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A Wider Scope of Action: *Fru* Ingerd Ottesdotter's Exercise of Power in 1520s and 1530s Norway

Abstract: As a rule, gender norms excluded noblewomen from exercising direct forms of political and military power in late medieval Norway. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of King Christian II's ousting from his Scandinavian kingdoms in 1523, *Fru* Ingerd Ottesdotter (*c.* 1475–1555) secured an independent position of power and participated actively in political and military endeavours. The Norwegian Council of the Realm's policy of self-government and the leading role of Vincens Lunge, *Fru* Ingerd's son-in-law, served as catalysts for her expanded scope of action. Changes in monarchical rule during the last years of King Frederik I's reign (1524–1533) ensured that the next interregnum would not present the same opportunities for the council and *Fru* Ingerd. She retained a reduced position of authority in the 1530s, but she no longer played an active part in the political and military scene. Although the monarch – and the women's family members – evidently benefitted from noblewomen's extended scope of action, the monarch did not support direct female participation in political and military activities in Norway. Politics and war were the prerogatives of men. If a woman were to exercise direct power within these areas, extraordinary political circumstances and close connections with benevolent and, above all, powerful men were required.

Introduction

The Council of the Realm was the Norwegian elite's political institution during the late Middle Ages. As a *consilium regni*, its members were appointed by the king, and consisted of high nobility and leading prelates.[1] Inspired by similar constitutional movements in Europe, the councillors sought to set limits to royal power. They did this by performing a virtual tug-of-war with the union monarch over the council's constitutional role. According to the council, the union king should rule in accordance with the laws of each kingdom and the union was supposed to be a personal union with considerable powers of self-government. These powers were assigned to the three national councils that would participate actively in governmental decision-

1 The most recent account of political developments in Norway during the 1520s and 1530s and the structures, institutions, and people that influenced them can be found in Lars Hamre's highly detailed account and analysis in *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 212–826. See *Helle*, Down to 1536 (1995), 112–119, for a short English account of the period.

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making processes. King Hans' accession charter from 1483 contains 51 paragraphs where the Norwegian and Danish councils of the realm sought to limit the king's freedom of action. The last paragraph, concerning royal income during interregnums, states that an interregnum lasted from a king's passing until a new king was crowned in Norway, and that the council exercised sovereign power during this period.

Despite the council's policy, the Danish monarchy managed to strengthen its hold on Norway at the close of the late medieval period. While not as successful in withstanding the consolidation of centralized monarchical rule as its Swedish counterpart, the Norwegian Council of the Realm still managed to profit from interregnums and changes of monarchical rule to secure varying degrees of self-government. The Norwegian council took advantage of the events in wake of King Christian II's ousting from his three Scandinavian kingdoms in 1523, and the ensuing transition period when Frederik I fought to secure Denmark. At this time, the Norwegian Council of the Realm implemented a policy designed to restore its powers and its members to positions equivalent to those outlined in 1483. This policy enabled leading councillors to benefit politically and financially. They did this by combining positions of authority with private motivations, and established regional positions of power of a kind that would not have been tolerated by King Christian II.

Women could not become members of the council. However, in 1524, *Fru* Ingerd Ottesdotter (fl. 1475–1555), a wealthy widow belonging to the Norwegian high nobility, obtained a position of power comparable to that of a councillor. She participated in decision-making processes directly through involvement in political and military activities throughout the latter 1520s. In the aftermath of King Frederik I's passing in 1533, and while his son fought to secure Denmark, the council again took control during the ensuing transition. During this period, *Fru* Ingerd retained a position of authority and still exercised power indirectly with, and through, the powerful men of her family and her wider social network. However, *Fru* Ingerd did not actively participate in the major political and military events of the 1530s. This leads to the questions: Why was *Fru* Ingerd able to exercise direct power and participate actively in political and military activities in the 1520s, but not in the 1530s? To what extent did interregnums and other changes of monarchical rule impact *Fru* Ingerd's agency and scope of action? How did these factors interact with the one issue that Nordic historians consider pivotal for elite women's ability to exercise political power, i.e., their connections to powerful men?

Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power

Historians working in the field of women's history and gender studies generally depart from the premise that late medieval and early modern noblewomen primarily exercised power indirectly, via their role in the household and their family. Women contrib-

uted to the establishment and maintenance of the family's social network and presence at court. They also sought to influence the powerful men who led processes and activities of political life, in the broad sense of the term.[2] Since the 1970s, scholars argue that the increased royal control over government, from the high medieval period onwards, and the resulting institutionalisation and bureaucratisation, led families to relegate women to the household and restrict their ability to exercise power. Scholarship suggests that private structures of power were more favourable to women, as opposed to the centralized and institutionalized royal government, where offices and positions of power were reserved for men.[3] In a similar vein, historians studying elite women's participation in warfare and political conflicts of insular and continental Europe, argue for a waning of women's active participation. This falls in line with the shift, from the thirteenth century onwards, from private warfare, centred on the household and private troops, to more professionally organized war.[4] Thus, in this line of argument, it would have been exceptional for women to participate actively in political and military activities, and contrary to late medieval social and gender norms.

Over the last decades, historians specialising in the study of high and late medieval queens' and noblewomen's exercise of power in northwest Europe, establish a more generous approach to their role and its origins. They argue against the "power through the family" and "relegated to the household" theories, and against the concept that women's connections to powerful men was the essential precondition permitting them to be political agents. Scholars now begin to claim that there was nothing remarkable about elite women, that is, women belonging to the socio-political, and predominantly, landowning elite, taking an active part in the exercise and execution of political and military power beyond the household and the family. They demonstrate how society accepted and expected elite women to hold positions of power in their own right, and that they participated actively in securing their husbands' and their families' political and military interests. In this field of research, noblewomen who exercised power directly were not exceptions, but rather, the norm.[5]

Despite the above-mentioned processes, throughout the medieval period private structures of power and the nobility continued to play a significant role in royal govern-

2 *Harris*, English Aristocratic Women (2002), 175–240; *Daybell*/*Norrhem*, Introduction (2017), 4 f.

3 For summaries of the historical development of research on female political agency, and elite women's exercise of power, see *Earenfight*, Where Do We Go (2015); *Kelleher*, What Do We Mean (2015); *Tanner*/*Gathagan*/*Huneycutt*, Introduction (2019), 1–6.

4 *McLaughlin*, The woman warrior (1990), 193–209.

5 *Daybell*/*Norrhem*, Introduction (2017), 3–5; *Tanner*/*Gathagan*/*Huneycutt*, Introduction (2019), 1–6, underline the contrasts in approaches and outcome within the research field. See *Livingstone*, Recalculating the Equation (2015); *Sjursen*, War (2015); *ead.*, Pirate, Traitor, Wife (2019); *Earenfight*, A Lifetime of Power (2019); *Mitchell*, Portraits of Medieval Women (2003), 96–99; *Mitchell*, Joan de Valence (2016), 150–152.

ment and warfare on the regional, national, and union levels in the Nordic region.[6] Hence, we should anticipate that noblewomen, like *Fru* Ingerd, had opportunities to participate actively in their husbands and families' political and military ventures. Although research on noblewomen's exercise of political and military power in the Nordic region remains limited, recent studies of late medieval and early modern noblewomen generally confirm the main tendencies disclosed in research on insular and continental Europe. These studies accentuate the same social and economic factors, and circumstances explaining whether, how, and to which extent women exercised power. According to Nordic research, a noblewoman's agency originated in their legal capacity and marital status, their ownership and control of landed property, and other economic resources, and their specific roles in their household, family, and wider social circle. A premise for noblewomen's ability to exercise power were their connections to powerful men. Wives and widows of leading political figures had political agency, that is, the opportunity and ability to influence those who participated actively in political decision-making processes.[7] Furthermore, studies of Swedish early modern women reveal that wives of powerful men could come to constitute a separate socio-political network, working to secure their own, and others', interests.[8] Nordic research shows, in contrast, that women's opportunities for enacting a wider scope of action were present, but that noblewomen rarely held formal positions of power in their own right, or appear as independent agents in politics. In general, they were not formally present in the public political discourse but acted through others while remaining in the background. Thus, a woman's agency and involvement were generally hidden behind a man's documented decisions. When women exercised formal authority, it was usually in their husband's absence, in the legal role of their husband's caretaker.[9]

