

Commercial Travel and Hospitality in the Kings' Sagas

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The works written about trade in Scandinavia in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages cover almost everything one can think of: merchandise, merchants, trade routes, vessels, emporia etc. However, quantitative methods are difficult to apply in this field of study due to lack of sources.¹ This does not mean that trade cannot be studied at all; laws and sagas written down before the end of the thirteenth century reveal details about trade. The problem is how to pose questions in order to get answers. Trade can be studied, for example, as a social contact between people. Communicative situations between locals and foreign merchants are particularly interesting, from a number of perspectives: the manner in which the trade itself was conducted, how foreigners were received, hospitality as part of trade, which laws or regulations concerned trade.

When it comes to the contemporary sources, the Kings' sagas in general say very little about these matters, which is due to the nature of the sagas: they depict first and foremost the internal feuds in Norway and lives of the Norwegian kings. There are, however, very few other sources to be used. Despite the sporadic nature of the accounts concerning trade and hospitality in the Kings' sagas, the following information can be found: the foreign merchants mentioned in the sources are usually Germans, Englishmen or Danes, which is probably representative of trade relations at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and maybe earlier. Both foreign merchants in Norway and Norwegian merchants abroad sometimes had conflicts with the locals, the reasons for which vary. The tradition of hospitality, continuous since the Viking Age, was part of the trading business. The merchants bought their status and personal integrity in a foreign country by giving gifts (later taxes) to the ruler. We have no direct examples of this in the sagas but giving precious gifts is described as a part of hospitality and the strengthening of friendship. As such, trade relations depicted in the Kings' sagas can provide information about the kinds of contacts Icelanders and Norwegians had with foreigners, and their

¹ Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130 – 1319*, Universitetsforlaget: Kristiansand 1991 [1974], 162.

encounters with the otherness of these foreigners.

The Kings' sagas can be defined in slightly different ways, depending on the perspective. The narrow definition would comprise only four major compendia² written between 1190 or 1200 and 1230 or 1235. Roughly speaking, the first one, **Hryggjarstykki* – now lost – was written c. 1150, and the last Kings' saga, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, c. 1265. Some of the sagas cover the period from the half-mythical kings of the end of the ninth century all the way to the end of the twelfth century. The Kings' sagas cannot be considered to be genuine sources for the Viking Age; they should instead be seen in the context of the time in which they were written down. For this article I have chosen the following Kings' sagas as sources: *Sverris saga* (c. 1200-1207), *Morkinskinna* (c. 1217-20), *Fagrskinna* (c. 1217-1225, written after *Morkinskinna*), *Heimskringla* (c. 1230-35) and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (c. 1265). The reason for these choices is that they all were written in the first half of the thirteenth century, except for *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, which is slightly more recent. This provides an opportunity to look at the information about trading contacts as a reflection of the situation in the first half of the thirteenth century. Sources such as *Ágrip af Noregs konungasögum* (c. 1190/1200) and *Böglunga sögur* (c. 1202-1217) and the law code for the King's retainers *Hirðskrá* are also contemporaneous, but have been left out as they do not contain information about trading contacts.³ This is due to the nature of these sources: *Ágrip* is very short and concentrates on the kings' lives; *Böglunga sögur* concentrates on the period of civil war in Norway at the beginning of the thirteenth century; and *Hirðskrá* does not include references to merchants. *Konungsskuggsjá*⁴, also known as *Speculum Regale*, is instead used as a source regarding trading. It was written in the mid-thirteenth century and is thus contemporary with the King's sagas.

This article is divided in two main sections. The first one deals with depictions of trade and merchants in the sources. We will look at the contacts described in the sources between foreign merchants and locals which involve trading: how are these contacts depicted? Were they positive

² *Ágrip af Noregs konungasögum*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*.

³ *Ágrip* once mentions the *landauri* which Icelanders had to pay to the Norwegian king. *Ágrip af Noregs konungasögum*, Bjarni Einarsson gaf út, (Íslenzk fornrit 29), Hið íslenska fornritafélag: Reykjavík 1985, 29.

