Bately, *Orosius*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> See s.v. “Norðweg” in Janet Bately, “Translation notes,” in Bately and Englert, *Ohthere’s Voyages*, p. 54. See also Stefan Brink, “Geography, Toponymy and Political Organisation in Early Scandinavia,” in Bately and Englert, *Ohthere’s Voyages* pp. 66-73 (pp. 66-67, 71).

<sup>20</sup> All references to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (hereafter *ASC*) are to Bately’s edition unless otherwise indicated. Entries will be referenced by year and page.

<sup>21</sup> Lund, introduction in *Two Voyagers*, ed. Lund, trans. Fell, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> For example there are five uses of “Danish” (*denisc-*) just in the *ASC* entry s.a. 896, pp. 59-61.

the line “Nordmannos qui Dani vocantu” (Danes whom we call Northmen).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the entry in the *ASC* recensions (E) and (F) for 787 record that the “Northmen” (*Norþmanna*) from Hordaland (*Hereþalande*) in Norway who arrived in three ships were “Danish Men” (*Deniscra manna*).<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the 920 entry of the *ASC* makes a clear distinction between “Northmen” (*Norþmen*) and “Danes” (*Denisce*).<sup>25</sup> Ohthere’s usage also contrasts with a Scandinavian runic inscription, discussed further below, which implies a pan-Scandinavian meaning for “Northmen” (*norðrmonnum*). It is evident therefore that during the Viking Age, depending on who was using the term, a “Northman” could be either a resident of Scandinavia, or someone from a particular part of Scandinavia, and that this dual usage was practised by Scandinavians and others.

The use of “Norðweg” by Ohthere to refer to the full length of the western Scandinavian peninsula is particularly interesting. Although southern Norway was united at around this time by Harold Finehair, his rule is not thought to have extended very far north, and certainly not as far as Hålogaland.<sup>26</sup> Ohthere’s identification of Hålogaland as being part of Norway may be an example of what Anthony Smith has termed “lateral ethnies.”<sup>27</sup> This is Smith’s term for groups, especially aristocratic, with a common culture, history, origin myths and language, and he argues that such “lateral ethnies” could exist before the formation of a nation or kingdom and then actually help to homogenise such an entity. For instance this may occur where members of the aristocracy over a wide geographic area see themselves as belonging to the same culture.<sup>28</sup> Irmeli Valtonen has also recently suggested that Ohthere’s use of *Norðweg* “implies a shared unity of some kind that later supported Norwegian political unification.”<sup>29</sup> It appears that Ohthere, who was probably subject to the *jarl* of Lade, ruler of Hålogaland, and did not pay homage to the king that ruled in the south,<sup>30</sup> was able to view himself as being part of the culture and land of Norway.

The *Orosius* continues with Ohthere’s account of the journey from *Sciringesbeale* (probably Kaupang) to *Hæpum* (Hedeby), which describes present-day Denmark and

<sup>23</sup> *Einbard’s Life of Charlemagne: The Latin Text*, ed. H. W. Garrod and R. B. Mowat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), ch. 14, p. 16. For a fuller discussion of the use of “Northman” and “Dane” in Frankish sources see, Ildar Garipzanov, “Frontier Identities: Carolingian Frontier and *Gens Danorum*,” in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar Garipzanov, Patrick Geary, and Przemysław Urbańczyk (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 113-143 (pp. 115-25).

<sup>24</sup> “Manuscript E: Bodleian MS Laud 636,” in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: An Electronic Edition*, <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/e/e-L.html>.

<sup>25</sup> *ASC* s.a. 920, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Clarke, “Society, Kingship and Warfare,” p. 44. Ohthere’s description of his journey indicates that Halgoland extended a lot further north than modern Hålogaland. See Bately, *Orosius*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “The Origins of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 12 (1989), pp. 340-67 (pp. 340-53). Despite his stress on small regional identities, Svanberg also notes the likelihood of a supra-regional aristocratic community, *Decolonizing The Viking Age 1*, p. 186.

