

Origin Legends and Foundation Myths in Flateyjarbók

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

Flateyjarbók (“The book of Flat Island”) is the name given to GKS 1005, fol., a manuscript now preserved at the Árna Stofnun Magnússonar in Reykjavík, Iceland. Flateyjarbók is the largest of the extant medieval Icelandic manuscripts and is beautifully illuminated with historiated initials. It contains 225 leaves, with the text laid out in two columns to the page. The manuscript was commissioned by Jón Hákonarson, a very wealthy farmer who lived at Víðidalstunga in the Húnavatn district in the north of Iceland, and was undoubtedly written somewhere in the area, either at Víðidalstunga or at the nearby monastery of Þingeyrar, or possibly to the east of Húnavatn, in Skagafjörður. The manuscript was begun by the priest Jón Þórðarson in 1387; his hand starts on 4 verso, originally the verso of the first leaf of the manuscript, and continues through the next-to-last line of the first column of 134 verso. On these pages he copied *Eiríks saga víðförla*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, and virtually all of *Óláfs saga helga*. Jón Þórðarson left Iceland for Bergen, Norway, in the summer of 1388, and the work of continuing Flateyjarbók fell to another priest, Magnús Þórhallsson, whose hand begins on the last line of the

first column of 134 verso and goes on until the end of the manuscript (apart from 23 leaves, now folios 188-210, which were added by Þorleifur Björnsson in the second half of the fifteenth century). After finishing *Óláfs saga helga* for Jón Þórðarson, Magnús copied *Noregs konungatal*, *Sverris saga*, *Hákonar saga gamla*, excerpts from the *Óláfs saga helga* by Styrmir fróði, *Grænlandinga þátr* (also known as *Einars þátr Sökkasonar*), *Helga þátr ok Úlfs*, *Játvarðar saga*, and an annal he compiled himself. The annal seems to have been written continuously until its end in 1390, although there are fragmentary entries for 1391 through 1394, the year Jón Þórðarson returned to Iceland. After the annal was well started, Magnús added three leaves to the front of the manuscript, leaving the first one blank and beginning the two-column format on the recto side of the next. On these pages he copied the poems *Geisli*, *Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar*, and *Hyndluljóð*, followed by an excerpt from a translation of Adam of Bremen's *Historia hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, the short narratives *Þátr frá Sigurði konungi slefu* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, and genealogies of Haraldr hárfagri. Returning to the first leaf, he centered a brief foreword in the middle of the verso side. Magnús also illuminated the entire manuscript.

In this paper, I examine *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and the genealogies and argue that they form a response by Magnús Þórhallsson to *Eiríks saga víðförla* and *Fundinn Noregr*, two of the texts that Jón Þórðarson included in the first part of Flateyjarbók. This argument depends on the assumption that for the continuation of the manuscript Jón Hákonarson controlled the choice of kings' sagas but left Magnús free to select the other texts. It is possible that Jón may have asked that certain items written by his friends (e.g., *Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar*) or referring to his family (e.g., *Þátr frá Sigurði konungi slefu*) be included, but the remainder are far more likely to have been familiar to the priest rather than to the landowner. I believe we can see a strategy—first of matching texts and then of competing genres—in which Magnús literally surrounds the earlier part of Flateyjarbók with annals, chronicles, genealogies, and other historical records that recuperate proper linguistic and paternal relationships, all of which he uses to supplement (or even answer) Jón Þórðarson's typological history and stories in which King Óláfr Tryggvason's Icelandic retainers are portrayed as his spiritual sons. Moreover, it seems possible that Magnús did not merely choose texts in reaction to Jón's editorial program, but that he deliberately modified them to make them support his own agenda more strongly.

The last of Magnús's prefatory texts are additional prose supplements to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in the genres of mythography and genealogy. Like many of his other additions, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* ("How Norway was settled") and the *Ættartölur* (genealogies) are preserved only in Flateyjarbók. The former is a version of the origin legend that, in the words of Margaret Clunies Ross (1983:54), "traces the ancestry of certain ruling Norwegian

