

CHAPTER 8

GREENLAND AND THE EUROPEAN CHURCH

8.1 GREENLAND AND CANON LAW

8.1.1 The problem:

What was the relationship between Norse Greenland and the Roman Catholic Church?

It was argued in Chapter 6 that the Greenland settlers may have been Christians from a very early stage, and that their Christian faith may have contained Celtic Christian elements. Under any circumstances, their church organization must have held archaic elements compared to that of Norway after 1170.

When the Greenlanders received their first resident bishop in 1125 they fell under the authority of the Province of Lund, and from 1152/53 under that of Nidaros. The appointment of a resident bishop represented a formal attachment to the Roman Catholic Church.

In principle, this implied that certain new rules and regulations were introduced, in Greenland as anywhere else. These regulations no doubt differed from the previous religious and juridical concepts held by the Greenlanders, but to what extent the new rules actually penetrated in Greenland is unknown.

However, even the Roman Catholic Church in Scandinavia was subject to changes.

Throughout the Middle Ages the church gained increasing influence through a series of church reforms. By the 14th century it had reached a high level of influence, in economic and juridical matters as well as in matters of belief.

It is important in this connection to bear in mind that the Norwegian society underwent equally profound changes during this period.

One fundamental change was the transition from Germanic Law to the principles of Roman Law, as advocated by the church through the introduction of Canon Law. The acceptance of the juridical principles in Canon Law demanded changes in some of the basic concepts traditionally held by the society.

This was a slow process, which went slower in Iceland, the Faroes, and probably Greenland, than in Norway proper.

To what extent these new developments reached Norse Greenland has surprisingly been subject to little discussion, although there are some interesting sources to throw light upon the subject.

Most of the written sources on Norse Greenland are in some way connected with church matters. It should be obvious that a serious discussion of this material cannot be made without assessing the historical background of the sources.

In this chapter I will focus on certain laws and regulations passed by the Roman Catholic Church, and their possible impact in Greenland.

I will then discuss the possibilities of an attempted church reform in Greenland.

Finally some sources concerning payments to the Norwegian Church will be treated.

As previously argued (Sections 1.1.1 and 2.8), there has been a tendency to exaggerate Greenland's isolation in order to convey the uniqueness of its situation. This tendency was the result of the Danish - Norwegian conflict over Greenland in the 19th and 20th centuries (Section 2.8 above).

In the same token, the building of stone churches in Greenland, and the fact that the church architecture closely followed the stylistic changes taking place in Norway, has been used to emphasize the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

These statements are, to some extent, contradictory, and suggest that the relationship between Norse Greenland and the European church needs further scrutiny.

In the following, I will try to view the church history of Greenland in light of what happened in Norway and Iceland.

8.1.2 An example of early rules and regulations:

A document that has received little attention in the discussion of Norse Greenland may serve as an illustration of changes brought about by the Greenlanders' attachment to the Roman Catholic Church.

(This section is narrated and translated from Nordland 53a, see also Ingstad 59:334, Gunnes 70, Skånland 62, 69):

In the 1930ies, the German Walther Holtzmann found some unknown papal documents in England. They contained the so-called "Canones Nidrosiensis", and among them was a letter from Pope Alexander III to the Archbishop of Nidaros. The dating is uncertain, but Holtzmann assumed that it belongs to the period 1164 - 1181.

The letter refers to an island that lies in a distance of 12 days' travel from Norway. It states that the people of this island are so closely related that they have difficulties finding marital partners, and it is too far away from other (Christian) countries to fetch partners there.

According to Canon Law, marriage could not take place between relatives closer than the 7th kin. It appears that an application was made to allow marriage with the 4th kin. This was not permitted, but exemptions could be given for marriage down to the 5th kin.

This seems, by the way, to have been practiced in Iceland

(Hastrup 85:77-79).

Nordland argues that the island in question may have been Greenland, and rejects a number of previously suggested locations of the island. It appears from other documents that the concept of Greenland as an island prevailed in the Curia (Adam of Bremen, see also Section 2.2.1). Nordland's suggestion that the island was Greenland has later been confirmed by new findings (Skånland 62:136).

Obviously, it must have been difficult to obey this paragraph in a community as small and isolated as Norse Greenland, especially as "spiritual relatives", such as godparents, were also regarded as true kin (Nordland op. cit.:97).

If followed, this rule alone may have encouraged a certain demographic interaction between Greenland and Iceland (see Section 5.2.6).

Nordland also points to the fact that Pope Gregory the 7th had allowed the Anglians to marry with 4th kin, a permission which was later withdrawn (Nordland 53a:97).

The enforcement of these and similar rules had, of course, also an economic angle. Breaking the rules meant paying fines to the church, and applying for exemptions was a costly affair (Nordland op. cit.:98).

The example discussed here may illustrate the rules and regulations enforced by the Roman Catholic Church, and their economic implications.

During the Middle Ages, the number of regulations increased, and were often met with opposition. That certain rules, such as the one mentioned above were difficult to uphold in a small community like Greenland is obvious.

8.2 CHURCH REFORM IN GREENLAND?

8.2.1 The problem:

Knud J. Krogh raises the question whether Greenland had a proprietary church system similar to that of Iceland. He also emphasizes that a system of this kind could not, in the long run, be accepted by the Roman Catholic Church (Krogh 82a:135-136).

During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Norwegian Church was engaged in a long struggle to introduce Canon Law, i.e. to free the church from secular administration and control. One of the main goals in this struggle was to put an end to the proprietary church system in Iceland and, as suggested below, probably also in Greenland. This system seems to have disappeared in Norway with the creation of a Norwegian church province in 1152/53 or shortly after, in accordance with the ideals of Gratianus' Decretum from 1140/41 (Canones Nidrosiensis no. 1, see Gunnes 70, but also Skånland 69 and Vilberg 77).

Iceland and Greenland became, with the establishment of the Province of Nidaros, parts of the Norwegian church province. But neither Iceland nor Greenland were yet parts of the Norwegian kingdom, and hence not included in the kings' negotiations with the church.

It was not until Greenland and Iceland became parts of the Norwegian kingdom in the 1260ies that the king had the authority to make these countries subjects to the same clerical rules as the rest of the church province.

It may be argued that from this time, it became the responsibility of the king to fulfill his obligations to the Pope concerning Iceland and Greenland. Still, it was not the king, but the archbishop, who was the active part. As a consequence, Iceland and Greenland became more directly involved in the politics and reforms of the Norwegian Church after the 1260ies.

As we shall see, this implied the end of the proprietary church system, acceptance of an independent church, and the introduction of celibacy for the clerical men, in accordance with *Canones Nidrosiensis*.

These issues led to to bitter and violent encounters in Iceland from 1266 to 1297.

Do we have any indications of a similar conflict in Greenland? Again, Ivar Baardson's Description of Greenland is of extreme importance. Let us therefore take a closer look at the man himself.

8.2.2 Who was Ivar Baardson?

We know from a travel-permit issued by Bishop Håkon in Bergen that Jvarus Barderi, priest in Bergen, was sent from Bergen to Greenland in 1341. (GHM III:888-889, Reg. Norv. V, doc. 476, Dipl. Norv. V no. 152, see below, Section 8.2.5).

It appears from this document that he was an official representative of the Bishop of Bergen.

In the last (added) part of the Description of Greenland it is stated that he was some kind of steward at the Bishop's see at Gardar, possibly replacing Arni, who was bishop there from 1315 to 1348 (GHM III:14).

Gad has suggested that the word 'forstander' (steward, manager) is a Protestant's translation of the Catholic title 'officialis', a man who could act for the bishop in a number of functions, especially economic (Gad 67:173). The position was closely linked to the execution of Ecclesiastical Law. The title emerged around 1300. (KLN XII:536, Imsen & Sandnes 77:68-73).

Could this have been Ivar Baardsson's assignment?

Steinnes suggests that he acted in place of the bishop while the post was vacant from 1348 to 1368, and that he returned to Bergen before 1364 (Steinnes 58:416). If so, he must have held another position in the period from 1341 to 1348, quite possibly as 'officialis'.

Arneborg points to the possibility that the appointment of Jón as Bishop of Greenland in 1342, while Bishop Arni was still in office, may have been an attempt to introduce papal jurisdiction in connection with a church reform. (The sources state that it was "believed" that Bishop Arni was dead (GHM III:14, 52). Appointing two bishops to the same benefice was in strict conflict with Canon Law.)

She further argues that Ivar Baardson's task may have been to register ecclesiastical property in this connection (Arneborg 84:100 & 88:306).

None of these suggestions exclude the others, and it is also possible that he performed several duties.

In 1344 a Bergen priest Ivar Baardson is recorded as having applied to the Pope for a benefice (i.e. an expectancy to a position) in Bergen. The Pope granted him a benefice in Bergen having a minimum income of 22 'marks' in silver (Reg. Norv. V, doc.s 687, 688 & 689, see Steinnes 58:415).

And in 1364, the signature of a Canon Ivar Baardson of the Apostles' Church in Bergen appears on a letter in Stavanger. The Apostles' Church was one of the most prestigious of the royal chapels, and being canon there meant that this Baardson was in the service of the king (Steinnes 58:416, see also Gad 67:157).

It is quite possible that the person these documents refer to, and Ivar Baardson of Greenland is one and the same. The name is relatively common, however, and a definite identification is probably beyond reach.

8.2.3 The intent behind the "Description of Greenland":

What was the Description of Greenland really meant to be?

Is it, as the title suggests, just a geographical description, or does it contain elements of a more official nature?

Jette Arneborg has studied Baardson's Description and its historical context (Arneborg 84 & 88).

Many of the views presented below are based on my discussions with her, although we do not fully agree on all issues.

Arneborg has pointed out that the 'fehirde' (treasurer) in Bergen acted as royal tax collector for the Norwegian tier islands and Finnmark, and that the Bishop of Bergen was engaged in this administration around 1340 (see also KLNIV:210).

In 1340 Bishop Håkon of Bergen complained to King Magnus Eriksson that people "from the north and west" refused to pay their fees directly to him, but insisted on being responsible to the king only (Reg. Norv. V no. 337 & 340). This must imply that the taxpayers of these districts refused to accept the bishop's authority as royal collector. Arneborg indicates that this meant that the king did not receive his expected payments from the tier island, and suggests that Baardson's departure in 1341 may have been promoted by this situation (Arneborg 88:306).