There are, however, exceptions challenging this prevailing view of Nordic research. Recent studies underline that an expanded scope of action was possible – even for widows. The most influential families in Denmark made use of all their human resources, including women, to safeguard their economic and political interest. Very similar to English noble families, Danish families relied on wealth, family, and friends to successfully secure and maintain powerful positions within government. They utilized a woman's agency to intervene on behalf of others who sought to

6 See, e. g., *Ulsig*, Nobility (2003); *Opsahl*, Feider i Norge (2007).

7 E. g., *Jacobsen*, Køn og magt (2007); *ead.*, Formal and Informal Power (2011); *Lahtinen*, Anpassning, förhandling, motstånd (2009), 19, 30–33, 64–66, 202, 204, 207. The most comprehensive investigations of medieval female agency in the Nordic region for the late medieval period are: *Jacobsen*, Kvinder, køn og købstadslovgivning (1995); *Lahtinen*, Anpassning, förhandling, motstånd (2009); *Larsson*, Laga fång (2010); *Arnórsdóttir*, Property and Virginity (2010); *Raeder*, Hellre hustru än änka (2011); *Cederbom*, Married Women (2019); *Larsson*, Det öppna fönstret (2019); *Pedersen*, Propertied Women's Economic Agency (2023).

8 *Norrhem*, Kvinnor vid maktens (2007), 158–160; *Norrhem*/*Lindström*, Diplomats and kin networks (2017).

9 *Lahtinen*, Anpassning, förhandling, motstånd (2009), 19, 64–66, 202, 204, 207.

influence political decision-making processes.[10] In both Norway and Denmark, the highest-ranking widows were occasionally granted delegated royal authority, with the duty to maintain the crown's judicial obligations and fiscal interests.[11] Although their late husband's position was often the cause of the benefices giving them the formal exercise of power, they still held the positions in their own right. At times, widows also held valuable benefices, which were generally reserved for men, in order to ensure that they remained in the family during periods of transition between generational changes in male heads of households.[12] We also find wealthy widows engaged in military activities during uprisings in southern Denmark.[13] Upheaval and rebellion also led Norwegian noblewomen to participate more directly in military and political activity, although this was closely tied to their husbands' or late husbands' activities.[14]

Since the nineteenth century, *Fru* Ingerd Ottesdotter's activities during the 1520s have been observed and commented on – but rarely studied – by Norwegian historians. They generally assumed that she was a passive participant in her powerful son-in-law's political schemes.[15] However, considering what we now know of elite women's agency and their scope of action, *Fru* Ingerd's alleged passivity is not necessarily the most interesting aspect of her participation. Rather, given her marital status and the general absence of Norwegian noblewomen in political and military activities, it is surprising that she participated at all. Was *Fru* Ingerd's exercise of power in the 1520s exceptional, and did it meet with the expectations family, friends, authorities, and society in general, had of a noble woman of *Fru* Ingerd's standing?

Interregnum and Authority

In the spring of 1523, King Christian II of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, was ousted from the throne. Frederik, Duke of Schleswig and Holstein subsequently became King of Denmark. During the reign of King Christian II, the influence of the Norwegian Council of the Realm over government policy had been reduced to practically nothing.

10 *Jacobsen*, Køn og magt (2007); *ead.*, Formal and Informal Power (2011), and especially, *ead.*, Magtens kvinder (2022); *Harris*, English Aristocratic Women (2002), 175–209.

11 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013); *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017); *Jacobsen*, Køn og magt (2007); *ead.*, Formal and Informal Power (2011), *ead.*, Magtens kvinder (2022). Jacobsen's Magtens kvinder, provides insight into and analyses of the background and life of female *lensmenn* in Denmark in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

12 *Jacobsen*, Køn og magt (2007); *ead.*, Formal and Informal Power (2011).

13 *Poulsen*, Med harnisk og hest (2001), 44–77.

14 *Wærdahl*, Manndtz Nature (2019).

15 *Daae*, Fru Inger Ottesdatter (1874), 224–336; *Bull*, Vincens Lunge (1917); *Koht*, Ingerd Ottesdotter (1934), 519–522; *Rian*, Den nye begynnelsen (1995), 23; *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 248, 312. It is worth noticing, though, that Hamre generally gives her a more central role than others, cf. *id.*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 353, 362–368.

The fall of Christian II, and the ensuing interregnum, provided Norwegian councillors with an opportunity to re-establish what they believed to be the council's rightful role. Nobles took advantage to retake control over the positions and offices that had traditionally been reserved for them. When Duke Frederik requested to be elected King of Norway, the councillors prepared for negotiations with the duke by settling on a programme of constitutionalism. Their aim was to secure an independent position for Norway in the union with Denmark. Norwegians aimed to restrict royal power, and safeguard themselves against any future undermining of their own, and of the council's, political power.

Ingerd Ottesdotter's husband, Nils Henriksson, had been intended for a key role by the council.[16] When he died in December 1523, his son-in-law, Danish-born Vincens Lunge, took his place at the council, and was appointed castellan of Bergen castle by his fellow councillors. Lunge had been sent to Norway as a governor to the north-western part of the country, the *Nordafjelske,* to secure it for Duke Frederik.[17] It was Lunge who led the envoys from the Norwegian council to the new king in 1524, and secured his acceptance for an accession charter, which was largely drawn up by the councillors. Although King Frederik sought to re-establish his monarchical power as free from any restrictions as possible, his priority was to control more pressing political and military challenges in Denmark. Lunge fulfilled his role towards the king, while also taking the leading role in the council's policy, together with its *de facto* leader, the newly appointed Archbishop of Nidaros, Olav Engelbrektsson. Based in Bergen and Trondheim respectively, Lunge and Archbishop Olav came to dominate political life in the *Nordafjelske* during the 1520s. The archbishop also served as royal governor in Trøndelag, the district encompassing the archdiocese and *Fru* Ingerd's chief residences. In 1527 King Frederik defeated his enemies in Denmark. Amid increasing animosity between the Norwegian councillors, King Frederik began to strengthen his rule in Norway at the expense of the council's influence. A crucial step in crippling the council's power was the appointment of a Dane to Oslo's Akershus castle. In the *Nordafjelske*, the monarch's move profited from the breakdown of the political partnership between Vincens Lunge and Archbishop Olav. King Frederik prevailed when he replaced Lunge with a loyal Dane at Bergen castle in 1529, following a string of political blunders on Lunge's part.

Fru Ingerd Ottesdotter's family background, marriage, social network, vast economic resources, and her role in managing them, substantiate that she had had a prominent position in the *Nordafjelske* before her husband died.[18] A widows' legal capacity was almost comparable to that of men in Norway. *Fru* Ingerd was head of her

16 *Opsahl*, Nils Henriksson (accessed 08.07.2022).

17 From the Late Middle Ages, Norway was divided in two administrative-territorial units: The *Nordafjelske* and the *Sønnafjelske*. The *Nordafjelske* refers to the land west of Lindesnes and the central mountain chain in southern Norway, Mid-Norway (north of Dovre Mountain), and northern Norway.

18 See *Wærdahl*, Fru Ingerd Ottesdotters bruk (2010), *ead.*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017), *ead.*, Tingets muligheter og begrensninger (2022).

household, and guardian of her unmarried daughters. She managed the property she owned and controlled, without the consent of a (male) legal guardian.[19] She was an experienced landowner and businesswoman who rarely shied away from challenges in order to achieve her financial goals and safeguard her interests. This was a trait she shared with her son-in-law Vincens Lunge. *Fru* Ingerd's considerable business activities, centred on the seasonal cod fisheries, provided ties to the international merchant community in Bergen and abroad. As a widow, *Fru* Ingerd divided her time between the Austrått manor and estate, situated at the mouth of the fiord of Trondheim in Trøndelag, and her town house in Bergen. Throughout her life, *Fru* Ingerd held connections to royal officials on every level and with the leading political figures of Norway. Her correspondence reveals that she had keen interests in politics, and she expressed her opinions on the subject freely.[20] From this perspective, *Fru* Ingerd had an excellent foundation for an expanded scope of action. However, to successfully secure and maintain their resources over time, noble families relied on their men to obtain formal positions of power, thereby permitting them to secure their political and financial interests. Since *Fru* Ingerd lacked sons or other direct male relatives, she relied on her sons-in-law to secure vital positions, offices, and benefices. And, during the 1520s, she relied chiefly on Vincens Lunge to execute her interests. *Fru* Ingerd's other son-in-law, Erik Ugerup, was also a Dane. However, Ugerup lacked the necessary family background and connections in Denmark and therefore was not able to secure the most prominent positions.

