

The Testimony of the Hoofprints

Danish Legends about the Medieval Union Queen Margrethe

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Barbro Klein’s “The Testimony of the Button” is still, fifty years after it appeared, a fundamental study of legends and legend scholarship. Inspired by Klein’s article, I analyze legends about “lord and lady” Margrethe (1353–1412), who reigned for decades as the effective ruler of the medieval union of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Proceeding through various groups of related legends, I show how these legends were adapted to Margrethe’s anomalous status as a female war leader, including their cross-fertilization with robber legends and the use of a ruse usually associated with male protagonists. This article ends by indicating the importance of place within history as articulated in legends.



“The Testimony of the Button”: Legend and History

Barbro Klein’s “The Testimony of the Button” (1971) remains an important landmark in legend studies. The button in question – a man’s round coat button, split in half and filled with lead, and flattened on one side – was discovered in 1924 near the home of a smith in the province of Halland, Sweden, who gave it in 1932 to the folklorist Albert Sandklef. According to the smith, it was the bullet that had killed the Swedish king Karl (Charles) XII in 1718, during the course of a siege just across the Swedish border in Norway, thus putting an end to Sweden’s military ambitions. The official narrative was that an enemy sniper had killed him, but an alternative narrative that actually better fits the forensic evidence was that the king had been assassinated by a member of his own troops.

This latter version circulated as rumor back in the capital, Stockholm, and has also been widely recorded in rural legend tradition, though only from the era of heavy collecting during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Why was a button used as ammunition? Because according to the legends, Karl was invulnerable; ordinary bullets bounced off him like blueberries, and only a special bullet could kill him, made either of silver or from his own clothing.

Klein’s article offers a penetrating and nuanced analysis of the debate surrounding the button given to Sandklef. First with co-authors (1940), then as sole author responding to criticism (1941), Sandklef propounded the argument that legends could show that the king had been assassinated with a bullet made of his own button. He claimed that the bullet in question had been carried by a soldier back to Halland, where it had been tossed on a patch of gravel and ultimately found by the smith in 1934. Klein focused on the opposition to this argument by the historian Nils Ahnlund (Jägerskiöld et al. 1941). Ahnlund indeed found weak points in Sandklef’s argumentation, but he was completely closed to the idea that folklore materials could contribute to national history. His stance was in contrast to the kinds of arguments that had been current in Europe a century earlier, although in Sweden the hostility toward folklore in the hyper-source criticism of scholars like the brothers Weibull had been well established by the early decades of the twentieth century (see e.g. Odén 1975).

In addition to unpacking the disciplinary prejudices surrounding the legend, Klein brilliantly situated the debate in its own historical context of World War II:

The nation of Charles XII was sitting out the war, fearful of attack and aware of its helplessness should war come. But the very people they feared also considered the Aryan Charles XII as a hero of their own, a state of affairs that symbolized some

of the conflicts and guilts they felt themselves embroiled in. The bitterness of the Sandklef-Ahnlund controversy was one result of the national identity crisis of 1940. (Klein 1971: 145–146)

For neutral Sweden, the military aggressor Karl XII was not a pleasant memory, whereas for national-socialist Germany, the king was an Aryan warrior hero; and to make matters worse, Sweden's neutrality carried the moral cost of acquiescence to German aggression.

Klein's paper is ultimately not about a controversy in Sweden; it is about the nature of legend, especially historical legend. Legends may be set in the past, and they may retain elements of the past, but they exist for the present:

Narrators of historical legends may attempt consciously to judge or explain the events they describe. But there are even more essential ways in which legends, by concentrating on certain characters, actions, and motifs, implicitly and symbolically express the values of their tellers and their groups. In a sense, the entire Sandklef-Ahnlund controversy distracted attention from the way in which all historical legendry is "true": as a condensed representation of the image a group has of its own past and of the meaning of this image for its present and future. (Klein 1971: 144)

Kings in Scandinavian Folklore

Given the importance of kings and kingship in Scandinavia, one might expect the topic to be reflected in folklore, as it certainly was in written literature. The modern nation-states of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden can trace their origins back to evolving kingships during the end of the Viking Age, that is, during the eleventh century. Although all three kingdoms have existed formally since that time, from 1380 to 1814 Norway and Denmark comprised a personal union under the Danish monarch, and the two major Nordic powers were Denmark-Norway and Sweden, both of which were major players on the European stage after the Reformation (in both countries ushered in by the king). At the height of Danish power, King Christian IV took Denmark into the Thirty Years War but later had to cede territory to Sweden after disastrous defeats in the mid-seventeenth century. Sweden then became the dominant northern power up until the death of Karl XII mentioned above. Thereafter both kingdoms, and Norway from 1814 (when at the treaty of Kiel it was placed under the Swedish crown, where it remained until it achieved full independence in 1905), grew into the regionally important nation-states of today.