We have no documents that directly explain the nature of Ivar Baardson's mission in Greenland, apart from the travelling permit and a short note in the Description added at a later date. The "Description" itself may, however, contain some clues, as it contains information concerning

- a. the fjords and their location
- b. the location of the churches
- c. the estates owned (in the true sense) by the cathedral, and in two cases the king
- d. the area "owned" by the different churches, i. e. their parishes
- e. For the first four churches in the text he also describes to whom they had been consecrated:
 - e.1 Auroos was consecrated to the Holy Cross
 - e.2 The Monastery (Petersvig?) was consecrated to St. Olav and St. Augustine
 - e.3 Vagar was consecrated to St. Olav
 - e.4 Foss was (?) consecrated to St. Nicholas

This information looks suspiciously like an inventory of the foundation, property and income of the parish churches. I am not aware of any Icelandic documents which directly parallel Ivar Baardson's Description. The kind of information presented by him is, however, gathered in two different types of documents:

The "Kirknaskrá" of Bishop Pál Jónsson from around 1200 describes the fjords and churches in the Skálholt diocese in Iceland (Dipl. Isl. vol. 12 doc. 1:1 -20, see Section 7.1.3 above). The information in this document equals the information in Ivar Baardson's "Description" listed as points a. and b. above.

Thus the "Description of Greenland" may have served a similar purpose as the "Kirknaskrá".

The "Description" contains, however, more information than the "Kirknaskrá", listed as points c., d. and e. above.

In Iceland, this type of information was gathered in the 'máldag' of each church. The 'máldag' was a kind of church charter, listing to whom the church was consecrated, what the church "owned", and usually also what items it contained. (They are published in Dipl. Isl., see KLN M XI:264 & XIII:714, see also Olsen 38, Gjerløw 68:39-52, Smedberg 73:202). In addition, registers (tabulæ) were usually kept at each see (see KLN M XIII:713).

Thus the "Description of Greenland" may have served a similar purpose as the Icelandic 'máldags'. It is, however, not of the same detail as the 'máldags', and the items contained in the church are not mentioned. As original written material from Greenland is not preserved, we do not know if 'máldags' were kept in Greenland.

It is, of course, possible that Ivar Baardson's "Description" was intended to serve a combined function as a church list and as 'máldags' for the churches in Greenland. What I find more likely, is that the "Description" was copied from such documents, either by Ivar Baardson himself, or by someone in Norway after his return. In any case, Ivar Baardson obviously brought this information to Norway, either as original documents or as written excerpts of such documents.

The question is, why should an inventory of the Greenland diocese be made and sent to Norway?

May we suggest: because the archbishop had asked for it?

Possibly the request was made in connection with a church reform of a similar kind as carried out Norway and Iceland during the same period (Arneborg 84:98-101 & 88, discussed below).

We know moreover that the proprietary church system was the major obstacle to this reform in Iceland. Could Baardson's Description deal with the churches that had been, or were intended to be, transferred from private ownership to the church?

There is at least one indication in the text that such a reform had gained a foothold, even if there seems to be some confusion in the text on this point:

The king owned the farm Foss, where a "costly church" is described. Most probably, the church was built by order of the king, and at one time even owned by him.

It is, however, specified that the king did not own this "costly church", but the advowsen (GHM III:255, Jónsson 30a:24).

This practice was not unusual in Iceland, where the former church owner often became manager (patron) of the same church (Smedberg 73:111). If things were done by the book, the king ought to have given the church(es) he owned in Greenland to the church

in the 1260ies, at the very latest. (Thorfæus refers to a Danish version of Baardson's text which says that the king has the 'Jus Patronatus' to this church (Thorfæus 06:34)).

In accordance with Arneborg's view, I will suggest the following theory:

1. That parts of Ivar Baardson's "Description of Greenland" was based on a lost church list and on 'máldags' of the Greenland churches.
2. That the central part of the "Description" was an inventory made for the purpose of implementing a church reform, or was based on a lost document of this nature.

This interpretation has far-reaching consequences for our concept of Norse Greenland history, and the evidence for an attempted church reform will be discussed in more detail below.

We may, however, pursue a couple of questions in connection with Baardson's text.

First of all, why was the consecration mentioned for some, but not for all the churches on the list? We know for instance that the Cathedral at Gardar was consecrated to St. Nicholas, patron of seafarers, children and bakers (Gripla in GHM III:224, see Jónsson 30a:44, Nørlund 67:34, Gad 67:141). (Indeed it is an interesting coincidence that the Cathedral in Greenland should be consecrated to the later Santa Claus!)

I can see three possible explanations:

1. Only a few of the churches were consecrated. (This seems to have been quite common in Iceland, see Smedberg 73:203-204.)
2. The churches not mentioned as consecrated had received benediction from a priest, but had not been consecrated by the bishop.
3. The churches were consecrated but information was omitted or lost during transcriptions.

The 3rd possibility is interesting, because if true, it implies that the description is incomplete.

Is the "Description of Greenland", supposedly "told by Ivar Baardson", really a later compilation or excerpt of documents he brought home? It may indeed seem so, but this implies that Baardson's Description may have been based on documents made for several, entirely different purposes.

This triggers a couple of other questions as regards the understanding and use of this document in historical research.

How shall Ivar Baardson's church list be compared to the church list of Flateyjarbók? If Baardson's list primarily was made in connection with a transfer of proprietary churches, the lists are incomparable. Most likely, the Flateyjar list was made before the church reform, and accordingly for some entirely different purpose (Halldorsson 78).

The churches listed in an ordinary inventory would of course be those owned by the church itself. If, however, the purpose of the inventory was to specify previously proprietary churches that were to be transferred to the church, those churches already owned by the church would be omitted.

Finally, there is no reason to believe that all proprietary churches were transferred to the church, even in connection with a reform. In Iceland, only about 1/3 of the churches were transferred to the bishop in the reform in 1297 (Magnús Stefansson pers. comm.). In addition, private chapels or prayer-houses would be omitted.

So far, it is not possible to state with certainty that Baardson's church list is complete, or even near to it. Thus a direct comparison between his list and the Flateyjar list is bound to limp.

But the last and most complicated question is: Was in fact a church reform actually attempted, and was Ivar Baardson involved in its implementation?

This will be discussed below, but first, we should take a closer look at the proprietary church system, which came to be the main target of the church reforms in Iceland.

8.2.4 The proprietary church system in Iceland:

Gunnar Smedberg has discussed the proprietary church system in his book from 1973. I have drawn heavily from his work in the following section.

As already discussed, the building of the earliest churches was a private undertaking. This practice seems to have been widespread, and was common in most of Northern Europe, England included. In Iceland, there were two, possibly three types of proprietary churches (Smedberg's designations are presented in brackets).

1. **Farm-churches** (*privatkyrkor*), were built for the use of a single family. In pagan times the dead were usually buried on the farm, and the establishment of a church and cemetery on the farm must have been a natural continuation of this practice. Later, such churches served as private chapels.

2. **Proprietary churches** (*egenkyrkor*), were built for a larger community, usually a parish. These churches were privately owned. The owner received tithe from the community, of which he could dispose quite freely. The building of such churches were, in other words, good investments. At the Synod in Braga in 572 it was declared that churches built for economic and not religious purposes were not to be consecrated. (From Smedberg 73:89-90).

3. Churches were also built by communal effort, as discussed in Section 6.3.3. Smedberg has argued that a prerequisite of this was a society of free peasants, and was unthinkable in areas with a feudal economy (*op. cit.* 102). A number of examples are known from the Norse areas, and theoretically may have existed in Greenland. I will later argue that Greenland developed a feudal or near-feudal economy, thus making this alternative less probable (Section 9.3.4).

The proprietary church system dominated in the Early Middle Ages in Europe, even in the Carolingian Empire. It was, however, unsatisfactory from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church, and several attempts were made to change the system.

The most important of these attempts was the church reform which began in the first part of the 10th century. It was later known as the Gregorian Church Reform, as Pope Gregory VII "The Great" (1073-1085) was instrumental in its implementation. Its slogan was 'Libertas Ecclesiae' (Freedom of the Church), and the idea was to "liberate" the church from any secular influence, in economic as well as spiritual matters.

Gregory is best known for his conflict with Emperor Henry IV, who walked to Canossa in 1077. He also led an active campaign against the proprietary church system, which was considered to be simony. (Simony was one of the severest of crimes, and could only be dealt with by the bishop or his 'officialis'. From 1464 simony led to automatic excommunication (KLN M XV:293).

The attempted reform ended with a compromise. Instead of a private owner, a church could have a manager (patron), who supervised (and disposed) its income. This ensured that laymen had a strong influence on ecclesiastical affairs throughout the Middle Ages. (From Smedberg 73:94-99). In Norway, this arrangement was introduced in 1152-53 or shortly after.

In Iceland, however, the proprietary church system dominated. Even the cathedrals at Skálholt and in Hólar were built by the bishops as private ventures. Attempts to put an end to the proprietary church system during the late 12th century were unsuccessful, partly due to the influence of the Norwegian king, Sverre Sigurdsson (1177-1202) (see Helgason 25:108-111, Smedberg 73:108 & 111).

It was not until 1253 that a law was passed by the 'Allting' (General Assembly) in Iceland that in cases where God's Law and Iceland's Law diverged, God's Law should reign supreme. This was, in other words, an acceptance of Canon Law, at least in principle. This of course implied that the concepts of Roman Law had finally gained a foothold, even though it conflicted with basic concepts of Germanic Law.

In the 1260ies, Iceland and Grœnland submitted to the Norwegian king. From this time, the church organization in Iceland and Greenland became the formal responsibility of the king, and at least Iceland was drawn into the controversies of the Norwegian Church.

During the subsequent years, Archbishop Jon Raude of Nidaros (1268-1282) tried to establish a New Ecclesiastical Law in Norway, in the spirit of the Gregorian Church Reform (Erkebiskop Jons Christenrett, NGL vol. II).

When the Icelander Arni Thorláksson was ordained Bishop of Skálholt in 1269, he received a document with 5 commands from Archbishop Jon, together with a copy of Gratianus' Decretum.

One of these commands was to put an end to the proprietary church system. This was to be Arni's main and most difficult task.

The wealthier church owners strongly opposed the reforms, and Arni had to threaten them with excommunication and penalties from the archbishop and the Norwegian king.

The latter promised his support on the condition that Bishop Arni would encourage the acceptance of Norwegian Law, the so-called 'Járnsida' (Ironsida). It was accepted in Iceland in 1271-73, much due

to bishop Arni's influence. 'Járnsida' was replaced by 'Jónsbók' in 1281.