⁴ This was probably written for the education of the prince or princes. It contains a dialogue between a father and his son. The son asks questions concerning for example foreign lands, the king's court and behavior. *Konungsskuggsjá. Speculum regale*, Magnús Már Lárusson brjó til prentunar, H.F. Leiftur: Reykjavík 1950; Anne Holtsmark, "Kongespeillitteratur", in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid* 9, København 1981, 61-68.

or negative? The purpose is to consider how these passages reflect the situation at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The article's second section deals with hospitality as a part of trading communications. When studying the background of trade in the early Middle Ages it becomes apparent that hospitality was an inevitable part of it. Hospitality as a phenomenon did not mean simply being friendly to strangers; rather, it could be described as an institution the purpose of which was to secure the outsider's status in the society in question. Merchants had to rely on the hospitality of the local ruler and people in order to get protection. All in all, the code of hospitality made the communication between strangers and locals easier. For a foreign merchant, it was an opportunity to secure his position and it guaranteed that he could carry on his business in peace.

Trade and travel

Travel was an essential part of trade. In fact, travel always had a purpose in the Middle Ages – whether it was trade, pilgrimage, war, missionaries, or kings moving from one castle or manor to another.⁵ Travel was toilsome because of poor roads, or lack of them, and travelling by ship was dangerous not least because of pirates. One could not be certain that other people would always be friendly and show hospitality, upon which one was dependent as there was not always a guesthouse available. On the other hand, travelers were welcome because they brought news; in the Icelandic sagas especially, travelling is associated with news. This demonstrates the communicative character of travel.⁶

Konungsskuggsjá gives advice as to how a merchant should behave when abroad. It emphasizes that he should behave well, generally speaking, and that he should preferably speak such languages as Latin or *völsku* (referring here to French). Perhaps it was not necessary to mention German, as Norwegians could, at least to some extent, understand the language of the Hanseatic merchants who came from the northern parts of Germany. It was also useful for a merchant to know the law which applied in trading, the so-

⁵ Margaret Wade Labarge insists, however, that in the late Middle Ages the upper classes began to travel as a mere leisure activity. Margaret Wade Labarge, *Medieval Travellers. The Rich and Restless*, Hamilton: Phoenix, AZ – London 2005, 249: "Many of these fifteenth-century travellers actively enjoyed their journeys and admitted to a heightened curiosity and fascination with the strange and the unfamiliar..."

⁶ Kristel Zilmer, 'Representations of Intercultural Communication in the Sagas of Icelanders', in Simek, R. & Meurer, J. (eds.), *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July – 2nd August 2003*, Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn: Bonn 2003, 549–556, here 551.

called *Bjarkeyar rétt*.⁷ Apparently this law or code applied more or less in most of the Scandinavian emporia. We have no knowledge of how the code came to be, but the essential content seems to have been the guarantee of personal integrity to all free men in the town. In reality there were, of course, differences between ranks. The *Bjarkeyar rétt* defined the highest rank as 'husfaste menn' which in the later law code was defined to be free men who had owned at least one quarter of a house ('bygård') during the previous half-year.⁸

Trade is most commonly mentioned in the sagas when a merchant had some kind of role in the story, for example in *Morkinskinna*, when Norwegian brothers Karli and Björn make a trading voyage to *Austrríki* (meaning the realm of 'Rus', in most of the saga sources referred as *Garðaríki*), where they are captured because of hostility between King Yaroslav and King Sveinn Álfífuson of Norway.⁹ In *Heimskringla*, Loðinn, a Norwegian, travels to *Eistland* in order to trade there. However, he finds King Óláfr Tryggvason's mother there in the slave market and buys her free.¹⁰ Another merchant, Guðleikr garðski, often travels to the east, and has been given his nickname because of his travels to *Garðaríki*. There he bought luxury items for King Óláfr Haraldsson. While on his way back to Norway from *Hólmgarðr* (Novgorod) a group of Swedes kill him and steal his cargo.¹¹ We are told that Norwegian merchants travelled to Denmark, England and to *Valland* (France).¹²

The Danish King Knut granted the Norwegian merchants permission to trade wherever they wished in his realm; this was his thanks for the help of Norwegians in his military expedition in England.¹³ As the examples show, being a merchant was a risky business, so merchants often travelled together or even formed a loose partnership (Icel. *félag*). The Norwegian Þórir hundr travelled with his companions on a trading voyage to *Bjarmaland*.¹⁴ This trading voyage turned out to be a plundering expedition:

⁷ *Konungs skuggsjá*, 7 – 9.

⁸ The later law code for Norwegian towns was called *Byloven* (1276). Helle 1991, 144 and 176.

