

I. Eastern Norway in the Saga Period.

According to our oldest sources, East Norway consists of two large regions, Vík(in), the coastal region between Gautelfr in the east and the promontory Rygjjarbit on the western side of the Oslo fjord (between the modern towns of Kragerø and Risør), and Upplönd, the inland region between the Swedish border and the mountain ridges in the west and north.

Both regions were divided into smaller districts, traditionally regarded as ancient kingdoms, with names ending in -land, -ríki, -mørk. These tribal areas are older than the Viking Age, the names of the inhabitants of some of them are mentioned in foreign sources such as Beowulf and Jordanes, the first component of district names like Raumaríki, Haðaland, Þelamørk is the name of the inhabitants, the Raumar, Haðar, Þilir, some of which are mentioned by Jordanes. In the 13th century some of these areas are occasionally called fylki, - Heinafylki = Heiðmørk with Eystridalir, Haðafylki = Haðaland, Hringaríki, Þótn and Land, etc., but these names quickly disappeared again while the old names remained in use.

Older than the 13th century fylki is the division of the coastal area into skipreiður, probably dating from the Viking Age and traditionally associated with King Hákon the Good, and the 12th century organisation of the whole country into sýslur, in the East frequently corresponding to the old tribal areas, with royal officials, sýslumenn, as the local representatives of the king, responsible for the collection of fines and the maintenance of the peace.

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Norway

Before the age of the sýslumenn, local power was in the hands of the lendir menn, the heads of the great landowning families. Two legal codes are known from East Norway. One, the Laws of Eiðsivabing, with its central þing at Eiðsvøllr, just south of Lake Mjørs, near the border between the tribal areas of Heiðmørk and Raumaríki, and not far from Hringaríki and Haðaland, is the Law of the Upplønd region. The other, Borgarþingslög, with its central þing at Borg (the modern Sarpsborg) east of the Oslo fjord, comprises the coastal districts. Only a few fragments of these laws have been preserved, chiefly dealing with ecclesiastical matters, and consequently we know little about the social organisation of these regions in pagan times, although the fragments contain many interesting details apparently going back to the missionary period.

Originally there was only one bishop in East Norway; one of them, an Icelander, is referred to as Kolr Víkverjabiskup. Eventually Oslo became the permanent seat of the bishop. In the 12th century a new bishopric was created in Upplønd, with Hamarkaupangr on Lake Mjørs as the seat of the bishop. Raumaríki remained under the bishop of Oslo, while the other inland districts as far west as Þelemørk belonged to the diocese of Hamarr.

The inhabitants of East Norway were farmers, they did some hunting and fishing, but tilling the soil and collecting food for their cattle took most of their time. Some families owned more land than

they could use, others had no land at all, but the normal citizens were the farmers who owned their own land and not much more. There were great differences between social conditions in the comparatively fertile districts around the Oslo fjord and the great inland lakes and in the remote valleys of the mountain region, which were apparently only sparsely populated at the end of the pagan period.

The powerful lendir menn, who owned much land and rented it to tenants, were the councillors of the king and the leaders in war. When King Magnús lagabǫetir introduced European titles, the lendir menn became, significantly, barúnar. We do not know how many baronial families there were in the land, or in East Norway, but there cannot have been very many of them.

Below the lendir menn in rank there was a much more numerous class of small landowners, a "squirearchy", and from this group were recruited hirðmenn, officials of various kinds, members of the cathedral chapters, etc. Below this group were the ordinary farmers, those who owned or rented fairly large farms, and had servants, in the older days slaves, to help them, the einwirkjar, men whose farms were so small that they did not need any grown up men to help them, and those who left the old settled districts to find new land in remote valleys and forests (called stokklendingar in the Eiðsivaþingslög), free labourers, freedmen, and, until well into the 12th century, þrælar. It is quite clear that there were social tensions,

perhaps scarcity of arable land and overpopulation in some districts, and throughout the period of the civil wars in the 12th century there were always people willing to run away and join one or other of the pretenders.