In a Synod in Bergen 1273 it was decided that the proprietary churches of the Skálholt diocese were to be transferred to the bishop (Helgason 25:168-172). The diocese of Hólar was not included.

In 1275 the 'Allting' (General Assembly) passed a new Ecclesiastical Law on Bishop Arni's demand, but it too applied only to Skálholt (Reg. Norv. II, doc. 150).

It was not until 1354 that this law was accepted for Hólar (Helgason 25:209, Smedberg 73:112).

Similar conflicts took place in the Faroes around 1300, where Bishop Erlend seems to have been expelled shortly after. The same evidently happened in Man (Arneborg 84:100).

In Norway, Archbishop Jon Raude and King Magnus Hákonsson "The Lawmender" reached an agreement concerning secular and clerical rights at the Concordat in Tønsberg 1277 (Sættargjerd i Tunsberg). The agreement, however, led to violent reactions. The archbishop was forced to flee the country in 1282, and the agreement was set aside.

But although unofficial, Archbishop Jon Raude's Ecclesiastical Law did have an influence on Norwegian church matters.

On the death of King Magnus in 1280 many of the Icelandic churches were reclaimed by their original owners.

With the help of the Norwegian king Erik Magnusson, an agreement on the distribution of the church property was reached in 1297, the so-called "Sættargerð um Stadamál" (Helgason 25:176-177, Smedberg 73:108-113).

The agreement of 1297 meant the formal termination of the proprietary church system in Iceland, even if this was not fully accomplished until 1500 (Smedberg 73:113). In fact, a great number of the churches in Iceland continued to be proprietary churches throughout the Middle Ages (Magnús Stefánsson pers. comm.).

The proprietary church system offered great opportunities for the local aristocracy to consolidate and expand their power. Thus most church owners were of the opinion that the tithe and the income of the church property was at their free disposal (Helgason 25:171).

Accordingly, church owners who donated gifts or land to the church were simply filling their own pockets. It was not until Bishop Arni's Ecclesiastical Law of 1275 that it was formally stated that 2/4 of the tithe must be used for the church and the priest (Smedberg 73:109).

In 1190 Archbishop Erik of Nidaros banned the 'godi' (headmen of the Icelandic law districts) from being ordained priests in order to prevent the mixing of secular and clerical administration. Still, it was not unusual that the church owner himself was ordained a priest.

As little attention was paid to the rules of celibacy, clerical officials often had a family and thus were more personally involved in the secular community than in other countries.

It is difficult to regard the proprietary church system in Iceland as anything else but a Christian version of the pagan Norse social structure, with religious and political powers united in the hands of the aristocracy. Seen in this perspective, the Gregorian Church Reform may have implied a greater challenge to social organization in Iceland than the transition from paganism to Christianity itself.

It is obvious that this situation did not favor the development of a strong and independent church. In fact the church, represented by the bishop, had few means of executing control.

The bishop could refuse to consecrate a new church, although Smedberg's study of 'máldager' from Hólar (church charters specifying the properties of each church) reveals that a great many of the early churches were not consecrated, and a number of the later ones had only received benediction from a priest (from Smedberg 73:122-123).

Furthermore, the bishop had the power to excommunicate, he could deny serving Communion and the Sacraments, and he could act as prosecutor in cases dealing with Ecclesiastical Law. A brief survey of Icelandic history shows, however, that he was heavily dependent on allies outside the church. Alone, his executive power was limited.

8.2.5 Indications of church reform in Greenland:

It was suggested above that Ivar Baardson's Description of Greenland was, or rather, was based on an inventory of the diocese, possibly in connection with a church reform. Evidence in Baardson's Description alone is too weak to sustain this theory. We must therefore look to the historical context, and the few sources available.

Jon Raude and Bishop Olaf:

As described above, a new Ecclesiastical Law and a church reform was strongly advocated by Archbishop Jon Raude (1268-1282).

In 1269 he ordained Arni Thorláksson Bishop of Skálholt, and gave him five demands that he was to work for. One of these was to put an end to the proprietary church system. Arni also managed to get a new Ecclesiastical Law accepted in 1275 (above).

Is it possible that a similar strategy was directed towards Greenland?

In 1246 Olaf was ordained Bishop of Greenland, after a 4 year vacancy following the death of Bishop Nikulás (Nicholaus). (Isl. ann., GHM III:10 & 11).

Bishop Olaf went to Greenland in 1247, and was to deliver King Hákon Hákonsson's demand that the Greenlanders were to submit to his rule and taxation.

In 1261 the Greenlanders' message of acceptance reached Norway (Hákon Hákonsson's Saga, GHM II:774-779).

Bishop Olaf stayed in Iceland from 1262 to 1264, and then went to Norway, where his presence in Nidaros is recorded in 1267. He returned to Greenland in 1271 (Isl. ann., GHM III:10-12).

Thus Bishop Olaf of Gardar was present in Norway when Jon Raude was ordained Archbishop in 1268, and also in 1269 when Arni Thorláksson was ordained Bishop of Skálholt and received Jon Raude's five commands and proposals for a new Ecclesiastical Law.

Bishop Olaf of Gardar was, in other words, close at hand when these important events took place, and could hardly have been unaware of the attempted reforms.

It is therefore not unlikely that Bishop Olaf brought orders of a similar nature to Greenland on his return in 1271. (The so-called Statute from Archbishop Jon was not passed until 1280, and hence

could have had no bearing at the time of Bishop Olaf's departure (Norske middelalder-dokumenter:164). Its contents may, of course, have been communicated later.)

A somewhat dubious source tell of an uprising in Greenland around 1273 (Lyschander's Chronicle of Greenland, GHM III:453-457. The authors of GHM suggest that the uprising may have been described in the lost Saga of Magnus the Lawmender).

In 1280 Bishop Olaf died, and two Icelandic sources of uncertain origin indicate that a Norwegian Book of Law, the so-called 'Jónsbók', was brought to Greenland this or the following year. It was supposedly brought to Greenland by Jón Laugman, also called Gjaldkyli (i.e. "the tax-collector") (GHM III:458).

Lyschander has similar entries, but the reliability of these sources may be questioned (GHM loc. cit.).

We have, in other words, no concrete evidence that Archbishop Jon Raude tried to implement a church reform in Greenland, but as he did attempt to do so in Norway and Iceland, it is rather a likely assumption. Bishop Olaf's presence in Norway at such a crucial time increases the probability.

It is equally probable that he attempted to introduce the Norwegian Book of Law, 'Járnsida'. As noted above, the Book of Law called 'Jónsbók' may have been attempted introduced around the time of Bishop Olaf's death.

The stories of an uprising may, if we are to believe them at all, refer to reactions against these laws (or the tax-collector). There chance is, however, that the attempts to introduce church reforms released hostile reactions.

Still, it is quite a way from the stories of an uprising in the 1270ies to the mind-shattering message that the Greenlanders in 1342 "forsook the Christian faith" (Gísli Oddson's account from 1637, GHM III:459, discussed in more detail below. Lyschander has a similar entry, which may have been Gísli's source).

If these sources have any validity at all, we may ask whether the term "forsook the Christian faith" means that they actively discarded the Christian religion, or just that they refused to submit to the church reforms imposed from Norway.

This is indeed interesting, and will be further dealt with. So far, we must state that there are positive indications of conflicts between the Greenlanders and the Norwegian authorities between 1270 and 1350. The question is whether these conflicts were directed towards the church or the crown (see Arneborg 88).

Pál Bárðsson and Ivar Baardson:

The next likely period for a church reform was around 1350, during Ivar Baardson's stay in Greenland.

Let us therefore have a look at the person who sent Ivar Baardson to Greenland.

A travelling permit for Ivar Baardson was, as mentioned above (Section 8.2.2), issued by Bishop Hákon of Bergen, on August 8th 1341. It appears from the document that Baardson was of the Bergen diocese.

"Exhibitorem presentium Ivarum Barderi nostre dyocesis...".

Further, it states that he was to act on behalf of

"...quem in nostris ecclesie nostre negotiis ad Grænlandiam..." (our church as our negotiator in Greenland) (GHM III:886-889, Reg. Norv. V doc. 476, Dipl. Norv. V no. 152).

This probably means that he was a representative of the Bishop of Bergen. Arneborg has indicated that Baardson was to act on his behalf in economic matters, presumably in connection with tax defaults (Arneborg 88).

The Archbishop in Nidaros at that time was Pål Bårdsson (1333-1346), a Doctor of Roman and Canon Law from Orléans, and probably the most learned man to hold this office during the Middle Ages (Kolsrud 58:258). He had been the king's chancellor from 1327-1333. His "surname" is similar to that of Ivar, but this was a common name, and we have no evidence that they were related.

Archbishop Pål led a successful campaign to strengthen the power of the church. The year after his ordination he held a synod, where a six point document was issued. It stated that laymen could not hold administrative positions in the church, forbade the selling of church property, and annulled such sales that had previously been made (September 22. 1334, Reg. Norv. IV, doc. 1081, Keyser 58:248-249).

A series of similar synods followed. Of special interest is the synod which met in Nidaros in September 1341 (Reg. Norv. V, doc.s 463 & 479). Here, it appears from a later document, Archbishop Pål announced his intent of inspecting his church province (Reg. Norv. V, doc.s 527 & 544).

He did not, however, visit Iceland himself, but authorized Sir Aslak, Canon in Nidaros, to inspect Iceland on his behalf (Reg. Norv. V, doc. 521 undated).

Ivar Baardson's travel-permit is dated August 8th, three weeks before the synod. Is it possible that he was sent to Greenland on a similar mission?

The archbishop could hardly have arrived at the idea of an inspection on the spur of the moment, and the opportunity of a passage to Greenland may have forced Baardson to leave before the announcement was officially made at the synod. (It is also possible that Bishop Håkon of Bergen issued Ivar Baardson's travel-permit before he himself left for Nidaros.)

This hypothesis appears to conflict with the assignment given in the travel-permit, which specifically states that he was to act on behalf of "our church", i.e. the Bishop of Bergen. It is, however, difficult to imagine Baardson's Description of Greenland as resulting from the mission given him by Bishop Håkon alone.

An inventory of this scope must have been made by the order of, or in understanding with, the archbishop. It is therefore not impossible that Baardson held authorization from the archbishop as well as the bishop in Bergen. The spheres of interest were, after all, related.

