

13 The urban hinterland

Interaction and law-areas in Viking and medieval Norway

Frode Iversen

Introduction

While previous research on urbanisation in Scandinavia has focused upon the role of the king and the Church as founders and developers of towns, less attention has been directed towards the economic and legal preconditions and ramifications of this development, in particular the way trade in the rural hinterlands of towns developed and was regulated in relation to an urban market. The legal assembly through which administrative and economic changes were channelled – the *thing* – was a particularly strong institution in Scandinavian societies compared to Central Europe (Taranger 1898; Imsen 1990; Iversen 2013). This may have played a crucial role in the economic development of urban hinterlands and control over inland markets, in particular regarding the surplus production of important commodities such as hunting produce and iron from the ‘Mountain Land’ (Holm et al. 2005; Rundberget 2012). What effect did urbanisation and emerging market power have on inland regions and law administration in the Viking Age and Middle Ages?

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries most of the Norwegian rural *lawthings* were relocated to coastal towns. Both urban and rural *lawthings* were administered by a lawman who, although situated in the town, nevertheless also actively participated in important *things* and legal meetings in the rural hinterland. Hence, legal matters drew people to certain towns. Previous research on Norse legal organisation has mainly addressed the internal administrative organisation of the medieval towns (Helle 2006: 114–18), to a lesser degree discussing the towns as legal centres for a greater hinterland. Here, I will investigate the impact relocating *lawthings* from rural to urban locations had on the organisation of rural jurisdictions and urban hinterlands. Were the jurisdictions adapted to the towns’ need for greater hinterlands, and what was the role of the *thing* in these processes?

Before Christianity, in the Norse world the *thing* was the most important societal meeting place, both locally and regionally. The *thing* was the Archimedean point in Norse cosmology as well as the human world. Everything revolved around it. The Norse gods resolved their disputes at the *thing* (Løkka 2010). In the human world, delegates travelled great distances to annual

meetings at *lawthings* (*lagting*). These had judicial and legislative authority over vast regions – the so-called provincial law-areas, of which there were about 20 in Scandinavia prior to the mid-thirteenth century (Iversen 2015).

The pre-Christian *thing*, however, was not purely a legal body, as it is in modern times. It also held political, economic and cultic authority. Separate trade laws, *Bjarkøyretter*, developed at the latest from around AD 1000 (Hagland and Sandnes 1997). Towns became, or were from the start, separated from the rural jurisdiction and obtained their own laws and courts (*mót*). Beyond the town boundary (*takmark*), rural law (*heraðs rett*) applied. In medieval Norway, the urban bailiff (*gjaldker*) was the head royal official in the town and also held the rights of prosecution. He led or took part in legal meetings at the town assembly (*mót*), and no doubt collected fines, taxes and tributes on behalf of the king. He was equivalent to the rural bailiff (*sýslumaðr/fogd*).

Compared to Europe, the degree of urbanisation in Scandinavia was low, particularly in Norway (Holt 2009). In 1135 the English chronicler Ordericus Vitales knew only six *civitas* in the Kingdom of Norway: Konghelle, Borg, Oslo, Tønsberg, Bergen and Nidaros. By the end of the Middle Ages there were only 16 towns in Norway, compared to more than a hundred in Denmark and 40–50 in Sweden (Jensen 1990; Helle 2006). In Norway most medieval towns were royal foundations (Brendalmo and Molaug 2014). According to written sources of the thirteenth century, Nidaros was founded by Olaf Tryggvasson (995–1000), Bergen by Olaf Kyrre (1066–93), Borg by Olaf Haraldsson (1015–28) and Oslo by Harald Hadrada (1046–66). There has been much discussion on the time of foundation, comparing written and archaeological evidence (Molaug 2007), but recent research tends to highlight consistency between the sources, in particular for Nidaros (Christophersen and Nordeide 1994) and Oslo (Schia 1991: 122–32). This is not quite so clear for Bergen (Hansen 2005). The saga phrase *setja kaupstad* may indicate when an existing market or ‘embryo town’ became a judicial entity and achieved formal trading rights (Christophersen 1998). It has, for instance, been argued that Harald Bluetooth established Oslo, while Harald Hadrada empowered it with certain judicial rights (Schia 1991).

Only one Norwegian town, Skien, seems to have been founded on aristocratic initiative, while Stavanger and Hamar developed and grew when bishops’ seats were established there in the twelfth century (Brendalmo and Molaug 2014). Concerning Tønsberg, the sagas give no foundation history, but recently the archaeologists Jan Brendalmo and Petter Molaug (2014) have concluded that here, too, the king played a major role in the initial phase. The Norwegian kings seem to have had a relatively stronger grip on trade and towns compared to their European counterparts. There were few towns, and most of them were subordinated to the king. The initiative behind the archeologically known trading sites predating the medieval towns of Norway is debated. Dagfinn Skre (2007) has suggested that the Danish king Gorm founded Kaupang in Vestfold in the early ninth century, while this is more

uncertain for the newly discovered, contemporary trading site of Heimdal, near Gokstad in Vestfold.

Legal assemblies must have been a propelling factor for processes of territorialisation. At the *thing* attendees from different communities met. Both the royal and ecclesiastical administrative landscape echoed the hierarchy of the *thing* institution, with local, supra-local and regional meetings. My point of departure is thus to (a) reconstruct the rural jurisdictions of Norway in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages (AD 800–1150), and (b) investigate how they changed in the High and Late Middle Ages (AD 1150–1537), when the majority of Norwegian towns reached their peak. The hypothesis is that these areas were also the main inland trading areas for the medieval towns. The precise state of the juridical division and organisation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is still to some extent unresolved and has been the subject of debate. By reconstructing the judicial areas I hope to shed light on the changing hinterland of the towns. Obviously, towns became jurisdictions in their own right, but what was their impact on the organisation of provincial law territories? This will lay the foundation for subsequent discussion of changes in how people interacted within the emerging Kingdom of Norway. I will focus on South Norway, as this area had more towns in the Middle Ages, and the changes in administrative organisation were profound. I will also concentrate on the interaction between coastal areas with towns, and the interior valleys without urban centres.

Background: law-areas and trade regulations

According to *Historia Norwegie* (1150–75), Norway was divided into three main geographic areas: The Coastal Land (*Zona itaque maritime*), the Central or Mountain Land (*Mediterranea zona/De montains Norwegie*) and the land of the Sami people (*De Finnis*), a division I shall retain in this context (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003: 54–64) (Figure 13.1). There were four provincial law-areas (*patriae*) in the Coastal Land, and four in the Mountain Land. These were further subdivided into provinces, 30 in the Coastal Land and 12 in the Mountain Land. These 42 regions in eight law-areas were the fundamental regions of human interaction, judicially speaking, in Norway in the twelfth century. These were further divided into about 550 local *thing* districts. The main law-areas and their divisions are listed in Table 13.1. These differ considerably from the territorial organisation that emerges during the period 1250–1350, as first pointed out by historian Gustav Storm (1880) and discussed by Gustav Indrebø (1937: 41–3), Asgaut Steinnes (1946) and Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen (1995), among others. The question is how towns influenced the administrative ‘legal landscape’.