A main element of the council's restoration policy was the retrieval of key offices and benefices traditionally held by members of the council. In the Nordic region, the core unit of local and regional royal governance was the *len*: Fixed administrative districts of different sizes, types, and importance, individually managed by a royal official, a *lensmann*, who exercised delegated royal authority, and carried out judicial and fiscal responsibilities on behalf of the king.[21] *Lensmenn* generally held *len* in exchange for duty and/or services. A *lensmann* paid the king a fixed annual duty and/or rendered services, in exchange for all, or a varying proportion, of the royal revenue from the district. In Norway, councillors and other noblemen generally held *len*. The

19 Due to the relative generosity of Norwegian inheritance and marriage laws on the part of women, and the fact that noble spouses usually had agreements of joint ownership, *Fru* Ingerd probably inherited half of what she and her husband had acquired together during their marriage, when he passed away. In addition, the Norwegian king had no feudal tenure or say in a noble widow's remarriage or wardship over minor heirs. See *Pedersen*, Propertied Women's Economic (2023).

20 See, e. g., DN, vol. 6, no. 620; DN, vol. 8, no. 538; DN, vol. 11 no. 627.

21 *Len*, both sg. and pl., *Lensmann* sg. and *lensmenn* pl. The term *len* refers to both the *lensmann*'s office and benefice, as well as the geographical district. Norway was divided into six castle *len* and approximately thirty lesser crown *len*. In addition to regular crown *len* there were so-called 'property *len*' granted by the crown, typically a farm or an estate sometime tied to an office as payment. See *Wærdahl*, Opportunity to profit (2017), 90 f., for an English description of the system. *Lensmann* was also used if a woman held *len*, thus underlining that this in principle was an office reserved for men.

distribution of strategically important castles with their accompanying castle *len*, and of other lesser crown *len*, were a key element in Scandinavian politics. Consequently, *len* were a recurring point of contention in the power struggles between the union king and the noblemen of the three realms. If the union king was strong, Norwegian castle *len*, but also lesser *len*, tended to be held by Danes, sometimes of non- or lower noble birth.[22]

From 1524 to 1529, *Fru* Ingerd held six lesser *len* that had formerly been in possession of her husband; two securities, Stjørdal (with Selbu) and Herjedalen, for old loans to the crown that had not been redeemed, and four so-called "duty and service" *len*, Sunnmøre, Romsdal, Edøy, and Fosen.[23] *Fru* Ingerd was the third greatest *lensmann* in the *Nordafjelske*, following her son-in-law and the archbishop, and she held more *len* than the average member of the Norwegian Council of the Realm. In addition, *Fru* Ingerd was the only woman who held *len* in Norway in her own right during the 1520s. Widows of prominent officials and *lensmenn* were allowed to retain one or two lesser *len* from the 1530s onward.[24]

As a *lensmann*, *Fru* Ingerd was a royal official who held and exercised delegated royal authority on behalf of the king. Her bailiffs attended to the daily business of enforcing the law, and securing income for *Fru* Ingerd and the Crown. She also managed the collection and transfer of taxes from Mid-Norway, together with Vincens Lunge and the archbishop.[25] Hence, *Fru* Ingerd had formal authority, permitting her to exercise power in her own right on the crown's behalf, and not as the deputy of a man. This alone set her apart from other noblewomen in the 1520s.

The distribution of six of the approximately thirty regular *len* in Norway to a woman, is in itself an indication that the situation in 1524 was extraordinary. That the *len* were held as a direct result of Vincens Lunge's control of their distribution, confirms this. In his Norwegian accession charter from November 1524, King Frederik granted the council great influence over government, and he agreed to reserve most Norwegian castles, *len,* and council membership, for Norwegians or men married to Norwegians, like Vincens Lunge. The Norwegian councillors divided among themselves and their followers both vacant *len,* and *len* that were held by Danes. But in November 1524, Lunge, in the capacity of governor of the *Nordafjelske*, had already

22 Cf. *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), contains detailed accounts of *len* distribution in the reigns of King Christian II and King Frederik I, e.g., 312–314.

23 Fosen, Edøy, Romsdal, and Sunnmøre roughly covered what is today the county of Møre and Romsdal on the northernmost part of the west coast, and the southernmost coastal part of what is today the county of Trøndelag. Stjørdal (with Selbu) is situated in the inland parts of Trøndelag, while the adjoining Herjedalen is today a part of Sweden. See *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017), concerning *Fru* Ingerd's and other widows' *len* in Norway.

24 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013); *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017).

25 See *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 106; *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017); *ead.*, Tingets muligheter og begrensninger (2022), 202 f., for information regarding *Fru* Ingerd's career as a *lensmann*.

granted *len* to *Fru* Ingerd, and the Vardø castle, in the far north, to Erik Ugerup. King Frederik had confirmed the grants, even if the appointment of *lensmenn* was a royal prerogative. Thus, an interregnum and the weak royal presence, enabled *Fru* Ingerd's son-in-law to bestow her with a formal authority of a kind and an extent that had not formerly been held by a noblewoman in Norway.

We know from Denmark that women held *len*, either with their husbands or as widows, and this formed part of Danish families' overall economic strategies.[26] Widows of prominent royal officials were also permitted to retain benefices and positions of authority, that had formerly been granted to their husbands or the married couple. This was done, for instance, to retain the resources they generated, and the political influence they provided, within the family during periods of transitions between different generations of men.[27] Still, given the tough competition over *len* and their political importance, it seems odd that the other Norwegian councillors, including the archbishop who wanted to hold the *len* left by Nils Henriksson himself, accepted that *Fru* Ingerd held six *len*.[28] The lack of female *lensmenn* prior to 1524, and, as we shall see, King Frederik's policy after 1529, imply that *Fru* Ingerd would not have been allowed to hold six regular *len* if King Frederik's control of Norway had been stronger, or if someone other than Vincens Lunge had controlled their distribution. Thus, *Fru* Ingerd's formal position of power in the 1520s, albeit independent, substantiates that elite women's exercise of power originated in their connection to powerful men. Holding *len* did not in itself qualify women, or men for that matter, to participate in political or military activities. Yet, between 1526 and 1529, *Fru* Ingerd was involved in activities normally associated with councillors of the realm, prominent royal officials, and envoys in the *Nordafjelske*.

Exercising Power with, through, and independently of the Family

King Christian II's local allies caused trouble in Denmark during the first years of King Frederik I's reign. King Christian was the brother-in-law of Karl V, Holy Roman emperor, and the ousted king ceaselessly appealed to the emperor for military and political support, with limited result. Though an invasion was first carried out by King Christian only in 1531, its possibility was a constant threat from the mid-1520s onwards. In 1527, *Fru* Ingerd's ships participated, alongside those of Vincens Lunge, in

26 *Jacobsen*, Køn og magt (2007); *ead.*, Formal and Informal Power (2011); *ead.*, Magtens kvinder, 110–152.

27 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 104–110; *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017), 90–94.