Copy of the travel-permit is preserved in a letter book of the Bergen diocese, but as no such book from Nidaros has survived, this question must remain open.

Gísli Oddsson's account:

There is a strange account recorded in Iceland stemming from Bishop Gísli Oddsson of Skálholt, "Annalium in Islandia Farrago, hinc inde descripta", dated July 24. 1637.

Finn Magnussen thinks the account may have been based on material in the archives at Skálholt, which burned 1630 (GHM III:459).

Gustav Storm, on the other hand, thinks it was taken from Lyschander (Storm 90b.).

In either case, both the contents and dating must be treated with great care.

It reads:

"1342, the Greenlanders voluntarily forsook the true faith and the Christian religion, after having abandoned all good morals and true virtues, and turned to the people of America;... (ad Americæ... populos se converterunt)... Thereof came that the Christians abolished their sailing to Greenland." (GHM III:459-460, Storm 90:355, my translation).

This is one of the most frequently quoted passages in the literature on the Vinland voyages, and has given rise to various interpretations.

P. A. Munch suggests that the Greenlanders emigrated to the American Continent (Munch 52-63 vol. V:314-315).

Storm rejects the source as a later attempt to explain the desertion (Storm op. cit.).

GHM suggests that a group of Norse settlers may have been cut off from the rest of the settlement, perhaps by the Eskimos, and gradually lost contact with the true faith (GHM III:460-461).

Finn Gad has not mentioned the source, probably because he doubted its credibility.

Fridtjof Nansen suggests that the Greenlanders may have mixed with the Eskimos (especially their women), despite the fact that contact with pagans was forbidden by the church (Nansen 11 vol. II:100-101).

Poul Nørlund is, with reservation, inclined to support Nansen's interpretation that the Greenlanders had converted to the belief of the Eskimos, although he argues that this could only pertain to the Western Settlement (Nørlund 24:250 and note 2, same page).

William Thalbitzer, like Munch, suggests that the Greenlanders emigrated to the American Continent (Thalbitzer 48).

Helge Ingstad also holds that the statement may indicate an emigration to America. Like Nansen he believes this must refer to people of the Western Settlement (Ingstad 59:521 & 85:368).

Jette Arneborg suggests that Gísli's source alludes to a rejection of the church reform, and argues (like Storm) that Gísli's text contains the bishop's own explanation of the desertion (Arneborg 84:99-100 & 88:305).

Obviously, the name "America" is not of medieval origin: In 1507 the German Waldseemüller suggested that the new continent should be named after the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci.

The original text was, in other words, rephrased after this date, probably by Gísli himself. Thus Arneborg's explanation is, in my opinion, the most reasonable one.

It is a peculiar statement indeed that the Greenlanders

"...voluntarily forsook the true faith..."

Did Baardson report an alarming state of affairs in extreme conflict with Ecclesiastical Law? Such conflicts could, for instance, have stemmed from the rejection of reforms demanded in the 1270ies, after Greenland had become part of the Norwegian kingdom (see above, Section 8.2.1).

As the Greenlanders had paid their six-year's tithe and Peter's Pence in 1327 (below), a total rejection of the Norwegian Church is unlikely. But what about a partial rejection?

It is likely that the problem concerned internal ecclesiastical affairs in Greenland, for instance that the rules introduced by Bishop Olaf before 1280 had been rejected. Ivar Baardson's demands may also have been opposed. To disobey certain of the demands made by the church in this period automatically lead to excommunication. If the Greenlanders openly had broken Ecclesiastical Law by opposing rules of this sort, the event could well have been described with the words that the Greenlanders "voluntarily had forsaken the true faith and Christian religion". In other words, that they had chosen a road that they knew would lead to excommunication from the Christian Church.

Arneborg links this situation with defaults evidenced in the tax-payments to King Magnus Eriksson (Arneborg 88:306 - 307). See below.

Pål Knutsson:

In 1355 a man named Powell Knudsson at Anarm (Onarheim?) was ordered to Greenland on a mission authorized by Magnus Eriksson (King of Norway and Sweden).

Pål Knutsson's (intended) voyage has been the subject of fanciful speculations, and has been associated with hoax "Viking" finds in the New World in general, and with the Kensington Stone in Minnesota in particular (see Wahlgren 86:110 for a review).

The original document is lost, probably destroyed in the fire of Copenhagen in 1728, and the surviving copy is a rather clumsy Danish translation from Swedish. (There is apparently a slight disagreement whether the year was 1354 or 1355, see Steinnes 58:416 & Gad 67:178). It is difficult to render a literal translation of this garbled document, but the essence is as follows.

The king appeals to the people on board the ship to accept his order in good will towards the cause. The order is given in honor of God, and for the sake of our soul and our parents(?), who till this day have (yielded?) Christian faith and living in Greenland, which we shall not surrender in our time.

(Based on GHM III:120-123, my translation).

Whatever the exact content, most authors agree that it implies that the Christian Religion in Greenland was in decline, and that the purpose of the expedition was to prevent further disintegration (GHM loc. cit, Nansen 11 vol. II:106, Nørlund 24:250-251, Thalbitzer 48, Steinnes 58:416, Gad 67:178, Ingstad 59:275 & 85:368, Arneborg 84:99-100 & 88:299, 308).

Admittedly, it is not explicitly clear whether it was the Christian faith, the settlement, or both that were threatened.

Nansen assumes that this threat had its basis in increased mixing with the Eskimos (Nansen 11 vol. II:106-107).

Nørlund assumes that the mission was to deal with the desertion of the Western Settlement and the hostile advance of the 'Skrælings' (Eskimos), as recorded in other entries (Nørlund 24:250-251).

Thalbitzer believes the letter to be evidence of a royal mission in Greenland, but rejects the idea of hostile encounters with the Eskimos. Instead, he suggests an emigration to America (Thalbitzer 48).

Ingstad expresses similar views to Munch's and Thalbitzer's (without reference), but in addition argues that the primary objective of the expedition must have been economic (Ingstad 59:275).

Gad expresses a view similar to Nørlund's. But he doubts, I think on loose grounds, that the venture ever got under way, due to political events in Norway and Sweden at the time (Gad 67:178-181, see also Wahlgren 86:110). But under any circumstances he is clear in his concept that the expedition was intended as a crusade against the pagans.

Steinnes argues that Pál Knútsson was identical with a former Lawman of Gulating, i.e. the law district to which Bergen belonged (see Reg. Norv. V, docs 586, 616, 788, 823, 851, 952, 995, 1069, 1071, 1093), and even suggests that he has held a position in Greenland and / or was known there under his former title (Steinnes 58:416).

He also assumes that the expedition was sent to retaliate against 'Skræling' attacks (Steinnes loc. cit.).

If Steinnes' theory is correct, the leader of the expedition was a man of considerable status. What is more important, he was a representative of the king, and a man of some legal standing.

Considering the uncertainty of Gfslí Oddsson's text, it is not unlikely that the two entries refer to the same situation, i.e. a Christian society in decline. And none of the sources refer to any special part of Greenland.

Arneborg suggests that the expedition was sent to protect King Magnus Erisson's economic interests in Greenland in a conflict between the bishop and the settlers, as well as to collect the king's share of the four-year tithe, which was due the same year (Arneborg 84:101 & 88:308).

It is reasonable to assume that the knowledge of this conflict was at least partly due to alarming reports from Ivar Baardson.

The situation suggested by Arneborg obviously has far-reaching consequences for the view upon the desertion of the Western Settlement, but this is outside the aim of this study (see Arneborg 88).

8.2.6 The 'Skrælings', conflicting theories:

These presumed conflicts between the Eskimos and the Norse settlers is one of the major topics in Arneborg's works (op. cit.), and will only be discussed in a general terms.

The written sources concerning the decline of Christianity in Greenland are diverse, but from the majority of them two main subjects are distinguishable.

1. They report a decline in the Christian faith.
2. They mention the 'Skrælings', often as being hostile.

In a very general sense, this holds true both for the more reliable sources as well as for those of uncertain origin.

As mentioned, Nansen argued that the reported decline in Christianity was the result of "over-friendly" attitudes towards the 'Skrælings' (Nansen 11 vol. II:95-134). A mixing of the two peoples can hardly be ruled out on the basis of the (statistically speaking) limited number of skeletons investigated, but positive evidence is still lacking (see Sellevold 77).

Most authors have maintained the opposite view that the sources indicate that the 'Skrælings' were a threat against the Norse society, and hence also against the Christian Religion (Nørlund 67:129, Steinnes 58:416, Gad 67:178, Ingstad 85:365-366).

The logical consequence of this view is that the 'Skrælings' are to be blamed for the decline of Christianity:

Christianity declined because the 'Skrælings' advanced.

The statements which tell of a decline of the Christian faith thus become secondary to the statements about hostile encounters with the 'Skrælings'.

But Nansen argued, and I think with some reason, that the concept of hostile Eskimos is largely a later phenomenon, which may have colored the later transcripts of the sources. Arneborg expresses a similar view (Arneborg 88).

In this light it is difficult to maintain that the 'Skræling' attacks were the primary subject of the sources, and the declining faith the secondary. This is not to deny hostile encounters between Norsemen and Eskimos. This was bound to occur between two cultures with conflicting views and traditions, regarding concepts like property. Thus a 'Skræling' attack in Greenland is recorded in the Icelandic annals in 1379 (GHM III:33, 60 - 61).

A papal letter from 1448 deals with a reported "attack by the barbarians from the neighboring coasts of the heathens" 30 years previously (GHM III:165 - 176). The letter is believed by some to refer to an Eskimo attack (Rafn 54:413, Rink 77:22, Holm 84a:159, Bruun 96a:175, Gad 67:193, see especially Ingstad 59:524). I have previously argued (Section 2.2.1) this interpretation may stem from a confusion with the Russian / Karelian attacks around 1420 on northern Norway (which was then considered lying close to the island of Greenland). If it is so, this source must be dismissed as evidence concerning conditions in Greenland.

8.2.7 Later sources on apostasy in Greenland:

After Ivar Baardson's stay in Greenland, Alf was ordained Bishop of Gardar in Nidaros in 1365 (Isl. ann. GHM III:28).

He seems to have stayed some time in Norway before his departure (GHM III:888-890) and arrived in Greenland in 1368 (Isl. ann. in GHM III:30 & 59) where he apparently died in 1378 (Isl. ann. GHM III:32-60, Gad 67:181-182). He was the last Bishop of Gardar ever to set foot in Greenland.

