CHAPTER SEVEN

CNUT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
‘MACHINERY OF CONTROL’ IN WESTERN AND
CENTRAL DENMARK

There is some debate about the date at which Cnut came to power in Denmark. The fullest account of the Danish succession in this period is provided by the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. It claims that when Sveinn and Cnut left Denmark in 1013, Sveinn’s other son, Haraldr, remained in control of the country.\(^1\) After Sveinn’s death on 3rd February 1014 Cnut returned to Denmark, and asked his brother for, and was refused, a share of the kingdom.\(^2\) Much of this accords well with the other evidence, and can be believed. However, there is numismatic evidence that Cnut did hold some form of governing responsibility in Denmark immediately after the death of his father. Some of the earliest coins from Lund which name Cnut as a *Rex Danorum*, most probably date from the period 1014–15.\(^3\) The numismatic evidence appears to be

\(^1\) I reject the suggestion of I. Howard, *Swein Forkbeard’s Invasions and the Danish Conquest of England 991–1017* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), 10–11, that Cnut had two brothers named Haraldr, one of whom died, the other subsequently being named Haraldr to follow “the custom of replacing the name of a dead child”. Furthermore, I can find no evidence of such a custom. Instead, it appears that the confusion is created by the encomiast’s insistence that Cnut was the elder brother, while all other sources record that Haraldr was the elder. It is probable, and more economic on the invention of siblings, that the encomiast retrospectively altered events to give Cnut (and thus his living heir, Harthacnut) the best claim to the Danish throne. See also N. Lund, “Cnut’s Danish Kingdom”, in Rumble, *Reign of Cnut*, 28, for a similar conclusion on this point.

\(^2\) *Encomium*, 2: 2 (Campbell, 16–18).

\(^3\) M. A. S. Blackburn, “Do Cnut the Great’s First Coins as King of Denmark Date from before 1018?”, in *Sigtuna Papers. Proceedings of the Viking-Age Coinage Symposium at Sigtuna, 1989*, eds. K. Jonsson and B. Malmer, (Stockholm: Swedish Numismatic Society, 1990). Blackburn’s principal arguments focus on the fact that Scandinavian copies of English coins tend to copy the current English issue-type, or the issue-type in use in England in the immediately preceding years. All the early Lund coins which bear Cnut’s name are copies of King Æthelred’s Last Small Cross issue, current between c. 1009–15. It should be noted that Lund, “Cnut’s Danish Kingdom”, pp. 29–30, has criticised Blackburn’s interpretation of the numismatic evidence here, but these criticisms seem to me to be in error. In an attempt to show that the occurrence of Cnut’s name on these Danish coins does not necessarily indicate that he actually held power there, Lund discusses other examples of Scandinavian coins bearing the names
sound, and suggests that the encomiast is in error here, and in fact in 1014 the brothers contested for power or entered into a joint-kingship, a form of rule common in Denmark until the rule of Valdimar I. We cannot know where the boundaries of any joint-kingship lay, but one modern historian when discussing joint-kingship in ninth-century Denmark has concluded that when close family members ruled together (usually brothers) they tended to rule the same area in cooperation with each other, rather than sub-dividing the kingdom. Thus, Cnut and Haraldr may have ruled Denmark jointly in this period. Cnut reinvaded England in the autumn of 1015, and spent the time between then and late 1018 consolidating his hold over his new acquisition. We do not know when Haraldr died (or as in the narrative of the late-medieval and dubious Annales Ryenses, was deposed for effeminacy). He appears to have been alive and in power in 1017 × 1019 when his name was entered after Cnut’s in a note of confraternity in a Christ Church, Canterbury Gospel book. Thus, it has been deduced that when Cnut went to Denmark in the winter of 1019, it was to receive the royal title following his brother’s recent death (or deposition).

What then did Cnut inherit in Denmark? In the century before Cnut came to power Denmark had only just begun to be politically unified, and it was still greatly fragmented in 1019. Little about Cnut’s dynasty can be known with any degree of certainty, but it seems probable that they were originally petty-kings from mid-Jylland who extended their control over much of Jylland and the neighbouring island of Fyn, and as I shall discuss in a subsequent chapter there appears to have been a powerful rival dynasty based in Skåne in the life of Svein and Cnut at least. Literary evidence indicates that the jarls of Skåne also had