<sup>28</sup> Further support for the existence of lateral ethnies comes from references in *Orosius* to two other geographical and cultural entities, *Ira land* (Ireland) and *þisum lande* (this land, England), that later became nations. Ireland and England were, like Norway, divided between a number of rulers at the time of Ohthere’s address, including areas under Scandinavian control.

<sup>29</sup> Irmeli Valtonen, *The North in the Old English Orosius. A Geographical Narrative in Context* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 2008), p. 331. I would like to thank Irmeli for sharing this information with me before I was able to obtain a copy of her book.

<sup>30</sup> Storli, “Ohthere and his World,” in Bately and Englert, *Ohthere’s Voyages*, pp. 76-99 (pp. 85-7).



southern Sweden. The Viking Age demarcation between Sweden and Denmark is complex. South-west Sweden is called *Denamæarc* (Denmark; *Or* p. 16), an identification that was correct for much of the Viking Age as Danish kings usually controlled Skåne and Halland. The political reality is also reflected in the archaeology, with the burial types in this area being similar to those in modern-day Denmark.<sup>31</sup> It seems that even if south-west Sweden was at times not directly controlled by a Danish king, culturally it was still regarded as Danish.

Although the south-west of present day Sweden is described as “Denmark,” Ohthere calls the area north of it “Sweden.” After his description of Norway he says “ðonne is toemnes þæm lande suðewardum, on oðre healfe ðæs mores, Sweoland” (then alongside the land southwards, on the other side of the mountains, Sweden; *Or* p. 15). Sweden is said to continue northwards until it reaches Cwena land (*Or* p. 15), an area of mountains and large fresh water lakes. If the identification of Sciringesheal as Kaupang is correct, then it would appear that the area east of it across the Kattegatt and to the north, perhaps from Lake Vänern, was considered to be Sweoland, presumably the kingdom of the Svear.

Another sailor’s report, by Wulfstan, immediately follows Ohthere’s in *Orosius* and is also taken from an oral account. It claims that the areas of “Blecingaeg, Meore, Eowland, Gotland on Bæcbord, þas land hyrað to Sweon” (Blekinge, Møre, Öland, and Gotland were on the port-side, these lands belong to Sweden; *Or* p. 16).<sup>32</sup> These ninth-century accounts of Sweden are quite different from Svanberg’s analysis, as he considers that south present-day Sweden was made up of a number of different cultural communities, each with its own sense of identity. Svanberg does acknowledge that south-east Scania including Öland may have shared a cultural identity, but he does not include Gotland as part of this, nor all of the areas that Ohthere appears to indicate to the west.<sup>33</sup>

Ohthere’s account is interesting as it demonstrates that a ninth-century Scandinavian had no difficulty in identifying lands and peoples with the three nations that were later to emerge, whereas some twenty-first century scholars still do. While Ohthere was not part of any of the communities in present-day Denmark or Sweden and therefore may not have known how they perceived themselves, he presents an outsider’s view of their perceived unity. His personal sense of identity is instructive, as it is probably the only indication we will ever have of how a Scandinavian viewed Scandinavia in the ninth century.<sup>34</sup> Ohthere claims to belong to the elite from his area (“he wæs mid þæm fyrstum mannum on þæm lande” he was amongst the foremost men of the land, *Or*

<sup>31</sup> Svanberg, *Death Rituals in South-East Scandinavia AD 800-1000*, p. 145.

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting that Ohthere uses “Gotland” for Jutland (and the text makes it obvious that Jutland is meant), and Wulfstan uses “Gotland” for Gotland, and both are in the same manuscript. See Batley, *Orosius*, p. 195 for discussion.

<sup>33</sup> Svanberg, *Decolonizing The Viking Age 1*, pp. 186-8.