Regarding South Norway, my hypothesis is that the axes of human interaction prior to urban development followed the topographic, economic and climatic zones, which had similar legal requirements. Coastal areas connected with other coastal areas, and mountain and upland communities with each

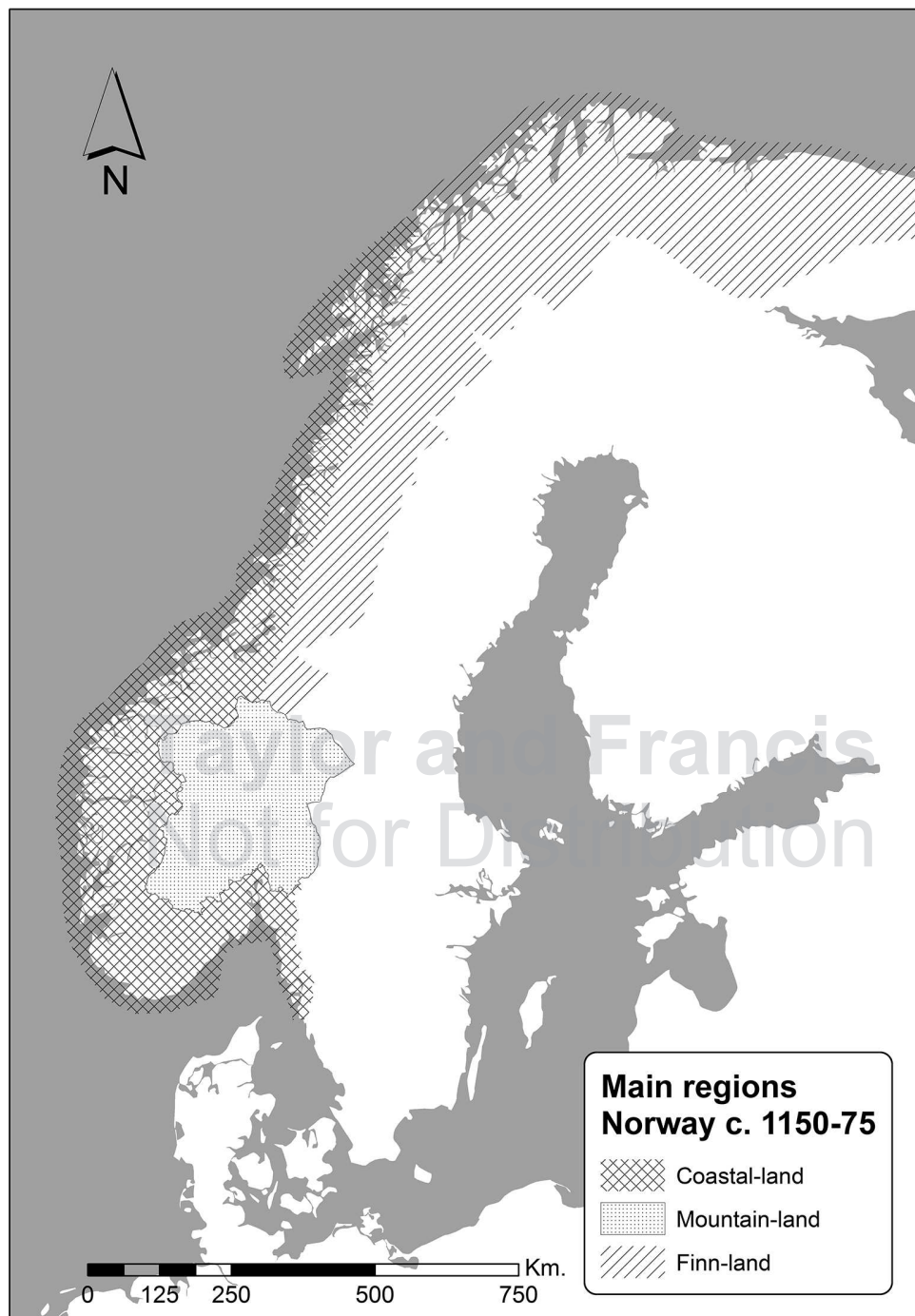


Figure 13.1 The major divisions of Norway, according to *Historia Norvegie* (c. 1150–75).

other. There was less interaction between the coast and the interior, which may have changed with the rise of towns and trading centres during the Viking Age and Middle Ages. Coastal towns stimulated increased trade with inland

areas, and thus had a ‘civilising’ impact. This evolved along vertical axes of identity and economy, perpendicular to older law territories and topography. In the High Middle Ages, the law-parish system was redefined, which expresses the underlying socio-economic development, where inland resources were increasingly drawn into the market economy of the coastal towns.

In *Historia Norwegie*, the maritime zone is described as a *Decapolis*, an area with ten towns. Gustav Storm (1880: 76) identified these as Nidaros, Bergen, Oslo, Borg, Tønsberg and Konghelle, together with Stavanger, Veøy, Skien and Kaupanger in Sogn (Figure 13.5). However, the precise number may have been somewhat unimportant for the anonymous author. He alludes to the ‘learned’ concept of the ten cities of the Decapolis. Two of the gospels mention the Decapolis; it was the core area of Christianity (Matt. 4: 25; 2 Macc. 5: 20). Furthermore, the Decapolis is mentioned by the Roman historian Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) in *Naturalis Historia* (N.H. 5.16.74). The towns of the Decapolis have traditionally been seen as bridgeheads for both Greek and Roman culture in the Semitic areas of Judea and Syria, and these towns also represented strongholds on the Roman Empire’s eastern border. The author of *Historia Norwegie* may have associated the Decapolis with a form of Christian ‘civilising’ power, radiating from the coastal towns. In reference to the interpretation of the prose Edda *Gylfaginning*, which explains the creation and destruction of the Norse gods’ world, both archaeologist Frans-Arne Stylegar (2004) and religious historian Gro Steinsland (1991: 24) have pointed out differences in cosmological concepts regarding the coast and the inland in Norse mythology. Therefore, it is tempting to ask: did the coastal towns have a ‘civilising’ force? Was the ‘wild’ inland territory – the Mountain Land with its rich resources – amalgamated into the Norwegian realm as a result of urbanisation?

In 1384 the child-king Olav IV Håkonsson of Norway and Denmark, under the guardianship of his mother, Queen Margrete Valdemarsdotter, declared that all trade within certain areas north of Bergen should take place in old towns with jurisdiction, *takmark* (NgL III: 121; RN VII: 1191). Competition from the Hanseatic towns, such as Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen, increased in the Holy Roman Empire, and stock fish from northern Norway and timber from eastern Norway were important commodities on the European market. In this competitive situation, the kings of Norway tried to reinforce Norwegian towns by granting them a trade monopoly within certain areas. This may only have represented confirmation and enforcement of existing customary rights, but clearly the intension was to secure royal rights and income from trade on the home market (Blom 1967).

The trading territories listed in 1384 coincided with customary rural jurisdictions, namely law-parishes and counties. All trade within Finnmark and Helgeland (= Hålogaland law-parish) was to take place in the town of Vågan. Trondheim received similar rights with respect to Namdalen, Nordmøre and Trøndelag, which is equivalent to the Frostathing area, apart from the southernmost county, Romsdal, where the old royal villa, trading and assembly

site of Veøy had a monopoly. The same applied to Borgund in the case of Sunnmøre – the northernmost county in the law-area of the Gulathing. Trade elsewhere, in fjords and fishing villages, was declared illegal (NgL III: 121; RN VII: 1191).

We lack direct information on the trade monopoly and the rural hinterlands of towns in South-East Norway before the fifteenth century. Trade in timber increased from the thirteenth century, and many 'loading sites' for timber purchase evolved along the coast, such as Son and Drøbak in the district of Follo; Koppervik, Bragernes and Strømsø by the estuary of the Drammen river; Sandefjord, Snekkestad and Melsomvik in Vestfold; and Langesund at Skien. The historian Knut Helle claims the trade contravened the monopolies of the old towns (Helle 2006: 129). In 1299 a royal ban was imposed on all traders against the sale of goods outside the towns, while farmers were still allowed to trade with each other (NgL III: 42; RN II: 1011). Later, in 1302, this ban was explicitly directed against foreign traders (Bagge et al. 1973: 218). The earlier town privileges, for example that of Oslo from 1358 (RN VI: 469), do not specify the primary hinterland, while in 1358 Skien renewed its rights to trade whetstones, grain and other commodities in the area of Skienssyssel (RN VI: 489). During the fifteenth century several towns obtained formalised exclusive trading rights: Stavanger received exclusive rights within Stavanger Diocese (1425), Marstand in Båhuslen (1442), Oslo in Oslo Diocese (1445) and Skien in the county of Telemark and interior areas (1473).

The origin and organisation of *lawthings*

It is attested that Norwegian kings moved rural *lawthings*, for example the Eidsivating and Gulathing, from one location to another, and established new ones, such as the Borgarthing (Taranger 1898). However, it is unlikely that royal power dealt directly with the geographical organisation of jurisdictions in the early phases. The development towards larger law-areas cannot be understood purely from a power perspective, with the king as the sole instigator. I regard this as a process where both *bottom-up* and *top-down* forces worked together. The population had its legal needs. Local communities and societies could benefit from being part of a larger law-area. The emergence of larger regions could, for example, increase mobility and trade. On the other hand, royal power required an institution that could legitimise the king's power and negotiate on behalf of the people.