Although there are a handful of legends about other kings in Sweden, Karl XII dominates the tradition. In Norway, too, St. Olav (c. 995–1030, king of Norway

1015–1028), whose sanctity certainly aided in the formation of the nation-state, is clearly dominant in tradition. As a figure from the far distant past, in legends he functions primarily as someone who contributed to the formation of the landscape by actions such as turning trolls to stone (Bø 1955).

In Denmark it is less easy to identify a single figure who is dominant in legend tradition. In Just Mathias Thiele's legend collections (1818–23, 1843), King Christian IV, the last king of Denmark as a world power, appears far more frequently than other monarchs. Thiele gathered many of these legends from written sources (as did the Grimms in their seminal *Deutsche Sagen* [1816–18]). The possibility of underlying oral traditions can hardly be ruled out, especially as many of the elements of Christian's life story are unlikely to be "historical" in our sense of the word: a mermaid predicted his birth and he was born outside under a hawthorn. A few legends recount his meetings with peasants who do not realize he is the king and portray him as friendly and just, and many relate specific incidents from his life and career. It is hardly surprising that a king who reigned for almost sixty years and put through a great many building projects, including numerous royal residences in and around Copenhagen, should be well represented in legend tradition. But it seems that this strong representation was limited to Zealand (Sjælland), the island dominated by Copenhagen, the capital and seat of the monarchy. In Jutland (Jylland) across the Great Belt, the figure most dominant in tradition was another monarch, namely Margrethe (1353–1412), regent of Denmark (1375–1412), Norway (1380–1412), and Sweden (1388–1412). Margrethe was effectively the ruler of all Scandinavia for nearly half a century. In the formal treaty of the Kalmar union in 1397 described below, Margrethe was accepted as "our lady and lord" by the assembled nobles, an expression that recognizes the anomaly of a woman wielding full royal power in medieval Europe.

Historical Background

Margrethe was born in 1353, the daughter of the Danish king Valdemar IV, one of the most significant Danish kings of the Middle Ages, who had restored much of the territory that had been lost to German counts or to Sweden. When he died in 1375, electors chose as his successor his infant grandson Olaf II, the son of Margrethe and her husband Haakon VI, king of Norway. Margrethe served as Olaf's regent and thus effectively wielded royal power in Denmark. To her realm was added Norway when Haakon died in 1380, which is the point when the personal union between Denmark and Norway began. The year after Olaf's death in 1387, the nobles of Denmark and Norway accepted Margrethe as their regent without reference to a minor child or incapacitated king.

Needless to say, such a female regent was anomalous, and Margrethe put forward her nephew Erik of Pomerania as king. After Margrethe overcame in battle a challenge from the deposed Swedish king Albrekt of Mecklenburg in 1389, the way was clear for Erik. In 1396 he was declared king of all three Nordic kingdoms, a fact that was formalized in a treaty Margrethe pushed through in Kalmar in 1397. The Kalmar union lasted formally until 1523, but it effectively ended with Margrethe's death in 1412. Although Erik had come of age in 1401, Margrethe continued to rule in all but name, up until her death aboard her ship in 1412.

The Legend Corpus

Danish legend tradition is best documented in the collections of Evald Tang Kristensen (hereafter ETK), and for this essay I have examined the legends about Margrethe in both the earlier and later series of his *Danske sagn* (1896 and 1932). All told, by my count there are twenty-five texts in the 1896 volume and an additional six in the 1932 volume, or thirty-one in total. Although these legends were recorded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on a couple of occasions ETK indicates that his informant was 70 or 80 years of age. Thus, the legends very likely had been in circulation before the latter decades of the nineteenth century, as indeed other sources show, especially the legend collections of Thiele mentioned above.