<sup>34</sup> There is one other candidate for consideration as a Scandinavian writing on Scandinavia at the time. Rimbert, the author of the ninth-century *Vita Anskarii*, is the subject of a recent, renewed argument that he was a Dane. See James T. Palmer, “Rimbert’s *Vita Anskarii* and a Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55.2 (2004), pp. 235-56 (pp. 237-8). If this is correct then Rimbert’s use of the terms “Danes” (e.g. ch. XII) and “Swedes” (e.g. ch. IX) is significant. An English translation of Rimbert is available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anskar.html>.

p. 15). As Smith pointed out, “nations tend to develop from aristocratic ‘lateral’ ethnies,”<sup>35</sup> so it is true that Ohthere is more likely to use supra-regional identities. He identifies himself as a Northman from Hålogaland, which obviously existed as a concept in the ninth century, long before it became a political reality. Ohthere appears to view Scandinavia largely within the framework of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, thereby validating this approach by modern scholars.

Runic inscriptions are the only other examples of primary Scandinavian records from the Viking Age that provide a sense of how Scandinavians identified themselves and their neighbours. The number of runic inscriptions mentioning the Scandinavian kingdoms is not large. However they are, apart from Ohthere’s account, the only Scandinavian written primary sources from the Viking Age that indicate, in their own words, how these people viewed themselves and therefore the inscriptions must be fully exploited. Most surviving runic inscriptions are found on runestones, although a group of rune-inscribed coins from Lund also feature information about early identities. Although by their very nature these texts cannot be as expansive as the account of Ohthere, they still allow important insight into Scandinavian identity, particularly as they present the views of more than just one individual from one time and place. While it must still be noted that only those who could afford to have a runestone carved are represented by the stones, the sheer number of Viking Age runestones in some areas, particularly in Uppland where they also occurred on small farms, indicates that their usage was probably not restricted to small elite.<sup>36</sup>

There are a number of runestones from the tenth and eleventh centuries that name Denmark, Sweden or Norway, or one of these national peoples. Two of these, the Jelling stones raised by Gorm and his son Harold Bluetooth, were erected by kings. Harold Bluetooth’s mid-tenth century inscription at Jelling famously claims that **haraltr** (: **ias** : **soR** \* **uan** \* **tanmaurk** (*sá Haraldr er sér vann Danmørk*, Haraldr won for himself all of Denmark; DR 42).<sup>37</sup> As rulers, kings were probably the people most likely to think in supra-regional terms, and as such these inscriptions are not necessarily indicative of widespread supra-regional identities. The other relevant runic inscriptions are not thought to have been made at the behest of kings, and they subsequently provide a broader sense of how Viking Age Scandinavians viewed themselves. However the importance of kings in forging a sense of “national” identity cannot be overlooked, particularly, as I shall argue below, because many of the relevant non-royal inscriptions can be dated later than the two royal runestones.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Smith, “Origins of Nations,” p. 340.

<sup>36</sup> Frands Herschand, “Runestones as a Social Manifestation,” in *Runestones – A Colourful Memory*, ed. Eija Lietoff (Uppsala: Museum Gustaviaum, 1999), pp. 15-19 (p. 16).

<sup>37</sup> Runic transliterations are given in bold, with Old Norse transcriptions in italics and English translations in Roman type. All runic texts and translations, both into English and Old Norse, are taken from the online *Samnordisk runtextdatabase*, [www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm](http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm). The full texts of all the inscriptions used herein are found in the database. Inscriptions are identified parenthetically by identification number in the main text, following the English translation.

<sup>38</sup> The non-royal runestones are also later than the issuing of royal coinage in Denmark (DAENOR) and Norway (NOR) in the late tenth century that name the kingdom. For images of the coins, see Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, p. 113.