It is often claimed that there was just one *lawthing* per law-area in Norway in the Middle Ages: the Eidsivating, Gulathing, Frostathing and Borgarthing. However, in 1223 there were two lawmen and two *lawthings* in each of the major law-areas in Norway (Table 13.2; Figures 13.2 and 13.3). The exception was the Frostathing area, where there were three *lawthings*, including one in Jämtland (Seip 1934; Indrebø 1936).

The German legal historian Konrad Maurer (1907: 8) proposed that the law-parish system (*lagsogn*) appeared in the Late Middle Ages. A law-parish is



Figure 13.2 The law-parishes of Norway in 1223, according to the Saga of Håkon Håkonsson.

a subdivision of a law-area. Such subdivisions are not mentioned in the rural law of 1274, and therefore had to be of later origin. However, Maurer did not include the evidence of Håkon Håkonsson's Saga, which specifies nine lawmen in Norway in 1223 and the law-parishes for most of them. The historians Jens Arup Seip (1934) and Gustav Indrebø (1936) were the first to discuss the law-parish system in detail. Indrebø suggested that it was established in the twelfth century, when lawmen became royal officials. On the other hand, Seip

was not convinced that all the lawmen from the eastern provinces participated in the *hofdingiafundr* in Björgvin in 1223, a political meeting where the leading men of the kingdom met. He believed there were even more lawmen in earlier periods, as indicated by the administrative geography stated in *Historia Norvegie* (Seip 1934: 12).

I contend that the law-parish system may have an earlier origin. There are several arguments for this. First, this appears to have been the situation in both Denmark and Sweden. There were four or five *lawthings* (*landsting*) in each of the three Danish provincial law-areas in the thirteenth century (Jørgensen 1940; Lerdam 2001; Vogt and Tamm 2009; Andersen 2010). Similarly, in Sweden there were multiple *lawthings* within the same law-area. Snorri Sturluson's description of the Kingdom of Svitjod is illustrative (Hkr, King Olav Haraldsson's Saga: 77). Here, we gain insight into a formation process where several autonomous territories amalgamated into a 'legal cooperative'. Many of the regions had their own laws and legislative *things*. The cooperative had decided that, when two laws were in conflict, one law should override the other as *lex superior* – the Uppsala Law. The lawman from the 'weightiest' area, Tiundaland ('Land with Ten Hundreds'), outranked the other lawmen from less weighty areas, such as Attundaland ('Land with Eight Hundreds') and Fjärdrundaland ('Land with Four Hundreds') (Iversen 2013). A market was held in Uppsala for a week in connection with the annual assembly (Hkr, King Olav Haraldsson's Saga: 77).

To summarise: I do not envisage the situation in Norway in 1223 as something new or associated with royal organisation, as Indrebø has suggested. On the contrary, I find it plausible that, for instance, Ranrike (Båhuslen) in present-day Sweden had its own *lawthing* prior to its integration into the Borgarthing area in the eleventh century. I see the law-parish division of 1223 as a remnant of this. The question is how these law-parishes changed as urban influence increased.

Methods and materials: the scheme of the study

The first stage of investigating this hypothesis is to identify and reconstruct the 'legal landscape' in Norway during the Viking Age and Middle Ages (800–1537). Four main sources are available for this purpose: *Historia Norvegie*, c. 1150–75, Håkon Håkonsson's Saga for the year 1223, a mid-sixteenth-century legal manuscript (AM: 94 4^o) and Christian IV's law of 1604. The latter two provide lists of the Norwegian *lawthings* of the time. Together with charter evidence from c. 1250–1550, this enables a discussion of the changes in the 'legal landscape' of Norway before and after c. 1250–1300.

The dating and purpose of *Historia Norvegie* is much debated. Recently, Lars Boje Mortensen (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003) has convincingly argued that Inger Ekrem's (1998) classic hypothesis must be reconsidered. She claimed that *Historia Norvegie* was written prior to the foundation of the Norwegian Church Province (1152/3). The aim was to convince the Pope and the cardinals that

Norway was well organised, mature and deserved the status of an independent church province, seceding from the Danish Church Province (*Prouincia danorum*), with its centre at Lund (Nyberg 1991). However, as Mortensen has pointed out, this is not very likely. According to *Historia Norvegie*, Iceland paid tribute to Norway, which did not occur before 1264 in secular terms. Therefore, the passage probably refers to the tithes the bishops of Iceland paid to the archbishop in Nidaros. This suggests that *Historia Norvegie* was written after 1152/53, when the Nidaros Church Province was established. Furthermore, since Jämtland is not mentioned as part of the Kingdom of Norway, which it was from 1177, Mortensen dates the saga to c. 1150–75.

The identification of the regions in *Historia Norvegie* is relatively unproblematic, and is discussed at length by Gustav Storm (1880). In more recent times, this has been studied by, among others, Frans-Arne Stylegar (2004). *Historia Norvegie* states that there were 30 *prouinciae* in the Coastal Land. P.A. Munch believed the number 30 ('XXX') was incorrect and considered Hålogaland as a single shire (*fylke*) (Munch 1850: 30). Munch's authority overruled the actual statement in the source; surprisingly, Storm followed his lead and corrected 30 to 22 in his source-critical edition (Storm 1880: 76), something which has been repeated in later translations. Even the newest source-critical edition, from 2003, gives this figure (Ekrem 1998: 33, note 113; Ekrem and Mortensen 2003: 179, note 105).

In my opinion, such an error is unlikely. The coastline from Hålogaland to Karlsøy stretches for over 600 km. From Vennesund to Vegestav it must have been over 1500 km, and a further subdivision of this large area seems probable (Iversen 2015). Twenty-one provinces are specified for the remaining Coastal Land. If there are indeed 30 provinces in total, Hålogaland must, therefore, have had nine provinces. This seems to equate with the known historical divisions of 'half-shires' and counties or *syssele* (*sýsla*, 'ship district') in Hålogaland, extending northward up to Troms (Indrebø 1935). I have, therefore, chosen to follow the primary source, and propose nine provinces in Hålogaland, as shown in Table 13.1.

The historian Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen (1995) has pointed out how little Snorri and other thirteenth-century saga writers knew about people and the former administrative organisation of *Upplönd*. In the Kings' Sagas *Upplönd* almost always refers to the Eidsivathing area, but the Icelandic authors knew little about events here in the eleventh and tenth centuries (Halvorsen 1995: 51, 54). This is one of the reasons why *Historia Norvegie* is an especially important source for this particular area (Robberstad 1951). In regard to the Mountain Land, my interpretations differ somewhat from Storm's (1880: 81) suggestions. I believe Land, Hadeland and Tverrdalene were the neighbouring provinces to Ringerike, and Toten to Gudbrandsdalen. Toten was connected to the *lawthing* at Hamar in 1337, and therefore probably part of the northern law-parish in 1223 (DN III: 191). This law-parish may have comprised *patria* 3 and 4 in the Mountain Land, according to the division in *Historia Norvegie* (see below). This area probably coincided with the land held by the 'rebel leader' Sigurd Erlingsson Ribbung in the early 1220s. He established a seat on the little island of Frognøy, central to the area, and close to the bishop's residence at Storøya

and the royal villa of Stein. According to Håkon Håkonsson's Saga, most people from Telemark to Vardal submitted to Sigurd (HH: 75).