The towns were few and very small, apart from Bergen in West Norway. Konungahella on the Gautelfr was an important place at the beginning of the 12th century, but nothing is known about when it was founded. In Fagrskinna there is an allusion to it in the saga of Magnús the Good (1035-1047).

Borg on the river Glåma (Raumelfr) was founded by St. Olaf, probably as a Viking stronghold of the same type as the Danish fortifications such as Trølleborg. It is not known when it became a real town.

Oslo is supposed to have been founded by Haraldr hardráði (1046-66), and it had become an important place at the beginning of the 12th century, with a cathedral and a royal chapel, and its local saint, St. Hallvarðr, a kinsman of St. Olaf.

Túnsberg is supposed to be the oldest town in Norway. Snorri mentions it in the early 10th century, but it is not mentioned by any skald. It probably took over from the older kaupangr Skíringssalr further south along the coast, when the harbour at that place became too shallow. Skíringssalr is mentioned by Ohtere and in Ynglingatal.

Skiðan (now Skien) is mentioned in the late 12th century.

Hamarkaupangr was the only inland town, and it probably owed its existence to the fact that the bishop and the members of the cathedral chapter resided there.

In the 13th century the coastal area was divided into 44 skipreiður which provided at least 60 ships for the leiðangr, the naval defense organisation. The discrepancy between the number of ships and the number of skipreiður is probably due to an increase in the number of ships in connection with the growth of the population in the 11th and 12th century.

The division of the country into sýslur is first mentioned in the 12th century, and in certain parts of the country, the names of the sýslur supplanted the older names of the districts, especially in the coastal region. Thus the old tribal area of Ránríki (the modern Bohuslän, which became part of Sweden in 1658) was divided into Elfarsýsla in the south and Ránríki in the north. In Ynglinga saga and Hálfðanar saga svarta in Heimskringla, the name Álfheimar is used for this area, and the name is occasionally used in other sources, such as Hervarar saga and Sögubrot. Since the name Ránríki was probably in use long before the Viking Age, it is unlikely that Álfheimar was ever the real name of the district. There is a farm named Álfheimr in Tune, near Borg, and this very large farm may have been the residence of the kings of the district east of the Oslo fjord, and some historian who was not familiar with the district may have thought that the name of the farm was really the name of

the kingdom.

The districts north of Ránríki are usually referred to as Vingulmørk in the earlier sagas of Heimskringla, but the name is last used in the saga of St. Olaf, and it seems to have gone out of use fairly early. In Heimskringla it is used of the whole area east and north of the Oslo fjord, but in the 12th century the southern part, roughly corresponding to the modern county of Østfold, is called Borgarsýsla, and the northern part is named after its only town, Oslo, but the name Oslóarsýsla was not much used. The area west of the fjord corresponding roughly to the modern county of Vestfold is occasionally called Túnsbergssýsla, but the ancient name Vestfold is much more frequently used; this is the home of the Norwegian Ynglingar, and many names of farms in this area are mentioned in Ynglingatal. South of Vestfold lay the ancient district of Grenland, which together with the inland districts to the north and west is usually referred to as Skiðusýsla in the later Middle Age, after the small town of Skiða(n).

In Upplönd the ancient names of the tribal kingdoms remained in use. East and north east of Oslo is Raumaríki with Soleyjar, on both sides of the river Raumelfr (Glåma), further north Heidmork on the shores of Lak Mjors (Mjøsa).

Beyond the large forests north of Oslo lay the ancient kingdom of the Haðar, Haðaland, on Lake Rønd (Randsfjorden). The districts of Þótn to the east and Land further north belonged to the same sýsla as Haðaland in the later Middle Ages. West of Oslo, north of Lake

Tyri (Tyrifjorden) is Hringaríki, which in the 13th century is regarded as part of Haðafylki. The area west of Hringaríki does not seem to have formed part of the ancient Eiðsivapingslög, even if it belonged to the diocese of Hamarr. Guðbrandsdalir, the large valley district north of Heiðmørk, belonged to Eiðsivapingslög, but the valleys of Valdres and Haddingjadalr further west were parts of Gulapingslög and the diocese of Stafangr. The mountain area of Belamørk belonged to the diocese of Hamarr, but it apparently did not belong to any of the ancient lög.