Writing to place the legends collected by ETK in social and historical context, Timothy R. Tangherlini summarized the important changes that took place between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. These include Denmark moving from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy and from a manorial system in which church and crown controlled most land to private land ownership by individual farmers (Tangherlini 2013: 6–7). The low legal status of peasants had also been abolished. Furthermore:

The privileged status of the market towns and cities had evaporated, literacy was widespread, a well-functioning railway connected virtually all parts of the country, high-speed communication via telegraph was commonplace, and the popular press had become an accessible and important factor in people's understanding of community, region, and nation. (Tangherlini 2013: 7)

These changes allowed the concept of the nation to become important at the local level. Particularly for the “rural proletariat” from whom ETK collected his legends,¹ they were

¹ The expression is from Holbek (1987), who was able to relate fairy tales to the social circumstances of this group.

compelling and important. To cite but one possible example, the growth of agricultural cooperatives (see Tangherlini 2013: 8), which enabled farmers to find markets all over Denmark and even as far as England, must surely have increased the sense of farmers as living within the nation, not the closed locality around their smallholding.

It is hardly surprising that royals should represent one avenue for expressing nationalist feelings, and during the period when the legends were circulating and being collected, Margrethe would have been a particularly compelling subject as the union queen. She was the historical queen of not only Denmark, but also of Norway and Sweden. Politically, Denmark had ceded Norway to the Swedish king in 1814 and Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia in 1864. In 1905, when ETK was still collecting materials that would appear in the second collection of the legends and other publications, Norway gained independence from Sweden. While I doubt that the Scandinavianist movement of the middle of the nineteenth century, which flourished primarily in intellectual circles, was meaningful to ETK's informants, they would have been aware of these major events in their nation's history.

Margrethe and the Landscape

Before indicating some common narrative patterns, I should mention that frequently Margrethe simply serves as a fixed point in the past, to show how the landscape has changed. Thus, for example, she used to live in a manor house or castle, or party in a pleasure palace that no longer stands; or she and her army sailed through a bog that was once navigable water. These fit a broader pattern within legend tradition in which an important figure from the past signifies the change in some aspect of the local landscape over time. Frequently the change involves "low level" or local cosmogony, in that the figure from the past caused the landscape to look as it does today. Often in the Nordic legends they are supernatural beings, giants turned into rock formations or trolls who throw boulders at churches (see Lindow 2021 for an analysis of some of these notions). It is worth noting that these brief references to Margrethe's presence in what is perceived as a changed landscape deviate from the usual "low level" or local cosmogony: what seems to matter is that Margrethe had been there, not that she had somehow formed the landscape. Indeed, in the legends collected and printed by ETK, legend-tellers can frequently point out a local feature of the landscape where Margrethe's army camped, or where a battle took place. Some legends can "imbue a portion of local space with history" (Asplund Ingemark 2004: 245), and these traditions about Margrethe do just that – they bring national history into the local landscape in which people lived. Such spaces were thus not just local, they were national. When people walked through the same places where Margrethe lived or stayed, or where she

led her army, they participated in national history. Margrethe was not just someone whom one heard or read about in school; she had been in these places, just as people were in the here and now.

The Ruse of the Horseshoes

Many of these toponymic legends point out the first and perhaps most salient feature about Margrethe in the oral traditions recorded by ETK: she led armies and fought battles. Generally, her opponent is “the Swedish king,” sometimes specified as Albrekt (the aforementioned Albrekt of Mecklenburg was king of Sweden from 1363 until his death in battle with Margrethe in 1389); sometimes just “the Swedes,” and once the Lübeckers. She usually wins her battles, but not always; a few legends mention strategic retreats.

Margrethe does not, however, win battles through normal military strategy or personal valor, but rather through trickery, especially by having her and her soldiers’ horses shod backward so that it would look as if they had ridden away rather than toward her enemies’ base of operations. Here is a text that reveals many of the traits I have just mentioned.

Queen Margrethe lived at Trælsborg Castle on the grounds of Ørum between Ørum and Ajstrup. There is a little rise in the ground, which has been flooded, and there was a castle there. She had a fort in Gammelstrup heath, and kept her horses in Dronning Mærgårds valley. It is told that she watered her horses at Tastum brook and was so clever that she reversed the horses’ shoes, so that the enemies would be tricked. We have found a cannon ball as big as a child’s head, once when we were digging turf out there.² [All translations by the author.]