I do not consider Råbyggelag as part of Telemark, as Storm believed and Stylegar also suggests (Stylegar 2004). The description *remotis ruribus*, 'remote or far-flung rural areas', fits well with the elongated valley of Numedal. There are further arguments for this, such as that Numedal was subject to the Skien *lawthing* in the Late Middle Ages (Taranger 1915). In the *Landnåmabok* (*Hauksbok*), a 'Telemark-thing' is mentioned (ch. 314). This was allegedly located near a mountain pass, close to *Tinz dal*, which is probably identifiable as present-day Tinn. A 'Telemark-thing' at Tinn would only have been central to the province if it included Numedal. Furthermore, Råbyggelag was neither part of the Skien *lawthing* nor of the Diocese of Hamar, but was subject to the Gulathing from 1274 at the latest. The suffix *-lag* (ON *lög*) in the name *Råbyggelag* means law, which indicates that Råbyggelag was originally an independent law-area. If Råbyggelag was, however, part of the Mountain Land, I would expect it to have been labelled a province, or preferably a *patria*, which is not the case. In other respects, I follow Storm and share his viewpoint that the four *patriae* in the Mountain Land were *separate legislative districts* (Storm 1880: XXVII).

Håkon Håkonsson's Saga is the main source for the law-parishes in the early thirteenth century. As previously mentioned, this saga records that nine lawmen met at the *hofdingiafundr* in Bjørgvin in 1223 (HH: 85–95; Helle 1972: 248). The subject of this important political meeting was the right to the Norwegian throne. The lawmen's opinion was given considerable importance in the conflict between Håkon Håkonsson and Earl Skule.

In addition to charters, I have used two other sources concerning *lawthings* from 1300–50. Evidence is drawn from Christian IV's 1604 law, which provides a detailed overview of the *lawthings* in Norway, in addition to a mid-sixteenth-century manuscript which also lists the country's *lawthings* (AM94 4°; Ngl III: 4–6; Hallanger and Brandt 1855: 7, note 1; Indrebø 1935: 74). It is a copy of a manuscript from c. 1320 of the 1274 rural law of Magnus the Lawmender (AM: 322fol; Ngl IV: 502). However, the list itself is a postscript, probably added by Peder Claussøn Friis (1545–1614), according to Anna Catharina Horn at the University of Oslo (correspondence via email 1 March 2012). These sources have to be used retrospectively and compared to the older charter evidence.

The two later sources show 12 or 13 *lawthings* in Norway, not the nine mentioned in 1223. There was a new rural *lawthing* at Agdesiden and two new town *lawthings*. In addition, several rural *lawthings* were relocated to towns.

The source AM: 94 4° indicates three *lawthings* within the Frostathing area: Steigen, Trondheim and Jämtland. There were three in the Gulathing area, namely Bergen, Stavanger and Agdesiden, and four in the Eidsivathing area – Oslo, Skien with Telemark, Tønsberg and Hedmark with Oppland. Finally, there were also two *lawthings* in the Viken area: Fredrikstad and Båhus. It is worth noting that Foss *lawthing* is not mentioned, despite the fact there were assemblies at Foss in 1450, 1558 and 1604 (see below). Another curiosity is that the town *lawthings* in Skien, Tønsberg and Oslo are listed under the

Eidsivathing area, and not the Borgarthing area, as their locations would suggest. However, it is clear that parts of the earlier Eidsivathing district were now under the jurisdiction of lawmen in these very towns: thus, Upper Telemark and Numedal were subject to Skien, Tverrdalene to Tønsberg, and Ringerike and Romerike to Oslo, an issue I will return to later.

The charters issued by lawmen have previously been catalogued by Eivind Vågslid (1930). Indrebø's (1936) article on the Norwegian lawmen and his critique of Seip's (1934) interpretation of the law-parish system have been useful. These two works diverge on some points, and my conclusions also differ somewhat from these, something that will be explained as we proceed. A review of the Swedish charters indicates that Aslak Petersson, the lawman in Viken, issued a charter from Foss, Båhuslen on a Wednesday after 23 June 1450 (SDHK: 26289). The letter was not published in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. Another charter dated 25 June 1444 was issued at Foss by the same lawman, in *Laghmanz stadh*, the lawmans-place (DN XI: 178). According to the law of 1604, one of the two fixed *lawthings* at Foss was to be held on the first working day after St Hans's Day (St John's Eve), namely 24 June, which fits well with both letters. Foss is centrally located in Båhuslen, and it is reasonable to assume it was both the seat of the lawman and location of the *lawthing*. This was an old assembly site. There is mention of a *thing* by Foss Church in the Sverris Saga (SS: 167) for the year c. 1200, concerning a battle between King Sverre and his rivals during the civil wars. Only archaeological excavation could help date the Foss *lawthing* more precisely.

There is no written evidence to say Tjølling was a *lawthing*. Both the name, ON *þjóðalyng* or 'People's Heath', and the archaeological discoveries in 2010 indicate that Tjølling was an important *thing* site, as previous research has also suggested. I consider it the likely *lawthing* for Vingulsmark, Vestfold and Grenland, a subject I will return to later.

I have reconstructed the law-areas with a GIS application, using land registers and tax records to reconstruct the exact areas. I assume that the Mountain Land was identical to the Eidsivathing and the Diocese of Hamar, with the exception of Valdres and Hallingdal, which were under the Gulathing and also the Diocese of Stavanger. Neither was Solør part of Hamar Diocese (DN XXI: 130). Jørgen H. Marthinsen's map of the law-parishes c. 1320 in *Norsk historisk leksikon* (Imsen and Winge 2004) has been useful for seeing concurrences with Seip's and Indrebø's results.

Results

The Coastal Land was composed of four *patriae*: Viken in the east (*Sinius orientalis*), the south and west coast (*Gulacia*), Trøndelag in Middle Norway (*Trondheimia*) and Hålogåland, north of Trøndelag (*Halogia*). This matches the areas of the Borgarthingslag, Gulathingslag and Frostathingslag, including Hålogaland, respectively. The Gulathing area was subdivided into six provinces, while in Trøndelag there were eight provinces surrounding the Trondheim Fjord and three along the open seacoast.

The Mountain Land also consisted of four *patria*e, with 12 provinces in total, corresponding to the area of the Eidsivathing. Their identification is somewhat vague, as previously discussed. Toten is, as mentioned, assigned to the fourth *patria* (see Table 13.1).

How does this fit with the well-informed Saga of Håkon Håkonsson? At the Bjørgvin meeting in 1223, three lawmen from the Frostathing area attended, while the Gulathing, Viken and ‘Upland’ areas were each represented by two. The lawmen from Frostathing represented the areas Trøndelag, Hålogaland and Jämtland. Both the *þingasaga* and the Frostathing Law consider Hålogaland as part of the Frostathing law-area (F X: 3; F XVI: 2; Storm 1877: 15; Indrebø 1935: 75).

Dagfinn Bonde was a lawman of Gulathing, and Amunde Remba represented Ryfylke. There were also two lawmen from *Eidsivathing* (the Uplands) at the meeting in 1223. Tore Lagmann (Gudmundsson) was the lawman for the southern ‘Uplands’ (Seip 1934: 12). Sakse of Haug was the lawman for Hedmark, and the *lawthing* was located in the vicinity of Hamar. Moving on, Tord Skolle was the lawman for the area east of the Svinesund, namely Båhuslen. It appears his father and forefathers had previously also been lawmen here. It is reasonable to associate them with the *lawthing* at Foss or Baholm near Konghelle. Øystein Roesson was probably the lawman for the remainder of the Borgarthing law-area, more specifically the law-parishes of Vingulsmark, Vestfold and Grenland (Indrebø 1936: 492). Tjølling is central to this area, which makes it a likely candidate for the location of the *lawthing*. Around 1200, a man called Simon at the Tomb in Råde is mentioned as a lawman (DN I 3; Indrebø 1936: 492), potentially for this law-parish.

When this picture is compared to younger sources, interesting patterns appear. King Christian IV’s law of 1604 gives detailed information on the *lawthings* in Norway, including the meeting dates (see Table 13.3). In total, 13 *lawthings* are mentioned, including the town *lawthings* at Tønsberg and in Oslo. Båhuslen had been divided into two law-parishes, with *lawthings* at both Båhus and Foss. There appears also to have been a *lawthing* at Agdesiden, which was ‘held on rotation’ between four counties (*sysse*l). The urban *lawthings* in Oslo, Fredrikstad, Tønsberg and Skien met four to five times a year. The frequency of meetings was somewhat less for the other *lawthings*, down to once or twice a year. The king’s bailiff (*fogd*) had an obligation to attend the *lawthing*. The attendees of the *lawthings* were appointed by the bailiffs at the local *things* (*sysse*l) on Laetare Sunday (the fourth Sunday in Lent) (C IV: ch. 1).