II. Eastern Norway in the Sagas.

Descriptions of places in the *Íslendingasögur* are usually based on familiarity with the districts and the farms mentioned, even if we occasionally get descriptions which do not fit the circumstances, as in the case of the valley in the hváll at Bergþórs-hváll. Since the events are supposed to have taken place between 930 and 1030, and since the authors usually knew *Landnámabók*, they are generally also able to supply us with correct informations as to who lived on neighbouring farms or in other parts of Iceland whenever such information is required, and this creates the illusion that we really know most of the important men in Iceland during the century between 930 and 1030, where they lived, to whom they were married, who were their friends and foes.

As soon as the saga heroes set sail for Norway, this comfortable feeling of being familiar with the land and its inhabitants disappears. The saga heroes visit the kings, they meet compatriots who are hirdmenn, and they stay in the towns or, occasionally, with a chieftain in his farm, but we no longer know what the places looked like, and quite frequently we do not even know the name of the farm. Víga-Glúmr visits his maternal grandfather in *Vors*, Egill stays with Þorsteinn Þóruson in *Raumaríki*, Hrútr Herjólfsson stay with Gunnhildr and her sons in *Konungahella*, and Gunnarr at *Hlíðarenda* with Ólvir in the island of *Hísing* - no farm names, no descriptions of the place where they are staying.

In fact, a description of Norway in the 10th century based on the *Islendingasögur* and *Landnámabók* would run more or less as follows:

The country consists of a coastal area with a large number of fjords and islands; the central part of the country is *Þrándheimr*, where the archbishops reside in the city of *Nidaróss*, and where the kings are also frequently to be found, when they are not in the Bergen area further south. Far away to the east there is another coastal area, called *Vík*, through which one has to pass to go to Sweden or Denmark. Behind *Vík* there is a remote area called *Upplönd*, a region of petty kingdoms, with large forests and mountains, a somewhat dangerous place where highwaymen, outlaws, and even trolls and other supernatural beings live.

The *fornaldarsögur* also regard the inland region as a dangerous and remote area where anything may happen. The Icelandic authors of these sagas mention a number of place names, but the names are usually the well known district names and have certainly been taken from the *Sagas of the Kings*.

The *Konungasögur* are better informed about Norway than the *Islendingasögur*, but the knowledge is frequently rather superficial, at least as far as Eastern Norway is concerned. The names of towns and petty kingdoms, a few names along the main routes from north to south, inland lakes and islands along the coast, are quite frequently mentioned, but only few farm names in *Upplönd* and *Vík*, chiefly those associated with men who play a part in the history of the 11th and 12th centuries - *Ketill kálfr af Þringunesi*, *Steigar-Þórir*, *Brattsberg*, the residence of *Gregorius Dagsson*, *Sigurðr af Reyri*.

Some names of important farms in Vík and Upplönd occur in the sagas of the kings earlier than 1066. In some cases the source of the name is a skaldic poem - thus the Vestfold names in Ynglinga saga are mentioned in Ynglingatal. Some names occur in the oldest Norwegian sources, Theodoricus, Historia Norwegiae, Ágrip, and in these cases the most likely source is Norwegian oral traditions of the 12th century, even if the possibility of deliberate invention on the part of the authors cannot be completely ruled out. Ágrip was used by the authors of Fagrskinna and Heimskringla, and the geographical details connected with the drowning of Hálfðan svarti in Rykinvík in Rønd and his burial at Steinn in Hringaríki come from this source, and so does the mention of Þoptyn in Guðbrandsdalir in the Snjófriðr episode. Tryggvareyrr, where King Tryggvi, father of Óláfr Tryggvason was buried is also first mentioned in Ágrip.

