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Three Kings Posturing? Royal diplomacy and Scandinavian neutrality in the First World War

A. Introduction

One of the major events for the neutral powers of Northern Europe in the initial stages of the First World War was a meeting at Malmö in Southern Sweden on the 18th and 19th of December 1914. This gathering, promptly known – and even temporarily staged – as the Three Kings’ Meeting (Swed. *Trekungamötet*), brought the Swedish king, Gustav V of Sweden, together with his counterparts Haakon VII of Norway and Christian X of Denmark. The meeting was accompanied by political talks among the foreign ministers of the three Scandinavian states, Knut Wallenberg for Sweden, Nils Ihlen for Norway and Erik Scavenius for Denmark. The summit was widely reported, almost amounting to a minor sensation in both the national, the Scandinavian and the international press. It had a twofold aim, legitimising the governments’ neutral policies in the war in their respective domestic arenas and coordinating Scandinavia’s widely differing neutrality policies and political orientations vis-à-vis the major belligerent powers. Malmö built upon previous efforts at collaborating on neutrality policy – like the negotiations prior to releasing neutrality regulations in late 1912 – and was followed by a second meeting of the monarchs in November 1917 in Kristiania and regular consultations at ministerial level.

All this suggests an importance that contemporaries clearly sensed. In the course of the 20th century, however, historiography relegated the meeting more or less to the side-lines, along with the more general indifference towards the Scandinavian experience of the First World War in both research and the public. Recently, though, interest in the First World War has been fuelled by a host of recent publications, largely in line with the more general trend to recasting the Great War as the defining source of the 20th century’s desolation and destruction. Opposed to that, the study of Scandinavian

diplomacy and politics – let alone of the royal diplomacy of the conflict – has not necessarily benefitted from this development. A generally excellent overview of Scandinavia during the War, written by the few leading specialists on the subject in Northern Europe, symptomatically dismisses the Three Kings' Meeting at Malmö just before Christmas 1914 as “posturing” against the much more dominant backdrop of disintegration and lack of coordination within the region.¹ There are good grounds for this view, especially if one considers the diverse policies and practices of neutrality throughout Scandinavia during the War from an angle of political history. It is undoubted that neither the diplomatic initiatives of the Scandinavian states nor the always rather elusive, “altruistic” and “idealistic Scandinavianism” that had shaped public discourse since the 19th century translated into anything even remotely resembling a coordinated neutrality policy, let alone the building of a coherent neutral bloc in Europe's North.² But then, would it necessarily have to in order to become worth considering? Differing from the premises of traditional political and diplomatic history, the role of Scandinavian royals in the conflict and in particular the Three Kings' Meeting offer an ideal field for testing the significance of a cultural historical approach to the study of war, as explored by Peter Stadius in a recent article.³

This paper intends to revisit the Three King's Meeting not – or at least not primarily – by judging it according to its concrete political impact on Scandinavian neutrality or on future regional policy in terms of Nordic cooperation. Instead, it broadens the scope and views Malmö and its contemporary perception in the Scandinavian countries and among the major belligerent powers as an object for a culturally orientated history of international politics.⁴ Practically, this orientation applies on several levels: firstly and primarily, the Three Kings' Meeting is explored as an example of the

¹ Rolf Hobson, Tom Kristiansen, Nils Arne Sørensen and Gunnar Åselius: Introduction. Scandinavia in the First World War, in: Claes Ahlund (ed.): Scandinavia in the First World War. Studies in the War Experiences of the Northern Neutrals, Lund, 2012, 9-56, here 1-2, 20-21 (cit.). Patrick Salmon: Scandinavia and the Great Powers, 1890-1940, Cambridge, 1997, 128-129, interprets the meeting as a largely symbolic “expression of Scandinavian solidarity.”

² Ibid., 20-21.

³ Peter Stadius: Trekungamötet i Malmö 1914. Mot en ny nordisk retorik i skuggan av världskriget [The Three Kings' Meeting in Malmö 1914: Towards a new Nordic rhetoric in the shadow of the world war], Historisk tidskrift för Finland 99 (2014), 369-394.

⁴ The term is indebted to the German field of the cultural history of politics (Ger. Kulturgeschichte des Politischen), which in turn is to be seen against the backdrop of a significantly broadened new political history (Ger. Neue Politikgeschichte). Cf., among many recent studies, Thomas Mergel: Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Politik, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 28 (2002), 574-606; Ute Frevert and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.): Neue Politikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung, Frankfurt a. M., 2005; Thomas Nicklas and Hans-Christof Kraus (eds.): Geschichte der Politik. Alte und neue Wege, München, 2007; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.): Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?, Berlin, 2005; Susan Pedersen: What is Political History Now?, in: David Cannadine (ed.): What is History Now?, New York, 2002, 36-56.

“mechanics of monarchical relations”, reinforced by the event’s symbolic character.⁵ My analysis is largely centred on this aspect, not least because it differs most markedly from the few existing interpretations in Nordic (and international) historiography. As indicated above, earlier research tends to view the Three Kings’ Meeting from a traditional diplomatic and political historical angle, thereby judging it according to its allegedly negligible impact on practical policy. With newer tendencies in the history of diplomacy interpreting political actions and structures as symbolically reinforced and even produced phenomena, this line of distinction has blurred.⁶ A number of recent studies has illustrated that the symbolic and ritualised framework, in which the political is based, is a constitutive element of politics – and not its largely trivial accessory.⁷ Allegedly proper politics in the traditional sense cannot be divorced from its symbolic and ritual representations. Against such a backdrop, the role and representation of the nationalised monarchies of the late 19th century both within nation-states and in the international system has been reassessed, first and foremost by Johannes Paulmann’s ground-breaking study “Pomp und Politik” of 2000.⁸ For Paulmann, the “time-specific theatricality in European politics at the turn of the 20th century” refashioned the monarch in national-ideological terms, as the personification of the “abstract units of nation and state on the international stage.” Global processes deemed unavoidable, supra-individual and often intimidating were, according to Paulmann, translated into the concrete shape of personal meetings among monarchs and hence rendered

⁵ Johannes Paulmann: Searching for a ‘Royal International’: The Mechanics of Monarchical Relations in Nineteenth-Century Europe, in: Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.): *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, Oxford, 2001, 145-176; cf. Paulmann’s much larger study: *Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg*, Paderborn, 2000. Cf. as well the instructive review by Karina Urbach: *Diplomatic History Since the Cultural Turn*, in: *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), 991-997, and her own work on the subject: *Royal Kinship*, in: idem (ed.): *Royal Kinship. British-German Family Networks 1815-1914*, Munich, 2008, 13-23.

⁶ On the so-called New Diplomatic History cf. Ursula Lehmkuhl: *Diplomatiegeschichte als internationale Kulturgeschichte: Ansätze, Methoden und Forschungsergebnisse zwischen Historischer Kulturwissenschaft und soziologischem Institutionalismus*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2001), 394-423; Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte (eds.): *The Diplomats' World: The Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914*, Oxford, 2008, especially the introduction of the editors; Johannes Paulmann: *Diplomatie*, in: Jost Dülffer and Winfried Loth (eds.): *Dimensionen internationaler Geschichte*, München, 2012, 47-64; idem: *Grenzüberschreitungen und Grenzräume: Überlegungen zur Geschichte transnationaler Beziehungen von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in die Zeitgeschichte*, in: Eckart Conze, Ulrich Lappenküper and Guido Müller (eds.): *Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen: Erneuerung und Erweiterung einer historischen Disziplin*, Köln, 2004, 169-196.

⁷ Jennifer Mori: *The Culture of Diplomacy. Britain in Europe, c. 1750–1839*, Manchester, 2010; Verena Steller: *Diplomatie von Angesicht zu Angesicht. Diplomatische Handlungsformen in den deutsch-französischen Beziehungen 1870-1919*, Paderborn, 2011; Thomas Mergel: *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik. Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag*, Düsseldorf, 2012; Jakob Hort: *Architektur der Diplomatie. Repräsentation in europäischen Botschaftsbauten, 1800–1920: Konstantinopel – Rom – Wien – St. Petersburg*, Göttingen, 2014.

⁸ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, here 170-179, 295-400.

the complex understandable and tangible.⁹ With the evolution of nation-states and increasingly nationalised publics, the traditional function of European monarchs, linking state and dynastical rule, had faded into the background. Residua of the old dynastic “internationalism”, that “Royal International” of the Vienna order, can still be found in and about 1914.¹⁰ In effect, however, monarchical relations had been privatised. The monarchs function – and indeed role – became that of a hinge between abstract politics on the one hand, and nationally mobilised publics. In this, the monarch did not only act domestically, as long assumed in historiography, but also and most powerfully within the international system. As participants, even as representations of that “global play”, as Paulmann describes it, the “royal actors” reinforced existing constellations and developments in the international arena.¹¹ At the heart of this symbolic enactment were state visits and monarchical meetings, as demonstrated here through the gathering of the three Scandinavian kings just before Christmas 1914. Paulmann’s observation about the contemporary use of the metaphor theatre (or any of its derivatives) to describe, characterise or even criticise and dismiss royal gatherings at the turn of the 20th century leads him to employ the concept *theatricality* as a value-neutral analytical tool.¹² Indebted to Paulmann’s approach, I intend to explicitly employ the metaphorical constituents of a theatre, the theatre’s stage and its “inhabitants” – actors and spectators – as ordering principles for the subsequent analysis.¹³ Through that, it is hoped, the performative, theatrical character of the event will be communicated more immediately.