Although Bishops of Gardar continued to be ordained in Norway until 1519, sometimes several at a time, this was a title in the name only (Gad 67:182).

In 1492 or -93 Pope Alexander VI wrote a letter in reply to a Benedictine monk Mathias, who applied to be appointed Bishop of Gardar.

The letter describes how people in Greenland lived on dried fish and milk, and that no ship had visited them for the last 80 years due to the frozen sea;

"...and for this reason it is said that for eighty years or thereabouts no bishop or priest has resided at that church. Therefore, and because there are no Catholic priests, it has befallen that most of the parishioners, who formerly were Catholics, have (oh, how sorrowful!) renounced the holy sacrament of baptism received from them; and that the inhabitants of the land have nothing else to remind them of the Christian religion than a 'corporale' (altar-cloth, my comment) which is exhibited once a year, and whereon the body of Christ was consecrated a hundred years ago by the last priest who was there."

On this touching background the monk is appointed Bishop of Gade (Gardar):

"...with much godly zeal made ready to bring the minds of the infidels and apostates back to the way of eternal salvation and to root out such errors,..."

(Cited from Nansen 11 vol. II:121, see also Storm 92:399-401. The letter was discovered in the Vatican Archives by dr. Luka Jelic (Nansen 11 vol. II:121 notes), who was later accused of forging the Vinland map... (Wahlgren 86:112)).

The evocative passage about the altar-cloth may seem like a detective puzzle of the "closed-room-type", and Storm has thought this to be an indication of an unrecorded sailing contact (Storm 92:401).

The dates regarding the last bishop in Greenland seem accurate, and the lapse of 80 years since the last ship ties in well with the wedding at Hvalsey church in 1408 (Nansen 11 vol. II:122).

The description of Christianity in decline corresponds with previous reports to the same effect, and may of course be seen in this light. But to a Catholic this was the logical consequence of the absence of a bishop and priests. When the line of consecration was broken, the Sacraments could not be administered, and Christianity as they knew it, would cease.

The statements in the letter are therefore logical in their own

right, but the possibility that they are based on previous assumptions about a Christianity in decline cannot be ruled out.

It is interesting in this connection to note that if the Greenlanders really continued their opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, they would have certainly been excommunicated for simony in 1464 (KLN M XV:293, see Section 8.2.4 above).

A mathematician Jacob Ziegler authored a script called Scandia, probably printed in Strasbourg in 1536, which included a description of Greenland.

He says that he found certain records in Rome that were written by an old (senior) Archbishop of Nidaros. This most probably refers to Archbishop Erik Valkendorf. The text runs:

"...As the Mother-Church only has kept heedless supervision of the state of belief in these parts (i.e. Greenland, my comment), the people there have almost befallen to paganism, and have otherwise unstable minds and are especially devoted to witchcraft...."

Then follows a description of their ability to cause storms by singing, and that they attack ships from their small hide-boats (from GHM III:497-501, my translation).

This part of the description obviously confuses Sami with Eskimo people, a common misinterpretation which prevailed in Europe in the 15th century (Section 2.2.1 above). The quoted part may have been derived from some of the sources already presented above, but there is a chance that Ziegler has had access to material collected by Valkendorf which is now unknown to us.

We have an even later source from 1567, i.e. after the Reformation, written by Absalon Pederssøn Beyer. His description of Greenland states that:

"...and they, who are our countrymen, make (pagan) idols, and (the) subjects and faithful Christians (receive) no visits or support of any kind..."

"...What could be of greater honor to God and his Christian Church than to seek out these lost sheep, and create a green pasture for God? What could be a better praise to the Kingdom of Norway, in these the last days of the world, than to bring the prodigal son back to his father's house once more?" (To norske... 68:49-51 my translation).

We do not know what sources this description was based on.

It is tempting to suggest that, being written just after the Reformation, the idea was to win Greenland for the Reformed Lutheran Church. But more likely Pederssøn Beyer's script reflects ideas about the Greenlanders' apostasy which had prevailed in Norway and the Curia for a long time.

8.2.8 Conclusion:

We have no sources that directly describe attempts of a church reform in Greenland. The question can therefore not be settled with certainty.

But it is likely that the rules and regulations issued by the

Norwegian king during the period 1152/53 to 1261/64 were attempts at introducing church reforms in Iceland and Greenland after these countries had become parts of the Norwegian kingdom.

As Iceland was drawn into the conflicts and reforms of the Norwegian Church after the 1260ies, it is likely that Greenland became similarly involved.

Bishop Olaf's contact with Bishop Jon Raude in the first years after his appointment as archbishop, and Ivar Baardson's departure around the time of the synod in 1341, demonstrate that the opportunity was there. Considering the communications of the time, this must be more than coincidence.

It is also likely that the Greenlanders' hesitancy to abolish the proprietary church system and pay taxes and obey the regulations of Canon Law was the major obstacle.

It is not unlikely, in this situation, that Ivar Baardson was to carry out more assignments than the one given by the Bishop of Bergen.

Further, Arneborg's theory of an attempted church reform is a reasonable explanation of the character of Baardson's Description, no matter if it was an original document or a later compilation. Which of course may raise some suspicion about the consistency of Ivar Baardson's report.

Did he describe the parishes and the conditions of ownership as it existed at the time, or was he describing a situation a situation after an intended reorganization?

The fact that the next bishop in Greenland was also to be the last, suggests that Baardson's efforts at best had a temporary effect.

Finally, this theory seems to explain the otherwise peculiar statements found in the sources discussed above.

The interpretations by 15th century writers as well as later authors, that the "decline in Christianity" resulted from attacks by the 'Skrælings', must for the most part be rejected (Arneborg 88).

For the time being, I find the arguments sufficiently well founded to accept the theory of an attempted church reform in Greenland, although the chances of ever providing final evidence for this may be small. And it is most likely that one of the basic obstacles for the implementation of this reform was the Greenlanders' refusal to abolish the proprietary church system.

8.3 PAYMENTS FROM GREENLAND TO THE EUROPEAN CHURCH

8.3.1 The problem:

The balance between demands and resources in Norse medieval Greenland may, as previously discussed, have been seriously disrupted, either by demographic increase, by climatic deterioration or both.

On this background it is interesting to examine to what extent the clerical organization added to the production demands. Was Norse Greenland a kind of 'El Dorado' that supplied the European church with bounty from the High Arctic, or was it the poor "country" cousin of the far north, supported by its European brothers in belief? The King's Mirror states that:

"There are only few people in that country... But if it had been closer to other countries, it would have been called one third of a diocese; yet it now has a bishop all of its own, anything else is impossible, due to its great distance to other peoples." (GHM III:330-333, my translation).

Greenland's isolated position is in itself a palatable explanation to why a diocese was erected in the country. We must, however, also take into account that the costly arctic products that were exported from Greenland may have stimulated the process.

Our knowledge of the economic relations between Greenland and Europe is scanty, and our chances of reaching a valid conclusion on this point may appear equally limited. Still, one important question should be discussed.

To what extent did demands from the European Church affect the inner economy of Greenland? Was Greenland subject to a traditional center-periphery relationship that drained its resources and pushed it over the brink, as McGovern has argued (McGovern 81, McGovern et. al. 85)?

When approaching this problem, it may be useful to distinguish between the economic system within Greenland, and its external economic relationship to Europe.

The Roman Catholic Church was beyond comparison the most successful economic structure in Medieval Europe, perhaps the most efficient economic organization ever. Only part of its income was based on organized taxation such as the tithe and the Peter's Pence. A fair portion came from the fines and, as the church gradually gained control of productive land, an even larger portion came from the land-rent.

In Norway, where most farms were single-family units, the church often owned parts of farms. It has been suggested that in the 14th century, a Norwegian parish priest had about 45 times more land at his disposal than a peasant, while a bishop had something like 500 times as much (Lunden 80:36).

The distribution of property in Norway before 1350 and around 1500 has been estimated as follows.

Land-holding classes	% of land before 1350	% of land around 1500
Peasants and citizens	ca. 35	ca. 33
The king	ca. 7	ca. 8
Secular aristocracy	15 - 20	ca. 12
The church	ca. 40	ca. 47

(Based on Norsk historisk atlas:160-161 & 201)

It shows that the church was the biggest landowner in Norway during the High and Late Middle Ages. This is, of course, a result of the Norwegian Church being an independent organization throughout the period. I have, however, argued that the Greenland church organization was based on the proprietary church system for most of this period (Section 8.2 above). If so, it is unlikely that the church could control land in Greenland to the same extent as in Norway.

It is, in other words, extremely dangerous to draw parallels between the Norwegian economy of the High Middle Ages and that of Greenland. In Greenland the local aristocracy seems to have held most of the economic power, land and churches included. Correspondingly, the economic power of the church must have been quite limited.

Still, we know that payments were made to the European church, and the size of these payments may be an indication of the pressure put on Greenland's external economy. Let us have a closer look at some of the payments made to Europe, and then compare them with the other dioceses under Nidaros.

8.3.2 The payment in 1327:

A passage often cited in the literature on Norse Greenland is a record of the payment of the six years' tithe (*decima sexannali*) and the Peter's Pence (*denarius sancti Petri*) sent by the Bishop of Greenland in 1327. The payment was made in Bergen, and consisted of walrus tusks.

This gives an interesting insight into the importance of walrus hunting at the time, and the nature of Greenland's export. Unfortunately, some of the information found in the works on this topic is inaccurate, and requires a discussion of some detail.

As far as I know, no attempt has been made to compare the value of this consignment with the value of equivalent payments the same year from the other Norwegian dioceses. If such a comparison is possible, it may give us an idea of the economic status of Greenland in relation to the rest of Norway. This is, of course, important for the understanding of Greenland's economy as a whole.

It must be kept in mind, however, that this payment was made during the reign of Erling Vidkunsson, appointed by Archbishop Eiliv Arnesson as regent during King Magnus Eriksson's childhood.

Erling Vidkunsson's rule favored the aristocracy, and the church held a relatively weak position.

To what extent the payments from 1327 are representative for the general situation is not known. If, as argued, there was a conflict over the proprietary church system, Norwegian officials probably had only a limited influence on the size of the payment.

The Peter's Pence, being a per capita tax, has been used to estimate the medieval population in other countries, and an attempt has even been made to estimate the size of the population in Greenland.

In the following sections I will discuss the texts, the circumstances surrounding the payment, and the possibilities for making such estimates as mentioned. I will also have a look at Greenland's situation during the economic crises from the late 1200s until the Black Death hit Norway in 1349.