This is the first text under the title “Dronning Margrethe” in the earlier collection (1896) and thus the one ETK chose to begin the section about Margrethe. Here we see changes in the landscape, placenames associated in local tradition with Margrethe, the stratagem of the reversed horseshoes, and a token of the past in the form of a huge cannonball. That the informant was not one of those with an exceptionally large repertory may be reflected in the fact that the text has no real narrative, only a stringing together of pieces of information about Margrethe.

² “Dronning Margrethe boede på Trælsborg slot på Ørum ejendom mellem Ørum og Ajstrup. Der er en lille forhøjning, som har været omflødt, og der har ligget et slot. Hun havde en skandse i Gammelstrup hede, og havde hendes heste i dronning Mærgårds dal. Det fortælles, at hun vandede sine heste ved Tastum bæk og var så sløv at vende hestenes sko. For at fjendene skulde blive narrede. Vi har fundet en kanonkugle så stor som et barnehoved, en gang vi grov törv der ude” [Informant: Søren Favrhøldt, S.-Ørum] (Kristensen 1896: 31 [no. 132]).

Margrethe as War Leader: The View from Afar

Besides the recurrent motif of the reversing of the horseshoes, Margrethe's military prowess is expressed in these legends through her ability to follow action from afar, frequently through a telescope, sometimes from the top of a church tower. If she sees her troops losing the battle, she may use the ruse of the reversed horseshoes to effect a retreat, or she may make a religious vow to reward the church whose tower she is in. Both legends are attached to the tower at Karup church, although the gold cup she provided to the church, according to the 89-year-old Bodil Pedersen, was later removed.³ Several informants began this legend by saying that Karup church once had a tall tower. This church was consecrated in 1485 and indeed had a tall tower that was demolished in the eighteenth century after it was struck by lightning.⁴ Margrethe stands as a waypoint in the past who helps mark change. The fact that her observation post is not a high hill but a church tower, however, indicates the connection between Margrethe and religion, or perhaps one could say God's will. Although such a notion may have been more salient in medieval thought than on the cusp of modernity, it remained important in Nordic legend tradition into the twentieth century.

One curious motif concerning Margrethe's observation that turns up in a few legends is that with her telescope Margrethe spots the Swedish king trying to hide inside his horse, which he has cut open. The narrators mention this curious subterfuge almost in passing, and it seems that it is actually the church that matters. Here is an example:

Queen Margrethe came riding to Bavnhøj with her people and turned the shoes around, and then she left Bavnhøj and went up to Kobberup church, where she sat with her telescope and watched the battle which was going on at Fly or Dommerby heath. A message came to her that they had won the battle but they did not know what had become of King Albrekt. "Well," she said, "he has slit open his horse and crawled inside," for she had seen that. And so they captured him. There are a whole lot of mounds up there on the heath where the fallen soldiers are buried. Bavnhøj is a bit south of the church.⁵

³ "nu er den taget bort"; no. 44.

⁴ <https://thyrashm.blogspot.com/2009/08/karup-church.html>.

⁵ "Dronning Margrethe kom ridene til Bavnhøj med hendes folk og vendte skoene avet, og så gik hun fra Bavnhöj og til Kobberup kirke, der sad hun med hennes kikkert og så på slaget, som stod på Fly eller Dommerby hede. Da kom der bud till hende, at nu havde de vundet slaget, men de vidste ikke, hvor kong Albrekt var bleven af. Ja, siger hun, han havde sprækket sin hest og var krøben inden i den, for det havde hun set. Så fangede de ham. Der er en svær hoben høje der over på heden, hvor de faldne krigsfolk er begravede. Bavnhöj er et lille stykke syd for kirken [Kobberup. No informant information.]" (Kristensen 1896: 33–34 [no. 39]).

ETK's protégé Jeppe Aakær, who collected exclusively in his home parish of Fly, had no fewer than three versions of this legend, so we can presume that it was locally widespread. Like the version from ETK, there are numerous appeals to features in the landscape. One version contains just the hiding in the horse and capture (Aakjær 1966: 4 [no. 6]), one continues with the cruel imprisonment of Albrekt (Aakjær 1966: 17–18 [no. 66]), and a third lacks the horse but implies that the capture was made possible by Margrethe's stratagem of reversing the horseshoes (Aakjær 1966: 44 [no. 223]).