⁹ *Morkinskinna*, Utg. For Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur ved Finnur Jónsson, København 1932, 5 -7.

¹⁰ *Heimskringla I*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson gaf út, (Íslenzk fornrit 26) Hið íslenzka fornritafélag: Reykjavík 1979, 301-302.

¹¹ *Heimskringla II*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson gaf út, (Íslenzk fornrit 27) Hið íslenzka fornritafélag: Reykjavík 1979, 83-85.

¹² *Fagrskinna*, Bjarni Einarsson gaf út (Íslenzk fornrit 29) Hið íslenzka fornritafélag: Reykjavík 1985, ch. 115; *Heimskringla I*, 320; *Heimskringla III*, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson gaf út, (Íslenzk fornrit 28) Hið íslenzka fornritafélag: Reykjavík 1979, 83 and 292.

¹³ *Morkinskinna*, 239.

¹⁴ *Heimskringla II*, 227 – 234.

after the actual trading had ended, Þórir and his companion came back in the night and plundered the treasures of the Bjarmian graveyard. If a trading place was weakly defended, it made a tempting target for plunderers. In fact, it was a thin line that divided trade voyages or expeditions from military expedition prior to the seventeenth century.¹⁵

In Norway, Bergen was the centre of foreign trade in the thirteenth century; it was founded at the end of the eleventh century by King Óláfr kyrri¹⁶. This information given by the sagas can be considered quite reliable. *Heimskringla* states that wealthy men lived in Bergen; the merchants from *Saxland* in particular are mentioned.¹⁷ Tönsberg and the area of Viken (Oslo) are also mentioned as important places of trade¹⁸, and are also mentioned as important towns by other twelfth century sources¹⁹. Merchants are seldom mentioned in the sagas, but those that are either Germans²⁰ or Englishmen, and in a few cases Danes.²¹

We have no firm evidence as to which countries were Norway's most important trading partners before the second half of the thirteenth century, but it seems probable that the sagas – which usually mention Germans and Englishmen as foreign merchants – accurately reflect the situation. By the year 1300, Norway had trade relations with the most important emporia in the North and Baltic Seas.²² In *Heimskringla* there is a passage which mentions that there was peace between peasants and merchants, and so neither damaged the other nor the other's property.²³ The merchants mentioned in this passage are not necessarily foreigners, but I am inclined to think that each of these groups represented some form of otherness for the other. Although they were people from the same area, they had different sources of livelihood.

The fact that foreign merchants were under the protection of the local leader or king did not rule out skirmishes with the locals. For example, in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* the Norwegian merchants, who travelled to

¹⁵ Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller*, Boydell Press: Woodbridge 1996 [original in German 1986], 64.

¹⁶ *Morkinskinna*, 289; *Fagrskinna*, 299-300; *Heimskringla III*, 204-205.

¹⁷ *Heimskringla I*, 140; *Heimskringla II*, 83.

¹⁸ *Heimskringla I*, 140; *Heimskringla II*, 83.

¹⁹ Helle 1991, 164.

²⁰ They are called *Suðurmenn*, *þýðverskir menn* or even *Lybikumenn* in one saga. *Konunga sögur*, *.Sagaer om Sverre og hans efterfølgere*, [Eirspennill] udgivne af C.R. Unger, A.W. Brøgger: Christiania 1873, 350 and 408.

²¹ *Morkinskinna* 6; *Heimskringla I*, 140; *Heimskringla II*, 83.

²² Helle 1991, 170-172.

²³ *Heimskringla I*, 163.

Bjarmaland, ended up fighting the Bjarmians²⁴; in another episode, the German merchants in Bergen had conflicts with the locals.²⁵ In *Sverris saga* the German merchants sell cheap wine, which causes unrest in Bergen; King Sverrir is fed up with this, and no longer welcomes the German merchants, but rather hopes that they will leave the town.²⁶ He does not, however, despise merchants from other countries, praising those from England and from the islands west of Norway.²⁷

The line between trade and tribute may also have been an obscure one, as is shown by the example of the contact between the Norwegians and their neighbours, the Sámi people (*Finnar*). One of the means used by the Norwegian king to control the northern parts of Norway (mainly Hálogaland and the areas to its north) was to give some magnates the right to collect tribute from the Sámi people, or the right to trade with them (*finnkaup*). Thomas Wallerström has pointed out that the Norwegian Óttarr, for example – whose account is found in King Alfred's *Orosius* – may have considered the tribute that he collected from the Sámi compensation for the transportation and selling of the goods.²⁸ *Finnkaup*, *finnfavr*, *finnferð* and *finnscatt* are all mentioned in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*.²⁹ Apparently these words were often considered synonyms, referring to the Norwegian trade and tribute system with the *Finnar*, which reveals how intimately intertwined two concepts now considered separate – business and taxation – were.