My second line of interpretation examines the meeting as one of a number of tentative steps towards greater policy integration in Northern Europe,

⁹ Ibid., 178; cf. as well Johannes Paulmann: Peripatetische Herrschaft, Deutungskontrolle und Konsum: Zur Theatralität in der europäischen Politik vor 1914, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 53 (2002), 444-461, here 445, 455.

¹⁰ Paulmann, “Royal International”, 145-176; cf. Roderick McLean: *Royalty and Diplomacy in Europe, 1890-1914*, Cambridge, 2001, 1-3, whose line of argument appears too much indebted to the traditional approach of political history, in line with John Röhl’s not entirely convincing attempt to reinterpret Wilhelm II’s rule as an effectively authoritarian “personal monarchy [or – as earlier – regime respectively rule]”. Cf. John Röhl: *Germany without Bismarck: The crisis of government in the 2. Reich, 1890–1900*, London, 1967, as the classical reference; furthermore Röhl’s impressively detailed, but also highly opinionated three-volume biography of Wilhelm II, Munich, 1993-2008: vol. 1: *Die Jugend des Kaisers, 1859-1888*, 1993; vol. 2: *Der Aufbau der Persönlichen Monarchie, 1888-1900*, 2001; vol. 3: *Der Weg in den Abgrund, 1900-1941*, 2008. Cf. now as well Frank-Lothar Kroll: *Modernity of the outmoded? European monarchies in the 19th and 20th centuries*, in: idem and Dieter J. Weiß (eds.): *Inszenierung oder Legitimation? / Monarchy and the Art of Representation Die Monarchie in Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Ein deutsch-englischer Vergleich*, Göttingen, 2015, 11-22, unfortunately limited to the Anglo-German comparison.

¹¹ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 178.

¹² Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 337-342.

¹³ Besides Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 337-344, see the explorative article of David Blackbourn: *Politics as Theatre. Metaphors of the Stage in German History, 1848-1933*, in: idem: *Populists and Patricians. Essays in Modern German History*, London, 1987, 246-264.

rhetorically foreshadowing what was to emerge as Nordic cooperation. Such an approach has been at the centre of earlier – though unfortunately unpublished – research by Jan Ahtola Nielsen and of more recent contributions by Ruth Hemstad and Stadius, who sees the meeting as an “important event in the history of Nordic cooperation.”¹⁴ As evident as this interpretation seems, all the more against the backdrop of Nordic cooperation since then, its explanatory power is limited. By accentuating the Nordic component of the meeting and placing it at the effective beginning of future integration efforts in the region, Malmö becomes part of the Nordic project that the rather Whiggish and often self-congratulatory historiography of Nordic integration has been celebrating for decades.¹⁵ It is obvious that such a practice can easily turn into a retrospective projection of subsequent sensibilities, rendering the assessment – at least by tendency – teleological and hence ahistorical.¹⁶ Whilst acknowledging its implications and apparent place in the evolution of a coordinated Scandinavian foreign policy, the main argument of this paper illustrates the function of symbolic politics in the societies of Northern Europe. In this view, the summit and its careful enactment appear less anachronistic, but much rather as a constitutive and indeed productive element of Scandinavian neutral discourse, targeting both the “home front” – i.e. three rather diverging publics – and the international arena. The cultural historical analysis of neutral discourse furthermore allows for emphasising the transnational aspects of Scandinavian societies in and around the outbreak of the First World War, here exemplified through the common monarchical framework Sweden, Norway and Denmark shared. (It is only symptomatic that research into the transnational links of the Scandinavian labour movements is by any standard much more evolved.) By adopting key analytical concepts from, among others, Paulmann’s comprehensive study on monarchical state visits and meetings in the long 19th century, my analysis reads monarchical relations, state politics and self-assertiveness fundamentally as transnational phenomena. It thereby attempts to move beyond previous interpretations of the event as mere royal “posturing” – a view that comfortably ignores the unceasing prominence of symbolic action in modern politics and diplomacy.¹⁷ Combining international, transnational and comparative aspects, Scandinavia’s monarchical relations in the First World War make for an ideal, albeit

¹⁴ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 370, 393-394, follows the excellent PhD of Ruth Hemstad: *Fra Indian Summer til nordisk vinter. Skandinavisk samarbeid, skandinavisme og unionsoppløsningen* [From the Indian Summer to the Nordic Winter: Scandinavian cooperation, Scandinavianism and the dissolution of the Union], Oslo, 2008, 397-398.

¹⁵ The ambivalence is palpable in a number of recent collections on the subject; cf. the instructive contributions in Jóhann Páll Árnason and Björn Wittrock (eds.): *Nordic Paths to Modernity*, Oxford, 2012, especially the editors’ introduction, 1-23, and Bo Stråth: *Nordic Modernity: Origins, Trajectories, Perspectives*, 24-48.

¹⁶ Especially Hemstad’s highly complex analysis is free from that tendency.

¹⁷ Hobson et al., Introduction, 21.

regrettably unexplored element of international politics in line with recent research tendencies in First World War Studies.¹⁸

B. Context: Neutral dispositions and orientations

At the outbreak of war in August 1914, all the three Scandinavian countries were comparatively ill-prepared. In fact, the region as a whole had just come back from intense conflict itself, having narrowly averted war in 1905 and lived through a perpetual crisis that was only fully resolved – after much meddling on the part of the great powers – with the Baltic and North Sea Agreements of April 1908.¹⁹ The Union Crisis, which led to the break-away of Norway and hence the dissolution of the union with Sweden, serves as an apt reminder that it was primarily conflict that shaped the Scandinavian preconditions of 1914. This potential for conflict was not only external, as in the case of Sweden and Norway after 1905 or the highly volatile relationship of Denmark to the German Empire over the Schleswig question since the War of 1864; it had also – and even more importantly – an internal dimension. Sweden illustrates this most effectively: like Denmark and Norway it was a country in transition – and, especially in terms of domestic politics and self-conception, not necessarily at peace. It is therefore only symptomatic that the most controversial question in the domestic arena in 1914 was the liberal government's attempt to reduce defence spending, which was seized on by the country's Right in order to mobilise against an unwanted government. The subsequent so-called Farmers' March in February, a highly agitated demonstration of some 32 000 peasants brought in to Stockholm, led to a crisis that left Swedish society and politics divided – and the government forces significantly weakened. The crisis is usually – and already contemporarily – referred to as the Courtyard Crisis (Swed. *borggårdskrisen*) after the courtyard of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, where King Gustav V held a speech to the amassed participants of the march. The brief, but carefully crafted and well-enacted speech had been co-drafted by the famed Swedish explorer and fervent right-wing activist Sven Hedin. Despite the monarch's central role, albeit as a vehicle of right-wing forces, the

¹⁸ As evident in the unfortunately rather Anglocentric conference "Monarchies at War" in May last year (King's College, London, 27 May 2014).

¹⁹ Pertti Luntinen: *The Baltic Question, 1903-1908*, Helsinki, 1975; Salmon, *Scandinavia*, 71-84; David W. Sweet: *The Baltic in British Diplomacy before the First World War*, *Historical Journal* 13 (1970), 451-490; on the dissolution of the union of Sweden and Norway cf. Raymond E. Lindgren: *Norway-Sweden: Union, Disunion, and Scandinavian integration*, New Jersey, 1959, 62 ff.; Bo Stråth: *Union och demokrati. De förenade rikena Sverige-Norge 1814-1905*, Nora, 2005.

staging of the event bore remarkably modern features.²⁰ The king's speech symbolically unified the monarch as the country's supposedly natural leader with the mobilised peasants, the mythologised national ur-image of the Swede. This aspect was particularly reinforced by the appearance of most participants in folkloristic national costume. In line with that, both ceremony and speech portrayed Gustav V as the last resort of national conscience, an embodiment of resistance against an allegedly unpatriotic, careless and negligent government. As intended, the king's ochlocratic intervention into Swedish politics, his "unorthodox assault on his own ministers", caused a constitutional crisis that eventually led to the downfall of the liberal government of prime minister Karl Staaff.²¹ Despite forcing Staaff's government into resignation, however, the success of the Right's imposition of mob rule was extremely limited; only two days after the king's gathering of some 32 000 peasants in the courtyard of his Stockholm palace, the liberal and socialist forces – the government's electoral base – mobilised about 50 000 workers for a counter-protest labelled the workers' march.²² Societal divisions that had been latent since the late 19th century had moved to the fore and apparently threatened the domestic equilibrium of the country.

The other dividing line, at least among the country's elites, related both to Sweden's foreign policy and to its political culture. Whilst undoubtedly bearing a host of typical features, Swedish neutrality policy remained uncommon throughout most of the war because of its intense orientation towards Germany. This set the country apart from the majority of the neutrals, not least in Northern Europe. Germany's case for war and conduct in war was, after all, not necessarily popular among the neutral powers and especially the neutral publics.²³ To begin with, Berlin's disregard for Belgian neutrality and territorial

²⁰ Axel Odelberg: *Med kungen som verktyg: historien om försvarsstriden, borggårdskrisen och Sven Hedin* [With the king as an instrument: the story of the defence struggle, the Courtyard Crisis and Sven Hedin], Stockholm, 2014. For the speech see Sven Hedin: *Försvarsstriden 1912-14*, Stockholm, 1951, 304-306.