28 DN, vol. 7, no. 579. Cf. *Wærdahl*, Opportunity to profit (2017), 92–96.

privateering activities themselves to deter King Christian II's privateers.[29] With a shipyard, large merchant ships, crews, and weapons at her disposal, *Fru* Ingerd had the means to engage in maritime activities.[30] We have other examples of Scandinavian noblewomen engaging in privateering, or even piracy, in the Late Middle Ages. However, their aims were not to defend the realm, but to achieve financial compensation not obtainable through other means.[31] We cannot disregard the possibility that *Fru* Ingerd's ships and crew participated in illegal privateering against Scottish, Dutch, and German merchant ships. Since, after receiving complaints from King James V of Scotland against his men, Lunge admitted in a letter to Archbishop Olav that his ships and those of *Fru* Ingerd had mistakenly seized the wrong vessels.[32]

In a politically delicate situation, the foremost ecclesiastical and secular authorities from the *Nordafjelske* and Bergen became involved in finding solutions for Scottish merchants and crews, who had fallen victim to Archbishop Olav's privateers. Acting in accordance with the council of Bergen and the German merchants, the Bishop of Bergen, Vincens Lunge, Erik Ugerup, and *Fru* Ingerd, wrote to Archbishop Olav concerning the complaints against his men.[33] They informed the archbishop of their decision to promise the Scottish king to negotiate with the archbishop's men regarding the compensation, restitution, damages, and the punishment of the guilty. A promise they repeated in a letter to King Jacob V.[34] They also presented the archbishop with a summary of the negotiations with his representatives in Bergen. At one point, it was discovered that the archbishop's men planned to leave town with their prizes. At this news, *Fru* Ingerd took initiative to negotiate with Archbishop Olav's men at her own residence in Bergen. However, they ultimately set sail, only to be subsequently apprehended and imprisoned by Lunge's men.

In the letter to the archbishop, *Fru* Ingerd is named and listed in Latin after the bishop and her two sons-in-law. Both Bishop Olav of Bergen and Vincens Lunge are listed with their offices, to underline the official nature of the letter.[35] In the letter to the Scottish king, the issuers give the impression that they are acting on behalf of King Frederik, repeatedly referring to him in their account of the activity of the archbishop's men.[36] In addition, in an earlier letter to Archbishop Olav, Lunge had explicitly mentioned the participation of his mother-in-law's ship and crew.[37] Norwegian historian Lars Hamre, who last wrote about the events from the 1520s in depth, only mentions *Fru* Ingerd's role in

29 DN, vol. 8, no. 562. Ingerd had a shipyard close to her chief residence, Austrått, merchant ships that sailed to Scotland (DN, vol. 7, no. 652; DN, vol. 9, no. 713), and weapons (DN, vol. 9, no. 741).
30 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 320–322, 352–354.
31 *Wærdahl*, Manndtz Nature (2019).
32 DN, vol. 8, no. 562, also no. 561.
33 DN, vol. 8, no. 564.
34 DN, vol. 8, no. 565.
35 DN, vol. 8, no. 564.
36 DN, vol. 8, no. 565.
37 DN, vol. 8, no. 562.

the negotiations with the archbishop's men. Hamre brings her into the argument when discussing privateering and its aftermath.[38] He acknowledges the authority she enjoyed, both among the archbishop's men and others, but does not recognize the extraordinary nature of her involvement. However, sending ships and crews to patrol the coastline, and deliberating with Bergen aldermen and merchants together with the local bishop, castellan, and a councillor of the realm, are tasks we associate with councillors and leading political figures in late medieval Norway. Also, we do not expect to find widowed noblewomen negotiating with the archbishop's men, and co-signing official letters to the archbishop and the Scottish king, and, as in the latter example, acting in King Frederik's name. Although some of the involvement can be explained by her responsibilities as a *lensmann*, her active participation in the negotiations and the correspondence with King James V is remarkable.

Further confirmation of Ingerd's authority and role among the *Nordafjelske* socio-political elite is found in a letter written by the Bishop of Bergen in the form of instructions from the bishop to an envoy heading north to Trøndelag. His envoy was charged with partaking in deliberations with the archbishop, key royal officials, and representatives. In turn, the bishop's envoy would be dealing with a corresponding royal envoy, Ove Lunge, Vincens' brother, who was in Norway on the king's behalf, and who had the authority to deal with matters that would normally have been dealt with directly by the king.[39] Ove Lunge was one of two royal envoys sent to Norway by King Frederik and the Danish Council of the Realm. Their task was to safeguard from further aggression against friendly merchant ships, to deliberate regarding King Frederik's coronation, and to contribute to the strengthening of the king's royal power in the *Nordafjelske*.[40] The bishop's envoy was given the task of convincing Ove Lunge to present the bishop's needs to the king in a way that would favour the bishopric of Bergen, including complications arising from a deanship in Bergen, and a *len*. In the instructions, the bishop lists *Fru* Ingerd and her daughter *Fru* Margrete, Vincens Lunge's wife. The two women are listed among the friends from whom the envoy could expect to receive assistance and comfort, and more importantly, friends who were capable of guiding him in matters that he needed to address on behalf of the Bergen bishopric.[41] *Fru* Ingerd and *Fru* Margrete appear last in the list containing the archbishop, the archbishop's chapter, Ove Lunge, Vincens Lunge, Erik Ugerup, and Morten Skinkel (the other royal envoy). Although the bishop's instructions are obviously written for someone with intimate knowledge of the bishopric's concerns, the bishop unmistakably includes these two women as members of the powerful group capable of assisting the envoy in reaching his goal, that is, in securing the best possible outcome for the bishopric.

38 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 353.
39 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 355; DN, vol. 9, no. 596 f.
40 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 353–356.
41 DN, vol. 9, no. 597.

Officially, *Fru* Ingerd and *Fru* Margrete had no role in the matters discussed. This is clear from the bishop's detailed instructions, which told the envoy how to address each subject-matter, and from whom he was to obtain agreements. However, that the bishop of Bergen counts Ingerd and Margrete amongst those who can add valuable contributions to, and influence, the outcome of the deliberations with the king, is a testament to the power elite women (with or without independent positions of power) could exercise in political life. *Fru* Ingerd, and very likely her daughter as well, had vital roles in the socio-political network governing Norway at the time. Roles that are rarely addressed directly by sources, but which are fruitful to keep in mind, since they are essential for recognizing these women's latent agency in contemporary events. Other sources demonstrate how *Fru* Ingerd enjoyed great authority within her socio-political network. One such instance is when the archbishop requested her to be an intermediary between Vincens Lunge and the councillor Johan Kruckow. The point of contention centred around one of Kruckow's *len*, which Lunge tried to gain by force.[42] This conflict was ultimately also handled directly by the king, and was enumerated as one of the reasons Lunge lost his position in 1529.[43]

While Ove Lunge was visiting Trøndelag from the autumn of 1527 to spring of 1528, he became embroiled in a political scandal, often referred to as the *Daljunkern*-affair. The controversy involved Ove Lunge's brother Vincens, Erik Ugerup, *Fru* Ingerd, and the archbishop who supported and assisted a young Swedish rebel, a *junker*, originating from the Dalarna district of Sweden, where several rebellions against King Gustav had begun.[44] During this period, Swedish rebels had been seeking refuge in Mid-Norway for a couple of years. Sources indicate that *Fru* Ingerd and her household provided shelter for well-known rebels at Austrått. This later brought her in conflict with Archbishop Olav, who had a more ambivalent attitude towards the refugees.[45] *Daljunkern* claimed to be the son of Sten Sture, the late steward and regent of Sweden. Instead, and the point of contention, was that King Gustav of Sweden claimed he was an imposter. *Fru* Ingerd and the others were thoroughly convinced of *Daljunkern*'s identity. They supported and assisted him with provisions, manpower, weapons, and even by betrothing one of *Fru* Ingerd's daughters to him. Vincens Lunge and Erik Ugerup accompanied *Daljunkern* and his supporters to Sweden, where he failed to raise the necessary men and support. Thereafter, *Daljunkern* returned to Norway. He stayed there until Vincens Lunge gave in to pressure from King Frederik and King Gustav and sent him to Denmark.

Vincens Lunge and the archbishop's support of *Daljunkern* can be partially explained by their understanding of Norway's role within the union and their wish to

42 DN, vol. 9, no. 607.

43 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 377.

44 See *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 359–370 for a detailed account of the Daljunkern-affair. Also the discussion of *Fru* Ingerd's role in *Wærdahl*, Why did Fru Ingerd (2013), 103–109.