Margrethe and the Swedish King

The legends make the war between Margrethe and the Swedish king highly personal. Motifs that play into these legends include the Swedish king's treacherous murder of Margrethe's son and the return of his dismembered body in a barrel; Margrethe's capture of the Swedish king, sometimes ingeniously, and the subsequent torture and/or humiliation he must endure. All are found in this recorded version:

So, Queen Margrethe had a son, and when the king of Sweden once had a huge banquet he also invited her son. He indeed came, but the Swedish king killed him and cut him into pieces, put them in a barrel and sent it back to her. So it was that she went to war against him and defeated him. On old decorated ceramic stoves (*kakkelovne*) their pictures are to be seen: he is lying under her feet as an object of derision. She sits with a scale in one hand (for she was honest in trade) and with a spear in the other (a sign of her power).⁶

Another variant of this legend, collected later from Bodil Jensdatter (Kristensen 1932: 17–18 [no. 46]), has Margrethe send the Swedish king a pot of pepper, to which he replies by sending her a bunch of sewing needles and calling her *skjortekonge* (petticoat king), before slaughtering the son and sending his body to Margrethe in a barrel. This version explains too that the Swedish king is under Margrethe's feet after she has captured him because she uses him as a kind of footstool to enter and leave her carriage or to climb upon her horse, especially when the ground is muddy.

In a rare act of editorial intervention, ETK explains the images on *kakkelovne* as Lady Justice and remarks that the transfer to Margrethe is quite strange. The images that

⁶ "Dronning Margrethe havde jo en søn, og da kongen i Sverige en gang gjorde et stort gjæstebud, bød han også hendes søn med. Han kom godt nok, men så slog den svenske konge ham ihjel og hug ham i stykker, puttede disse i en tønde og sendte den hjem til dronningen. Så var det, hun gav sig til at føre krig med ham og overvandt ham. På gamle kakkelovne kan man se deres billeder, han ligger under hendes fodder til spe og spot. Hun sidder med en vægtskål i den ene hand (ti hun var oprigtig i handel og vandal) og med et spyd i den anden (tegn på hendes magt)" [Informant: Inger Marie Jensdatter, Tårs] (Kristensen 1896: 31–32 [no. 133]).

the narrator of the above example interpreted as the defeated Swedish king are more difficult to guess at. It is, however, telling that for her and perhaps others the story of Margrethe's dominance over the Swedish king was a salient feature of folk belief about her. It seems to have been important enough to motivate this interpretation of images on commercially-made porcelain stove tiles. For those who told and heard the legends, this was surely a clear example of Danish dominance over Sweden.

Domestic Opposition

In some legends, Margrethe faces defiance from not only the Swedish king but also from her own subjects. These stories also involve towers:

In the old days at Store-Rugtved castle there was a very tall tower, which could be seen from far out at sea even though there was a huge forest between the castle and the sea. Once Queen Margrethe came sailing by, and she saw the tower and wanted to shoot it down because she could not stand such arrogance. She shot a cannonball into it and knocked the tower down with it.

A man at Kringelgård manor has a large ball which is set on the top of the southernmost gable of the barn, and people have said that it is Queen Margrethe's cannonball, which she shot at Rugtved.⁷

In the legend version in the first series of ETK's legend collection (no. 153; Kristensen 1896: 38), the tower is a lighthouse built by an evil Lady Ingeborg and is used to lure ships into wrecking on the coast so that they may be looted. Thus, Margrethe attacks arrogant pride in one version and theft in the other.

Margrethe and Robbers

Besides enemy armies and tower-builders, Margrethe has one other common enemy in the legends suggested by Lady Ingeborg's motives, namely robbers. Indeed, 6 of the 25 texts in the 1896 volume concern robbers (there are none, however, in the 1932 volume). In general in Nordic legendry, robbers are disruptive all-male groups who live outside of society in some kind of stronghold and threaten the domestic order, either through

⁷ "I gammel tid var der paa Store-Rugtved borg et meget højt taarn, der kunde sees langt ude paa havet, uaget der imellem havet og borgen var stor skov. Saa kom dronning Margrethe sejlende, og hun saa det store taarn og vilde skyde det ned, da hun ikke kunde lide saadant hovmod. Hun sendte altsaa en kugle derind og skød taarnet ned dermed. En mand paa herregaarden Kringelhede har en stor kugle, som er anbragt paa spidsen af fæhusets sydlige gavl, og den har man sagt er dronning Margrethes kugle, som hun skød efter Rugtved" [Informant: M. C. Christiansen, Frørup, 1909] (Kristensen 1932: 17 [no. 45]).

armed robbery or through the kidnapping of and sometimes “forced marriage” to (i.e., rape of) women. The robbers in these legends do all these things until they are subdued by Margrethe, as in this example.