²¹ Brian J. C. McKercher: *Esme Howard: A diplomatic biography*, Cambridge, 1989 [2006], 139.

²² Cf. Olle Nyman: *Högern och kungamakten 1911-1914: ur borggårdskrisens förhistoria* [The Right and monarchical power 1911-1914: on the prehistory of the Courtyard Crisis], Stockholm, 1957; Wilhelm M. Carlgren: *Ministären Hammarskjöld: Tillkomst – Söndring – Fall. Studier i svensk politik 1914-1917* [The ministry Hammarskjöld: rise – disruption – downfall] (Stockholm, 1967), 9-42; Jarl Torbacke: "Försvaret främst": Tre studier till belysning av borggårdskrisens problematik ["Defence first": three studies on problems of the Courtyard Crisis], Stockholm, 1983; Kent Zetterberg: *Borggårdskrisen i ny belysning: en studie i försvarsberedningarna 1911-1914* [The Courtyard Crisis in a new light: a study of armaments preparations 1911-1914], in: Mats Bergquist, Alf W. Johansson and Krister Wahlbäck (eds.): *Utrikespolitik och historia* [Foreign policy and history], Stockholm, 1987, 347-359; Erik Lindorm: *Gustaf V och hans tid 1907-1918* [Gustav V and his times], Stockholm, 1979, 290-297.

²³ Sverker Oredsson: *Svensk rädsla: Offentlig fruktan i Sverige under 1900-talets första hälft* [Swedish angst: public fear in Sweden in the first half of the 20th century], Lund, 2001, 88; see also Lina Sturfelt: *From Parasite to Angel: Narratives of Neutrality in the Swedish Popular Press during the First World War*, in: Hertog/Kruizinga, *Caught in the Middle*, 105-120, here 108; Salmon, *Scandinavia*, 118-168; Samuel Kruizinga, *Neutrality*, in: *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Vol. 2: The State*, ed. Jay Winter, Cambridge, 2013, 542-575.

sovereignty had already severely damaged its credibility.²⁴ The increasing propagandistic moralisation of the conflict and further, at times blatant violations of international law left the German cause for war deeply discredited. In Sweden, however, a significant and vocal segment of society sympathised with the German war effort and agitated in favour of a Swedish entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers. Activism, as this political movement was known, was suited to compromise the government's neutrality course and therefore expose the country to considerable foreign-political risks, no more so than during the crucial years 1914 and 1915. The activists' political views and aims, indeed their belief system as a whole, harked back to the heyday of Swedish imperial might in Northern Europe, with the ultimately existential struggle against a projected "Russian menace" at its heart.²⁵ There was a residual imperialist agenda of a small and increasingly insignificant state that had lost an empire, but had not yet found a role.²⁶ In the eyes of the activists, an alliance with Germany was first and foremost intended to eliminate the greatly exaggerated danger from the East, probably return the Åland Islands to Sweden and – if at all possible – liberate a allegedly subjugated Finland from the Russian clutch. As such, Sweden would be restored as the half-hegemon of Northern Europe, albeit at Germany's benevolent mercy.²⁷ At court, it was principally Gustav's wife, Victoria, Queen of Sweden, princess of the House of Baden and through her mother a cousin of Wilhelm II, who lobbied the activist cause, seconded by the immediate court environment, among them the chamberlain to the royal family Robert Douglas and his aged, though still influential father Ludvig, the *riksmarskalk* (Swed. imperial marshal) and former foreign minister.²⁸ Already the British minister to Stockholm before the war, Cecil Spring Rice, had struggled with the unabashedly pro-German attitude of the court. He warned his successor, Esme Howard, in no uncertain

²⁴ John Horne/Alan Kramer: *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, New Haven/London, 2001; Isabel V. Hull: 'Military Necessity' and the Laws of War in Imperial Germany, in: Stathis Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro and Tarek Masoud (eds.): *Order, Conflict, Violence* (Cambridge, 2008), 352-377.

²⁵ Gunnar Åselius: *The 'Russian Menace' to Sweden: The Belief System of a Small Power Security Elite in the Age of Imperialism*, Stockholm, 1994, 398-405; idem: *Hotbilden: svenska militära bedömningar av Ryssland 1880–1914* [The threat scenario: Swedish military assessments of Russia 1880-1914], in: Johan Engström/Lars Ericson (eds.): *Mellan björnen och örnen. Sverige och Östersjöområdet under det första världskriget, 1914–1918* [Between the bear and the eagle: Sweden and the Baltic Sea area during the First World War], Visby, 1994, 197–208.

²⁶ Dean Ascheson's description of Britain's disorientation in the post-war period, delivered in a speech at West Point, 5 December 1962, captures the sentiments among the Swedish elites rather aptly.

²⁷ Besides Carlgren, *Neutralität oder Allianz*, the definite account of the activist movement is Schubert, *Schweden und das Deutsche Reich*, here 31-39. On the persistence of Swedish great power delusions see Sverker Oredsson, *Stormaktsdrömmar och stridsiver: Ett tema i svensk opinionsbildning och politik 1910-1942* [Great power dreams and conflict anxiety: A subject in Swedish opinion-making and politics 1910-1942], *Scandia* 59 (1993), 257-296, 335-336.

²⁸ The *riksmarskalk* was – institutionally from the early 17th century onwards – the head of the court's administration in Sweden (still referred to as Swed. *Kungliga Hovstaterna*).

terms: “I think the Court officials are the very devil: Berlin and putty. You will loathe them.”²⁹ Gustav himself was to an extent an object of different influences, often explicitly sympathetic to the activist and – by implication – the German cause. Occasionally, however, the king wavered and showed himself receptive towards the more moderate position of the government, as especially reflected in his dealings with the liberal liberal foreign minister Knut Wallenberg, whom the activists – not least the queen – considered Francophile by disposition and an impediment for the more conservative and allegedly pro-German views of Sweden’s Prime Minister, Hjalmar Hammarskjöld.³⁰ Whilst historiography tends to agree that the influence of the activist movement on Swedish government policy remained relatively weak, during its heyday of 1914/15 and then again in the wake of the Russian collapse in 1917/18 activism’s semi-official counter diplomacy certainly threatened the procedures and overall stability of Swedish policy-making and implementation. The outbreak of the war mended these divisions for a time, forcing a caretaker cabinet, headed by the conservative prime minister Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, to remain in office. In general, however, Sweden appeared ill-suited for a general war in Europe. Declaring its neutrality, as Sweden did on 3 August and then again five days later jointly with Norway, was therefore not only a matter of choice and tradition, but also one of necessity.³¹

In contrast to Sweden and its effectively pro-German leanings, Norway was assumed to be – in Olav Riste’s classical phrase – Britain’s “neutral ally”.³² Here, aggressively enforced British interests, derived from the geostrategically sensitive situation of Norway in relation to the British naval blockade, were opposed by incessant German political manoeuvring in order to preserve at least a semblance of Norwegian neutrality. Norway’s structural trade

²⁹ Cited in: McKercher, Howard, 134.

³⁰ In the face of Wallenberg’s difficulties vis-à-vis Activist agitation the British minister to Stockholm, Esme Howard, only observed wryly: “Unfortunately all Swedes are not as intelligent as M. Wallenberg.” Cf. National Archives [NA], Foreign Office [FO] 371/2754: Political: Scandinavia (War) Files 7907-212676: 1916: Howard to Grey, 11 September 1916. On the wider context see Wilhelm M. Carlgren: *Neutralität oder Allianz: Deutschlands Beziehungen zu Schweden in den Anfangsjahren des ersten Weltkrieges*. Stockholm, 1962, 34-47, 112-122, and especially Inger Schuberth: *Schweden und das Deutsche Reich im Ersten Weltkrieg: Die Aktivistenbewegung 1914-1918*, Bonn, 1981, 49-58, 92-106, who describes multiple Activist campaigns against Wallenberg in depth. Cf. as well Nils-Olof Franzén: *Undan stormen: Sverige under första världskriget* [Aside the storm: Sweden during the First World War], Stockholm, 1986, 138-152; Michael Jonas: *Activism, Diplomacy and Swedish-German Relations during the First World War*, *New Global Studies* 8 (2014), 31-48; Mart Kuldkepp, *Sweden’s Historical Mission and World War I: A regionalist theory of Swedish activism*, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39 (2014), 126-146; specifically on Gustav’s foreign political attitudes see Wilhelm M. Carlgren: *Gustav V och utrikespolitiken*, in: *Studier i modern historia: tillägnade Jarl Torbacke den 18. augusti 1990*, Stockholm, 1990, 41-57.

³¹ The best overviews for the three Scandinavian states are Hobson et al. *Introduction*, 9-56, and Salmon, *Scandinavia*, 118-168; see as well Sofi Qvarnström, *Sweden*, in: *1914-1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel et al. [acc. 19 Feb 2015].

³² Olav Riste, *The Neutral Ally: Norway's Relations with Belligerent Powers in the First World War*, Oslo, 1965.

dependence on Britain, especially on British imports of coal and oil, left the country virtually no choice but to effectively forego its neutrality and become an element of the Western Powers' war effort and not least of the British naval blockade. Norway's situation was further complicated by Berlin's controversial decision to resume its campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare from early 1917 onwards. The country possessed the fourth largest merchant fleet on earth and suffered dramatically increasing losses due to German submarine activity, eventually losing half of its pre-war tonnage and up to 2000 sailors.³³ As a consequence, relations to Germany were repeatedly strained and at times – in particular towards the end of the war – at the brim of collapse.