45 DN, vol. 14, no. 551.

act independently in order to impede King Frederik's policy of monarchical restoration, which was well underway in the *Sønnafjelske*. It is, however, difficult to discern political motivations. Documents shedding light on the affair are subjective and defensive in tone, and the roles of those involved is often obfuscated by competing narratives. When King Gustav pressured King Frederik to act against those involved, the archbishop put up a relentless defence. Archbishop Olav blamed everything on Vincens Lunge and his family. Although it is difficult to discern why *Fru* Ingerd supported Swedish rebels, her active role was acknowledged by both King Frederik and King Gustav. This is recorded when King Gustav demanded that King Frederik should punish *Fru* Ingerd for her role in supporting the rebel.[46]

Fru Ingerd's involvement in the *Daljunkern*-affair is, of course, an example of a woman acting together, and in accordance, with the chief political agents of her family and its network. The same can be noted regarding Erik Ugerup. However, a letter she sent to the archbishop in 1526, long before *Daljunkern* came to Norway, defending why she supported Swedish rebels, reveals that *Fru* Ingerd also acted independently of her family.[47] She explains to the archbishop that she had allowed one of the rebels to be taken to her residence because he was ill and needed fresh food. While *Fru* Ingerd stayed in Bergen, her household cared for the Swedes. In this case, *Fru* Ingerd exercised power not only with her family, but also made independent decisions.

In a letter from 1525, Vincens Lunge asks the archbishop to be a favourable master to his mother-in-law. He requests this from the archbishop for his own sake, and suggests that if she is not cooperative in some cases, he would let Lunge know. Lunge reassures the archbishop by noting how, if such an occasion arose, he would send a letter to *Fru* Ingerd in order to ensure that she would be guided.[48] This request might be interpreted as a confirmation of *Fru* Ingerd's passive role, where she acted solely on her son-in-law's wishes. It furthermore suggests that she was at the mercy of the archbishop's behest, that is, resulting in her having no independent political agency, with her actions controlled by her son-in-law. However, the letter also highlights that she did not always let herself be guided by others. This is a poignant fact discerned from several documented clashes between her and the archbishop.[49] Degrading *Fru* Ingerd to a mere passive supporter of Lunge's political schemes misses the point. Of course, at times she followed the direction established by Lunge (and the archbishop), as did Erik Ugerup. Lunge and Archbishop Olav were the leading political agents of

46 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd (2013), 100 f.

47 DN, vol, 14, no. 551.

48 DN, vol. 10 vol. 10, no. 459: *Kere herre verer mind moder end gunstig herre for mind skyld oc er thet so at hwund seg ey vil *seg i noger sager sye ladeverdes ethers nade meg thet at giffue tilkende vil ieg fremdeles met skriffuelse forskaffue at hund seg retlede skald.*

49 For instance, in 1531 she became the matron of Rein monastery against the archbishop's strong objections and was granted its land as a property *len* by the king, as part of the broader programme of secularization of monasteries (DN, vol. 10, no. 631).

the *Nordafjelske.* In addition, Lunge was the leading political agent of the family, and they relied on him to secure their interests. While in the Norwegian context, *Fru* Ingerd's participation in politics during the 1520s might be exceptional, we have many examples of *Fru* Ingerd misusing her power for private financial gains. These examples overwhelmingly demonstrate she was in no way a passive character.[50] Lastly, when attempting to discern medieval noblewomen's agency and exercise of power based on the extant sources, it is vital to consider the overall picture from combined evidence, and not decontextualize one statement from any single source.

It is evident that *Fru* Ingerd operated by means of, and together with, other political agents in her family. Not unlike any other male political figure, for instance Erik Ugerup, *Fru* Ingerd's position was the result of her connections to powerful men. Both Ugerup and *Fru* Ingerd provided Vincens Lunge with support and assistance. And this relationship was mutually benefitting. It was Lunge's responsibility to ensure that his marital family, including his mother-in-law, maintained the position it had held since the times of Nils Henriksson's father. And, like any nobleman with political ambitions, Lunge depended on his family for support and assistance.[51] Lunge exceeded his authority by appointing Erik Ugerup to the council, and he continued this manner of operation by also including his mother-in-law in a policy designed to strengthen and maintain his role. Lunge either wanted, needed, or was obliged to include his mother-in-law in his schemes. In this respect, *Fru* Ingerd's role resembles that of other well-connected elite women. It supports the "power through the family" model of female agency. Furthermore, there is no doubt that *Fru* Ingerd was a more important political and military partner for Vincens Lunge than Ugerup in the *Nordafjelske*.

Vincens took over the position of Nils Henriksson, his late father-in-law, in the council and at Bergen castle, which were roles reserved for men. It can, however, be argued that some of the other roles performed by Nils Henriksson were taken over by his widow, especially in Mid-Norway, where she built on a foundation she likely already had created together with him. That *Fru* Ingerd had private motives for acquiring this position in the *Nordafjelske*, supports such a hypothesis. In the 1530s, widows of prominent councillors and *lensmenn* sought to retain their late husband's *len* and the revenue they generated.[52] *Fru* Ingerd's *len* covered areas where she owned and controlled vast landed property and where she had great financial interests. The combination of private financial motives and formal authority was a sure recipe for extracting financial profit for a *lensmann.* And, perhaps more interesting, it also proved for *Fru* Ingerd as a way to safeguard her control over property she held illegally in the area.[53]

50 *Wærdahl*, Tingets muligheter og begrensninger (2022), 200–217.

51 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 377.

52 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd (2013), 97–100, 104–110; *ead.*, Opportunity to profit (2017), 96–98.

53 DN, vol. 11, no. 603; *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 639–643.

Fru Ingerd's role during the 1520s was made possible by extraordinary political conditions. The prevailing political situation provided her son-in-law with the necessary tools to secure his mother-in-law a position, which was normally unattainable for women of late medieval Scandinavia.[54] As noted above, the interregnum and the transitional period before King Frederik managed to strengthen his monarchical rule in the *Nordafjelske*, provided *Fru* Ingerd with a scope of action that extended far beyond that of other noblewomen in Norway. The situation provided *Fru* Ingerd with the means to convert an already strong regional financial position into actual political power. This can be seen as a confirmation of how noble families made use of all their human resources to establish or maintain a dominant position. Noblewomen belonging to these families or political factions could take the opportunity to benefit from changes of monarchical power, or, as in this case, profit from a weakened royal presence.

Restoration of Monarchical Rule and a New Interregnum

While the *Daljunkern*-affair put King Frederik in a delicate position with King Gustav of Sweden, it also offered an opportunity to increase his control in the *Nordafjelske*. The accusations from King Gustav were included in a long list of Vincens Lunge's alleged misconduct in his role as Norwegian councillor, castellan of Bergen castle, and royal governor, that King Frederik had drawn up before he summoned Lunge to Flensburg in October 1528. The Flensburg meeting ended in a compromise agreement. Lunge lost the Bergen castle and the accompanying *len*, but he was compensated for his loss and remained a councillor. The compromise ultimately served to tie Lunge closer to King Frederik, while distancing him from the archbishop and his former allies among the Norwegian nobility.[55]

In the aftermath of the *Daljunkern*-affair, a feud broke out between the former political allies in the *Nordafjelske.* This happened when the archbishop seized Vincens Lunge and *Fru* Ingerd's *len* and properties from Sunnmøre and northwards. A document dated from after the event demonstrates that the archbishop's aggression was directed against *Fru* Ingerd's interests. In the document, the archbishop describes their conflict as a *hostile act which has been between her and us*.[56] Following the involvement of practically every level of governmental body, from King Frederik downwards, the feud was eventually solved by settlements in 1530. However, although he

54 *Wærdahl*, Opportunity to profit (2017), 94–96, 98–101.

55 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 376–383.