Oddr Snorrason, author of the oldest saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, distinguishes between the coastal region of Norway and the Upplönd, more or less in the same way as Historia Norwegiae, he knows that there were fylkiskonungar in Upplönd and regards Tryggvi and Haraldr grenski, the fathers of the two Olafs, as kings of Hringaríki. It is tempting to regard this as an attempt by the author to utilize the few scraps of information about the topography of East Norway that he (or his informant) had picked up. But in the story of the flight of Queen Astriðr to Upplönd after the death of King Tryggvi there are some names that cannot have been known to people outside East Norway, such as the farm í Vizum in Skaun (Stange) in Heiðmörk .

The Legendary Saga of St. Olaf on the other hand shows very little knowledge of Eastern Norway, in spite of the fact that St. Olaf was an Easterner. Thus when the king and his retainers spend their first winter with King Sigurðr sýr, apparently in Hringaríki, no topographical details are given. Only one episode in the Legendary Saga shows any real detailed knowledge of localities in East Norway, the famous story of the conversion of Dala-Guðbrandr, which is also found in Snorri's saga of St. Olaf. This tale, which originally began with an account of the crossing of the mountains, contains a surprising number of names of even small farms and local features, and it must originally have been written by someone who knew the road from Valldalr in Sunnmoeri to Guðbrandsdalir well.

Morkinskinna, the oldest surviving Icelandic saga of the Kings of Norway in the period from 1035 to (presumably) 1177, is strangely ignorant of conditions in East Norway until well into the 12th century. Haraldr harðráði, himself an upplendingr, had to deal with an apparently widespread rebellion in Upplönd, but the details mentioned in Morkinskinna (and also in Fagrskinna and Heimskringla) are all derived from the skaldic poems quoted in the text, the cause of the trouble, the names of the leaders, and their no doubt unpleasant fate, are unknown to the saga writer.

Óláfr kyrró (1066-1093) began his long and peaceful reign as king of Eastern Norway, but apart from the name of the farm in Ránríki on which he died, no East Norwegian names or people are mentioned in his short saga.

His son Magnús berrfoetr (1093-1103) also began his reign as King of Eastern Norway, and he had much trouble with an important lendr maðr, Sveinki Steinarsson, who belonged to the country "near the River" (i.e. Gaut^uelfr), but of this prominent chieftain we know practically nothing, not even the name of the farm on which he lived or who his ancestors were. Three loyal lendir menn are mentioned in this connection, Sveinn bryggjufótr, Dagr Eilífsson and Kolbeinn klakka, but two of them disappear again without trace, only Dagr Eilífsson is better known because he accompanied King Magnús on his last expedition to Ireland and because he was the father of Gregorius Dagsson, one of the most powerful councillors of King Ingi Haraldsson (1036-61). This Gregorius is the first Eastern lendr maðr who is more than just a name to the historians.

Among those who accompanied King Magnús on his last expedition well known lendir menn from other parts of the country are mentioned, the only Eastern chieftains are Dagr Eilífsson and Þorgrímr húfa from Upplönd, an otherwise unknown person.

Of the three sons of King Magnús, Sigurðr Jorsalfari (1103-30) received the eastern part of the kingdom. Both he and his son Magnús were buried in Oslo, and he seems to have spent much of his time in Vík even after the death of his brother, but Easterners are rarely mentioned in his saga, and the historians are far better informed about his crusade than about his activities in Norway.

The Civil War between Haraldr gilli and Magnús Sigurðarson started in East Norway, and from about 1130 the men of Vík and Upplönd play

a more important part in the events described in the sagas. The first great battle of the war was fought at Fyrileif in present day Bohuslän (1134), and among those killed was the important lendr maðr Ingimarr af Aski, supposed to have lived at Askr in Hringaríki. When the country was divided between the sons of Haraldr gilli, Inge Haraldsson received the eastern part of the kingdom. Among his most powerful supporters were Þjóstólfr Alason and Amundi Gyrðarson Lög-Bersasonar, but of their families and possessions the sagas know nothing. When King Magnús blindi escaped from the monastery at Niðarhólmr, he went to Upplönd because he expected to find support there, which he apparently did, but we are not told why the upplendingar were supposed to support him, and among those killed in the battle at Mynni the only prominent men mentioned came from the Prándheimr area. The only lendr maðr from Upplönd mentioned among King Magnus' men is Loðinn saupprúðr af Linustöðum, from Heiðmörk.