The fact that the Norwegians, as well as the Swedes and Finns, exploited the Sámi people in the Middle Ages has also been given a new perspective. Lars-Ivar Hansen has suggested that the Sámi people seem to have had a special status in the exploitation of resources. The reciprocal exchange of goods and products was mutually profitable because both partners benefited from the transfer of surplus production, and received in exchange sought-after 'use-values' produced by the other: the Norwegian magnates got their furs, and the Sámi people got for example agricultural products or money. Products which were exchanged or bought may also

²⁴ *Konunga sögur*, 284–285.

²⁵ *Konunga sögur*, 350.

²⁶ *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4º*, Gustav Indrebø, Emil Moestue A/S Boktrykkeri: Kristiania 1920, 109.

²⁷ *Sverris saga*, 110.

²⁸ Thomas Wallerström, *Norrboten, Sverige och medeltiden. Problem kring makt och bosättning i en europeisk periferi 1* (Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 15:1), Lund 1995, 187 and 210.

²⁹ *Morkinskinna* 241, 254–255, 367–368; *Heimskringla II*, 175 and 306.

have had social functions within the group³⁰; in other words, the Sámi people were not necessarily the target of exploitation, but were rather business partners. The fact remains, however, that the Sámi people do not act as equal partners in the Kings' sagas, which seems to reflect the situation in Norway in the thirteenth century. Hansen himself has pointed out that the status of the Sámi began to deteriorate after the beginning of the consolidation of the monarchy and the Church in Norway, whereas the reciprocal exchange of goods belonged to the Viking Age and early Middle Ages.³¹

All in all, the element of danger was as much a part of trade in the Viking Age as in the Middle Ages. Travel – usually by ship – was made dangerous by pirates, and there was no guarantee of welcome for a foreign merchant. The merchants, after all, could turn out to be plunderers who would take advantage of a weakly-defended emporium. By the High Middle Ages there seems to have been a law (*Bjarkeyar rétt*)³² in the Scandinavian emporia guaranteeing the safety of free men in the towns; still, this was not a waterproof guarantee of integrity, and it was possible for the merchant to end up in conflict with the locals.

Hospitality

Let us now look at hospitality as a phenomenon belonging to trade and travel. Leopold Hellmuth has come to the conclusion that hospitality was born out of a paradox: people were afraid of the Other, the stranger, and yet the encounter was necessary. When a lone stranger was encountered, one could not know whether he was carrying with him secret (and thus supernatural) powers, or was just a harmless passerby – a merchant for example. One might remember, for example, that in Old Norse mythology one of Odin's characters was a wandering stranger, among whose many names were *Gestr* and *Gestumblindi*. According to the sagas, in the Christian times this heathen god could still expose himself to the people.³³ Odin was

³⁰ Lars-Ivar Hansen, *Samisk fangstsamfunn og norsk høvdingeøkonomi*, Novus Forlag: Oslo 1990, 129; Lars-Ivar Hansen, 'Interaction between Northern European sub-arctic Societies during the Middle Ages. Indigenous peoples, peasants and state builders', in M. Rindal (ed.): *Two Studies on the Middle Ages*, (KULTs skriftserie No. 66, The Research Council of Norway: Oslo 1996, 32.

³¹ Hansen 1990, 179, 270 – 272.

³² Elias Wessén, 'Bjarköarätt', in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid* 1, København 1980, 655–658.