Denmark's position appeared even more complex. The country was subject to an overarching influence from Germany, while hanging on to its "natural" political preference for Britain and the Entente, following the Second Schleswig War of 1864 and its deeply humiliating results for the small country.³⁴ Just as Norway ultimately compromised its neutrality in giving in to Britain's various demands, Denmark saw itself incapable of resisting German diplomatic pressure for long. In response to increasingly vehement German interventions, Copenhagen took up mining the Danish straits, i.e. the areas between Jutland and the island of Funen, the strait between Funen and the island of Sealand, and the sound between Sealand and Sweden, which had been international waterways since the Copenhagen Convention of 1857.³⁵ Denmark's enforced concessions towards Berlin were symptomatic for the country's neutrality policy as a whole, which Einar Cohn once described justifiably as "an act of balancing on a knife's edge". Denmark in many ways inverted the Norwegian case. Copenhagen's neutrality, however, appears to have been generally more stable than Kristiania's, which was largely due to the geopolitically exposed situation of Norway, but as well related to Denmark's frantic and often rather successful diplomatic efforts led by the country's foreign minister Erik

³³ Hobson et al., Introduction, 38-39, and Bjarne S. Bendtsen: Neutral merchant seamen at war : the experiences of Scandinavian seamen during the First World War, in: *ibid.*, 327-354; Riste, Neutral Ally, 170-190; Salmon, Scandinavia, 129-145.

³⁴ Cf. recently Stehn Bo Frandsen: Klein und national: Dänemark und der Wiener Frieden 1864, in: Ulrich Lappenküper/Oliver Auge (eds.): *Der Wiener Frieden als deutsches, europäisches und globales Ereignis*, Paderborn, 2015 [forthcoming].

³⁵ This had been reinforced by Denmark's proclamation of neutrality in 1912; cf. Hobson et al., Introduction, 23-24, 27; Salmon, Scandinavia, 126-127; Nils Arne Sørensen: Denmark, in: 1914-1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel et al. [acc. 19 Feb 2015]; Michael Epkenhans/Gerhard P. Groß (eds.): *The Danish Straits and German Naval Power 1905–1915*, Potsdam, 2010, especially the contributions by Alexander Rindfleisch and Hans Branner; Bent Bludnikow: Denmark during the First World War, *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989), 683-703.

Scavenius and supported by Berlin's chief envoy, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau.³⁶

As diverging as their neutralities appear their different policies vis-à-vis the great powers “did not leave them at odds with one another in any real sense”.³⁷ On the contrary, it was their common, partly coordinated neutrality policy in the face of a global conflict that tended to bring the three Scandinavian kingdoms together. The Three Kings' Meeting in Malmö can be considered as the fullest, most popular and probably received expression of that tendency. It would, however, have to be seen against a much larger backdrop of intensified trilateral diplomacy and policy coordination, framed by pre-war efforts to collaborate on neutrality policy, like the negotiations prior to releasing neutrality regulations in late 1912, and the subsequent royal summit in November 1917 in Kristiania. Considering the almost violent break-away of Norway from its previous union with Sweden just nine years earlier, the momentous symbolic effect the conference had upon both the Scandinavian and international public is indicative for the prominence the meeting possessed in the contemporary imagination – “an event of more than momentary importance”, *The Spectator*, for instance, expected.³⁸

C. Setting the Stage: Malmö in December 1914

The initiative for the meeting rested with Stockholm. The actual impulse originated with foreign minister Wallenberg – and not, as systematically spread *post festum*, with the king, who was rumoured to have been sceptical in the beginning. For Wallenberg, employing royal diplomacy in a generally volatile situation catered two elementary interests of Swedish or at least the government's foreign policy in the early stages of the war: the consolidation of the country's neutrality course both at home and in the larger diplomatic and security-political environment on the one hand, and the improvement – or much rather: the recovery – of the Swedish-Norwegian relations after the bilateral hostility of 1905. Wallenberg and the neutrality proponents in the government assumed that linking Stockholm's political interest to the differing approaches to neutrality in Denmark and especially Norway would somewhat rub off on Sweden and defuse the country's highly volatile domestic situation, thereby, as Howard observed, “greatly strengthen[ing] [the] position of [the]

³⁶ Einar D. Cohn: Danmark under den store krig: en økonomisk oversigt [Denmark during the Great War: an economic survey], Copenhagen, 1928, 49 (cit.); Gerhard P. Groß: German Plans to Occupy Denmark: 'Case J', 1916-1918, in: Epkenhans/Groß, Danish Straits, 155-166, here 156.

³⁷ “Diverging neutralities” as cit. in Hobson et al., Introduction, 37.

³⁸ *The Spectator*, 19 December 1914, 7.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and the neutral party here.”³⁹ Trying to facilitate such a development, the British minister even recommended to discipline the British press prior to the meeting “so that they may refrain from comments likely to irritate Scandinavian susceptibilities”, which was promptly arranged for.⁴⁰ Howard himself was a passionate advocate not only of Wallenberg’s efforts at creating a neutral bloc in Northern Europe, but also and more generally of further integration in the region. Through cooperation with Copenhagen and Kristiania, Howard – and others – believed, Stockholm’s long-standing affinity to Germany could be balanced and anti-Entente elements in the country’s foreign policy contained. However, Howard’s pendant in Kristiania, who happened to be his “old schoolfellow” Mansfeldt Findlay, opposed such a rapprochement and the idea of an entente of neutral Scandinavian states on reverse grounds. Bringing Norway to close to Sweden, would actually, Findlay argued with the Foreign Office, undermine the autonomy and – implicitly – the pro-British character of Norwegian foreign policy.⁴¹ The war’s great power politics and the question of Scandinavian neutrality were evidently never very far apart.

The king’s initial misgivings about meeting his Danish and especially his Norwegian counterparts (and cousins), certainly reinforced by an unabashedly activist court environment, was in any case swiftly overcome. His letter of 6 December 1914 to Christian X, the king of Denmark and older of his two cousins, is a clear statement of intent, sounding cautiously out how best to arrange for an rapprochement with Norway:

“My beloved Christian.

I send you these lines through landshövding [i.e. regional governor Eric af Trolle whom you have known for a very long time. My keen wish is that as soon as possible a meeting with you and your brother Carl [i.e. Haakon VII, King of Norway] is arranged in and for matters related to our common interests as neutral states. It is my firm belief that under the recent general circumstances in Europe we must stay together.

Through such a meeting a friendlier relationship should also emerge. The timing for such a move towards Norway seems right now the most fitting. [...] With many greetings to the whole family and to you

³⁹ NA, FO 371/2097: Political: Scandinavia (War): 1914: Howard to Grey, 10 Dec 1914.

⁴⁰ NA, FO 371/2097: Political: Scandinavia (War): 1914: Howard to Grey, 10 Dec 1914, and draft by the director of the Press Bureau to newspaper editors, 14 Dec 1914.

⁴¹ Cf. NA, FO 371/2097: Howard to FO, 10 Dec 2014; FO 371/2458: Howard to FO, 31 Dec 2014; FO 371/2459: Findlay to FO, 18, 22, 21 Oct 1915 (including private letter of Findlay to foreign minister Edward Grey), 4 and 5 Nov 1915; *ibid.*, Howard to FO, 20 Oct and 1 Nov 1915 (including a confidential letter of Howard to Grey); FO 371/2753: Findlay to FO, 31 Dec 1915; FO 371/2755: Findlay to FO, 13 Nov 1915; cf. Esme Howard, *Theatre of Life, 1905-1936* (London, 1936), 239 (cit.); McKercher, Howard, 148; Salmon, *Scandinavia*, 129.

Yours always sincere old friend and uncle Gustaf.”⁴²

The Norwegian king Haakon, Christian’s younger brother, was generally affirmative, but indicated himself certain misgivings rather typical for the Norwegian position in 1914. Unclear about the exact content and motive for the meeting, Haakon informed the British minister Findlay on 13 December that he and – by implication – his government considered dealing with Denmark and Sweden separately as preferable, as official consultations among three governments would in any case be prone to “much more friction” than private bilateral discussions.⁴³ Haakon’s reservations are symptomatic for both the distinctly sceptical Norwegian position on a rapprochement with Sweden and the emotional gulf that continued to separate the royal houses of Norway and Sweden as a result of the crisis of 1905.⁴⁴ This friction as well translated into the concrete preparations, with Haakon rejecting the idea of convening in Stockholm, the capital of the dissolved union, which carried with it too much symbolic-political connotation of the Swedish imperial past for Kristiania to accept. Haakon himself preferred Gothenburg close to the Norwegian border as an alternative, whilst the king of Denmark had apparently suggested Malmö in the expectation that one could continue ones gathering at his own summer residence Fredensborg Palace, right opposite Malmö at the Danish side of the Oresund. Eventually, once Stockholm had been vetoed by Haakon, royal diplomacy settled for Malmö, without the projected Fredensborg addition, though.⁴⁵

The question of where, when and under what circumstances to arrange a state visit was – and always has been – an intricate issue, all the more in royal diplomacy. Malmö is only representative for the observation “that difficulties of detail” could easily wreck proposed demonstrations of unity and solidarity.⁴⁶ This is largely due to the symbolic dimension of the act that is being exercised. Paulmann has explored the complexity of the process of “arriving” in the

⁴² „Min käre Christian. Dessa rader sänder jag till dig med landshövding Trolle, som du känner sedan gammalt. Min livliga önskan är att med det snaraste få till stånd ett personligt sammanträffande med dig och din bror Carl i och för överläggningar rörande våra gemensamma intressen som neutrala stater. Det är min bestämda åsikt, att vi under det nuvarande allvarsamma läget i Europa måste hålla tillsammans. Genom ett sådant möte skulle också ett mera vänskapligt förhållande kunna uppnås. Tidpunkten för ett sådant närmande till Norge synes just nu vara den mest lämpliga. [...] Med många hälsningar till hela familjen är jag Din alltid tillgivne gamle vän och onkel.“ Cit. in: Gustaf von Platen: *Bakom den gyllne fasaden: Gustaf V och Victoria : ett äktenskap och en epok*, Stockholm, 2002, 289; cf. as well Stig Hadenius: *Gustaf V: en biografi*, Stockholm, 2005, 151.