Apart from a reference to **nuruiak** (Norveg, Norway; DR 42), on Harold Bluetooth's stone, "Norway" appears on only two other stones. One of these states that "tolf vetr hafði kristindómr verit í Nóregi" (Christianity had been twelve winters in Norway; N449),<sup>39</sup> so it was probably erected in around 1036, twelve years after Christianity was made the official religion at the Moster Thing by Óláfr Haraldsson, in about 1024.<sup>40</sup> As Óláfr pursued a vigorous policy of Norwegian unification, it could be supposed that a "Norwegian" consciousness began at this time, yet the testimony of Ohthere 150 years earlier cautions against such a simple correlation. The other runestone to identify Norway says that it was erected in the sixth year of the reign of **mahnusar ÷ norihs ÷ konohs** (*Magnúsar, Noregs konungs*, Magnús, King of Norway; N 179M) and therefore must post-date inscription N449. Although there is no clue as to which of the various Magnuses to rule Norway the stone may belong, the first Magnús, Magnús the Good, reigned from 1035–1046, so even a reference to the sixth year of his rule (1041) is later than the likely 1036 date for the previous inscription. It may be supposed that the concept of "Norway" was well established by the time of its erection.

There are also two runestone references to "Norwegians." One is a stone from Uppland, Sweden, raised in the memory of Geirbjörn after "hann drápu norrmen" (Norwegians killed him; U 258 \$). The stone is difficult to date and thus cannot provide a firm indication of when identifying people as Norwegian became current in Sweden, but as the only adornment on the stone is what appears to be a Christian cross, it can reasonably be dated as post-1000.<sup>41</sup> The other inscription is from Denmark and mentions an estate steward employed by "Ketils þess norrœna" (Ketill the Norwegian; DR 107).<sup>42</sup> The runic database dates the stone as post-Jelling, c. 1000–1050,<sup>43</sup> and it is therefore contemporaneous with the stone raised during the reign of Óláfr Haraldsson. Significantly, this indicates that the concept of people being Norwegian, that is from something corresponding to the present-day nation rather than just a locality within it, was current in Denmark by the time of Óláfr's reign if not earlier.

There are four runestones which mention "Sweden" or "Swedish." The location of these stones is unusual, as only one is found in mainland Sweden, another is on Gotland, and the other two are both found in present-day Denmark. The inscription on the island of Gotland features the only mention of the term **svensku** (Swedish; G 172 M). The other stones all feature a term for "Sweden," using the forms **suoſþiaufu** or **suiþiufu** (Svíþjóðu; Sö Fv 1948; 289, DR 216 \$, DR 344).

<sup>39</sup> **tualf \* uintr \* ha(f)(þ)i : (k)r(i)(s)(t)(i)(n)\*(t)umr : (u)iri(t) \* (i) n(u)riki.**

<sup>40</sup> Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, p. 165. Although the runic database occasionally provides dates for the stones, they are usually just dated as V for Viking Age.

<sup>41</sup> Anne-Sofie Gräslund, "Rune Stones – On Ornamentation and Chronology," in *The Twelfth Viking Congress. Developments Around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age*, ed. B. Ambrosiani and H. Clarke (Stockholm: RAÄ, 1994), pp. 117–131 (p. 126). See also Magnus Källström, *Mästare och minnesmärken: Studier kring vikingatida runristare och skrifmiljöer i Norden*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis: Stockholm Studies in Scandinavian Philology, n.s. 43. (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> **kitils ÷ þis ÷ ſ nuruna.**

<sup>43</sup> *Samnordisk runtextdatabase*, DR 107.

The stone from mainland Sweden is interesting as, like Ohthere's use of the two terms "Hålogaland" and "Norway," it uses multiple personal identifications. It is dedicated to two people who "died in Denmark" but had been "powerful in Rauningi and the ablest in Sweden," thereby proudly identifying them both by their nation and with their locality within Sweden, Rauningi.<sup>44</sup> The animal motif on the stone belongs to the "birds-eye-view" classification group, probably dating the stone to c. 1015–1050.<sup>45</sup> By the thirteenth century, Rauningi was known as Rönö, a hundred in Södermanland, and unless it represented a much greater area during the Viking Age it is a good indication of the micro-level at which personal identification could exist, especially when compared to the larger territorial concepts of Denmark and Sweden. Yet it also demonstrates that a larger Swedish consciousness existed in this instance alongside local loyalties, at least by the early eleventh century.