8.3.3 The texts:

The original documents concerning the payment are found in the Vatican Archives (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, collect. 227 f. 6 v 1326 - 1343 (Rey 76:138)).

They were first copied by Swiss born Paul Henri de Mallet in Rome in 1763, on requests from Denmark. They were published in Latin in J.H. Schlegel: *Sammlungen zur dänische Geschichte 1B. 1St.* under the title of "Excerpta ex archivio Vaticano de pristino Gronlandiæ" (GHM III:90). A copy of this, in the "Kongelige Geheime Archiv" (KGA) in Denmark, is the basis for the edition in GHM, printed 1845 (GHM III:112-113). The texts are reported to be printed (though somewhat inaccurate) in Paul Egede's work on Greenland (see GHM III:90).

The GHM version of the texts seems to be inaccurate on several points.

The originals were also copied by the Norwegian historian P. A. Munch, nearly 100 years after de Mallet. His version is published in "Pavelige Nuntiers Regnskabs- og Dagbøger", Christiania 1864.

For reasons discussed below, Munch's version seems to be the more accurate of the two. I will therefore use this as the basis for my calculations.

It is worth adding that an abridged edition of Munch's version is printed in *Regesta Norvegica IV*, documents 521 and 522. (The document 521 contains a misprint: 127 'lispunds' of walrus tusks in the original is given as 227 'lispunds' in the *Regesta*.)

The essence of the text is as follows:

The tithe:

Document dated Bergen, August 11th 1327:

Bernardus de Ortolis, papal envoy, received from Archbishop Eiliv of Nidaros the six years' tithe from the Greenland diocese, consisting of 127 'lispunds' (lisponsos) of walrus tusks (dentibus de roardo). The lot was sold on September 6th to a Flemish merchant, Johannes Dipre, for 12 pound 14 solidi in "Turon. argenj." i.e. 'gros tournois' (from Munch 64:25, my translation).

The Peter's Pence:

Document dated Bergen August 11th 1327:

Bernardus de Ortolis, papal envoy, received from Archbishop Eiliv of Nidaros the Peter's Pence from the Greenland diocese, consisting of 3 'lispunds' of walrus tusks. The lot was sold September 6th to a Flemish merchant Johannes Dipre for 6 solidi 'gros tournois' ("sex solidos. Turon. argentj.") (from Munch 64:28, my translation).

The GHM version of the texts differs, among other things, in the following aspects.

- The name of the papal envoy is given as Bertrandus. Munch consistently calls him Bernardus in all the documents in his book, and this is probably correct.

- The name of the Flemish merchant is given in GHM as de Pre, in Munch's version as Dipre.
- The price of the tusks from the Peter's Pence is quoted in GHM as 2 'solidi', and in Munch's version as 6 'solidi'. It will appear from the calculations below that 6 'solidi' corresponds to the price calculated from the sale of the tithe, which was 2 'marks' per 'lispund'.

Munch's version is therefore probably the more reliable. It appears, by the way, that the Danish historian Finn Gad uses Munch as his source when discussing this matter (Gad 67:168 and note 354, see also Rey 76:139-140).

8.3.4 Reconstructing the weight:

The weight of the payment is given in 'lispund' ("lisponso" in the Latin text). This weight of measurement was called 'liwesche Pund' in German, and 'talentum livonicum' in ordinary Latin. It underwent changes during the Middle Ages, and around 1327 at least 3 different weights were in use:

The Western Norwegian 'lispund' = 6,17 kg
 The Copenhagen 'lispund' just below 8 kg
 The Lübeck 'lispund' = 6,8 kg

The Western Norwegian 'lispund' was used in Western Norway, partly in Trøndelag (Nidaros), in Northern Norway, Iceland and, with some variation, in Hjalmland (Shetland) and the Orkneys (Steinnes 36 (1982:29), KLN M X:605-606).

The use of this weight is mentioned in documents from 1282, 1302, 1328, and 1329 (Steinnes loc. cit.).

It is therefore most likely that this is the 'lispund' referred to in our texts.

The Western Norwegian weights were:

1 'skippund' = 24 'lispunds' = 148,08 kg
 1 'lispund' = 24 'marks' = 6,17 kg
 1 'mark' = 0,257 kg

The six years' tithe from Greenland should accordingly be calculated:

127 'lispunds' x 6,17 = 783,59 kg.

Similarly, the Peter's Pence from Greenland should be:

3 'lispunds' x 6,17 = 18,51 kg.

The total payment thus consisted of 130 'lispunds' or 802,1 kg.

The Danish historian Finn Gad has calculated the weight to roughly 668 kg based on a 'lispund' of 5,144 kg, with reference to Steinnes 36. This is, as far as I can see, incorrect.

Gad bases his weight on a 'mark' weight of 0,214.32 kg, which

evidently was the one used by the papal envoys. But Steinnes distinguishes between the 'mark' used with the balance-weight (skålvekt), and the 'mark' used with the steelyard-weight (bismarvekt). The balance-weight 'mark' was used for small-scale goods, like silver, while the steelyard 'mark' was used for bulky products, like iron.

The steelyard 'mark' is calculated to 0,257 kg, admittedly with some uncertainty as regards Bergen.

I find it likely that bulky commodities like tusks were sold by the steelyard-weight, and accordingly by a heavier 'lispund' than Gad has used. Ingstad arrives at the same conclusion, on the basis of information from Steinnes (Ingstad 59:376).

8.3.5 Reconstructing the value:

Payment of the six years' tithe from Greenland in 1327 came to consist of 127 'lispunds', which was sold for 12 pounds 14 'solidi gros tournois'.

Counting 20 'solidi' per pound, this gives 254 'solidi'. The price of walrus tusks can then be calculated to 2 'solidi' to the 'lispund'.

The Peter's Pence consisted of 3 'lispunds', which were sold for 6 'solidi gros tournois'. The price agrees with the value above: 2 'solidi' to the 'lispund'. (This is an argument for accepting Munch's version of the text.)

The exchange rate for 'gros tournois' in Norway at that time seems to have been approximately 1 'solidus' = 1 'mark' Norwegian coins (Munch 1864:45).

In other words, the six years' tithe had the value of 254 Norwegian 'marks', and the Peter's Pence was worth 6 Norwegian 'marks'.

(General reference: Schive 68:LXXI-LXXV. The calculations were made with the kind assistance of Dr. Phil. Kolbjørn Skaare, Oslo.)

Steinnes (in Ingstad 59:376) reckons 13 pounds tournois to 39 pounds sterling, which again is equalled to 65 'marks' Norwegian, or 12,5 kilos of pure silver. I have not been able to trace Steinnes' chain of argument for these calculations.

8.3.6 Reconstructing the number of tusks:

An interesting record concerns a payment of the tithe from Nidaros the same year.

One part of the payment consisted of 24 walrus tusks, sold May 1st for 12 Norwegian 'marks' (Munch 1864:21). The price, in other words, was 1/2 'mark' for each tusk.

Can we assume that the price for this consignment was the same as for the one from Greenland three and a half months later? If so, the price of 1/2 'mark' for one tusk should equal 4 tusks to the 'lispund'. (The Norwegian historian Alexander Bugge arrived at a similar conclusion (Bugge 98a:137).)

The average tusk weight can then be calculated to 1,5425 kg.

The six years' tithe from Greenland should then contain 508 tusks, based on the average weight.

The Peter's Pence should contain 12 tusks, based on the same average.

The total number of tusks in the shipment can thus be estimated to 520, representing a kill of at least 260 animals. (As the calculation is based on average weight, the figures are hardly accurate.)

These figures differ somewhat from those suggested by other authors.

Krogh does not mention the sources for his calculation, but says that the

"consignment must have consisted of about 400 tusks"
(Krogh 82a:161-163 my translation).

McGovern, on the other hand, suggests a weight of 653 kg for the tithe payment, and 15,4 kg for the Peter's Pence (McGovern 85a:305-306. He bases his estimate on Gad 70:136-137). By estimating a kill of 32 animals per year over a six year period, McGovern arrives at 192 animals, or 384 tusks to make up the consignment. This gives an average weight per tusk of roughly 1,6 kg.

None of the tusk weights suggested in these references are improbable seen from a zoological point of view.

8.3.7 Reconstructing the tithe from Norway:

During the years 1327 to 1328, the two papal envoys, Johannes de Serone and Bernardus de Ortolis, travelled throughout Scandinavia and collected the six years' tithe and the Peter's Pence.

Their accounts are documented in full by P.A. Munch, as discussed above.

Thus the Greenland payments can be compared with the payments from the other dioceses. Several of the dioceses, however, were behind in their payments (Reg. Norv. IV, documents 519, 520 and 531), and since we do not have equally well-preserved accounts from the preceding years, complete accuracy cannot be expected. With these reservations, I present the following figures (only whole 'marks' are counted).

THE SIX YEARS' TITHE 1327	
Oslo	5002 'marks'
Nidaros	4207 'marks'
Bergen	2700 'marks'
Hamar	1571 'marks'
Stavanger	1132 'marks'
Orkneys	768 'marks'
Greenland	254 'marks'
TOTAL	15634 'marks'

(Based on Reg. Norv. vol. IV, docs 488, 493, 496, 504, 505, 506, 518, 519, 520, 521, 532, 533).

The payment from Greenland thus seems to have been only 1,62 % of the total, or 5,08 % of the payment from Oslo. In other words, Greenland seems to have been by far the smallest contributor to the six years' tithe in Norway. Skálholt, Hólar and the Faroes are

not included because of lack of source material.

It must be emphasized, however, that this is not necessarily an indication of an impoverished economy in Greenland. It may just as well indicate a reluctance on the part of the Greenlanders against payments of this sort.

For comparison, the 'leidang' tax for the Gulating (the law district for Western Norway, and somewhat bigger than the Bergen diocese) for 1325 has been calculated to 2.900 'marks' (Helle 82:331 with reference to Steinnes 33:168-97). The 'leidang' was originally a duty to mobilize in war, later a defense tax or royal tax. The value of the 'leidang' tax for Gulating seems roughly to equal that of the tithe from the Bergen Diocese.

8.3.8 The six years' tithe in 1276 - 1349:

Another interesting question is how the terms of the tithe from Greenland were stipulated.

Was payment stipulated as a fixed sum of money, or rather a fixed amount of walrus tusk? It is likely that hard currency was scarce in Greenland, and that the opportunities of converting goods to money within Greenland were nonexistent. We must therefore consider the possibility that the tithe was exacted in other values, for example in tusks.