⁴³ NA, FO 371/2097: Findlay to FO, 13 Dec 2014.

⁴⁴ Dag Hoelseth: “En svensk-norsk union av det rätta slaget”. *Forholdet mellom kongehusene i Norge og Sverige 1905-1929*, in: Øystein Sørensen and Torbjörn Nilsson (eds.): *Norsk-svenske relasjoner i 200 år*, Oslo, 2005, 41-56, here 47 f.; cf. as well Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 373.

⁴⁵ NA, FO 371/2097: Howard respectively Findlay to FO, 13 Dec 2014.

⁴⁶ NA, FO 371/2097: Howard to FO, 13 Dec 2014.

monarchical context. The moment a monarch crossed the border into another monarch's territory, he maintains, the actual act of crossing had to be ritually defused. The entire ceremonial framework, traditionally held at the physical border and further extended by the highly ritualised travel of the received monarch through the receiving state territory, thereby amounted to a "ritual of mitigation". This ritualised and recurrent violation of both physical borders and imaginary limits transformed the visiting monarch from a potential intruder into a welcomed "guest", an at least symbolic threat to the integrity and sovereignty of the state became a friendship-inducing collective act.⁴⁷ In the second half of the 19th century, however, the ritualised reception of a foreign monarch had been moved away from the state border and to places more in line with the new conditions of mobility. Paulmann describes the railway station in its contemporary shape as the perfectly purpose-built place in order to arrange for the reception of a monarchical visitor.⁴⁸ In the case of Malmö, the harbour would have to be added as a site of reception, which permitted for the strongly symbolic arrival of Christian X on the Danish cruiser *Heimdal* (not the royal yacht *Dannebrog*). The remaining film footage of Christian's arrival in the harbour adds a modern dynamic to the event, reinforced by the royal motor vehicle employed in order to chauffeur the three monarchs through the centre of the city.⁴⁹ The Danish king's preference for a battle ship obviously related to the conditions of war, which had begun to severely affect the Baltic and not least the German-Danish relations. Symbolically, however, it could as well be read as a reference to the traditional status of Denmark as a maritime great power, as – albeit for the last time – in evidence in both Schleswig Wars decades earlier.⁵⁰

Both harbour and railway station share similar features and facilitate the transformation explored above. The train station, Malmö Central, rebuilt as a terminus in 1872 and equipped with a representative clock tower of the mid-19th century, was by then still connected to the City's inner harbour, so that both modes of arrival could be ceremonially catered for.⁵¹ Malmö was therefore well-suited for the purposes of enacting a symbolically powerful

⁴⁷ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 219

⁴⁸ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 227, based on Wolfgang Schivelbusch: *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise. Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit*, München, 1977 [PB 1989], 154, who ascribes a „lock- and transformer-function“ to the railway station, aptly fitting monarchical reception at these sites as well.

⁴⁹ Filmarkivet: Oidentifierad dokumentärfilm *Trekungamötet i Malmö* (1914):

URL: <http://www.filmarkivet.se/sv/Film/?movieid=71> [3 Nov 2015], here from ca. 3:33 min. onwards. Haakon's arrival by train and reception at the railway station slightly precedes the mentioned scene.

⁵⁰ Michael H. Clemmesen: *The Danish Navy: Expectations, realities and adjustments, 1909-1918*, in: Epkenhans/Groß, *Danish Straits*, 107-127, who speaks of the "marginal importance" of the navy after 1864 (cit. 107). For the pending crisis cf. Hans Branner: *The August 1914 mine-laying crisis*, in: *ibid.*, 97-105.

⁵¹ *Statens järnvägar 1856-1906: historisk-teknisk-ekonomisk beskrifning i anledning af statens järnvägars femtioåriga tillvaro*, ed. Kungl. Maj:ts nådiga befallning af Järnvägsstyrelsen, vol. 2, Stockholm, 1906, 338.

event. Its geographical location and easy accessibility both by train and sea made it close to ideal for a gathering of Scandinavian monarchs. In that, the decision in favour of Malmö followed a regular pattern in the choice of venues for monarchical gatherings. According to Paulmann's detailed reconstruction, if meetings did not take place in the typically much better equipped capitals, monarchs prior to 1914 preferred to gather in three alternative environments: residences of related dynasties, resorts and – Malmö following the pattern – harbour cities (or even anchoring berths off the coast).⁵²

Even if the actual decision in favour of Malmö in December 1914 was mostly pragmatically motivated, it could – and indeed was – as well interpreted as a generous Swedish concession to Danish and Norwegian sensibilities on the one hand, and to public discourse on the other. It was a compromise not only in geographic, but also in symbol-political terms.⁵³ As the central city – even the principal residential place – of the traditionally Danish region of Skåne, the meeting was held in an historical environment not only physically close to the Danish border, but also strongly Danish in its regional character. Since medieval times, Malmö had been a cultural, economic and political centre for the Danish crown and not least the birthplace of the Danish reformation. Only in 1658 – as a result of the Treaty of Roskilde – Denmark was forced to cede its large territorial possessions in southern Sweden, among them Skåne with Malmö.⁵⁴ During the heyday of Scandinavianism in the mid-19th century, Malmö gathered increasing importance as a centre of Scandinavianist lobbying and a meeting place for royal diplomacy. Against the backdrop of the First and Second Schleswig Wars Malmö functioned as the site of occasional meetings of the Danish and Swedish monarchs, Fredrik VII and Karl XV Johan (respectively the latter's father, Oscar I), among them a prolonged period of international negotiations in 1848, hosted by Oscar I, which resulted in the – eventually ineffectual – Danish-Prussian Treaty of Malmö.⁵⁵ Another significant series of meetings in and around Malmö, this time between Fredrik and Karl Johan, took place just ahead of the Second Schleswig War, when the crisis necessitated discussions about a probable Scandinavian defence union. Reigning in personal

⁵² Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 344 ff., see as well table 5 detailing the venues from 1855 to 1914, 426.

⁵³ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 372 f.

⁵⁴ Paul D. Lockhart: *Denmark, 1513-1660: The rise and decline of a Renaissance monarchy*, Oxford, 2007, 226-247. As to the complex heritage of Skåne as a border region, levelled out by an increasingly streamlined Swedish heritage narrative since the 19th century, cf. Tomas Germundsson: *Regional Cultural Heritage versus National Heritage in Scania's Disputed National Landscape*, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 11 (2005), 21-37; idem: *The South of the North: Images of an (Un)Swedish Landscape*, in: Michael Jones and Kenneth R. Olwig (eds.): *Nordic Landscapes. Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe*, Minneapolis, 2008, 157-191; Anders Linde-Laursen: *The Borders between Denmark and Sweden and the Question of Skåne*. In: Michael P. Barnes (ed.): *Borders and Communities*, London, 2001, 95-111.

⁵⁵ Carl Fredrik Akrell, Samuel Gustaf von Troil and Per Sahlström: *Minnen från Carl XIV:s, Oscar I:s och Carl XV:s dagar*, Stockholm, 1884-1885, here: *Minnen af landshöfding von Troil*, 177-179.

union over Sweden-Norway, both Oscar I and Karl Johan were rather eagerly in favour of Scandinavianism, but repeatedly failed to enforce concrete commitments in favour of Denmark onto their respective governments or parliament, the Swedish *Riksdag*.⁵⁶ With the public both in Denmark and Sweden frantic over the Schleswig Question, Malmö in 1863-64 transformed into a hub of Scandinavianist agitation whose memory remained strong even until after the turn of the century.⁵⁷ Even if the Danish defeat of 1864 had effectively done away with union rhetoric and political Scandinavianism for a while, a new, less political and at the same time pragmatic variety emerged around 1900, the so-called neo-Scandinavianism (Swed. *nyskandinavism*), which sought alternatives to political integration, first and foremost in the cultural arena, but also in areas like currency politics and law, at the level of a common civil society much rather than through dynastical relation and hegemonial integration.⁵⁸ This recent offshoot is manifest throughout the meeting, reflected in both the actual staging of the event and the public response. Malmö, in any case, functioned as one of the foremost *lieux de mémoire* of Scandinavianism and hence well-suited for the purposes of the meeting arranged in December 1914.⁵⁹

Besides historicity and tradition, there was another aspect that recommended Malmö: the city had just enjoyed quite a degree of international attention, hosting the Baltic Exhibition of 1914, a joint exhibition platform for Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Russia displaying diverse aspects of the modern era from the arts and culture to – typical for the period – industry and technology. At the outbreak of war in early August 1914, Berlin and St. Petersburg withdrew their participation; the exhibition continued nonetheless even beyond its official closing date on 30 September until 4 October. Malmö had greatly benefitted from hosting the exhibition. The centre of the city had been rearranged and modernised in line with the urban planning premises of the period. After that, the cityscape of modernised Malmö was somewhat able to

⁵⁶ Åke Holmberg: Skandinavismens kris. Alliansfrågan våren och sommaren 1863, in: *Scandia* 17 (1946), 137-211; David Kirby: *The Baltic World 1772-1993: Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change*, London 1995 [2013], 116-119.