families to the giant Fornjótr and his sons, the latter of whom appear as anthropomorphic representations of three of the primal elements, fire, air, and water.”¹ It also describes how one of Fornjótr’s descendants, a king named Nórr, gave his name to Norway, the country he conquered.² The other version of this story, which is believed to be the older of the two, is found in *Fundinn Noregr*, the title bestowed on the first three chapters of *Orkneyinga saga* (Flb. I:241-243).³ The *terminus post quem* for *Hversu Noregr byggðist* could thus be as late as 1225-1230, if Finnbogi Guðmundsson is correct in attributing *Fundinn Noregr* to Snorri Sturluson.⁴ Sigurður Nordal (Flb. I:xxv) suggests that *Hversu Noregr byggðist* serves as a kind of introduction to the *Ættartölur*, which trace the ancestry of Haraldr hárfagri back through Óðinn, Priam of Troy, Saturn, and Noah to Adam. The genealogies are followed by a list of Norwegian kings and a note about the death of Olaf Hákonarson. According to Nordal, Magnús compiled all this from sources of various ages and in places expanded it himself.⁵

Apart from the foreword to the manuscript, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and the *Ættartölur* are the last texts Magnús added, and they offer multiple connections to the rest of Flateyjarbók. With its reference to the “Skjöldungs, Buðlungs, Bragnings, Öðlings, Völsungs or Niflungs, from whom the royal families come” (Flb. I:22), the beginning of *Hversu Noregr byggðist* recalls Freyja’s request that Hyndla recount Óttarr’s legendary genealogy (*Hyndluljóð*, st. 11):⁶

¹ The extant versions of the legend do not say that Fornjótr was a giant, but his name is found in the first group of giant-*pulur* that are appended to *Skáldskaparmál* in some manuscripts of Snorri’s *Edda*. Clunies Ross (1983) provides a full discussion of the problem.

² Nórr’s eponymous role is also mentioned in the *Historia Norwegiæ* and Oddr Snorrason’s saga of Olaf Tryggvason.

³ Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965:ix-xi) presents the competing positions: Finnur Jónsson held that *Fundinn Noregr* was derived from *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, which he believed to be from around 1200, but Sigurður Nordal, although assuming that the legend of Nórr was an eleventh-century creation like *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, considered that *Fundinn Noregr* was the older of the two versions, a conclusion with which Guðmundsson was inclined to agree. Further evidence for this position is cited by Clunies Ross (1983:55) in a study of the thematic and intellectual cohesion between *Fundinn Noregr* and Snorri’s *Edda*. Her persuasive analysis of how giants could function as unproblematic dynastic progenitors allows me to focus the present discussion solely in the context of Flateyjarbók.

⁴ Guðmundsson (1965:xiv-xvi) argues that *Fundinn Noregr* was written by Snorri Sturluson after he had written most of the first third of *Heimskringla*. At this point he had been rejected by the Oddverjar as a son-in-law (Sólveig Sæmundardóttir was instead married to Sturla Sighvatsson), so he had had the genealogy of this family on his mind, and the preface to *Orkneyinga saga* provided an opportunity to make use of this information, as the Orkney earls also traced their ancestry back to the descendants of Nórr. Clunies Ross (1983:55) views this attribution as extremely suggestive but perhaps unprovable.

⁵ See Faulkes (1978-1979:104) for a list of Magnús’s sources.

⁶ “Nú skal segja dæmi til, hversu Noregr byggðist í fyrstu eðr hversu konungaættir hófust þar eðr í öðrum löndum eðr hví þeir heita Skjöldungar, Buðlungar, Bragningar, Öðlingar, Völsungar eðr Niflungar, sem konungaættirnar eru af komnar” (Flb. I: 22).

Nú láttu forna niðia talða,	Now count up the ancient kin
ok upp bornar ættir manna:	And the children of the races of men:
hvat er Skiöldunga, hvat er Skilfinga,	Who is of the Sköldungs, who of the Skilfings
hvat er Öðlinga, hvat er Ylfinga,	Who of the Öðlings, who of the Ylfings,
hvat er höldbörít, hvat er hersborít	Who is of the oðal-born, who is born to hersir,
mest manna val und miðgarði?	The choicest of men in Miðgarðr?