This is indeed an important question, as it concerns the economic status of Greenland during the High Middle Ages, when the Greenland trade was supposedly at its height.

The price of walrus tusk evidently peaked during the time of the crusades, when the supply of ivory from Africa was impeded by the Saracens (Tegengren 62:26). This situation would have increased the export value of tusks from Greenland considerably.

Do we have any information to throw light on this subject?

The six years' tithe was a crusade tax, aimed at financing military operations in the Middle East. It was issued by Pope Gregory X in a letter to the Archbishop of Nidaros dated Lyon September 20th 1274 (Reg. Norv. II doc. 122).

Several entries refer to the collection of this tax from Greenland.

In 1276 the Archbishop of Nidaros had trouble with communications to Greenland, and could not collect the six years' tithe at the prescribed time (Reg. Norv. II doc. 155).

In 1278 he managed to send an envoy to Greenland, who had been given the authority to lift the ban of excommunication (!) laid upon the defaulters. This authority was confirmed by the Pope. (Reg. Norv. II doc.s 209 & 218).

Admittedly, this occurred at a time when relations between the crown and the church were undergoing changes ("Settargjerden i Tunsberg" in 1277 - Norske Middelalderdokumenter :136-151, Kjelder... 76:24-25, and the synod in Bergen 1280 - Reg. Norv. II doc. 252, GHM III:92-93). But this should not, as far as I can see, have bearing on the present line of argument.

Most interesting is, however, a letter from Archbishop Jon Raude of Nidaros to Pope Martin IV, dated before March 4th 1282. It states that the tithe goods from Iceland, the Faroes and Greenland were hard to sell, and not suited for shipment to the Pope or the Holy Land. The Greenland goods consist of ox-hides, seal-skins, walrus tusks, and walrus-hide rope (Reg. Norv. II doc. 292). (The original is lost, but the contents are evident from the answering

letter, Reg. Norv. II doc. 295). The entry confirms, incidentally, what is said about Greenland export products in the King's Mirror (GHM III:327).

The Pope replied on May 15th 1282, stating that the goods were to be delivered for sale to certain merchants in Lucca (Reg. Norv II doc. 296).

From these entries, it should be evident that the payment of the six years' tithe was not stipulated in terms of specified goods. On the contrary, the picture fits with the usual way of stipulating tax in Norway. Most probably it was fixed in relationship to a neutral counting unit, like 'mark' or 'mark forngild' ("old marks"), or as part of a farm's total production.

Such units could be "translated" into current money, or into a series of farm commodities (Steinnes 36 (1982:63)). Local taxes and land-rent were usually fixed in natural products typical for the district in question (KLN M XIII:446).

It is curious then, to note that the tax payment of 1327 consisted of walrus tusks only. This is obviously a change from 1282. It may of course be a natural adaptation to the changing market, but it may also be the result of pressure from the Archbishop of Nidaros or his representative.

Equally, it seems that Bishop Arni in Greenland had made an effort to deliver the payments in goods of salable value.

As previously noted, Arneborg has suggested that the appointment of a new Bishop of Gardar in 1343, while Arni was still in office, may have its background in unsatisfactory conditions in Greenland in connection with the church reform (Arneborg 84:100 & 88). If so, there is a chance that the payment in 1327 was seen to be inadequate.

Anyway, it is difficult on the basis of these documents to imagine Greenland as a sort of Arctic El Dorado, at least from the last part of the 13th century. And the possibilities for unhindered exploitation by Norwegian officials, whether secular or clerical, must have been rather limited.

The situation must also be seen in the view of the dramatic price drop for certain goods in the late 13th century. By this time, wool, sheepskins, and hides had become an important export article from England, which in 1275 introduced a customs tax on goods carried by foreign merchants. This may be one of the reasons for the price drop.

The falling prices forced Iceland to change its export from frieze to fish (KLN M XIII:457), a trade in which Greenland was unable to compete. In this situation one option remained: to deliver their exports in the most stable "currency" they could, i.e. walrus tusks (see also Keller 86:153).

Interestingly enough, it is at this time that Ivar Baardson is sent from Bergen to Greenland on August 11th 1341, to attend the Bishop at Gardar (Reg. Norv. V, doc. 476). His task was discussed in Section 8.2 above.

Finally, there is an interesting document dated September 15th 1345 which mentions a provincial synod in Bergen. The bishops present stated that the three years' tithe demanded by Pope Clemens VI was impossible to fulfill. To cover the costs of sending an application to the Pope, the different dioceses were to pay the following.

Nidaros and Oslo 6 'libras'(pounds), Hamar 3 'libras', and the

other dioceses 4 'libras' each. The Faroes and Greenland were to pay nothing (GHM III:115, Reg. Norv. V doc. 801, DN IV no. 293, original: AM 34.8).

The question is, of course, why the Faroes and Greenland were not charged with their part of the expenditure. Did this reflect the economic capacity of these dioceses, or was it the logical consequence of an ongoing conflict with these dioceses?

The following year the Icelandic Annals report that a ship from Greenland arrived with an exceptional amount of goods. Was this the doing of Ivar Baardson? If so, it is a fair chance that the shipment was intended for the king. We know, however, nothing about the receiver, and it may equally well be an indication of flourishing commercial activity.

Four years later, the Black Death hit Bergen, wiping out between one- and two- thirds of the population in Norway, and the demand for Greenland produce decreased as an inevitable consequence.

8.3.9 Reconstructing the Peter's Pence:

The Peter's Pence, or 'Rumaskattr' (literally "Tax to Rome"), was a per capita tax, paid directly to the Pope.

It was collected by the church administration. It was probably introduced in Norway in 1152 -53 when the country got its first archbishop. It is stated in the Frostating Law that each person owning property valuing 3 'marks' or more (not including clothing and weapons) was to pay 1 'penning' every 12 months. Until some time after the Black Death, this was interpreted according to papal regulations to the effect that each "house", i.e. each family or household, was to pay one 'penning' (Steinnes 70:136-137). We have no sources to indicate that exceptions were made for Greenland.

The exact calculation of the number of taxpayers in Norway in 1327 is, however, somewhat complicated. At this time the normal practice seems to have been to count 216 'pennings' to the 'mark', while the papal envoys seem to have counted 192 'pennings' to the 'mark' (Steinnes 36 (1982:64)).

Several attempts have been made to estimate the population size in Norway on the basis of the Peter's Pence payments.

Steinnes has discussed these estimates in a paper from 1940 (reprinted 1970). In a critical account, he also presents his own. The following figures are taken from his paper, and supplemented with entries in Reg. Norv. vol. IV, docs 486, 487, 495, 503, 507, 515, 517, 522, 541. My presentation of the figures is found below.

THE PETER'S PENCE IN 1327:		
Oslo	53,52	'marks'
Bergen	30	'marks'
Nidaros	27	'marks'
Stavanger	10,67	'marks'
Hamar	10	'marks'
Greenland	6	'marks'
Skálholt	5	'marks'
Faroes	1,125	'marks'
TOTAL	143,315	'marks'

It appears that the payment from Greenland is surprisingly high in relation to the other dioceses. The payment makes up 4,37 % of the total.

In comparison, the percentage of Greenland's six years' tithe was 1,71 % (not including the Orkneys in the total).

And the payment of the Peter's Pence from Greenland was 11,21 % of that collected in Oslo, while the comparing percent for the tithe was 5,08.

It should be stressed that there is no indication in the text that the payment from Greenland represented more than one year (discussed below). We must therefore have a look at the relationships between the six years' tithe and the Peter's Pence for all the dioceses available for comparison.

Diocese	6 years' tithe	Peter's Pence	Relation
Oslo	5.002	53,52	94,38:1
Bergen	2.700	30	90 :1
Nidaros	4.207	27	155,81:1
Hamar	1.571	10	157,1 :1
Stavanger	1.132	10,67	106,09:1
Greenland	254	6	42,33:1
TOTAL	14.866	137,19	108,36

The comparison reveals striking differences, but it should be emphasized that the figures must be used with the utmost care. There are several possible explanations to the diversity.

1. The accounts preserved are incomplete.
2. The collection of tax was inefficient and thus inconsistent.
3. The basis from which the two types of tax were stipulated was so different that the figures are, in fact, true.

The answer to this problem is indeed a complicated matter, and for the time being I have no solution to offer. It is therefore with utmost reservation that I continue this discussion.

The Peter's Pence was, as mentioned, based on the principle that the head of each household was to pay 1 'penning' a year, provided he owned property to the value of 3 'marks'. Poor people were therefore exempted from the tax.

We have, however, reason to believe that coins were scarce in Greenland. It is therefore highly likely that the Peter's Pence was paid in a variety of natural products, which were later converted into walrus tusks at the diocese at Gardar.

This creates a problem, as we know nothing of the exchange value.

Furthermore, it is possible that the price obtained for the sale in

Bergen was quite different from the value reckoned in Greenland.

It is also a remote possibility that the value of the 'mark' was counted differently in Greenland and in Bergen, i.e. Greenland may have used the traditional 216 'pennings' to the 'mark', instead of 192 which the papal envoys used (Steinnes 36 (1982:64)).

Let us, however, have a look at the figures.
The Peter's Pence from Greenland was 6 'marks'. If we count 216 'pennings' to the 'mark', we get

$$6 \text{ 'marks'} \times 216 = 1296 \text{ 'pennings'}$$

And if we use the value 192 'pennings' to the 'mark', we get

$$6 \text{ 'marks'} \times 192 = 1152 \text{ 'pennings'}$$

As one 'penning' should equal one household, these figures should indicate 1152, alternatively 1296 households in Greenland, poor people not counted.

Dr. Luka Jelic has, on the basis of the Peter's Pence, estimated the Norse Greenland population to 10.000 people (from Rey 76:138). The figure of 10.000 people in Norse Greenland is absurd to say the least, and so is the more conservative figure of 1152 households. A thousand households is between 2 and 3 times more than the total number of ruin-groups in Greenland.

The reason for the apparent discrepancy between these estimates and the number of ruin-groups is difficult to explain. Perhaps the most reasonable guess would be that the Peter's Pence, being paid together with the six years' tithe, also was paid several years at a time, due to difficulties in communications.

For example, if representing payment for six years, the annual amount would be 192 (216) 'pennings', representing 192 (or 216) households.

With the difficulties mentioned as regards stipulating the exchange value, such a solution is possible.