⁵⁷ *Minnen af landshöfding von Troil*, 177, hints at the longevity of the memory of 1848; Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 372, quotes a pertinent anti-German article in the liberal *Göteborgs Handels- och sjöfartstidning*, 19 Dec 1914, placing the Three Kings' Meeting in the immediate context of 1864.

⁵⁸ Hemstad, *Indian Summer*, 89 ff., who identifies an abundance of different variants of later Scandinavianism; Jan Hecker-Stampehl: *Vereinigte Staaten des Nordens. Integrationsideen in Nordeuropa im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, München, 2011, 55-57, who – with Hemstad and others – describes the new movement(s) as „practical Scandinavianism“.

⁵⁹ Cf. Pierre Nora: *Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux*, in: idem (ed.): *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vls., Paris, 1997 [reprint; original publication in 7 vls., 1984-1992], here: vol. 1, 23-43; on the Nordic context cf. Peter Aronsson: *National Cultural Heritage – Nordic Cultural Memory: Negotiating Politics, Identity and Knowledge*, in: Bernd Henningsen, Hendriette Kliemann-Geisinger and Stefan Troebst (eds.): *Transnationale Erinnerungsorte: Nord- und Südeuropäische Perspektiven*, Berlin, 2009, 71–90.

cope with a brief royal gathering and the public response to such an event.⁶⁰ However, especially by comparison to capital cities at the onset of the 20th century, Malmö clearly had palpable deficiencies: despite the expansion and modernisation in the lead-up to the Baltic Exhibition, the city's resources were limited; for a start, it did not possess any major representative building that would allow hosting an official royal visit, let alone the convergence of three monarchs and their accompanying court at the same time. The only building of suitable proportions that could in principle compensate for the absence of a proper royal residence was the 18th century regional governor's residence (Swed. *länsresidenset*), ideally situated at the city's main square, *Stortorget*.⁶¹ Despite its deficiencies particularly in terms of size and capacity, the residence had already hosted numerous royal meetings in the past, among them the lengthy negotiations preceding the 1848 Treaty of Malmö. Furthermore, Gustav's grandfather, Karl Johan, had died in the Malmö residence in the summer of 1872, returning from medical treatment in Germany. During the summit in December 1914, Gustav occupied the residence of regional governor Robert de la Gardie, whilst the visiting monarchs had to be accommodated in two of the more representative buildings in the city's centre: Christian in the home of the bank director and newspaper editor, later turned local and national politician, Carl Herslow; Haakon in the house of Louise Kockum, the widow of a local industrialist and shipyard owner. The royal presence in the town was marked by Swedish soldiers from the crown prince's hussars regiment guarding the different properties with drawn sabres.⁶²

D. Actors: Three kings, no queens

With the arrival of the kings of Norway, Denmark and – as well – Sweden on Friday, 18 December 1914, the stage was set. Already the process of convergence on Malmö was indicative for established royal practices of the late 19th and early 20th century. The meeting can certainly be regarded as a rather typical expression of “peripatetic rule”, the increasing habit of monarchs to

⁶⁰ Göran Christenson, Anne-Marie Ericsson, Per-Jan Pehrsson: *Baltiska utställningen 1914*, Lund, 1989; Göran Larsson: *Baltiska utställningen och Trekungamötet i Malmö 1914*, in: *Ale: Historisk tidskrift för Skåne, Halland och Blekinge* 13 (2014), 1-13. On the context cf. Roger Johansson and Göran Larsson (eds.): *Malmö 1914 – En stad inför språnget till det moderna*, Malmö, 2013, especially Göran Larsson: *Trekungamötet i Malmö*, 64-75; Eva Eriksson: *Den moderna stadens födelse: svensk arkitektur 1890-1920*, Stockholm, 1990.

⁶¹ The building of 1729-30 was the result of a merger of two previous houses with origins in the late 16th century. Its outward appearance in 1914 (and even today) dates to the mid-19th century, with the interior largely redecorated in neo-Renaissance style in 1877. Cf. Staffan Nilsson: *Residens vid Sundet*, in: *Tidskriften Kulturvården* 1996:2, 18-21; Åke Jönsson: *Historien om ett residens, Malmö*, 1993, especially 93-102.

⁶² The three foreign ministers, Wallenberg, Ihlen and Scavenius, were accommodated in Malmö's most prominent hotel, the Kramer right at *Stortorget*. Cf. Larsson, *Trekungamötet*, 64 ff.; Jönsson, *Historien*, 93 ff.; Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 372.

represent and rule by constantly and ritually moving about their territories or – on state visits – abroad.⁶³ The monarchy thereby intended to consolidate its public profile in an age of nationalism and mass mobilisation that had effectively obliterated the modalities, structures and certainties of early 19th century dynastical politics. Wilhelm II of Germany appears as an admittedly extreme, nonetheless representative example for a political practice aimed at the popular adjustment of the monarchy to the requirements of bourgeois-industrial modernity. The ceaseless, almost breathless representation mirrors “the desire on the part of a charismatic monarchy [...] to transform the monarchy into the institution monopolizing the idea of the empire” or, as in this case, the idea of both nation and region, “through its public omnipresence, the multiplication of speeches, parades, inaugurations and commemorative ceremonies.”⁶⁴ John Röhl’s analysis of the domestic function of Wilhelm’s vagrant rule could equally apply to Christian X, Gustav V or Haakon VII. The constellation at Malmö, however, was even more complex than with regular state visits, as the three Scandinavian kings addressed a number of audiences at the same time: an obviously local and the wider national context, especially in terms of popularising a nationalised vision of monarchy, as well as a nordic (not necessarily Nordic) and international environment, both equally volatile. Just as the audiences both differed and overlapped, the intentions, expectations and policies attached to the meeting varied among the participants, both among kings and governments as well as between kings and their respective governments.

Despite the metamorphosis of monarchical rule in the 19th century, the tension between the outmoded and the modern appears no more drastic than in the continuum of dynastical relations. In Malmö, this was obvious in the relationship of the three kings to one another. Christian X of Denmark (1870-1947) and Haakon VII of Norway (1872-1957) were brothers of the reigning house of Glücksburg, with Haakon known as Prince Carl of Denmark until his ascension to the throne of Norway in 1905. Through their mother they were related to the Swedish royal family. Gustav V (1858-1950) was actually their great uncle. Both Gustav and Carl came to the throne in the midst of the Scandinavian crisis, triggered by the collapse of the union of Sweden and Norway, with Carl ascending to the throne of Norway in November 1905 and Gustav to the Swedish two years later. (Christian followed slightly later, after the death of his father, Fredrik VIII, in Hamburg on 14 May 1912.) The crisis, further deepened by the great powers formally guaranteeing Norway’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in November 1907, which Stockholm

⁶³ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 344-363; idem, *Peripatetische Herrschaft*, 444-461, 449.

⁶⁴ John Röhl: *Kaiser, Hof und Staat*, Munich, 1988, 112.

perceived as distinctly anti-Swedish, had left not only the Scandinavian publics at odds, but also the royal houses of Sweden and Norway, though less so in their relations with Denmark.⁶⁵ From 1905 onwards, there had not been any regular gatherings among the royal families, apart from their common attendance of the funeral of Fredrik VIII in 1912, who was Christian's and Haakon's father and effectively the "father-in-law of Europe", as he was commonly known.⁶⁶ Six years earlier, after the death of Fredrik's father, Christian IX, Haakon had been forced to travel incognito through Sweden, thereby avoiding unwanted complications and the heated conflict with the Swedish court and government, whilst Oscar II of Sweden had deliberately avoided the funeral and sent his sons instead, among them crown prince Gustav.

Even though the Three Kings' Meetings at both Malmö and Kristiania in 1917 did much to mitigate the antagonism as well on the personal level, the collective psychological residua of the crisis were not fully overcome until the late 1920s.⁶⁷ In his press historical analysis of the Three Kings' Meeting, Stadius hints at the degree to which the public media observed the rapprochement especially between Gustav and Haakon, whilst Gustav's relationship to Christian was apparently deemed intact. *Dagens Nyheter* even went as far as scrutinising the minutiae of the royal embrace, when Gustav received his counterparts in the morning of 18 December. It was noted that the Swedish king had greeted Christian with a kiss on each cheek and only extended a single kiss of welcome to Haakon. The conservative *Svenska Dagbladet* considered the first meeting as having been of "cordial warmth, probably with a bit of nervousness at the first moment."⁶⁸ In general, however, the presence of the Norwegian king in Malmö appears to have been appreciated throughout, with the press in all three Scandinavian countries highlighting his enthusiastic reception in the city, accompanied by his regal counterparts.