The location of this runestone may also have a bearing on the territorial identities used. It is found at Aspa bridge in Södermanland, next to a *thing* (assembly) site and along the *Eriksgrata*, the Swedish ceremonial route travelled by a new king to have his election confirmed by the local assemblies.<sup>46</sup> At this location, the Rauningi stone proclaims both the local district and the supra-regional name to the passing aristocracy.

The earlier of the two Danish stones is dated to the tenth-century Jelling period and reads **ian han uarþ taupr o suoſþiaupu** (*hann varð dauðr á Svíþjóðu*, he died in Sweden; DR 216 \$). The other is dated to c. 1050–1100.<sup>47</sup> Again this indicates that Sweden, or at least the kingdom of the Svear, was recognised at quite an early stage in Denmark.

An interesting Danish stone mentions "Swedes" in its commemoration of a man named Krókr. The database gives the style as RAK or unadorned, so the inscription could be quite early.<sup>48</sup> The inscription **sutrsuia (: ) au(k) (: ) suþr[tana** refers to *sundrsvía ok suðrdana* (Sunder-Swedes and South Danes; DR 217 \$), and "sundrsvía" may be more clearly translated into current English as "Swedes apart" from the Old Norse *sundr*. The term presumably refers to the part of present-day Sweden that was formerly ruled by Denmark, which echoes Svanberg's finding of a shared cultural identity.<sup>49</sup> What is surprising is that these people are referred to as Swedes at all, even as Swedes separate from the kingdom of the Svear, as both Ohthere and Wulfstan refer to the area as *Denemearc*, although they do not specifically name the inhabitants.<sup>50</sup> The stone was raised in present day Denmark and the person it commemorates, Krókr, was considered both a Sunder-Swede and South Dane, so it is unlikely to refer to another part of

<sup>44</sup> **urþu : ta...R : - (t)an...-(k)u : ua-u : rikiR : o rauniki : ak : snialastiR : i : suiþiuþu**, (*Urðu da[uði]r [i] Dan[mor]ku, vá[r]u ríkir á Rauningi ok snjallastir í Svíþjóðu*; Sö Fv 1948;289).

<sup>45</sup> Gräslund, "Rune Stones," p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> Alexandra Sanmark, "Thing Organisation and State Formation," *Medieval Archaeology*, forthcoming. I would like to thank Alexandra for allowing me to read this work before publication.

<sup>47</sup> *Sammordisk runtextdatabase*, DR 344.

<sup>48</sup> Gräslund, "Rune Stones," p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking Age 1*, p. 168.

<sup>50</sup> Batley, *Orosius*, p. 16.

Sweden, as the inscription ends with “He was the Sunder-Swedes end/yoke.”<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that by c. 950–1000 in Denmark, people could be identified as Danes and Swedes, whatever type of Swede that may have been. Indeed the concept of “Swedes” was evidently so advanced that differentiation was possible amongst the people that belonged to that group.

Krókr was also given a third level of identity as, like Ohthere, he is referred to as **af nurflimum som §D baistr** (*af norðrmonnum sem beztr*, the best of Northmen; DR 217 §). In this instance the word *norðrmonnum* appears to designate a pan-Scandinavian identity, especially as Krókr was also described as both Danish and Swedish. While the use of *Norðmen* in Ohthere’s account suggests that to him it meant Norwegians, or people from the very north of Scandinavia, it is difficult to imagine that Krókr was also a Norwegian. Therefore in this instance *norðrmonnum* appears to mean anyone from Scandinavia.