56 DN, vol. 9, no. 713: *ffyentligh handling som haffwer worydt emellom henne oc oss.*

officially supported King Frederik's rule, Archbishop Olav saw the Lutheran sympathies held by King Frederik, Lunge, and, possibly, *Fru* Ingerd (or at the very least, her men and servants) as a threat. The archbishop embarked on a policy of secrecy, culminating with the active support of King Christian II's invasion of the *Sønnafjelske* in 1531. His support also manifested with another occupation of *Fru* Ingerd and Lunge's *len* and properties. It also involved his part in King Christian II's order of *Fru* Ingerd's arrest, together with her sons-in-law. Yet again, this last act confirms the position she held in the *Nordafjelske*: She was seen as an independent political agent to be reckoned with, *en par* with the men of her family.[57]

The feud, together with King Christian II's invasion, served to tie *Fru* Ingerd and Vincens Lunge closer to King Frederik. It also alienated them politically from the archbishop, thereby further contributing to King Frederik's strengthening of monarchical rule in the *Nordafjelske*. Yet, following King Frederik's passing in 1533, the Norwegian Council of the Realm again took charge, and became the sovereign power. Following an initiative from the archbishop, the councillors met with leading royal officials, which included the Danish castellans at the Bergen and Båhus castles, along with the secular elite, and representatives for the commoners in Bud, a fishing and merchant settlement on the coast of Romsdal. The meeting was advisory in nature. It focused partially on remedying the harm caused to the realm by King Frederik. It also aimed to prepare for future negotiations for the combined Danish-Norwegian election meeting. And perhaps equally significant, it prepared for the creation of a new royal accession charter for Norway, with the Danish councillors and King Frederik's son, Duke Christian. The archbishop was awarded a central role in government until a new king would be elected. However, in Denmark, war reigned between the duke and the former allies of the late King Christian II.

Although the council embarked on a policy of constitutionalism similar to that of 1524–25, it held a significantly weaker position in 1533 than in former interregnums. The monarchical reaction of the late 1520s strengthened the monarchy's control over Norway. There were no forfeitures of Danish-held *len* after 1533, or replacements of Danish castellans, who remained at their posts in Bergen, Akershus, and Båhus. In addition, Vincens Lunge and other councillors that led and supported the council's programme during the 1520s, were now loyal to the monarchy. Furthermore, the council was not united. Early on, Vincens Lunge and other secular members of the council declared their support of Duke Christian in Denmark. In the summer of 1535, when Archbishop Olav summoned a Norwegian election assembly in Trondheim, the secular councillors in the *Sønnafjelske* refused to attend. They chose to issue an election letter for Duke Christian in May 1535, and encouraged the archbishop to do the same. Faced with Duke Christian's reformist programme, the primary objective for the archbishop and his allies was maintaining the survival of the Norwegian Catholic church.

57 DN, vol. 8, no. 663.

The archbishop publicly conceded to Duke Christian. However, he had secretly arranged for support from Karl V. The emperor promised the archbishop military aid with the help of the Count Palatine Friedrich V. von der Pfalz, a son-in-law of King Christian II, who was to attempt to win back his father-in-law's lost kingdoms.

In December 1535, a delegation from Duke Christian, led by Vincens Lunge and Claus Bille, arrived in Trondheim. They demanded the archbishop agree to a joint Norwegian royal acclamation and tax concession assembly. Yet the archbishop responded by setting in motion a veritable *coup d'état*, ultimately involving the killing of Vincens Lunge in January 1536 and imprisoning the other envoys. He then sent troops to Bergen and Oslo. However, when imperial military support failed to materialize, the archbishop backed down, and was forced to promise to acclaim Duke Christian as the King of Norway. By then, the duke had already become the King of Denmark. He did this by signing an accession charter, wherein he promised the Danish Council of the Realm to subordinate Norway to Denmark, converted into a kingdom subordinated under the Danish crown, with no separate or independent political institutions of its own. King Christian III sent troops to Norway, but when they arrived in Trondheim in May 1537, Archbishop Olav had already set sail for the Netherlands. As a farewell gesture, the archbishop's men sacked *Fru* Ingerd's Austrått manor yet again.

Due to his support of the king, and despite his political setbacks, Vincens Lunge managed to retain a strong position in Norway during the 1530s. He resided in Bergen and participated in political and military activities in the *Nordafjelske*. Together with his new brother-in-law, Niels Lykke, Lunge exceeded his authority as the showdown with the archbishop following King Christian II's invasion illustrates. Their conduct caused confusion and friction among the king's officials in Norway and Denmark. It demonstrates that Lunge no longer held control over the *Nordafjelske*. Lunge's bids to regain Bergen castle were also unsuccessful. His open support of Duke Christian caused trouble with the Lübeck merchants in Bergen, whose hostilities towards Lunge forced him to move to Oslo with his family. By 1535, he had established himself as a councillor in the *Sønnafjelske*. Together with his brother-in-law Erik Ugerup, and Erik Gyldenstjerne, the castellan of Akershus castle, Lunge began privateering against Lübeck interests. Lunge also became the caretaker castellan of Akershus castle in Oslo. At this point, Lunge wielded great influence among secular councillors who supported Duke Christian and opposed the archbishop's policy. There are, however, no signs of him involving his mother-in-law in these, or other, political and military activities. And although she had a close relationship with Eske Bille, Lunge's successor at Bergen castle,[58] Eske did not involve her in the Crown's political and military activities either.

58 *Wærdahl*, Fru Ingerd Ottesdotters bruk (2010), 61 f.

Despite Christian II acknowledging *Fru* Ingerd in 1531 as a figure of authority in the *Nordafjelske*, her sons-in-law's continued political and military involvement, and the presence of a new interregnum, she did not exercise any direct forms of political or military power in the 1530s. What where the circumstances causing *Fru* Ingerd's apparent diminishing agency and scope of action?

On the Sidelines of Political Life

Fru Ingerd was certainly present where politics was practised, both at the levels of the realm and the union. She was in Denmark for a *herredag*, a meeting of gentlemen, in 1531.[59] She was in Bud in 1533, but similar to the council's previous deliberations and negotiations with the king elect in the early 1520s, there are no traces of female participation in extant official documents from that meeting.[60] Her correspondence gives further evidence that she took opportunities to exert influence on prominent political actors. *Fru* Ingerd's archive has not been preserved. What remains of her letters to others, reveals that she actively sought and obtained news about political and military events from various sources, and distributed them to her network. Understandably, the war in the Kingdom of Denmark and the Duchy of Holstein is repeatedly addressed in her extant letters to the archbishop from the 1530s. These letters also provide glimpses of the contents of the (now lost) replies he sent to her. Of significance is that this correspondence reveals that she gave him advice concerning political matters.[61] In May 1535, she advises him to postpone a proposed *herredag*.[62] A wish that reflected the view of Vincens Lunge and other councillors in the *Sønnafjelske*. In a separate instance, *Fru* Ingerd tried to mediate between the archbishop and Lunge.[63] She also used her position and contacts to assist her sons-in-law in a similar way in which they helped her. In 1530, *Fru* Ingerd and Erik Ugerup applied to Eske Bille asking for Lunge to keep a *len*.[64] In the aftermath of the archbishop's occupation and plundering of Ingerd's property and *len* in Mid-Norway between 1529 and 1531, Lunge and Niels Lykke negotiated compensations and payments of damages with the archbishop on her behalf.[65] Lykke acted as his mother-in-law's go-between with Archbishop Olav and his influential Danish relatives.[66] Securing his own and his mother-in-law's *len* was one of the matters Vincens

59 DN, vol. 5, no. 1062.
60 DN, vol. 23, no. 347.
61 See DN, vol. 11, nos. 600, 617, 620, 627.
62 DN, vol. 11, no. 613.
63 DN, vol. 11, no. 617.
64 DN, vol. 22, no. 152.
65 DN, vol. 9, nos. 723, 752.
66 DN, vol. 10, no. 560; DN, vol. 12, no. 541.