Discussion: towns and *things*

I will now discuss the changing administrative division of legal matters in Norway, in relation to towns and trading areas. Which areas changed, and were these changes due to increased urban impact on the organisation of rural law-areas?

The Eidsivathing law-area was reorganised after the civil wars (c. 1130–1240), when its outer parts (Øvre Telemark, Numedal, Tverrdalene and Ringerike)

Table 13.1 Proposed subdivision of districts and provinces in Norway in *Historia Norvegie*, c. 1150–75

<i>Main area</i>	<i>District (patria)</i>	<i>Municipality (province)</i>	<i>Identification</i>
<p>Zona itaque maritime The Coastal Land 10 towns (Decapolis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 <i>patriae</i> • 22 or 30 provinces 	<p>Sinius orientalis Borgarthing (Viken)</p> <p>Gulacia Gulathing (south and west coast to the island of Mien)</p> <p>Trondhemia Frostathingslag (Trøndelag)</p>	<p>4 provinces from the border with Denmark to Rygjabit</p> <p>6 provinces. Møre was most remote (= northerly). Valdres and Hallingdal were subject to the Gulathing</p> <p>11 provinces (8 by the fjord and 3 beyond)</p>	<p>Ranrike, Vingulsmark, Vestfold, Grenland</p> <p>4 provinces Agder, Rogland, Hordland, Sogn, Firda, Sunnmøre</p> <p>6 provinces</p>
	<p>Halogia Frostathingslag (Hålogland, north to Vegestav, bordering Bjarmeland)</p>	<p>30 provinces in total, and therefore nine provinces in Hålogaland</p>	<p>Orkdalen, Gauldalen, Strinda, Stjørdalen, Skaun, Verdalen, Sparbuen, Innerøya, Romsdalen, Nordmøre, Namdalen</p> <p>11 provinces Herøy half-shire (Alstadhaug <i>sysse</i>l), Rødøy half-shire, Bodø <i>sysse</i>l, Steigar <i>sysse</i>l, Lofoten <i>sysse</i>l, Ulvøy <i>sysse</i>l (Vesterålen), Andenes <i>sysse</i>l, Senja, Troms</p> <p>9 provinces</p>
	<p>Mediterranea zona/De montains Norwegie (Eidsivathing/the Uplands) The Mountain Land</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 <i>patriae</i> • 12 provinces 	<p><i>Patria</i> 1</p> <p><i>Patria</i> 2</p> <p><i>Patria</i> 3</p> <p><i>Patria</i> 4</p>	<p>Romerike and Ringerike plus unnamed neighbouring provinces (plural)</p> <p>Telemark and unnamed remote rural areas (<i>remotis ruribus</i>)</p> <p>Hedmark with Elvdalene</p> <p>Gudbrandsdalen with Loar and unnamed neighbouring provinces (plural). The Dovre range marks the boundary.</p>

Table 13.2 A suggestion for the law-parish divisions in Norway in 1223

<i>Provincial law-area</i>	<i>Lawman in 1223</i>	<i>Law-parish</i>	Lawthing	<i>Provinces in Historia Norwegie (HN)</i>
Frostathing	Gunnar Grjonbak Bonde	Trøndelag	Frosta	11 provinces (see Table 13.1)
	Bjarne Mårdsson	Hålogaland	Steigen	9 provinces (see Table 13.1)
	Torstein Åsmundsson	Jämtland	Jamtamot	Not part of Norway when HN was written
Gulathing	Dagfinn Bonde	Gula	Gulathing	Hordaland, Sogn, Firda, Sunnmøre
	Åmunde Remba	Ryfylke	Avaldsnes	Rogaland, Agder (+ Valdres, Hallingdal)
Borgarthing	Øystein Roesson	Borgarthing	(Tjølling?)	Vingulsmark, Vestfold, Grenland
	Tord Skolle	Viken, east of Svinesund	Foss	Vika (= Ranrike/Båhuslen)
Eidsivathing	Tore Lagmann	Søndre Opplanda	(Stein?)	<i>Patriae</i> 3 and 4 (see Table 13.1)
	Sakse of Haug	Hedmark	Åker	<i>Patriae</i> 1 and 2 (see Table 13.1)

Source: Håkon Håkonsson's Saga.

Table 13.3 *Lawthing* and meeting dates according to Christian IV's law of 1604

<i>Region</i>	<i>Location in 1604</i>	<i>Time as of 1604</i>	<i>Date</i>
Båhuslen <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Båhus	1) the Monday before St Bottolf's/ Botwulf of Thorney's Day	17 June (St Bottolf)
		2) the Monday after <i>Fastelaven</i> Sunday	the Sunday before Ash Wednesday
Viken <i>lawthing</i>	Foss	1) the first working day after the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul	25 January (St Paul's Day)
		2) the first working day after St John's Eve (St Hans's Day)	24 June (St John's Day)
Borgarthing (town)	Fredrikstad	1) the first day after Twelfth Night	6 January
		2) the Monday after Laetare Sunday	the Monday after the fourth Sunday in Lent
		3) the second Tuesday after Easter (<i>Tökketirsdag</i>)	the second Tuesday after Easter
		4) the day after St Vitus and Modesti	15 June (St Vitus's Day)
		5) the first Sunday after Winter Night	14 October

(continued)

Table 13.3 (continued)

Region	Location in 1604	Time as of 1604	Date
Oslo <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Oslo	1) three days before and after St Paul's Day 2) three days before and after Laetare Sunday 3) three days after <i>Tokketirsdag</i> 4) three days before and after St John's Eve 5) Three days before and after Winter Night	25 January (St Paul's Day) three days before and after the fourth Sunday in Lent three days after the second Tuesday after Easter 24 June 14 October
Eidsvoll <i>lawthing</i>	Eidsvoll	1) St. Bottolf's Day	17 June
Tønsberg <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Tønsberg	1) the first Monday after Twelfth Night 2) the Monday after Laetare Sunday 3) <i>Tokketirsdag</i> 4) three days after St Bottolf's Day 5) Autumn Feast of the Cross	6 January the Monday after the fourth Sunday in Lent the second Tuesday after Easter three days after 17 June (St Bottolf's Day) 14 September
<i>lawthing</i> in Oppland	Not named (Hamar/Åker?)	1) <i>Tokketirsdag</i> 2) Martinmas	the second Tuesday after Easter 11 November
Skien <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Skien	1) three days before and after Laetare Sunday 2) three days before and after St Bottolf's Day 3) three days before and after Martinmas 4) <i>Tokketirsdag</i>	the fourth Sunday in Lent 17 June (St Bottolf's Day) 11 November the second Tuesday after Easter
<i>lawthing</i> in Agdesiden	Mandal Lista Nødnes Råbyggelag	1) the Monday after Trinity Sunday 2) Nativity of Mary Feast Day 3) the next working day after Michaelmas 4) the next working day after St John's Eve	the second Monday after Pentecost 8 September 30 September 25 June
Stavanger <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Stavanger	1) St Bottolf's Day 2) Autumn Feast of the Cross	17 June (St Bottolf's Day) 14 September
Bergen <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Bergen	1) St Bottolf's Day	17 June (St Bottolf's Day)
Trondheim <i>lawthing</i> (town)	Trondheim Jemtland	1) St Bottolf's Day 2) 14 days before St John's Eve	17 June (St Bottolf's Day) 10 June
Steigen <i>lawthing</i>	Steigen The fishing villages in Finnmark	1) St Bottolf's Day 2) every third year	17 June (St Bottolf's Day)

came under the jurisdiction of the Borgarthing. Stronger links were established with the royally controlled coastal towns of Skien, Tønsberg and Oslo. The reorganisation of the Mountain Land may be seen in the context of the civil wars. The last ‘rebel leader’ of the ‘Mountain Land’, Sigurd Erlingsson Ribbung, died in 1226, and when the powerful Duke Skule Bårdsson from Trøndelag was killed in 1240, internal resistance was weakened. King Håkon Håkonsson strengthened his position and kingdom.