The ultimate source of Morkinskinna (and Fagrskinna-Heimskringla) for this period is Eiríkr Oddsson. Eiríkr wrote about what he had seen or heard about, and he is a reliable source, but like so many contemporaries writing about events they had taken part in, he does not supply us with much background information. Thus even if we know more about East Norway after 1130 than before, we still know very little about men and events in this part of the country. The sagas do not explain why the Víkverjar generally supported Ingi, and after him Magnús Erlingsson, while some of the more prominent opponents of Magnús and his father Erlingr skakki were Upplendingar such as Sigurðar af Reyfr from Heiðmörk.

From the accession of Magnús Erlingsson (1161-1184), the story as told in Fagrskinna and Heimskringla (this part of Morkinskinna is lost) appears to be based on the account of eyewitnesses, but East Norway is still less familiar to the authors of the sagas than other parts of the country. Niðaróss and Bergen are frequently mentioned, and the writers are obviously familiar with people and places in these towns, while Ósló and Túnberg are barely mentioned. An exception is the account of the sacking of Konungahella by the Wends in 1137, when Loptr Sæmundarson, son of Sæmundr froði was present, otherwise the first time the saga gives an exact and detailed description of a battlefield in Eastern Norway is in 1163, at the first battle of Ré, when Sigurðr af Reyri was killed.

Fagrskinna and Heimskringla make some additions to what is told in Morkinskinna, correct mistakes and leave out bættir, but otherwise there is not much difference between the three large collections of Kings Sagas for the period 1030-1177.

For the earlier period, Fagrskinna is based on written sources, most of which are still extant, and on skaldic poems. Heimskringla on the other hand contains substantial additions, particularly in the sagas of Haraldr hárfagri and his predecessors.

The main source of Ynglinga saga is Ynglingatal, but there are a number of additions, mostly concerned with wars against kings in other parts of East Norway, and these wars continue in the reigns of Hálfðan svartí and Haraldr hárfagri. The question of the origin of

these tales is difficult, separate sagas of Haraldr and Hálfðan have been suggested as sources, but this is no real solution, it only pushes the question of the origin further back, and does not explain why the author of Fagrskinna did not know or use these tales. The real problem is: Are these tales derived from genuine East Norwegian oral traditions of the 12th century, or are they simply literary products, early fornaldarsagaes?

To take just one example: The Haki who is supposed to have given his name to Hakadalr on the road from Oslo to Haðaland may be a local hero, but he may also have been created by a writer who had travelled along this road.

It may seem gratuitous to throw suspicion on Snorri, but in fact he did frequently add details from various sources, including information about life in Norway which he may have gathered when he was travelling in that country. When Snorri describes the visit of St. Olaf to his stepfather Sigurðr sýr in Hringaríki, and the preparations for the great party, he shows no real knowledge of that particular district, but he describes very vividly life on a typical large Norwegian farm in the Middle Ages.

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The later King's Sagas are written by contemporaries or near contemporaries of the events. With the appearance of King Sverri (1177-1202), Niðaróss became the centre of power in the Birkibeinn part of the country, and since the sagas are generally written from the Birkebeinn point of view, East Norway and to a certain extent even

the Bergen region is regarded as alien territory. From 1208 to 1217 East Norway was a separate kingdom. Thus during the period 1177-1217 East Norway remained on the outskirts of the area known to the historians. A natural tendency among the Icelandic writers to regard Western and Northern Norway as more familiar, more central for geographic and historical reasons may have been reinforced by the historical accident that the victorious Birkibenar had their most powerful supporters in precisely those parts of Norway.