Lunge was to raise with Duke Christian on his trip to Denmark in 1535.[67] Lunge negotiated a final settlement for *Fru* Ingerd regarding a property she held illegally.[68] The best example of *Fru* Ingerd's continuous authority in the realm's leading socio-political network is provided by a letter sent from Bishop Hans Rev of Oslo to Archbishop Olav in 1535. In this letter, Bishop Hans advises the archbishop to deal lightly with *Fru* Ingerd as *she has the ability to speak and write well of Your Grace to Herr Vincens and to others*.[69] A document from May 1535, where the councillors in the *Sønnafjelske* condemned Niels Lykke's relationship with his sister-in-law, confirms that *Fru* Ingerd retained a strong position within the leading socio-political network of the realm. The councillors do not refer to *Jomfru* Lucie as her father's daughter, according to the norm, but as *Fru* Ingerd Ottesdotter's daughter.[70]

It is evident that King Frederik's restoration of monarchical rule and Vincens Lunge's reduced position were key factors limiting *Fru* Ingerd's political and military involvement. Furthermore, the 1533-interregnum and the transition period before King Christian secured the crown, did not offer opportunities to establish local and regional positions of power in the guise of royal service, as occurred in the past. With a strengthened monarchy, power was obtained from the king, not by opposing or ignoring him. There was, however, another aspect of King Frederik's restoration policy that directly affected *Fru* Ingerd's role and position in the 1530s, namely his distribution of *len*.

In 1528, King Frederik requested *Fru* Ingerd to transfer her *len* to Niels Lykke, the Danish noble that had recently become her third son-in-law. She gave up her *len* in exchange for a financial compensation from Lykke.[71] Replacing a female *lensmann* with a male also complied with the prevalent gender norms of the Scandinavian political culture. In 1524, King Frederik had commented on Vincens Lunge's distribution of the late Nils Henriksson's *len* in a letter to the archbishop by writing that, *it will remain as he* [Lunge, R.B.W.] *has done on Our behalf in Our absence*.[72] The statement suggests that the King considered Lunge's distribution of *len* to *Fru* Ingerd as special and temporarily. The granting of *len* was a royal privilege, and also predicted the future redistribution of castles and *len*. Royal policy dictated that *len* were a valuable resource, preferably granted to men loyal to the king, especially since *len* were a basis for building political careers of the kind women were excluded from. Tying six *len* to a widow went against royal policy and against ideas concerning the distribution of

67 DN, vol. 12, no. 556.

68 DN, vol. 2, no. 1114.

69 DN, vol. 8, no. 732: *ath hwn haffuer effne till ath thale och scriffue vel om ethers nade till her Vincencius och till andre.*

70 DN, vol. 15, no. 507.

71 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 97–100, 104–110.

72 DN, vol. 7, no. 579: *thet saa will ladhe bliiffwe szom hand giwrdt hagdhe paa ware wegne j wart frawerilsze.*

resources within the noble families, where sons and sons-in-law were favoured over widows.[73] *Fru* Ingerd's loss of her *len* reflects the changes that occurred in monarchical rule during King Frederik's reign. These changes benefitted Danish noblemen, not Norwegian widows. Notwithstanding, and reflective of her personality, *Fru* Ingerd did not remain without *len* for long. King Frederik did not object when Lykke returned Stjørdal and Herjedal to his mother-in-law in 1531. This allowed her, once again, to send her bailiffs to safeguard her and the king's interests.[74] However, with only two inherited securities, her position was less remarkable and more in line with what other noble widows were granted in the 1530s.[75]

Lykke's takeover of *Fru* Ingerds's *len,* lying in the strategically important coastal area of Mid-Norway did not have the repercussions he might have wished. Lykke had made the mistake of following King Christian II into exile in 1523. Yet, his powerful relatives and friends in Denmark later secured him a royal pardon. While this prevented him from ever being fully trusted with prominent offices in Denmark or even a castle in Norway, King Frederik made sure to provide Lykke with the necessary resources to secure his loyalty and enable him to serve royal interests in the *Nordafjelske*. *Len* provided income and authority and were a powerful means of furthering political and military interests.

Women could not officially become councillors, but *Fru* Ingerd had still participated in activities that were normally reserved for councillors or other leading noblemen and officials in the 1520s. From this perspective, it can be argued that Niels Lykke took over the political and military role his mother-in-law had formerly held in the *Nordafjelske.* Lykke would do this by operating together with Vincens Lunge, Eske Bille, and the archbishop, in circumstances and activities similar to those *Fru* Ingerd had previously participated in. Although this cannot be corroborated, Lykke's administration of the *Nordafjelske* may explain why his relationship with his mother-in-law contained fissures, that are not evident in her relationship with Lunge or Ugerup. Lykke was dissatisfied with having to pay compensation to his mother-in-law for the *len*, and this may explain why he returned the two securities to her. In 1531, Lykke tried to take possession of one of the greatest collections of estates in Norway. And not incidentally, this was property being held illegally by *Fru* Ingerd from the rightful heiress. Lykke attempted this by misleading Eske Bille and King Frederik.[76] Moreover, Lykke was practically *Fru* Ingerd's neighbour.[77] He was the *lensmann* of the Fosen *len,* where *Fru* Ingerd's chief residence, Austrått, was located. This very likely added to the friction between the two, for instance when disagreement arose regarding local

73 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 104–110.

74 NRR, vol. 1, 34 f.; DN, vol. 8, no. 695; DN, vol. 9, nos. 723, 752. Cf. also *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 103.

75 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 104–109.

76 *Wærdahl*, Tingets muligheter og begrensninger (2022), 212–214.

77 This contrasts with Vincens Lunge, who mostly resided in Bergen with his family during the 1520s.

farmers' tax payments in the Fosen *len*. In April 1534, *Fru* Ingerd wrote to the archbishop stating that she deliberated bringing Lykke before the archbishop and the council in Bergen.[78]

While Lykke had close family ties to Eske Bille, Lykke never obtained a position rivalling that of Bille or Lunge. He was dissatisfied with life in Norway and ceaselessly lobbied for better prospects in Denmark. In the aftermath of King Frederik's passing, and his attending the meeting at Bud, Lykke developed a close relationship with the archbishop, all of this while exercising his authority as *lensmann*. Ultimately, his relationship with his mother-in-law and the rest of the family broke down in 1534. This was caused by the family discovering that the newly widowed Lykke was in a secret and, by canon law, incestuous relationship with his unmarried sister-in-law. Amid the scandal, *Fru* Ingerd wrote to the archbishop that she wanted her son-in-law to lose his *len*, providing as a reason that she could not bear to have him near.[79] Lykke was imprisoned and charged with heresy by the archbishop. He was executed in December 1535. *Fru* Ingerd's daughter was not punished.

The killing of Vincens Lunge in January 1536 inevitably led *Fru* Ingerd and the rest of the family to mobilize all their power to punish the culprits who likely had acted with the archbishop's approval. The extant sources are either notoriously unreliable or surprisingly silent about the killing and its aftermath,[80] but a letter to Eske Bille by one of the leading canons at Nidaros archdiocese provides some clues.[81] The canon declared his innocence in the killing. He begged Eske Bille to intervene on his behalf with *Fru* Ingerd, *Fru* Margrete, and other relatives and friends of Lunge who threatened his life and property. It is a testament to the agency and scope of action likely displayed by *Fru* Ingerd and her daughter in avenging the matter. The canon's plead with Eske Bille shows, too, that Bille's relationship with *Fru* Ingerd and her daughter was perceived strong enough for him to be able to sway them. Sources attest that *Fru* Ingerd supported King Christian III and Eske Bille's military campaign against Olav Engelbrektsson in spring 1537. She was secure in Bergen when the archbishop ordered the plundering of Austrått, while on route to the Netherlands. *Fru* Ingerd sent a letter to Bille after having received reports about the incident. She asked him to send some of his men to Austrått to check on the houses and assess the damage. She also requested to send for fresh salmon from her farms for himself and his company.[82]

Although "relegated to the family" does not quite define *Fru* Ingerd's role in the 1530s, by this time she had certainly been pushed to the sidelines of political life. She continued to exercise power, but it was indirect in form. This was in keeping with the

78 DN, vol. 9, no. 748.
79 DN, vol. 11, no. 622.
80 *Hamre*, Norsk politisk historie (1998), 695–702.
81 DN, vol. 22, no. 372.
82 DN, vol. 22, no. 388.

new reality of a changed political environment that reduced her scope of action. King Frederik's restoration of monarchical rule disqualified *Fru* Ingerd from participating actively in political and military activities. The king's policy of distribution of *len,* and Niels Lykke's role in the *Nordafjelske,* ultimately served to alter the family dynamics. In contrast with the 1520s, which saw her at the forefront, the family now had two well-connected councillors (albeit, with one of them being substantially less influential) representing the family in public. Through the help of these men, *Fru* Ingerd could continue to influence her political stratagems, and they could both certainly look after their mother-in-law's interests with regard to the Crown.