The first sentence of *Hversu Noregr byggðist* also anticipates the *Ættartölur*, which include Haraldr's Skjöldung, Buðlung, Bragning, Öðling, and Niflung ancestors (Flb. I:25-27). As the third in the series of texts supplementing *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* also looks backwards to *Ór hamborgar historíu* and forward to *Fundinn Noregr*, which Jón Þórðarson interpolated into *Óláfs saga* as part of *Orkneyinga saga*.⁷ The *Ættartölur* are similarly relevant. They clarify the relationships of most of the names mentioned in *Hyndluljóð*, as well as providing a synopsis of the legend of Hálfðan gamli.⁸ The genealogies of Haraldr hárfagri anticipate *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which begins with an account of his life. Even the regnal list can be thought of as a brief yet comprehensive contextualization of *Óláfs saga*. However, the most interesting intertextual relationship is that between *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, almost immediately adjacent to it. The former relates how Nórr's son, Þrándr, inherited the area that was named Þrándheimr after him, and the latter begins at this point: "Þrándr was the name of the king who first ruled over Þrándheimr" ("Þrándr er nefndr konungr sá, er fyrstr réð fyrir Þrándheimi," Flb. I:30). In order to understand *Hversu Noregr byggðist*'s own textual origins, I will examine its relationship with *Fundinn Noregr* before proceeding to the relationship with *Eiríks saga*.

In their broadest outlines, the narratives of *Fundinn Noregr* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist* are the same. The family rules Finnland and Kvenland; Fornjótr's descendant Þorri is associated in some way with sacrifices, which explains the origin of the term *þorrablót*. Þorri has two sons, Nórr and Górr, and a daughter, Góa. One day she disappears, and her brothers go in search of her. After conquering Norway on his way south, Nórr meets a king, Hrólfr í Berg, who is part giant and the one responsible for Góa's abduction. In the end, Hrólfr marries Góa and Nórr marries Hrólfr's sister. The country is divided between Nórr and Górr, with the mainland going to the former and the islands to the latter, who took possession of them as he sailed south to meet his brother. Nórr is the ancestor of the Norwegian "land kings," Górr the ancestor of the "sea kings."

Within this shared framework, however, the two narratives differ in a

⁷ Both *Ór hamborgar historíu* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist* recount how foreigners divide up Norway between them, but whereas the partitioning in the former is a low point in Norway's struggle to constitute itself as an independent country, the partitioning in the latter allows a reasonable hegemony for each of the conquerors and their descendants.

⁸ The allusion in *Hyndluljóð* is in stanzas 14-15; the synopsis in the *Ættartölur* is taken from Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (Jónsson 1949:232-235).

number of ways. Some are minor differences in content (e.g., in *Fundinn Noregr*, Fornjótr is the king of Finnland and Kvenland, but in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, he is described as a man and it is Þorri who is the king of Gotland, Kvenland, and Finnland) or are blind motifs in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* that make sense in the fuller narrative of *Fundinn Noregr* (e.g., in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, we are told that the Kvens' sacrificial rite is a month late, although no reason is given; in *Fundinn Noregr*, we learn that the rite that occurred a month later is an extra one that was held to ask for Góa's return). *Fundinn Noregr* closes with the genealogy of Górr's son Heiti, the ancestor of the earls of Orkney; *Hversu Noregr byggðist* omits that one line of descent (presumably to avoid repeating it, as it is already in the manuscript) and supplies the genealogies of the other sons of Górr and all the sons of Nórr. It thus appears that in some places *Hversu Noregr byggðist* abbreviates *Fundinn Noregr* but in other places expands upon it. For example, *Fundinn Noregr* explains briefly how Norway disintegrated from its original unity under Nórr into the multiplicity of districts ruled by his descendants; *Hversu Noregr byggðist* omits the explanation and instead traces the genealogy of each descendant of Nórr who gave his name to a district of Norway.

Other differences between the two narratives are more significant. In *Fundinn Noregr*, Þorri is described as devoted to the practice of holding sacrifices ("Þorri var blótmaðr mikill," Flb. I:241), whereas in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, he is described as an excellent king, and it is his people who make sacrifices to him ("Þorri var konungr ágætr... Hann blótuðu Kvenir til þess, at snjóva gerði ok væri skíðfæri gott. Þat er ár þeirra," Flb. I:22). In *Fundinn Noregr*, Nórr and Hrólfr fight each other before coming to a settlement, whereas in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, Góa intervenes immediately and Hrólfr swears fealty to Nórr. In *Fundinn Noregr*, the sons of Górr fall out with the sons of Nórr and a civil war ensues, but no such thing happens in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*.

The effect of these changes in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is twofold. For one thing, Nórr's family and family relationships are considerably deproblematized or culturally "improved"—Þorri is no longer an active pagan, and his grandsons co-exist amicably instead of slaughtering another like Thebans. For another, greater emphasis is laid on Nórr's role as the first king of Norway and precursor to Haraldr. In *Fundinn Noregr*, Nórr's encounter with King Hrólfr í Berg resembles the episodes in the mytho-heroic sagas in which the protagonist and a worthy opponent test each other in a duel before deciding to become blood-brothers. In *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, however, Nórr is depicted much more as a king than a wandering hero or roving viking; in fact, his meeting with Hrólfr is rather like an idealized episode from the unification of Norway, in which a district king decides that discretion is the better part of valor and submits to Haraldr without a fight.