³³ *Heimskringla I*, 312–314. Hellmuth calls this kind of topos "Theoxeniesaga", in which the god Odin visits the people (usually Norwegian kings) and in the end his identity is revealed. Leopold Hellmuth, *Gastfreundschaft und Gastrecht bei den Germanen* (Sitzungsberichte der Österreichische Akademie der

by no means a god of hospitality, as were Zeus and Jupiter in the Greek and Roman cultures.³⁴ When he exposes himself in the sagas as a wandering stranger he seems to symbolize the underlying heathenism which was disappearing in the Middle Ages. One could not know beforehand whether a stranger was a threat; wanderers might also be outlaws who had been evicted from their own societies.³⁵ The stranger or visitor could also not be certain of the place from which he sought hospitality; he could not know beforehand what kind of household he was entering into when he asked for shelter, as stated in the Eddic poem *Hávamál*.³⁶ Hellmuth points out that this ambivalent attitude towards strangers is also apparent if the etymology of the German word 'Gast' is examined. The original meaning of this word was 'a stranger' ('Fremder'), but it came gradually to mean 'enemy' ('Feind').³⁷ If Hellmuth's theory is correct, hospitality was born as a reaction to an unpredictable situation. It was safer to greet the stranger in a friendly way than to show him hostility, because the stranger might use his powers to harm his host ('Gastgeber') if he were not satisfied with the welcome.³⁸ In principle, Christians were obliged, as directed in the Bible, to show hospitality and follow the example of the Samaritans.³⁹

A guest, *gestr*⁴⁰, was usually a man who stayed at the house of another man to whom he was not related, and the guest enjoyed hospitality. The Old Norse concept of hospitality (*frið*) can be seen as a part of Germanic

Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 440), Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Wien 1984, 338.

³⁴ Hellmuth 1984, 351.

³⁵ In Iceland, for example, there were two kinds of outlawry, so-called lesser outlawry (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) and full outlawry (*skóggangr*). Lesser outlaws were banished from Iceland for three years, but they enjoyed normal immunity while abroad. Full outlawry meant that a man was cast out of society. He forfeited his property and all rights. Nobody was allowed to give any assistance to an outlaw and he could be killed without consequences. *Laws of Early Iceland. Grágás*. translated by Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote & Richard Perkins. University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg Canada 1980, 246 and 250; Magnús Már Lárusson, 'Fredløshed (Island)', in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid* 4, København 1981, 603-608.

³⁶ *Hávamál*, ed. by David A.H. Evans (Viking Society for Northern Research 7), University College: London 2000 [1986], 39. The first seventy-nine stanzas of *Hávamál* consist of counsels to guests. The Eddic Poem *Hávamál* can give us a glimpse of how hospitality was appreciated in Old Norse society. The poem has been translated as "Wisdom of the Vikings" because it is believed that the poem dates back to the ninth century, even if the surviving manuscript is from the end of the thirteenth century.

³⁷ Hellmuth 1984, 19-22.

³⁸ Hellmuth 1984, 24.

³⁹ Norbert Ohler, "Reisen", *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 7, 673-674.

⁴⁰ One of the ranks in the king's *hirð* (retainers) was also called *gestir*. These were men who did not belong to the top rank of retainers, but whose duty was to help the king's local administrators, gradually also getting similar duties. The name *gestir* had the original meaning 'guest', because on their errands the *gestir* had the right to stay at people's homes – even if they were not always welcomed guests. On *gestir* in *hirð*, see Imsen Steinar, *Hirdskráen. Hirdloven til Norges konge og hans håndgangne menn*, Etter AM 322 fol., Riksarkivet: Oslo 2000, 154-158; *Konungs skuggsjá*, 80.

hospitality, *Gastfreundschaft*. As the Old Norse word *frið* reveals, hospitality did not originally mean giving food and shelter; it meant that the stranger was given a guarantee of his physical integrity. It was considered condemnable to harm – or, even worse, to kill – the guest. The host's duty was to stand between his own social group and his guest, and offer his protection to the guest.⁴¹ Of course food, drink and shelter were important to the traveler, and were part of the hospitality, but the most important thing was to have protection.

In the Kings' Sagas hospitality is usually shown between people who already know each other; as a result they do not provide very good examples of how hospitality was shown to total strangers. As the sagas concentrate on the kings and the upper class, we do not get a many-sided picture of how hospitality was shown by the lower classes. It is notable that hospitality concerned only the free men; also, it was preferable that the host and the guest be of the same social rank.⁴² A guest was supposed to give a gift to his host when departing, to compensate for all the food and drink he had received, and also as a token of friendship.⁴³ The exchange of gifts was a rite which was a part of hospitality as well as of trade. There was an unwritten rule that a gift should be compensated; however, seeming exceptions include situations in which the gift was compensation for food and shelter to the host. On the subject of gift-giving, *Hávamál* states that if a gift is offered it should be accepted, and that friends should exchange gifts, as it strengthens their friendship.⁴⁴ If people were of equal status they should compensate the gift the other party had given. Leaving a gift uncompensated meant that the recipient was considered to be dependent on or submissive to the giver.⁴⁵ If a king gave a gift it was of course an honour. The compensation to the king would be loyalty. The exchange of gifts was not just a rite; giving precious gifts was one way of demonstrating one's power. As the sagas tell us, men of the upper class gave valuable gifts such as rings or swords to their guests or allies. Not only prestige items were given: a king could for example donate lead to the cloister roof and get in