The Krókr inscription is the only runestone known to feature a “Northmen” term, and therefore one needs to caution against making grand statements about its significance. Nonetheless, the inscription is very important. Regardless of what cultural differences may be perceived throughout Viking Age Scandinavia, to Þyrvé who had the runestone inscribed, Scandinavia as a whole was apparently seen as the home of the Northmen, which strongly suggests a perceived shared cultural identity. This common identity seems partly to negate Svanberg’s rejection of “a Scandinavian Viking Age culture, a characteristic and specific culture in most parts of Scandinavia” and his deconstruction of the “systemized Viking Age.”<sup>52</sup>

“Denmark” or “Danes” are mentioned on eleven stones, more than either “Sweden” or “Norway,” and all but two of them are found within Denmark. This distribution perhaps suggests that there was a stronger sense of national identity within Denmark, possibly due to it being unified earlier. “Denmark” is named on eight stones,<sup>53</sup> while a “Dane” or “Danes” are mentioned on three.<sup>54</sup>

The two stones mentioning Denmark but erected elsewhere are both in present-day Sweden. Surprisingly they are not located in the area formerly controlled by Denmark. As well as the Rauningi stone from Södermanland already discussed, there is the Karlevi stone on the island of Öland commemorating Sibbi the Good, a chieftain who had ruled over land in Denmark:

(s-a... --(s)- i(a)s \* satr \* aiftir \* si(b)(a) \* kuþa \*... munat :  
 raip:uiþur : raþa : ruk:starkr \* i \* tanmarku : --ntils :  
 iarmun\*\*kruntar : urkrontari : lonti

<sup>51</sup> **han uas fl ... sutrsuia** : (-)uk \*, (*Hann var [þá](?) sundrsvía [l]ok(ok)*, *Samnordisk runtextdatabase*, DR 217 §).

<sup>52</sup> Svanberg, *Decolonizing The Viking Age 1*, p. 49. For a typical example of the type of approach that Svanberg rejects, see Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>53</sup> “Denmark”: ÖI 1 § (**tanmarku**: *Danmørku*), Sö Fv1948;289 ((**t)an...-(k)u**: *Dan[mør]ku*), U 699 (**t[an](m)(a)rku**: *Danmørku*), U 896 (**taï'ma...**, *Danmørku*), DR 41 (**tanmarkaR**, *Danmarkar*), DR 42 (**tanmaurk**, *Danmørk*), DR 133 (**tonflmarku**, *Danmørku*), N 239(**(t)on(m)arku**, *Danmørku*).

<sup>54</sup> “Dane/s”: DR 42 (**t(a)ni**, *dani*), DR 217 § (**suþr[tana**: *suðrdana*), DR M90 (**tanorum**, *danorum*).

*S[t]e[inn] [p]e[ss][i] er settr eptir Sibba Góða/Goða... munat Reið-Viðurr  
ráða rógstarkr í Danmørku [E]ndils jormungrundar ørgrandari landi*

[This stone is set up in memory of Sibbi Góði/Goði... Never will a more honest, hard-fighting ‘wagon-Viðurr’ upon Endill's expanses rule the land in Denmark.] (Öl 1 \$)

The stone is commonly dated to the late tenth century, but as the inscription is unadorned, it is possibly older than the Jelling runestones and would therefore be the earliest Scandinavian reference to Denmark other than Ohthere's account.<sup>55</sup> The wording is obscure due to the use of poetry, but it suggests that Sibbi ruled over a small part of Denmark, a situation which could fit a pre-Harold Bluetooth chronology. The earliest Danish reference to Denmark is considered to be the inscription on Gorm the Old's unadorned stone at Jelling, c. 935–40.<sup>56</sup>