Fru Ingerd and Changes of Monarchical Rule

Interregnum and changes of monarchical rule had a direct impact on *Fru* Ingerd's political agency and her scope of action. In the 1520s, the council's policy of self-government and Vincens Lunge's dominant position served as catalysts for *Fru* Ingerd's direct participation in political and military activities. Her participation was on a level, and of a nature, that was exceptional for Norwegian noblewomen in the late medieval period. That *Fru* Ingerd's political agency and a scope of action in the 1520s was special is evident from the indirect role she continued to play throughout the 1530s. As noted above, *Fru* Ingerd's relegation to the sidelines of political life was primarily a consequence of increased royal control over government in the *Nordafjelske* and the arrival of Niels Lykke into her family. King Frederik did not support female participation in political and military activities on a regional or broader level in Norway. Niels Lykke's presence and position in the *Nordafjelske* rendered *Fru* Ingerd's direct participation superfluous. While family matters benefited *Fru* Ingerd in the 1520s, they became sources of contention with, and inextricable from, monarchical policy in the 1530s.

To a certain point, *Fru* Ingerd's role illustrates some of the principal findings from historical research on Nordic noblewomen's agency: There was room to extend noblewomen's scope of action, but their relationship with powerful men was an *a priori* premise for their exercise of power. Most women exercised power indirectly through their role in the family and wider social network. However, in the case of *Fru* Ingerd, she had an independent position of power and participated actively in political and military activities. Furthermore, her role in the 1520s suggests that the extension of scope was not necessarily reserved for wives of powerful men, who often deputized for their husbands during their absence. *Fru* Ingerd's scope of action was linked to her legal capacity and marital status as a widow. This enabled her to establish an independent position of power. Thus, she was directly involved in political and military activities, not as the representative or deputy of a husband, but in her own right. And even when she was prevented from taking an active part in political

and military matters, she was not refused on grounds of having overstepped boundaries established by traditional female roles. On the contrary, it can be argued that *Fru* Ingerd and her daughters constituted a separate socio-political network working to secure their own and others' interests. In addition, *Fru* Ingerd's influence extended in such a way that she even continued to exercise authority within the regular, and overall, male-dominated socio-political network of Norway throughout the 1530s. As briefly noted above, there are also strong indications that her daughter, *Fru* Margrete, also wielded influence within this circle.

The shifts in *Fru* Ingerd's political agency and scope of action were not linked to institutionalisation or bureaucratisation. In the Nordic region, institutionalisation did not exclude women from exercising more direct forms of power. First, *Fru* Ingerd's role in the 1520s can be seen as a confirmation of the continuous strong role of the nobility in the Nordic region. She underscores how private structures of power and the nobility still played a significant role in royal government and warfare on regional, national, and union levels. Secondly, women were not excluded from holding offices in an institutionalized hierarchy of governance. It was not the rule, but it was not exceptional in any way either, that noble widows of high rank held *len,* and exercised delegated royal authority. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that female *lensmenn* were a very select group. In 1530s Norway, there were perhaps four or five women meeting the criteria required to hold regular *len*, including *Fru* Ingerd, and from 1536, *Fru* Margrete, Vincens Lunge's widow.[83] Danish noblewomen also held *len* in Norway from the 1530s onwards, with some receiving them as compensation for losing other *len* in Denmark.[84] But holding *len* did not alone promote active female participation in the political and military arenas. For that, instead, the presence of extraordinary political circumstances was required.

It was not common for women belonging to the socio-political elite to take an active part in the exercise and execution of political and military power in late medieval Norway. In extant sources, *Fru* Ingerd is the only example of a noblewoman who not only held an independent position of power, but who also exercised direct forms of political and military power on behalf of the Crown. It is difficult to assess how *Fru* Ingerd's role in the 1520s was deemed by her peers and society at large. There are no explicit references to gender in the sources relative to her exercise of power. However, the fact that she was unique serves to underline that she operated in a society where women had no place in political and military activities as a rule. She transgressed the prevalent gender norms of her society and its political culture.

In fact, *vis-à-vis* the changing role of *Fru* Ingerd, it is possible to identify a latent dichotomy in the king's and other political agents' approach toward noblewomen's exercise of power. On the one hand, there were those who profited directly from *Fru*

83 *Wærdahl*, Why did Ingerd Ottesdotter (2013), 104; *Wærdahl*, Opportunity to profit (2017), 90–92.
84 See, e. g., *Christensen*, Sofie Lykke (accessed: 08.07.2022).

Ingerd's expanded scope of action, like Vincens Lunge. Furthermore, the king profited from *Fru* Ingerd and other women who held *len,* and exercised authority on his behalf. That noble widows expected to be granted regular *len* from the Crown, indicates that society, that is, the widows themselves, their families, and the king, allowed women to hold authority and exercise delegated royal power. A noblewoman's advisory role within a socio-political network also seems to have been taken for granted. On the other hand, King Frederik and Niels Lykke seemed to have expected *Fru* Ingerd to hand over her *len* and give up her independent position of power in the *Nordafjelske,* in order to support the male members of their family. Thus, the king and a woman's family supported women's active exercise of power, so long as it did not hinder male members of the family. Especially so, if these men were slated for a royal career and needed to obtain crucial capital resources deemed necessary to succeed as political agents.

Being a *lensmann* was the only position of delegated royal authority a woman could hold. *Fru* Ingerd enjoyed an extended scope of action as a *lensmann*, but she could not formally attain offices and positions that were reserved for leading male political agents, like councillor, central offices, and military leadership. Women could not become "complete" political agents, except when extraordinary circumstances allowed them to participate in activities normally reserved for men, and yet in these instances, always in an unofficial position, with an ad-hoc function. Faced with scant primary sources, in all probability, these outstanding circumstances most probably stemmed from women's relationships with powerful men, and not the king, who benefitted from their participation. Thus, a premise for a noblewoman's active participation in political and military activity, beyond her possible role as a king's *lensmann*, was a relationship to powerful men. The opportunity to participate was predicated on these powerful men profiting from women's participation, so that they could aid them in fulfilling their ambitions. This hypothesis may include women that could simply not be ignored. Some women were in this latter category because they had influence over considerable resources, either via their family standing, their local position, or by means of their relationship with the king. As a rule, gender norms excluded noblewomen from exercising direct forms of political and military power in Scandinavia. But gender norms could be ignored when it was convenient for men, and women could be allowed to exercise an extended scope of action. This explains why *Fru* Ingerd continued to serve the king as *lensmann* in Norway, decades after Vincens Lunge's passing.

The chronicle of *Fru* Ingerd's exercise of power mirrors the general political development of the Norwegian realm during the 1520s and 1530s. Her extended scope of action in the 1520s is a symbol of the last attempt at self-government by the Norwegian Council of the Realm. *Fru* Ingerd was one of the last members of a declining Norwegian high nobility. It was a nobility that had gradually lost their hold on government and benefices since the house of Oldenburg ascended the Norwegian throne in 1450. Following the Danish councillors' acceptance of King Christian III's accession charter in October 1536, the king

and the Danish nobility established a firm grip on the government of Norway. Danes held the castles and the majority of the *len*. Notwithstanding, *Fru* Ingerd still remained a *lensmann*. How did she face King Christian III's regime? She continued to work closely with the king's officials and married off her daughters to Danes with key roles in the governance of Norway. A strategy that likely permitted her to exercise power, at least indirectly and independently of any changes of monarchical rule. In 1541, in exchange for returning Stjørdal to the Crown, the Romsdal *len* was returned to her.[85] When she passed away in 1555, her *len* were distributed amongst Danes. The unsettled nature of the 1520s and 1530s politics favoured pragmatism and rewarded flexibility. It had also created perfect conditions for a noblewoman who did not shy away from transgressing the gender norms that governed Scandinavian politics.

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