Just east of Støvring on the other side of the pond is the ruin of an old robbers’ stronghold. There is a farm in the neighborhood that is still called Slottet [the castle]. Encircling it are indications of a moat, and several oak pilings have been driven in along with indications of brickwork. Queen Margrethe conquered it. One day when the robbers were out, she rode in with twelve mounted soldiers and had the horses shod backward so that it would look as if they had ridden away from there. She remained inside, and in the evening the robbers came without caution right in to her, since they suspected nothing. And so she overcame them with her soldiers, took them prisoner, and cut them down. The pond is called Skjørpingholme and actually belongs to Buderupholm.⁸

Of the 36 or so texts regarding Margrethe in the two relevant volumes of ETK’s *Danske sagn*, 12 have the motif of the reversed horseshoes, eight times used against the enemy army and four times against robbers. 2 other legends report that Margrethe eliminated a robber band without using the motif of the reversed horseshoes. Obviously, there is structural equivalence between the Swedish army and bands of robbers in these legends of Margrethe. That is of course to be expected; invading armies and robber bands are both exclusively outsiders, male, and destructive. One might think, too, given the fact that robbers constitute a group, rather like an army, and inhabit a fortress, as an army might, that overcoming them would fall more readily to government or army than to individual. The Margrethe legends might seem to support that claim, but I believe they do more than that: they agree with robber legends from throughout the Nordic countries in that the robbers’ opponent is female. Reidar Th. Christiansen identified the migratory legend type 8025 “The Robbers and the Captive Girl,” in which a lone girl is captured by a band of robbers but frees herself by throwing boiling milk at them or, far more frequently, by summoning help by sending a message on her cow horn (Christiansen 1958: 215–221). This type is more or less identical to the international

⁸ “Lige østen for Støvring på den anden side af kjæret er en ruin af en gammel røverborg. Der ligger en gård i nærheden som endnu kaldes Slottet. Der er syn for runden omkring, at der har været voldgrave og der er nedrammet en mængde egepæle, ligesom der også findes murværk. Dronning Margrethe indtog det. En dag røverne var ude, red hun derind med 12 heste og ryttere, og hestene lod hun beslå avet, for at det kunde se ud, som de var redne derfra. Hun blev nu der inde, og om aftenen drog røverne dristig ind til hende, da de ingen ting anede. Så overfaldt hun dem med hendes krigsfolk, tog dem til fange og nedsablede dem. Kjæret kaldes Skjørpingholme og hører egentlig til Buderupholm” [Öster-Hornum. No informant information] (Kristensen 1896: 36 [no. 148]).

folktale type ATU 958 “The Shepherd Youth in the Robbers’ Power,” except for the gender of the protagonist (Uther 2004: 598). ATU 958 is found mostly in the Swiss Alps and southeast Europe, where shepherds are male, whereas in Scandinavia it is young women who take the cattle up into the mountains; this difference in transhumance will easily account for the gender of the protagonists (Wildhaber 1975).

In Sweden and Swedish-speaking areas of Finland the situation is identical. In *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend* Bengt af Klintberg (2010: 435–440; cf. also Tillhagen 1975) catalogues numerous legends about robbers: these include groups, individuals, coastal villagers plundering shipwrecks, and so forth. Of these, about a dozen are about robber bands who live in a fortress or cave [Y11–Y22]. When the legend is about how the robbers are thwarted or killed, the protagonist is overwhelmingly female. In two types she is the one rescued (Y15 and 22), but in another seven she arranges her own rescue or kills the robbers (Y11, Y12, Y13, Y19, Y23, Y24, Y26). I would read this pattern as an explanation for why robbers figure so prominently in the legends of Queen Margrethe: robbers threaten women or their areas of responsibility, and women defeat robbers. Often the protagonist in these legends foils the robbers by means of a subterfuge: blowing a recognizable tune on a horn (Y11) as in ML 8025, or adhering to the letter but not the spirit of an oath given to her captors. In one legend type, the girl vows to the robbers not to tell a soul about them, so in someone’s hearing she tells a cat, or she drops peas that lead back to the cave (Y13).

Similar legend types lack the robber band and cave but highlight the clever escape of the girl: as they climb one by one through a window, she beheads them (Y23); she leads a robber to a chest full of riches and overcomes him as he bends over into the chest (Y24); pinned down by her braids or sleeves, she cuts them off and escapes as the robbers sleep (Y26).