⁴¹ Hellmuth 1984, 135–136.

⁴² Hellmuth 1984, 229.

⁴³ Olav Bø, 'Gjestevenskap', *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid* 5, København 1981, 338–341.

⁴⁴ *Hávamál* (stanzas 39, 41 and 42), 47.

⁴⁵ Ingrid Gustin, *Mellan gåva och marknad. Handel, tillit och materiell kultur under vikingatid* (Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 34), Malmö 2004, 105; Thomas Lindkvist, 'Early political organisation, (a) Introductory survey' in Knut Helle ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia I. Prehistory to 1520*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2003, 160–167, here 163.

return prayers for himself.⁴⁶ Giving and exchanging gifts was a part not only of hospitality, but of social life in general.

The merchant did not automatically have status – and thus the protection of the law – in the society into which he came, so it was necessary to confirm his status in some manner; otherwise he would have no status at all, which basically meant that anyone could rob or even murder him without any consequences. The merchant would thus seek the protection (originally hospitality) of the local ruler. When a ruler gave status to a foreign merchant, he became the merchant's ruler. The merchant compensated for this privilege by paying taxes or by giving gifts to the ruler. Originally, payments called 'tolls' were not payments for merchandise, but for personal integrity. The oldest payments in the North were called *forban* or *farban*, which required that merchants pay a certain sum to the local ruler in order to be free to leave the emporium.⁴⁷ For example, Icelanders had to pay a tax called *landauri* to the Norwegian king; Norwegians were exempt from this tax when they travelled to Iceland.⁴⁸

Icelandic merchants had a special status compared to other foreign merchants in Norway; Icelanders (or at least most of them) were, after all, originally Norwegian, but they did not officially acknowledge the authority and overlordship of the Norwegian king until 1262-64. As Else Mundal states, Icelanders nearly had dual citizenship, as they had the status of *hauldr* when staying in Norway, which was that country's highest rank of the free peasants.⁴⁹ Niels Lund has suggested that, in Anglo-Saxon England for example, a foreigner may have had a status parallel to that of aristocrat, insofar as we can believe the Anglo-Saxon laws.⁵⁰ Later in the Middle Ages it was sometimes possible for an individual to be treated according to the law which applied in his or her homeland, town, or ethnic group, even when he or she was staying abroad.⁵¹

Local rulers tried to secure status for foreign merchants in their area, because merchants brought money and desirable items with them. As Jukka

⁴⁶ Gustin 2004, 155.

⁴⁷ Poul Enemark, 'Handelsafgifter (Danmark)', in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid* 6, København 1981, 119-123.

⁴⁸ *Ágrip*, 29.

⁴⁹ Else Mundal, 'Dei norske røtene, forholdet til Noreg og den islandske identiteten', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience. 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim 3.-9. August 1997, Preprints*. Senter for Middelalderstudier, Trondheim 1997, 479-488, here 485.

⁵⁰ Niels Lund, 'Peace and Non-Peace in the Viking Age – Ottar in Biarmaland, the Rus in Byzantium, and Danes and Norwegians in England', in Knirk, James ed., *Proceedings of the Tenth Viking Congress*, (Universitets Oldsaksamlings Skrifter, Ny rekke 9) Oslo 1987, 260.

⁵¹ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ 1993, 204.