I distinguish nine probable law-parishes in Norway in 1223, in four law-areas: the Borgarthing area, consisting of two law-parishes (Figure 13.2) – (1) Viken/Ranrike (Båhuslen) and (2) Vingulsmark, Vestfold and Grenland; the Gulathing area, with another two – (3) the southern (Ryfylke) and (4) the northern law-parish; three in the Frostathing area – (5) Hålogaland, (6) Trøndelag and (7) Jämtland; and two in the Eidsivathing area – (8) the southern and (9) the northern law-parish (cf. Table 13.2). These divisions coincide with Indrebø’s (1936: 491–3) interpretation. I shall review the known and possible *lawthings*, and compare these to the urban *lawthing* assemblies and the areas of jurisdiction of the town lawmen. I will follow the law-parish divisions specified above, and discuss each in turn. In Table 13.2 and Figures 13.2 and 13.3, I suggest the connection between law-parish, lawmen and *lawthing*, and the provinces of *Historia Norvegie*.

Charters, place names and archaeological evidence indicate the following *lawthings* in the Borgarthing area: (1) the Foss *thing* (1450, SDHK: 26289; 1558, DN XII: 493) and the Båholm *thing* (1396, DN IV: 670), indicating that *lawthings* were held at both urban and rural locations in Båhuslen/Vika law-parish; (2) Tjølling, as mentioned previously, may have been the *lawthing* site for the northern law-parish. At Lunde in Tjølling, a site consisting of over 1,000 cooking pits has been discovered. These sites have been interpreted as testifying to large, seasonal gatherings, possibly in connection with legal/cultic assemblies. Radiocarbon dates from 30 of these pits indicate activity from the Pre-Roman Iron Age to the Merovingian Period (Iversen and Ødegaard in prep). This may point to an early assembly site at Tjølling, which also has the largest stone-built medieval church in Vestfold, dating from the twelfth century (Brendalsmo 2003). There is no evidence that Tjølling Church held a particularly high position in the Church hierarchy. The construction of such a spacious building here is perhaps best explained in the context of the *lawthing*, which, of course, occasioned large gatherings. In 1557 a ‘half-shire’ assembly was arranged at Tjølling for the Brunla county (*sysse*l), corresponding to the southern half of the shire of Vestfold (DN I: 1118). This is rare evidence for the continuity of the *thing* location. However, the *lawthing* at Tjølling seems to have been reduced to a county-*thing*, possibly when the *lawthings* and lawmen in Tønsberg and Skien took over the highest level of law enforcement in rural districts.

Only a fragment of the secular Borgarthing Law is preserved (Halvorsen and Rindal 2008). The fragment concerns the *thing* organisation in the law-area. It states that cases could be moved from so-called third- or half-shire-*things*

(*tredingting/halvfylkesting*) to a shire-thing (*fylkesting*) or to a thing with final authority (*ályktaping*), as well as from shire-things to a three-shire-thing (NgL II: 523). Seip interpreted *ályktaping* as meaning the highest thing (Seip 1934: 14). The Gulathing Law has a similar provision, describing the procedures for moving non-consensus cases to courts of higher rank (G: 35). I would suggest that the three shire-things in the law refer to the *lawthing* for the western law-parish, including the three shires of Vingulsmark, Vestfold and Grenland, and that the *ályktaping* refers to the *lawthing* of the eastern law-parish (Båhuslen). The Borgarthing at Borg, close to the border between the two law-parishes, had the highest rank in the law-area.

Lawmen are mentioned in Tønsberg and Oslo in 1266. Together with the lawman from Romerike, they would pass judgement in cases in the rural district of Frogn (Indrebø 1936: 494). This shows that, even in this early phase, ‘urban’ lawmen acted beyond their urban areas. The lawmen from Skien and Tønsberg are also mentioned in a document from 1294 (Vågslid 1930: 13, 58, 65). In my opinion, this can be interpreted as indicating that Tjølling had ceased to function as the *lawthing* for Vingulsmark, Vestfold and Grenland, and that the lawmen from Tønsberg and Skien had taken over legal matters in the hinterlands.

There were two lawmen from the Gulathing area in 1223, one of whom represented Ryfylke. This fits well with the rural *lawthing* territories here: (3) At Avaldsnes on 24 June 1322 (DN I: 168; RN IV: 169), Ryfylke law-parish comprised Agder and Rogaland, and more tentatively, Valdres and Hallingdal. Already prior to 1150–75, Valdres and Hallingdal were under the Gulathing Law. In the Late Middle Ages they were part of the Diocese of Stavanger, indicating an association with the southern law-parish. The *lawthing* was moved to the town of Stavanger before 1351 (DN III: 275). Then there is (4) the Gulathing itself. According to Egil’s Saga, a thing was held at Gulen in spring c. 930 (Egs: 56; Helle 2001: 25–7). The case concerned a dispute between parties in the shires of Hordaland and Firda. A law court (*lagrett*) of 36 men reached a verdict in the case. This has been interpreted as indicating 12 men from each of the shires of Firda, Sogn and Hordaland, and further, that the Gulathing law-area originally comprised only these three shires (Helle 2001: 26). However, we should keep in mind that the thirteenth-century Egil’s Saga is not very reliable, and also uses the anachronistic term *lendmaðr* in this particular case. Furthermore, this interpretation does not consider the possibility that the subdivisions and law-parishes could be of great age.

The Gulathing was moved to Bergen around 1300 (DN I: 147) and was amalgamated with the town *lawthing*. The last known date when two lawmen, one urban and one rural, were simultaneously serving in Bergen was in 1348 (DN II: 295). In 1366 a lawman with the title of ‘Gulathing and Bergen lawman’ appears (DN II: 387; Seip 1934: 20, note 1).

In the Frostathing area there were important assemblies both at Frosta and Øyra (5). The relationship between them has been extensively discussed. The Frostathing Law, from c. 1260, describes an annual thing at Øyra, half a month



Figure 13.3 The lawthings of Norway, 1223.

before St John's Eve. From the eight provinces, all farmers with labourers had a duty to attend the Øyrathing (F: 1, 4; NgL I: 122, 128). It has been suggested that the Øyrathing was the *lawthing* for the eight provinces by the Trondheim Fjord before the law-area was expanded to include the three coastal provinces to the west (Indrebø 1935). However, it may be significant that the Øyrathing was not a representative *thing*, such as all the other *lawthings* we know. In the 1260s the Øyrathing had two main functions: to endorse laws and to choose the king. A royal charter from 1260 unequivocally states that the king was to

be chosen at the Øyrathing in Nidaros (RN I: 1974). According to the Sverris Saga, only kings received by the Øyrathing were the rightful, *rett tekin*, kings of Norway (Sverris Saga: ch. 12). On this basis, Jørn Sandnes (1967) claimed the Øyrathing was established by royal decree when Nidaros was founded (Sandnes 1967: 1–19). I concur, and see the Øyrathing as the younger *thing*, connected with the founding of the town, and the Frostathing as the prime *lawthing* of the law-area.

Eilif, lawman of Nidaros, is mentioned in 1297, and Indrebø believes his functions applied to both the town and the rural hinterland (Indrebø 1936: 496–7). If this is the case, it is only an interlude, because in 1346 the urban and rural lawmen had separate roles in Trondheim (DN V: 186). However, by 1422, the lawmen were being referred to by the title ‘Frostathing and town lawman’ (DN III: 66).

Steigen *lawthing* for the Hålogaland law-parish (6) is mentioned on 23 June 1404 (DN II: 580; Falkanger 2007: 20). The relationship between the *lawthing* at Steigen and a *thing* at Vågan has been discussed. Narve Bjørge (1982: 50) surmises that the Vågan *thing* at Brudberget was a town *thing*, and does not regard Steigen as a younger, superseding *lawthing*, as Seip considers it to be, an opinion I share.

Jamtamót (7) was the main *thing* assembly for Jämtland, and was located at Frösön in Storsjön (near Östersund). It was held at Sproteid in the Late Middle Ages. Jamtamót was held the week after St Gregory’s Feast Day, 12 March, while the date of the *thing* in 1604 was 14 days before St John’s Eve. This perhaps had its origins in the trade and cultic activities around Frösön (Scand. *Froys Øy*, ‘Frey’s Island’).