What united at least the kings of Denmark and Sweden was their ideological disposition: a fervent monarchical conservatism, aligned with a general

⁶⁵ Patrick Salmon: *Foreign Policy and National Identity: The Norwegian integrity treaty, 1907-1924*, Oslo, 1993, 9-15.

⁶⁶ Hemstad, *Indian Summer*, 398; Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 377; Stefan Gammelien: *Wilhelm II. und Schweden-Norwegen 1888-1905: Spielräume und Grenzen eines Persönlichen Regiments*, Berlin, 2012, 459.

⁶⁷ Only in March 1929, the royal wedding between crown prince Olav of Norway and Gustav's niece (the daughter of his brother Carl) Märtha normalised relations. It is both remarkable and characteristic that a royal wedding, the central vehicle for monarchical mass mobilisation in the modern age, should have symbolically brought the Swedish-Norwegian antagonism to an end. Even more remarkable is the fact that Märtha's father prince Carl has been the moderates' favourite for the Norwegian throne in the union crisis of 1905. Cf. Hemstad, *Indian Summer*, 364 ff.

⁶⁸ "[...] af hjärtligt värme, kanske en smula nervositet i första ögonblicket." *Dagens Nyheter*, 19 Dec 1914, 1, and *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1, both cited in: Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 376 f.

suspicion of modern politics, expressly of the twin forces of democratisation and parliamentarisation. Gustav had shown his disdain for the Left and the basic rules of the separation of powers earlier that year by effectively conspiring in the removal of the liberal cabinet Staaff, making the most of the peculiarly modern benefits of mass politics for the Right.⁶⁹ Christian shared this scepticism, even hostility to parliamentary rule, as markedly evident in his political behaviour during the so-called Easter Crisis of 1920. In late March that year, the king effectively brought down the social-liberal (radical left) government of prime minister Carl Theodor Zahle over the issue of the Schleswig plebiscites. Whilst Christian – and with him the Danish Right – argued vehemently in favour of the further expansion of post-war Denmark well into central Schleswig, including Flensburg, Zahle and his government limited their position vis-à-vis the League of Nations and Germany to the northern and majority Danish-inhabited part of the region.⁷⁰ Neither Gustav V nor Christian X were, however, able to contain the future electoral hegemony of social democratic and liberal parties in Northern Europe. Opposed to his pendants, Haakon of Norway had embraced this evolutionary process early on. Before his ascension to the Norwegian throne he had supported calls for a referendum on the future political system of the country, which resulted in an almost 80 percent majority in favour of the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.⁷¹ Only after that he accepted the throne, which led Wilhelm II to describe Haakon VII acerbically as “king by the grace of the people, not much better than the president of a republic”. Part of that reservation was due to Berlin’s own frustrations of not having been able to prevent an “English son-in-law” from ascending to the Norwegian throne.⁷² In 1896, the then Prince Carl had married at Buckingham Palace his first cousin Princess Maud of Wales, youngest daughter of the future King Edward VII and his wife, Princess Alexandra of Denmark, the first-born daughter of King Christian IX of Denmark. As queen of Norway, Maud had an intense influence on her husband and their immediate court environment, closely aligning the Norwegian royal family with their British counterparts and thereby feeding Berlin’s heightened sense of rivalry during the period.⁷³ From Malmö, however, Queen Maud, always reserved when it came to her representative duties, stayed away.

⁶⁹ Oredsson, *Stormaktsdrömmar*, 257-258, describes the attitude of king and queen towards Staaff and his partly social democratic cabinet as one of “intense hatred”.

⁷⁰ Tage Kaarsted: *Påskekrisen 1920*, Aarhus, 1968; Knud Jespersen: *Rytterkongen: et portræt af Christian 10*, Copenhagen, 2007, 276-322.

⁷¹ On the intricacies of the constitutional debate in Norway cf. Roald Berg: *Norge på egen hand 1905-1920*, Oslo, 1995, 43-51.

⁷² Cited in: Gammelien: *Wilhelm II. und Schweden-Norwegen*, 516.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 459. Urbach, *Diplomatic History*, 993, justifiably points to the deficient recognition of these marriages, which “offered transnational networks in an age of nationalism”. Cf. as well Kristin M. Haugevik: *Status, small states, and Significant Others: Re-reading Norway’s attraction to Britain in the twentieth century*, in: Benjamin

On the originally opposing side of the Norwegian-Swedish antagonism, Queen Victoria, herself a princess of the House of Baden and cousin of the German emperor, aptly compensated for the Anglophile orientation of the Norwegian royal family. With virtually the same frequency as Maud in Great Britain before and during the First World War, the Swedish queen travelled to Germany. Her notable absence in Malmö – at least until her arrival on Saturday – was actually due to such a voyage, which she used for political talks in Berlin on 17 and 18 December with the entire elite of German foreign policy-making, among them the emperor, prime minister Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, state secretary Gottlieb von Jagow and under-secretary Arthur Zimmermann.⁷⁴ Equipped with a personal message of Wilhelm to Gustav, urging the latter to intervene in the war as soon as possible, she returned to Sweden on 19 December, crossing over from Sassnitz to Malmö and from there together with her husband back to Stockholm.⁷⁵

E. Audience: The drama unfolding

The 19th century had seen the probably most dramatic change in representation and court life. Since the last third of the century, court life as established some fifty years earlier had been almost completely superseded. Instead, monarchical representation involved, as argued above, close to permanent movement, largely by domestic travel, but as well in the context of the growing number of summits abroad. Had court life been shut away from the public and therefore much less structured, the peripatetic and highly theatricalised representation of monarchical power around 1900 required detailed planning. Nothing was left to coincidence, as the consequences of a publically compromised monarch could be potentially lethal for monarchies increasingly tied to public opinion. Risk avoidance and continued control over the interpretation of the event, as termed by Paulmann, dominated the planning procedure.⁷⁶ Malmö was not altogether different, though more swiftly arranged than comparable meetings of the period. The programme for the 18 and 19 December appeared in any case closely knit and involved the whole repertoire of royal representation against the backdrop of a nationalised

de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann (eds.): *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing*, London/New York, 2015, 42-54, especially 48-51.

⁷⁴ Carlgren, *Neutralität*, 62-63.

⁷⁵ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 387; Larsson, *Trekungamötet*, 64 ff.

⁷⁶ Ger. *Risikovermeidung* and *Deutungskontrolle*; cf. Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 295-308.

public, “dynastical past and national present” elegantly and effectively merging.⁷⁷

The city had been systematically prepared for the meeting both by the local authorities and private initiative. The main streets and square, the harbour and central railway station, the local shops and department stores had all been decorated with an abundance of flags and other decorations, partly reused from the Baltic Exhibition. The more ambitious of those decorations, especially the arrangements in the shopping windows, interpreted the meeting of the three Scandinavian kings as a strongly regional manifestation of peace, “*Norden* as a region of peace detached from a continent consumed by war.”⁷⁸ Simultaneously, an audience had been brought in, systematically mobilised by the city authorities. In the centre of the enactment were the local dignitaries, among them the regional governor, Robert De la Gardie, and the bishop of Lund, Gottfrid Billing, receiving first Gustav V and foreign minister Wallenberg. The preserved film extracts then illustrate the arrival of Christian X in the harbour area, where the Danish king is expected by Gustav, Wallenberg and the *riksmarskalk*, Ludvig Douglas. The same procedure then played out at the railway station, where Haakon VII arrived from Kristiania. Both receptions were marked by a carefully crafted musical programme, to which even the military band of the Danish cruiser contributed when playing the Swedish *Kungssången* (the king’s song) on arrival. As a gesture of politeness, Gustav even went as far as to first board the *Heimdal*, before disembarking again with Christian at his side.⁷⁹

The remarkable use of the royal motor car is equally well reflected in the remaining film extracts. This, however, would have to be rather seen as an unconventional feature for a royal summit of the given proportions. It can certainly be read as an indication of the period’s rapid modernisation. In the decade leading up to 1914, the use of cars was increasingly common at European courts. In the context of a carefully crafted ceremony, though, a motorised vehicle was usually deemed “unsuitable”.⁸⁰ “The more ordinary motor-driven vehicles became in that time, the more prominent the use of a horse-drawn carriage became to emphasise the ceremoniousness of the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 308.

⁷⁸ This and part of the following is based on Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 373-375 (cit. 374).

⁷⁹ Filmarkivet: Oidentifierad dokumentärfilm *Trekungamötet i Malmö* (1914):

URL: <http://www.filmarkivet.se/sv/Film/?movieid=71> [3 Nov 2015].

⁸⁰ “[...] quite unsuitable for the occasion”, the British ambassador to Paris, Sir Francis Bertie, commented when having to consider whether or not to have the English king transported in a car. Cited in: Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 372.

event.”⁸¹ Contrary to that, and most likely due to the evident restrictions of time, in Malmö the royal car was used throughout.