This would, however, change the relation between the six years' tithe and the Peter's Pence:

If representing 6 years, the relation would be 254 : 1.

If representing 3 years, it would be 127 : 1, which is more in line with the general pattern.

As a ship arrived at Bergen from Greenland in 1325, a payment for 3 years is possible (GHM III:108-111, Reg. Norv. IV doc.s 358, 362).

Unfortunately, the text simply states that the payment was received "as Peter's Pence" ("pro denario sancti Petri"), and the number of years is not specifically mentioned.

To use these figures to estimate the number of households in Greenland is, as far as I can see, tantamount to guesswork.

8.3.10 A problem of currency:

We know very little about the nature of foreign trade with Greenland in the High Middle Ages. The goods from Greenland mentioned in the correspondence between Archbishop Jon Raude and Pope Martin IV in 1282 was limited to farm commodities and seal skin products (Reg. Norv. II doc.s 292 & 295). These types of goods may have been typical for Greenland's export in the preceding period, at least what the tax payments were concerned.

The fact that these letters confirm the statements in the King's Mirror (Konungs Skuggsjá) about the goods traded from Greenland strengthens the credibility.

As for ox-hides and seal-skins, it is interesting to note that these goods were ordinary farm produce. It was, in other words, not necessary to convert this capital before shipping it to Norway.

To procure walrus tusks and -hides, special hunting expeditions to the north were demanded. Most probably, such hunting expeditions were organized by the aristocracy or the bishop. The "arctic specialties" obtained on these hunts were probably sought primarily for their value on the export market.

Finds of walrus tusk shavings at V-51 Sandnes in the Western Settlement indicate that this was an important center for the Northern cash-hunts (McGovern, pers. comm.).

This was in many respects a good period for Norse Greenland. Climatic conditions were reasonably good, sailing contacts relatively frequent, and its products seem to have been in demand. The Greenland trade was, in other words, reasonably well adapted to the market.

From the late 1200s, the situation changed considerably. The first signs of a colder climate appeared, and farming became more difficult. Navigation gradually became more hazardous because of the increasing drift ice, and ordinary farm produce became harder to sell in Norway. In other words, the traditional Greenland exports had become maladapted to the market.

This must have brought about some changes in Greenland's foreign trade.

A reduction in farm productivity, combined with falling prices, must have created a gap between the Greenland farmers and the Norwegian market.

What could be done to bridge this gap?

A well known strategy in such cases is to change the commodities produced. Another strategy is to convert the farm products into capital exchangeable on the market.

Northern Norway and Iceland were faced with many of the same problems, and measures were taken to concentrate the export to "cash crop" giving highest returns, namely fish. It was possible, in other words, for these areas to adapt to the market.

But fish is a bulky product, demanding large ships and frequent sailing contact. Greenland lay too far away to partake in this trade, and had to concentrate on products of high value and little volume.

They would, in other words, have to focus on "arctic specialties" such as falcons, pelts, hides and walrus tusks in order to stay in business. Walrus hunting thus became important, not only as a profitable activity, but as a means of converting ordinary tax revenues at home into valid "currency" abroad.

This was perhaps the only possibility Greenland had of adapting

to the economic changes in Europe.

It is therefore nothing short of a paradox that the Western Settlement was deserted during the critical 14th century. As the base for the northern cash hunts, this settlement was the keystone of Greenland's export industry, and its extinction must have been a fatal blow to its foreign trade.

The costs in risks and resources of organizing cash-hunts from the Eastern Settlement must have become unproportionately high, bordering on the impossible of what could be accomplished in a single season. It is even possible that the expertise and equipment required for this trade were specific to the Western Settlement, and thus less familiar to the Easterners. In which case the gap between the Greenlanders and their European market may have become increasingly difficult to bridge.

An indication of this situation is found in a document from 1389, concerning merchants who had been blown to Greenland in a storm, according to the Icelandic Annals in 1385.

Upon their arrival in Bergen they were charged with having broken the royal trade monopoly. They were, however, acquitted, first because they had not intended to go to Greenland at all, and second because the 'Allting' (General Assembly) in Greenland had stated that no 'austmen' ("men from the east", i.e. the Icelandic expression for Norwegians) should be allowed to buy supplies in Greenland unless they bought Greenlandic trade-goods in return. The merchants had, however, refused to take the king's cargo. (The letter is addressed to the present regent, Queen Margrethe (From GHM III:139-141, see also Gad 67:183-185).

The merchants are usually identified as those accompanying Björn Einarsson 'Jorsalfarer' (see Isl. ann. in GHM III:32 & 34, and 135-137).

Gad writes about this situation:

"This means that the Norse population of the Eastern Settlement would force navigators who accidentally arrived in Greenland to buy Greenland produce. This is a strong indication that the Norse population was in such a fix that they had to resort to coercive measurements to get rid of their goods." (Gad 67:184, my translation).

Evidently, this not only implies that sailing contact with Greenland was infrequent, but also a lack of commercial interest in the kind of goods Greenland produced.

The letter is, in other words, not necessary evidence of reduced productivity within Greenland (although this may also have been the case), but may rather be an indication of of a "transport- and currency-problem" with the European market.

It is worth noting the very short span of time which had passed between Ivar Baardson's stay in Greenland from 1341 and Pål Knutsson's assignment in 1355, and this entry made in 1389. Baardson's Description gives us no hint of a crisis in the Eastern Settlement. King Magnus Eriksson's letter to Pål Knutsson implies

that Christianity was in danger, and in 1385 the windblown merchants were apparently met by furious Greenlanders who wanted to get rid of their goods. What had happened during this short period of time?

We know that the Norwegian sailing activity on Iceland increased in the 1370ies and 1380ies (Stefánsson 86:83). Why was Greenland apparently left out of this trade? Had the merchants in Bergen, who in fact held the trade monopoly, lost all interest in Greenland? As the trade with Iceland seemed to flourish for a short period, we may ask if this loss of interest was a consequence of the Black Death only, or if other changes were involved, either in the European market or in the general attitude towards the Greenlanders.

8.4 CONCLUSIONS

It does not take much imagination to see certain similarities between Norse Greenland and the Icelandic Freestate.

It is obviously dangerous to draw the Icelandic parallel too far, but there are reasons to assume that the social system of Greenland was of a related character.

Kirsten Hastrup has demonstrated how land control in Iceland gradually became more and more concentrated, until six clans ruled most of the country (Hastrup 85:189-200). She also argues that the Icelandic social system was subject to increased pressures from external forces like the Norwegian King and the Roman Catholic Church, ending in the fall of the Freestate in 1262 - 64 (Hastrup 85:230).

It is not unlikely that developments in Greenland followed a similar pattern. In which case, we may suggest that even in Greenland, socio-economic power gradually became concentrated in the hands of a few clans. This is, in fact, a most useful model.

Judging from the events in Norwegian and Icelandic church history, it is probable that a proprietary church system was dominant in Greenland for the better part of the settlement period, and that measures were taken in Norway to bring the system in line with the rules of the Norwegian Church.

There are also indications that these attempts were futile, or very nearly so.

Under the proprietary church system, much of the clerical power rested with the church owners. If Norse Greenland witnessed a gradual concentration of power, as in Iceland, this development most likely affected the church, meaning that most of the churches were probably owned by a handful of people.

This theory may explain the building of the costly stone churches in Greenland around 1300, which has baffled so many scholars. Thus this apparent extravagance may be regarded, not as a manifestation of episcopal power, but as a demonstration of the religious and economic power of the most prosperous clans.

The proprietary church system must have left the bishop in a peculiar and isolated position as far as his influence on ecclesiastical affairs was concerned.

Still, the extensive buildings at Gardar, and the apparently "uninhabited" area around the bishop's see, are by no means indications that the bishop was poor. The bishop quite possibly held

considerable property, as, in fact, indicated by Ivar Baardson. But it must be questioned whether his economic position was even remotely comparable to that of his Norwegian colleagues in the High Middle Ages.

Indeed, we may ask if the Bishop of Gardar should be considered a powerful chief, rather than the local cashier of the Norwegian Church.

Also, Greenland's relatively meager contributions to the six years' tithe and the Peter's Pence can by no means support the theories that Greenland was ruthlessly exploited by the European church.

Arneborg's arguments concerning possible tax defaults during the 14th century point in the same direction.

Thus it may seem as if the influence of the Norwegian Church and King was seriously reduced by the long distance between Greenland and the mother country.

My suggested interpretation of the terms for "owning" in Ivar Baardson's Description in Section 7.2.2 has certain consequences for our ideas about the land controlled by the church. There is little reason to believe that the parish churches held private property on a scale comparable to that of their Norwegian counterparts.

Most probably, land was largely controlled by the aristocracy, which also maintained ownership of most of the churches and their incomes. This must have been intolerable to the Archbishop in Nidaros, as it was in sharp conflict with the ideals of the High Middle Ages, as well as current Norwegian Law. After Iceland and Greenland had become parts of the Norwegian kingdom, this must certainly have become the concern of the king.

It is therefore logical that a church reform would have been attempted shortly after Greenland had become part of the Norwegian kingdom.

But a reform of this sort would sever the ties between secular and clerical power in Greenland, bringing about fundamental changes in a society where religious, economic and political power had traditionally rested in the same hands. It must also have been in sharp conflict with the basic judicial concepts of Germanic (and hence Greenlandic?) Law. After all, the transition from Germanic to Roman Law was a slow psychological process which had taken several hundred years in Norway.

Thus a change of the church organization must have implied changes in the basic fabric of Greenland society, a change which, in fact, may have been more devastating to its social organization than the transition from paganism to Christianity three centuries before.

If this model is correct, it is hardly surprising that the Greenlanders resisted the church reform.

But this line of thinking has much wider implications than just those pertaining to church history, it may even have bearings on the decline of the settlement itself.

Is it possible that the Greenlanders' resistance to the church reform discouraged further involvement from Norway, as Gísli Oddsson described? (Section 8.2.5 above). In other words, that reduced sailing contact was not only a result of increased drift ice, difficulties in raising ships and crews, and a shift in the political and economic focal point. Could it, to some extent, also have been self-inflicted through the Greenlanders' opposition against the church reform, and their resistance to certain taxes? After all, some

of the possible offenses involved automatically qualified for collective excommunication.

This could easily have triggered an attitude of disinterest in Norse Greenland among the king and clergy of Norway, thus merely adding to the other hardships endured by the Greenlanders during the late 14th century.