The original extent of the Eidsivathing law-area is unclear. Most likely, it coincided with the Diocese of Hamar and much of the Mountain Land (Figure 13.4). The border between the dioceses of Hamar and Oslo fell between Brunkeberg (Hamar) and Kvitseid (Oslo) (DN IX: 186; DN III: 291). In all likelihood, this mirrors the border between the Eidsivathing and Borgarthing areas. It was divided into four *patriae* in 1150–75 and two law-parishes in 1223. Two surviving fourteenth-century manuscripts of the Eidsivathing Christian law from the eleventh century mention lawmen in the plural, indicating an older division into several law-parishes (E: 30, 44; Halvorsen and Rindal 2008: 49, 90; Storm 1880: XXVII). To resolve this problem, I would simply suggest that two and two *patriae* shared a lawman. According to this logic, the southern law-parish includes (a) Upper Telemark with remote settlements in Numedal, and (b) Ringerike, Romerike and surrounding provinces, while the northern law-parish consisted of (a) Hedmark with Østerdalen and (b) Gudbrandsdalen and neighbouring provinces.

We do not know where the *lawthing* for the southern law-parish (8) took place. In around 1240, a lawman lived at the farm Hov, a day’s ride from Eidsvoll (HH: 235, 238; Indrebø 1936: 494). The Bishops of Hamar had two residences within the diocese, at Hamar in the north and at Storøya in Hole, Ringerike, in the south. This was for the purpose of administering the two

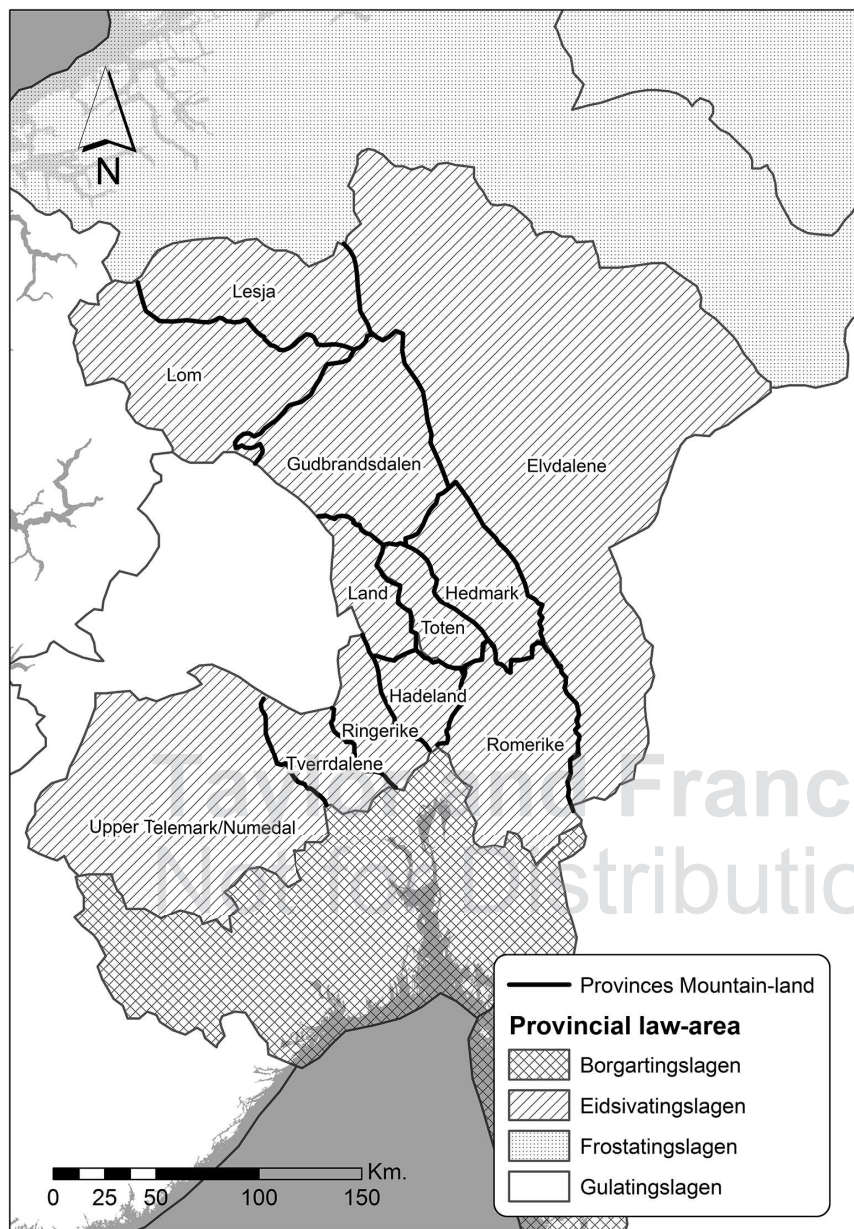


Figure 13.4 The provinces of the Mountain Land. This area may have corresponded to the Eidsivating law-area before the latter was reorganised during the reign of Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63).

parts of the diocese (Hommedal 1999). The *lawthing* for the northern law-parish was at Hamar and therefore near the bishop's palace. If we assume a parallel ecclesiastical and secular organisation, then a *lawthing* for the southern law-parish may be sought near Storøya.

Archaeological evidence suggests the bishop's palace on Storøya existed in the thirteenth century but may go back to the foundation of the diocese in the

mid-twelfth century (Hommedal 1999: 13). A verdict (*domsbrev*) from 1389 shows clearly that the bishop executed his power of prosecution from Storøya (DN IV: 561). Storøya borders the royal manor at Stein, where Halfdan the Black was reputedly buried in around 850. The archaeologists Perry Rolfsen and Jan Henning Larsen conclude, after a thorough review of historical and archaeological sources regarding the phenomena of ‘Halfdan’s burial mounds’