Y25 has a male protagonist who suspects that he will be attacked and robbed while asleep at an inn. He stuffs his clothing and places it in the bed and thus learns the identity of the assailant and overcomes him. This plot, including as it does traveling alone and staying in inns, could not have had an ordinary female protagonist since such activities would have been culturally unsuitable for women.

The clever subterfuge associated with Margrethe’s killing of the robbers is the reversed horseshoes. It is perhaps worth mentioning that in other genres in Nordic tradition this motif of shoes worn backward is associated with the realm of the female. In his collection of Icelandic tales, Jón Árnason printed a fairy tale in which the heroine, Helga Karlsdóttir, deceives a witch who had enchanted her future husband: Helga’s dead mother appears to her in a dream and advises her to put on her shoes backward before slipping out of the house to hide. The ruse is successful, and with the help of a

grateful dwarf she averts her lover's wedding to the witch and kills her (Jón Árnason 1862–64 I: 413–414, 1961 II: 396–397). In the well-known Danish historical ballad *Niels Ebbesen*, Niels seeks advice from his wife on how to avoid being seized by Count Gert of Holstein. She boldly suggests that he should kill Gert (the famous subject of the ballad) and instructs him to have a smith reverse the shoes on his horse (Grundtvig 1858: 476–542; the motif is found in four of the seven variants, all from written sources).

The feminine focus of the motif of the reversed horseshoes in Nordic legendry stands in stark – and from this perspective important – contrast to its usual context internationally, for it is usually men who employ this subterfuge. Thus, for example, in folksongs about Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, Cearbhall elopes on horses with reversed horseshoes, an attempt to fool the woman's father that ultimately fails (Doan 1985: 68). Further afield in geographic space but closer in subject matter, the robber El Tejano (the Texan) turned up in a number of legends collected in the area of Tucson, Arizona, mostly as a ghost connected with treasure, but one who owed some of his success as a robber to the clever subterfuge of reversing horseshoes to avoid detection (Roach 1968).

Closer to Denmark, in robber legends in Germany, especially in its northern parts contiguous to Jutland, the motif is common enough that Adalbert Kuhn could note of it as early as in the 1860s, during the early days of the collection and publication of legends: “the feature of attaching horseshoes reversed is common to nearly all robber legends” (Kuhn 1859: 76, original in German). The motif has been in print in German at least since the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen*, which includes the example of the robbers Johan Hübner from Westfalen (Grimm 1977[1891/1816–18]: 161, no. 129) and, citing Winkelmann (1711: 321), Count Berthold of Nidda (Grimm 1977[1891/1816–18]: 575–576), both of whom reverse their horses' shoes as they attempt to evade their pursuers. In Hocker (1855), to cite another nineteenth-century example, the robbers are marauding Knights Templar.

Before proceeding to a consideration of these matters, one curious analogue must be mentioned.⁹ According to Charlotte S. Burne (1890), in the area of Blore Heath where a battle of that name took place in 1459, the following occurred:

[T]he people tell how the brook ran red with blood for three days and three nights after the fight, and that when the Lancastrians were worsted, Queen Margaret hurried down from Muckleston church-tower, where she was watching the fray, made the village blacksmith reverse the shoes of her horse to mislead her pursuers, and so fled in all haste to the Bishop of Lichfield's castle at Eccleshall. (Burne 1890: 319)

⁹ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to me this instance and the analogues in Ireland and Arizona.

The website bloreheath.org, created to the best of my knowledge by the Blore Heath Heritage Group, adds the name of the blacksmith and reports that the anvil used stands as a memorial in the churchyard at Mucklestone.

The Margaret in this English version is Margaret of Anjou, wife of King Henry VI, the weak and sometimes deluded head of the house of Lancaster, in whose place she often reigned, and like Margrethe she is often associated with battle, in this case the War of the Roses. Without further information it is simply not possible to verify the direction of what seems to be obvious influence between the two traditions. The situation is further complicated by Burne's statement to the effect that: "The same story of a queen watching a lost battle, and fleeing away with reversed horseshoes, is told, with less foundation, on the site of the battle of Shrewsbury" (Burne 1890: 319), which was another battle in the War of the Roses. I have been unable to verify this statement; however, my purpose here is not to trace a motif, but rather to analyze the legend traditions about Margrethe in Jutland.