As the prologue to *Orkneyinga saga*, *Fundinn Noregr*'s function is to link

the genealogy of the earls of Orkney to the legendary Nórr, the descendant of Kári (“gust of wind”) Fornjóttson. *Hversu Noregr byggðist* seizes on the various implications of this linkage and builds on it to provide two interlocking origin legends: a “horizontal,” onomastic one to explain how the districts of Norway got their names, and a “vertical,” social one to explain the creation of the various ranks of Norwegian nobility. The latter depends on the linguistic theory presented in *Fundinn Noregr*, which asserts a unity between signifier and signified in order to identify Fornjótt’s sons with the primal elements.⁹ In *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, it is name (i.e., title) and rank that are one.¹⁰ *Jarlar* are created when Nórr’s grandson Guðbrandr refuses to be called “king” and gives himself the name “earl” instead (“ok lét gefa sér jarlsnafn,” Flb. I:24).¹¹ Three generations later, another Guðbrandr declines to take the name of either king or earl, and he gives himself the name *hersir*. The proliferation of Nórr’s descendants and their acts of self-naming create a hierarchically organized society in which the king is literally the father of his people and each member of the nobility has freely chosen his social station. The stability of such a society is thus doubly guaranteed: “natural” family ties reinforce the feudal allegiance of the aristocracy to the king, who is also of the oldest branch of their lineage, and the identity between one’s name and one’s essential nature ensures that a man with the name of “earl” can never be transformed into a man with the name of “king.”¹² The Norway thus constituted in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is a mythical kingdom indeed.

Hversu Noregr byggðist’s assertion of the identity between name and thing, together with the genealogies documenting the “real” sons of the king of Norway, forms a myth of linguistic and social propriety that stands in absolute opposition to the metaphorical myths of spiritual genealogy that Jón Þórðarson added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in which Icelanders of any degree can be transformed into the “sons” of the king of Norway by coming to him for conversion and staying to serve him as a retainer (Rowe 1998).¹³ The political

⁹ The transparency of language is argued in the first chapter of the *Gylfaginning*; see Clunies Ross (1983 and 1987).

¹⁰ The close relationship between linguistic and social structures is another characteristic of Snorri’s thinking. Clunies Ross (1987:80-96) argues that the system Snorri uses in *Skáldskaparmál* to classify kennings and *heiti* suggests that he considered the hierarchy of society to be implicit in language.

¹¹ Despite its depiction of Nórr as an earlier Haraldr hárfagri, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* does not follow Haraldr’s example here; the first chapter of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* describes how Haraldr created earls to serve as rulers for the districts that had previously been governed by kings (“Sumir [konungar] höfðu eitt fylki til forráða, en sumir nokkuru meir. Alla þá tók Haraldr konungr af lífi... Jarl setti hann í hverju fylki landi at stjórna ok lög at dæma,” Flb. I:39).

¹² A similar socio-linguistic theory is found in the mytho-heroic saga *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, perhaps not surprising in light of the fact that this saga, too, adapts the legend of Fornjótt, providing an account of the descendants of Fornjótt’s son Logi and the origin of Hálogaland that is missing from *Fundinn Noregr* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist* but that is a perfect imitation of their subject-matter. Rowe (1999) explores the ideological implications of *Þorsteins saga*’s use of the legend.

¹³ We may think, for example, of *Hrómundar þáttur halta*, which ends by recounting how

implications and ideological function of each of these myths are contraries as well. Jón's þættir extend the spiritual relationships of Christianity to the political sphere and portray each subject's submission to his king as voluntary and affective. Magnús's legend of a single origin for kings, earls, and chieftains paradoxically erases every distinction but one between them, presenting them as all of royal blood. Both of these ideologies could serve Jón Hákonarson. As an Icelander, he could participate in the metaphoric relationship with the king that Jón Þórðarson proffered, and as a descendant of a *hersir*, he could claim a literal one.¹⁴ Both are relationships that could potentially be turned to his advantage.