As well as the “nation” inscriptions discussed above, there are other runic inscriptions which, like the Rauningi stone, only mention a locality within Scandinavia. Most of these inscriptions are actually on coins deposited in Lund c. 1065–75, with brief inscriptions like **ulki i lundi**, (*Ulfkell í Lundi*, Ulfkell in Lund; DR M123) They do not represent a personal place consciousness so much as possession of wealth. Although these are the only inscriptions to name Lund, several runestones mention other Scandinavian localities, including **klabi** (*Kleppi*, Klepp in Rogaland; N 225), various places in Uppland,<sup>57</sup> and **uiauari** (*viaværi*, Vê in Östergötland; ÖG 136 \$). Of these smaller localities, only Jutland, with two eleventh-century mentions, is named more than once, in obvious contrast to the more numerous references to the nation names.<sup>58</sup>

Like Ohthere's description of Scandinavia, the runic inscriptions suggest that although people did identify themselves by micro-level regional localities, they could also identify themselves as belonging to supra-regional entities like kingdoms, or even perhaps to Scandinavia as a whole. It is surely significant that from at least c. 950, across all three present-day nations, people began to label themselves with the name of the kingdom in which they lived.

Svanberg maintains that we need to “move away from the dominance of the written sources” in order to reach “an understanding of what people actually did and how they “identified themselves.”<sup>59</sup> Although he is undoubtedly right about the importance of the archaeological record, it is foolhardy to disregard the historical record in dealing

<sup>55</sup> Gräslund, “Rune Stones,” argues that unadorned rune stones are earlier than adorned ones. Although Danish rune stones are not part of Gräslund's study and therefore her specific suggested dates may not be accurate, it is probable that the chronological sequence of styles would still apply. See for example Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), p. 1. ff.

<sup>56</sup>  $\text{ᚱA} : \text{kurmR} : \text{kunukR} : \text{ᚠ} : \text{k(a)(r)ᚢi} : \text{kubl} : \text{ᚢusi} : \text{ᚠ} : \text{a(f)(t)} : \text{ᚢurui} : \text{kunu} \text{ᚱB} \div \text{sina} \div \text{tanmarkaR} \div \text{but} \div$  (*Gormr konungr gerði kuml þessi ept Þyrvé, konu sína, Danmarkar bót*, King Gormr made this monument in memory of Þyrvé, his wife, Denmark's salvation; DR 41.) See also “Denmark” in Bately, “Translation Notes,” in *Ohthere's Voyages*, p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> For example **ulfr** \* **iuk i barstam** \* **iftiR** \* **ulf** \* **i skulobri** (*Ulfr hjó í Bárstaðum eptir Ulf í Skolhamri*, Ulfr of Bárstaðir cut [the stone] in memory of Ulf in Skolhamarr; U 16). However note that Uppland itself is not named.

<sup>58</sup> **iutska** (*Júzki*; DR M25) ; **iut(l)ati** (*Jútlandi*; U 539).

<sup>59</sup> Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking Age 1*, p. 199.

with the question of identity. When Ohthere identifies himself as “Norðmonna norþmest bude” (dwelling the furthest north of all the Northmen; *Or* 13), he clearly regards himself as a Northman. When the individual or group erected the runestone saying “(they) died in Denmark, were powerful in Rauningi and the ablest in Sweden,” they were clearly aware of a place called Denmark, and considered that those being commemorated were part of both the region of Rauningi and the kingdom of Sweden.<sup>60</sup>

At least some people living in Viking Age Scandinavia, whilst no doubt identifying themselves with their home region, also conceived of themselves as belonging to a larger supra-regional entity, one which was geographically based rather than a united political entity. The Scandinavian runic inscriptions and Ohthere’s account of his journey demonstrate that at least some Scandinavians during the Viking Age identified themselves as being from Denmark, Sweden or Norway. Whether this correlates to the usage of these terms used in Francia and England, or their use of “Dane,” “Northmen,” and “Swede” remains unclear. However it is clear that not only did outsiders use the “national” labels for people’s origins during the Viking Age, some Scandinavians did likewise.

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<sup>60</sup> *Samnordisk runtextdatabase*, Sö Fv 1948; 289.

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