Concluding Remarks

All legends are local, in the sense that they relate directly and irrevocably to the local communities in which they circulate; this has been a staple of legend scholarship for decades, and scholars such as Ulf Palmenfelt (1993) and Timothy Tangherlini (1999, 2008, 2013) have shown that even archival materials may be elucidated in such a way. One of the connections with the local is in bringing the past into the present, that is, in imbuing specific places in the local landscape with a past. In Scandinavian legend tradition, the actors in the past were frequently supernatural in nature, and often these beings actually formed the landscape both natural and cultural (mountains, churches). In other cases, the actors were figures from local and national history, who left traces either in the landscape itself or in memories about specific locations. It was natural that academic historians and folklorists would disagree on whether such traditions represented history or myth, as Klein's discussion so clearly showed. In 1962 Brynjulf Alver (1989) suggested a reconciliation, and a work like the Swedish historian Michael Häll's study (2013) of attitudes toward alleged sexual relationships between humans and supernatural beings in Sweden in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which analyses such materials as court records and theological writings alongside folkloric material, shows that the distinction between legend-as-myth and legend-as-history was artificial.

Thus, when one hears of past rulers in the rural landscape, there is little value in asking whether the rulers were really there, or whether they really did what local people say they did. Rather one should understand the traditions about their former

presence as a specific way of bringing the past into the present, namely, in this case, by attaching the local landscape to national history. Such attachment would have been particularly apt in nineteenth-century Jutland. In this region where ETK carried out his collecting, the country was far from the metropole and royal seat in Copenhagen where the national past could be glimpsed in numerous structures: palaces, large churches, forts, and so forth. Those who told legends about a great royal ruler who had once been in local places in Jutland were no different from people who told such legends about different royals in other parts of the North, and from this perspective Margrethe was no different from the kings who dominated traditions elsewhere.

And yet she was different. Medieval female head of state and military leader addressed by her higher subordinates as “our lord and lady,” Margrethe turns up in legends circulating in Jutland up to five centuries after her time. She is depicted as a military leader who defeats her enemies – with a special focus on a male enemy, namely the Swedish king – often using a subterfuge that in other legend traditions was used by male robbers; that is, she goes against gender expectations. But she also acts in accordance with gender expectations when she outwits and destroys robbers, for that is a female role in Nordic legend tradition. The recorded version below sums up these contradictions:

Right by Løgum cloister is or more accurately once was a rather deep valley called Dronningdal [Queen valley]; now it is filled with shifting sand. Legend recounts that Queen Margrethe lay there in childbirth and right there struck a great blow against the enemy, in which she triumphed. People also say that she had the horses shod backwards in order to trick the enemy.¹⁰

Margrethe was indeed betwixt and between, as a female head of state(s) and army leader (as was Margaret of Anjou). Tokens of her historical presence yielded up by the landscape were not the sewing needles that King Albrekt is supposed to have scornfully sent Margrethe according to one legend collected by ETK, but cannonballs and bullets from her military actions. The warrior king Karl XII prevailed, according to legend tradition, because he was invulnerable to bullets; the warrior queen Margrethe prevails in legends because she has excellent vision, and especially because she has excellent strategies that involve trickery and deceit. Margrethe was also betwixt and between two legend tradition areas: northern Scandinavia, where women tricked and overcame

¹⁰ “Tæt ved Løgum kloster er eller rettere har været en temmelig dyb dal, der kaldes Dronningdal, nu er den halvt efterføget med flyvesand. Sagnet fortæller, at dronning Margrethe der lå i barselseng og leverede fjenden et stort slag der jævne ved, hvori hun sejrede. Man siger og, at hun lod hestenes sko slå bagvendt på for at narre fjendet” [Informant identified as A. L.; no further information] (Kristensen 1896: 38 [no. 154]).

robbers, and Germany to the south, where robbers used the stratagem of reversing their horseshoes. Standing as it were in the middle, by turning her horseshoes around she in effect turned the robbers' stratagem against them.

As the character dominant in Danish royal legend tradition in Jutland, the "petticoat king" Margrethe offers an example of the importance of the unusual in traditional storytelling. Margrethe remained anomalous from a gender perspective over the centuries and was still so when ETK was collecting, and her mediation between female and male elements in tradition is probably best explained as an example of "the way in which all historical legendry is 'true'" (Klein 1971: 144).

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