Korpela has pointed out, in order to get merchants to the emporium, peace was needed:

The concept of *peace* meant, first of all, a trade agreement or treaty that guaranteed peaceful and well-regulated commerce. The opposite of a peace (*Frieden*) was not war, but non-peace (*Unfrieden*). Thus the various negotiations about peace and references to such negotiations in the documents do not imply military conflicts but intensive commercial relations which had a judicial base that had to be renewed from time to time.⁵²

Thus, hospitality was an essential part of trade contacts. Gifts and reciprocal presents were a part of this transitional rite in which the merchant was "adopted" by the local society, which shows how closely the concepts of trade and hospitality were intertwined. Little by little, hospitality developed into *Gastrecht*, a right that allowed the merchant to stay and trade freely in the emporium. In the Baltic Sea area, emporia such as Birka and Hedeby were considered juridical havens for foreigners which were guaranteed by the local ruler.⁵³

The protection of merchants was called *kaupfriðr*. The word *kaupfriðr* is only mentioned once in the Kings' sagas: in *Morkinskinna*, when there were hostilities between Norwegian King Sveinn Álfífúson and King Yaroslav of *Austríki*, as a result of which the rulers did not guarantee the safety, or *kaupfriðr*, of the other country's merchants. In a passage previously mentioned in this article, two Norwegian merchants, Karli and Björn, arrive in *Austríki*, where the locals are hostile towards them. The locals are then blamed by the Norwegians for not respecting *kaupfriðr*.⁵⁴ If merchants felt that they were unprotected in a certain area, they may have avoided going there; for example the Norwegian Óttarr relates in King Alfred's *Orosius* that he did not dare to go to the land of the Bjarmians because he did not enjoy the benefits of *frið* there.⁵⁵ A war between two countries could severely

⁵² Jukka Korpela, 'Beyond the Borders in the European North-East', in O. Merisalo (ed.) with the collaboration of P. Pahta, *Frontiers in the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the Third European Congress of Medieval Studies, Jyväskylä 10-14 June 2003* (Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales. Textes et Études du Moyen Âge, 35) Louvain-La-Neuve 2006, 373-384, here 377.

⁵³ Gustin 2004, 179-180.

⁵⁴ *Morkinskinna* 5-6: "Nv er vfríþr milli Sveins Alfifos. oc Iarizleifs konvngs. þvi at Iarizleifr konvngv virði sem var at Noregsmenn hóþo nize a enom helga Olafi konvngi. oc var þar noccora stvnd eigi caupfriþr i milli." Emphasis by the present author.

⁵⁵ Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, Penguin Books: Printed in England 1998 [1987], 118; Alan S.C. Ross, *The Terfinnas and Beormas of Ohthere* (Leeds School of English language, Texts and Monographs 7), Leeds

hinder trade; in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* for example, when the Danes were at war with the Hanseatic town of Lübeck, this war prevented German merchants from trading with Norwegians because the ships could not pass by the Danes in the Sound.⁵⁶ The Kings' sagas do not reveal how trade was actually conducted, nor the kinds of rites involved. In the Viking Age, *kaupfriðr* was given if the merchant arrived peacefully and raised a white shield; if the merchant was approaching by ship, the shield would be raised on the mast. If the request for *kaupfriðr* was accepted, it lasted until the exchange was over.⁵⁷ The merchant and his customer had a social relationship: it was decided beforehand who was trading with whom. The economic side of the trade played a minor role, and it was not appropriate to haggle over the price during the transaction.⁵⁸

To conclude, a stranger was always a possible threat in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages, and yet the encounter was necessary. As Hellmuth has pointed out, hospitality was born out of this paradox. According to the rule of reciprocity the stranger, who was in need of protection and shelter, would compensate by giving gifts to the host. Further, foreign merchants had to rely on the hospitality of the locals before there were laws giving them status, and they tried to secure their status by buying their personal integrity (through for example gifts and tolls).

Conclusion

Trade and hospitality were inseparable in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages because foreign merchants were strangers, 'Others', in the societies in which they arrived. Communicative situations related to the commercial activities can therefore be seen in the broader framework of encountering otherness. As this article has shown, the material may not be overwhelming, but it can give an idea as to how this otherness of the foreign merchants was perceived in Norway at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Perhaps the element of hospitality as a part of trade could be further studied in other sources, such as the Family sagas. This would provide deeper insight into hospitality as a part of trade in Icelandic and Norwegian society in the thirteenth century.

1940, 18. There is also another explanation: Óttarr was perhaps not afraid of the Bjarmians but simply did not have a contract with them, so that he could have traded in their area. Lund 1987, 255.

⁵⁶ *Konunga sögur*, 408–409.

⁵⁷ Gustin 2004, 220–221.

⁵⁸ Gustin 2004, 176.

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