PART TWO

INTEGRATION
CHAPTER THREE

JUDICIAL UNITY OR DIVERSITY?

Before we look more closely at how the king’s administrative apparatus was established in the tributary lands and how their government functioned up until 1397, we shall consider the consequences of King Magnus Håkonsson’s major legislation project for the tributary lands. King Magnus started by revising the provincial laws of Norway, but he raised his level of ambition in the early 1270s when he initiated work on a common code of law for the whole country. In 1274–76, King Magnus’s national law code of 1274, the Landlaw (‘Landsloven’ or ‘Kong Mangus Lagabøtes landslov’) was ratified by the regional assemblies in Norway, and Norway became one jurisdiction. In addition, Bergen acquired its own law code, the Townlaw (‘Byloven’) which soon became valid in Oslo, Tønsberg, and Trondheim as well. The old law code of the hird, the Hirðskrá, was revised, and with important additions, it came to resemble a “modern” administrative code.

In the endeavour to give his kingdom an up-to-date and uniform law code, Magnus the Lawmender stands in the first rank of Europe’s princes in the thirteenth century.¹

King Magnus’s legislative project and the tributary lands

The law code of the hird

Hirðskrá, the law code containing the regulations governing the king’s hird, was written down in Norway some time between 1274 and 1277, as a compilation of previous law codes and more recent royal decrees.² It regulated the relationship between the king and his liegemen, and relations within the hird, but it also regulated the king’s administrative apparatus. Hirðskrá applied to the king’s liegemen no matter where