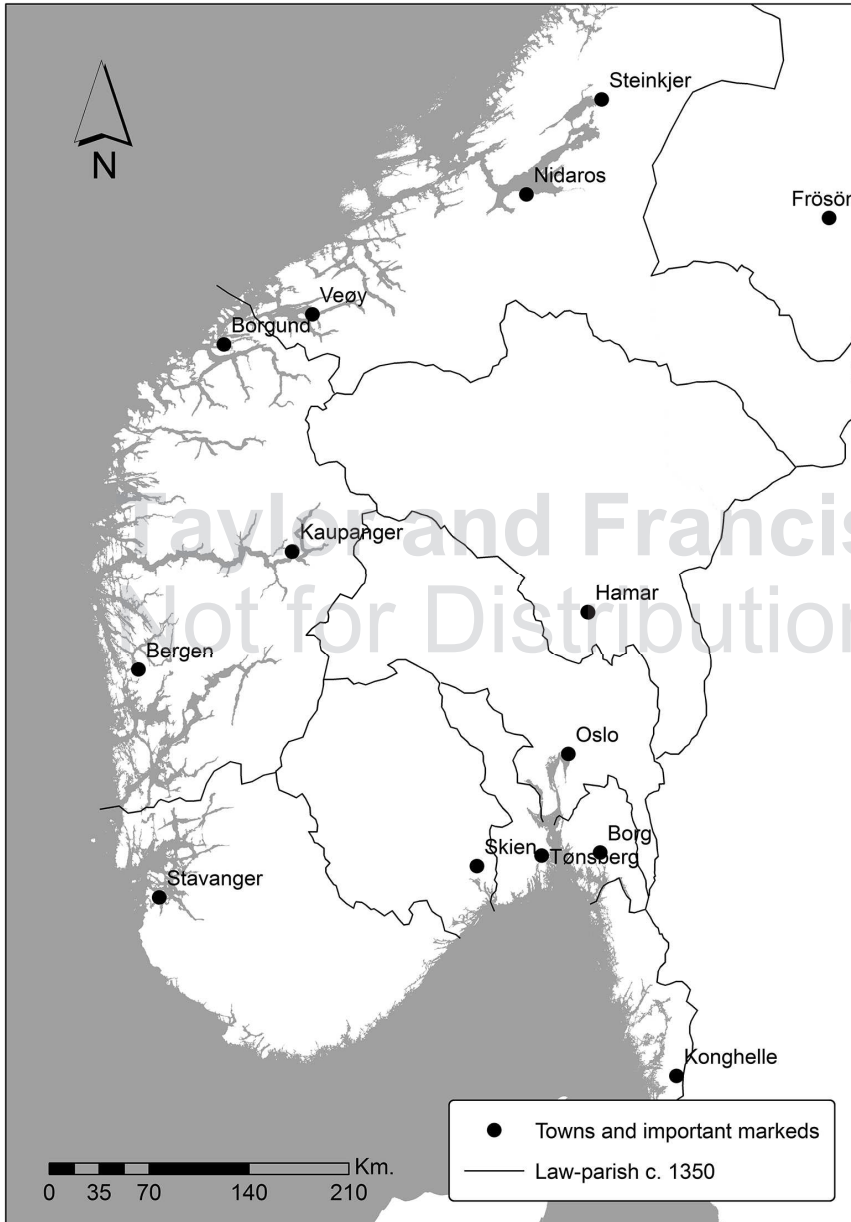


Figure 13.5 New regions emerging c. 1250–1350: the relocation of the rural *lawthings* to urban centres laid the foundation for the new cooperative law-regions of Norway, and gradually the inland was included in the ‘urban economy’ of the kingdom.

in eastern Norway, that the great mound at Stein is the best candidate for Halfdan's burial site (Rolfsen and Larsen 2005: 124). Halfdan the Black is in later tradition regarded as a lawmaker, and Snorri Sturluson accredits him in the early thirteenth century with setting fixed fines for offences, which were proportional to a man's lineage and standing (Hkr, Halfdan the Black's Saga: ch. 7). If Snorri is recounting a genuine tradition, it is tempting to seek a *lawthing* for the southern law-parish in the vicinity of Stein/Storøya. This, however, remains uncertain.

The northern law-parish in the Eidsivathing area (9) may have encompassed (a) Hedmark with Østerdalen, and (b) Gudbrandsdalen and the provinces. The 'people' of Gudbrandsdalen, Hedmark and Østerdalen supported the inauguration of King Christian I in Oslo in 1450 (DN III: 812). This area appears to coincide with the northern law-parish of 1223, where Sakse was the lawman.

Skien's *lawthing* was established in the mid-thirteenth century, and its jurisdiction comprised the fringe parts of both the law-areas of Borgarthing and Eidsivathing; that is, Grenland from Borgarthing, and Upper Telemark and Numedal from Eidsivathing.

A combined urban and rural Oslo lawman is known from the 1260s onwards and served the areas of the southern law-parish that were not under the new law-parishes of Skien and Tønsberg. As late as 1604, the Oslo lawman went annually to the Eidsivathing. He was also the lawman for Oslo county (*syssele*), which suggests that the northern part of the shire of Vingulsmark had been transferred from 'Tjølling law-parish' to the new Oslo jurisdiction. Indrebø (1936: 498) considers that the whole of Vingulsmark was under the Oslo lawman, but this is difficult to substantiate. Later, the southern part of Vingulsmark lay under the jurisdiction of the lawman in Tønsberg. Therefore, it seems most reasonable that Vingulsmark was divided in two, and that only the northern part came under the lawman in Oslo (together with Marker).

Conclusion: the urban impact and the alteration of the legal landscape

We can see a clear development, where co-dependent regions were significantly altered around 1250–1300, especially in South Norway (Figure 13.5). During King Håkon Håkonsson's reign (1217–63) the 'Mountain Land' was reorganised in accordance with strategic economic interests, namely exploitation of inland resources. The Kingdom of Norway gained a common law for the whole kingdom in 1274 during the reign of his son, Magnus the Lawmender, and this was a major step towards a unified kingdom.

The first town, Kaupang in Tjølling, lay centrally in a law-parish that included Vingulsmark, Vestfold and Grenland. This was perhaps the primary hinterland for Kaupang. The *thing* at Tjølling also attracted people to the area. The next generation of towns in the Borgarthing area were deliberately adapted to the established provinces: Skien in Grenland, Tønsberg in Vestfold,

Oslo in Vingulsmark and Konghelle in Vika. A town in each province, all centrally located, with the exception of Konghelle, which bordered Sweden and Denmark. The establishment of Borg early in the eleventh century breaks this pattern. It is feasible that Borg was created primarily to support the political and legal integration of Ranrike under Olaf Haraldsson's rule.

There were great changes to the boundary between the Borgarthing and Eidsivathing law-areas. Prior to c. 1250, Grenland was under Borgarthing, and Upper Telemark under Eidsivathing. Skien's hinterland was amalgamated under a new jurisdiction, and the *lawthing* located within the town. This change encouraged greater interaction across the older law-regions, which was formative for the modern Telemark County (except Numedal). The lawman of Tønsberg was active in the countryside from at least the 1260s. In the later Middle Ages the law-parish also included Tverrdalene, which had originally been under the Eidsivathing area, as well as part of Borgar *sysse*l on the far shore of the Oslo Fjord. Consequently, Tønsberg and Borg may have competed as chief legal centres. The lawman in Tønsberg received a relatively large law-parish and part of the Mountain Land.

Regardless, ultimately the winner was Oslo. The town gained a large share of the southern law-parish of the Eidsivathing area, specifically Romerike, Ringerike, in addition to Marker and half of Vingulsmark. In c. 1350 Valdres and Hallingdal were added to this list. This must have had great significance for the development of Oslo as one of the foremost towns in Norway in the fourteenth century. In reality, the former law-parishes connected with the *lawthings* at Tjølling and Ringerike (location unidentified) were subsequently split between Skien, Tønsberg and Oslo, each receiving their share. These new jurisdictions changed the axes of human interaction from 'horizontal' to 'vertical' interchange, as each town gained a part of both the Coastal Land and the Mountain Land. In the towns of Stavanger and Hamar, each with a bishop's see, the changes were less marked, and they remained central to their respective law-parish. In secular affairs, Stavanger lost the Mountain Land of Valdres and Hallingdal to Oslo, while Hamar lost the southern law-parish of Eidsivathing to the three coastal towns. This, though, was a compromise. The areas remained connected to their original diocese. This dual connection is also seen in Jämtland, which in secular terms was under Frostathing and in ecclesiastical terms under Uppsala. This special category, in terms of cultural geography, is worthy of a study in its own right.

Significant changes occurred after 1223. Rural *lawthings* were relocated to the towns, and the lawmen's roles in the town and countryside became fused together (Seip 1934: 16–24). Gulen and Avaldsnes (*Gulathingsslag*) were absorbed by Bergen and Stavanger in the fourteenth century. Two ancient law-parishes were divided between Skien, Tønsberg and Oslo. The Frostathing moved to Trondheim. In this process the Borgarthing lost its overall function as a *thing*, since the western law-parish was broken up. While there were at least nine rural *lawthing* sites in 1223, only Foss, Steigen and Eidsvoll remained in rural areas in 1604. Konghelle was a border town that was too impractically

located to be the central *lawthing* for Båhuslen. Foss was more central, and perhaps remained the location of the *lawthing* for this reason. In sparsely urbanised Hålogaland, Steigen remained the *thing* site, and Vågan did not have the gravity as a town to attract the *lawthing*. Altogether, seven or eight coastal towns in Norway partly or wholly attracted the functions of the rural *lawthing*. This applies to Konghelle (Bahus) (partly), Borg, Oslo, Tønsberg, Skien, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim, as well as Hamar in the Mountain Land. The changes on the western shore of the Oslo Fjord and the southern Mountain Land were the most extensive, as jurisdictions were altered to meet the needs of the coastal towns.

Despite the fact that all the towns were not equally successful as legal centres, the Decapolis metaphor in *Historia Norvegie* did contain a prophetic element. Even though the Decapolis did not have the direct ‘civilising influence’ that the concept alludes to, the coastal towns did influence the regional network of Norway. The changes were due to political developments and the power of the market.

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