The programme was, as indicated, tightly scheduled and did not leave a lot of room for manoeuvre or improvisation. The actual negotiations were taken up at the regional governor’s residence on Friday from 11.30 am onwards until lunch time at about one o’clock. After lunch, the monarchs stepped out into the comparatively modest steel balcony in order to receive the ovations of the amassed spectators on *Stortorget*, several thousand, as contemporarily estimated.⁸² In the meantime, ca. 400-500 students in their student uniforms, including the typically white caps, had arrived from Lund by train, led by senior academics. Grouped in front of the residence, they intoned traditional songs like Gunnar Wennerbergs *Hör oss, Svea!* (Hear us, Sweden!) and – with the monarch’s arrival on the balcony – Johan Ludvig Runeberg’s *Vårt land*, one of the most canonical patriotic songs of the period in Sweden and Finland.⁸³ After that, the president of the student corps addressed a greeting to the monarchs, *Nordens konungar*, culminating in the statement: “Whilst war welters through Europe, we are fortunate to witness the personified will for consent and trust among the people of the North.” In essence, the address commits the students of the whole North to work towards the unity of the Scandinavian people, “in full awareness of their country’s national tradition and particularity.”⁸⁴ Stadius builds most of his dense analysis of the actual enactment around the event’s two central pillars, the mobilization of students and the presence of the Swedish church. The students had traditionally been among the forefront of Scandinavianism and were centrally responsible for resuscitating the movement around 1900 again.⁸⁵

The afternoon of 18 December was spent with a common visit to Malmö’s local city museum. In the evening, a somewhat limited dinner for 32 persons was held at the residence, this time with the three foreign ministers in attendance. A concert had been arranged for the evening at the town hall, with the building itself illuminated by a staggering 8000 electrical lamps. Whilst the three regents

⁸¹ Ibid., 373, differing from David Cannadine: *The Context, Performance and Meaning of ritual: the British monarchy and the ‘invention of tradition’, c. 1820-1977*, in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.): *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, 101-164.

⁸² Larsson, *Trekungamötet*, 64 ff.

⁸³ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 378 f.

⁸⁴ “Under de tätt kriget välver sig över Europa ha vi lyckan att skåda de personifierade viljan till samförstånd och förtroende mellan Nordens folk. [...] med fullt hävdande av vartdera landets nationella tradition och egenart.” *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, 18 Dec 1914, cit. in Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 380.

⁸⁵ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 380 f. Cf. as well Hemstad, *Indian Summer*, 130 ff.; Bo Stråth: *The Idea of a Scandinavian Nation*, in: Lars-Folke Landgren and Pirkko Hautamäki (eds.): *People, Citizen, Nation*, Helsinki, 2005, 208-223.

walked over the square to reach the town hall, surrounded by the amassed spectators, a neon sign attached further above and spreading over the main square declared: “Hail Nordens 3 konungar [Hail to *Norden’s* three kings]!” The concert amounted to a “Nordic balancing act”, providing an amalgam of patriotic song and *lieder* by composers from all three Scandinavian countries, performed by a combined male choir from Malmö and Lund.⁸⁶

The second day of the meeting, Saturday, 19 December 1914, was opened with a church service at St. Petri Church in the centre of the city, in which the local vicar, Albert Lysander, evoked the essence of the summit by describing the scene as follows: “*Norden’s* three kings, gathered at the same altar, united in the same thoughts and praying for *Norden’s* peace and peace on earth.”⁸⁷ Stadius connects to Lysander’s comprehensive sermon and the liturgy as a whole a discussion of the churches role in the wider Nordic context, as it evolved during and especially after the First World War. The double moral authority of the Lutheran churches of Northern Europe, representing both god and the state, would not only have to be seen as enforcing social discipline and obedience in relatively homogenous societies, but also as having contributed fundamentally to the creation of the modern Nordic welfare state.⁸⁸ Legitimate as this connection certainly is, the primary intention of Lysander’s and the church’s rhetoric in the context of the Three Kings’ Meeting appears to rest with supporting what is at hand: the coordination and harmonisation of the divergent policies and orientations of the three Scandinavian states vis-à-vis an escalating war. It is peace or – more precisely – the principled abstention from war that is being celebrated, reinforced by the constant reference to the tradition and rhetoric of a – with Hemstad – pragmatic neo-Scandinavianism, whose intellectual residua in turn foster the early discourse on Nordism.⁸⁹ Neutrality, even if it remains largely unnamed in the public utterances, is thereby carefully reinvented as a keystone of the political culture and society of the North. At the onset of the war, notions of neutrality were based on an existing and internationally accepted legal code, last enshrined in the “Rights and Duties of a Neutral Power” of the Hague Convention of 1907. One can still see this tendency reflected in the Malmö conference. By the end of the war, however, neutrality had been reframed not any more in terms of legal privilege and obligation, but much rather as a virtue in itself. From a position of

⁸⁶ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 382 (cit.).

⁸⁷ “Nordens tre konungar, samlade vid samma altare, förenade i samma tankar och böner om Nordens fred och världsfreden.” Cit. in: Larsson, *Baltiska utställningen*, 10.

⁸⁸ Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 383. This interpretation is derived from Henrik Stenius: *The Good Life is a life of Conformity: The Impact of Lutheran Tradition on Nordic Political Culture*, in: Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (eds.): *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, Oslo, 1997, 161-171.

⁸⁹ Hemstad, *Indian Summer*, 417.

necessity born out of weakness, associated with lack of principle and opportunism, the neutral transformed into a moral superior. First clues of this moral metamorphosis are already manifest in the rhetoric and theatricality of the Three Kings' Meeting just before Christmas 1914.

F. Conclusions: Royal diplomacy in Scandinavia as part of the European "world-theatre"⁹⁰

When the kings left Malmö in the afternoon of 19 December 1914, again surrounded by celebrating masses, the communique their foreign ministers had drafted echoed the summits diplomatic complexity. The meeting's results were – in concrete terms – rather limited. Collectively, one asserted the "Nordic realms peaceful and neutral determination" and furthermore assured each other and the interested public of the continuation of governmental consultations on the questions addressed.⁹¹ In practice, however, the Three Kings' Meeting had a number of rather significant implications: in the Swedish domestic arena, it certainly consolidated both King Gustav's and foreign minister Wallenberg's position. "[...] it is now accepted as a fact in Court Circles", Howard, who knew better, reported from Stockholm on New Year's Eve that year, "that the idea of it [i.e. the meeting] originated entirely with His Majesty, and it is therefore felt that he should have the credit of it. The result has been that it has distinctly strengthened the King's position, not only in the country generally but also with the advanced Left". All apart from this, King Gustav's own commitment to neutrality had been somewhat reinforced, thereby influencing the court environment and the forces on the Right of the political landscape.⁹² Wallenberg, on the other hand, saw his own and the Hammarskjöld government's neutrality course reinforced, in particular against the constant pro-war agitation by the activist movement. In practical terms, the meeting had furthermore de-escalated the strained Swedish-Norwegian relationships atmospherically. Despite their neutrality- and non-aggression treaty early on in the war, both countries' geostrategic and military orientations were profoundly divergent, with Norway heavily dependent on British trade and protection and Sweden traditionally Germanophile and intensely linked to Berlin. There were patent limits to the envisioned rapprochement, at least as long as the war lasted, but the most basic of all options had been successfully contained: the possibility of a war between the two states, potentially triggered by the alliance politics and secret diplomacy

⁹⁰ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 337-400.

⁹¹ "[...] nordiska rikenas endrättiga neutralitetsvilja" cit. in: Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 384.

⁹² NA, FO 371/2097: Political: Scandinavia (War): 1914: Howard to Grey, 31 Dec 1914 (as well cit.).

of the great powers.⁹³ On the southern edge of the region, the meeting itself was as well suited to consolidate the neutral position of Denmark against Germany (or a possible invasion by the British). Forming what was commonly referred to as a “neutral bloc” or a “Scandinavian entente” would “no doubt make the Scandinavian Governments rather stiffer as regards issues concerning the rights of neutrals, in matters respecting contraband and maritime trade, than they might otherwise have been.”⁹⁴ In any case, the most immediate result of the gathering was the institutionalisation of consultations among the three Scandinavian governments, which had already been foreshadowed in the 1912 talks on neutrality regulations, but gathered shape, force and frequency only after Malmö. Regular ministerial consultations eventually led to Malmö’s follow-up, the second Three Kings’ Meeting in the Norwegian capital Kristiania in late November 1917.

Apart from these more or less practical consequences, the gathering of the three Scandinavian kings (and their foreign ministers) in Malmö should as well be read as characteristic for that new type of monarchical interaction and self-conceptions. As symbolically exercised in Malmö, monarchical and state visits were festivities that went beyond the manifestation of nation and state. Their choreography rested on the inclusion of civil – primarily bourgeois – society with its own institutions, practices and expectations. The participation of the nationalised masses was constitutive for the theatrical enactment altogether. In that, the mobilised public appeared both as an audience and an actor. This is especially evident in the much more pronounced rhetoric the public – whether students, singing and marching masses, or church – cultivated, which naturally contrasts to the diplomats’ rather sober declaration of intent. The staging and theatrical arrangement of Malmö, imbued with dense national and supranational symbolism, seems to have affected the public to a far greater extent than the professionals, i.e. the kings and their ministers. The public’s sensibilities and projections, in short: their emotions, were constitutive to the procedure. “Theatrical state visits”, Paulmann concludes, “provided the imagined nation with a concrete face, or better: they provided it with many real faces in different costumes. Community and society did not exclude, but rather complement each other in the ritual event.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Salmon, *Scandinavia*, 127; Stadius, *Trekungamötet*, 387.

⁹⁴ NA, FO 371/2097: Political: Scandinavia (War): 1914: Howard to Grey, 31 Dec 1914.

⁹⁵ Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, 384.