Viewed as a response to Jón Þórðarson's textual production, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* thus corresponds to *Fundinn Noregr*, but seems to speak to—indeed, to speak against—the þættir interpolated into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. However, Magnús chose to copy *Hversu Noregr byggðist* into the manuscript just before *Eiríks saga víðförla*, which Jón used to introduce *Óláfs saga*. This placement juxtaposes *Hversu Noregr byggðist* with a foundation myth of quite another sort. As has just been described, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is an adaptation of a text that finds in northern giants the origin of the kingdom of Norway. If the author of that text was not Snorri Sturluson himself, then it was someone who articulated ideas that are “pervasive and important in the *Edda*” (Clunies Ross 1983:55). *Eiríks saga* adapts a different origin legend of Snorri's, the Æsir migration from Troy that is recounted in *Ynglinga saga*. *Eiríks saga* presents a Christianized version of this theme, telling of the *translatio* of Christian culture from Greece to Norway in the earliest days of the monarchy. By a fortuitous coincidence, both of Snorri's dynastic origin legends wound up in Jón Þórðarson's part of *Flateyjarbók* in one form or another, enabling Magnús to identify one legend and set its variant next to the other legend. Magnús may have gotten the idea for this from *Eiríks saga* itself, which grafts the two legends together. Insofar as Eiríkr is the son of Þrándr, his saga invokes the legend of Fornjótr, but insofar as he brings an eastern religion to the north, it rewrites the beginning of *Heimskringla*.

The two origin legends share a number of structural components, some of which take similar forms in the two legends and some of which appear as opposites. The most important of these components are geographical information, a journey that precedes an act of cultural foundation, the presence and loss of a brother during the journey, the role of the hero and his brother as invaders or defenders of another country, the thing of value gained during the

Hrómundr's son leaves Iceland to become the retainer of King Olaf and eventually dies defending him at the Battle of Svöldr. The chapter of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* that follows the þátrr begins by relating the death of Olaf's infant son. The placement of the þátrr within the matrix saga seems to underscore Hallsteinn's filial relationship with King Olaf and suggest that the acquisition of an Icelandic retainer compensates for the loss of the biological child.

¹⁴ Genealogies found in copies of *Vatnshyrna*, another manuscript written for Jón Hákonarson, trace his family back to Einarr Þveræingr and his wife Guðrún, the Icelandic daughter of the Norwegian *hersir* Þorkell Klyppr (Flb. I:viii-ix, Halldórsson 1990b:198-199).

journey, the act of cultural foundation, and the role of women.

Geographical information plays a different role in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* than it does in *Eiríks saga*. In the second chapter of the latter, Eiríkr's geography lesson sets his and Óláfr's story (that is, the story of the conversion of Norway) into the universal context of Christian cosmography. In *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, however, the geographical information is an integral part of the legend itself, which tells how both the districts of Norway and the country as a whole got their names. In its main purpose, then, as the description of the creation of the political landscape, the naming of the country and its districts are not factual, as is the naming of the world and its regions in *Eiríks saga*, but constitutive or performative—the geopolitical entities spring into being as they are named by the narrator. Secondarily, the geographic information in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, limited as it is to Norway and the misty lands to the northeast of it, in effect depicts Norway as a miniature cosmos of its own. The important geopolitical entities are all internal, and as the author has changed Górr's journey to the Baltic and visit to his relatives in Denmark (in *Fundinn Noregr*) to a journey to the Polar Sea, Denmark is written out of the story, just as Rome has been erased from the map of *Eiríks saga* by having the throne of the Emperor in Mikligarðr be the seat of Christianity. Rather than locating Norway at the edge of the world, as the geographical information in *Eiríks saga* does, the geographical information in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* resituates it at the center.

The next components—the journey, the presence and loss of the brother, the role of the hero and his brother as invaders or defenders, the journey's reward, and the act of cultural foundation—can be discussed as a group. Here, too, they take opposite forms in the two texts. Eiríkr, having sworn to find the earthly paradise, stops off in Denmark, acquires a blood-brother, and travels with him to Greece, where they are baptized and serve the king by successfully defending the country from invaders. They then continue east, but the Danish Eiríkr turns back at the sight of the dragon at the entrance to Ódáinsakr, and Eiríkr proceeds without him, entering paradise, conversing with his guardian angel, and eventually returning to Norway with his new religion. Nórr and Górr, however, travel in search of their missing sister. They part ways at once, with Nórr conquering the natives as he heads west from the Keel and Górr apparently travelling by sea. Nórr's victories stop at the water's edge, where he meets up with his brother. Nórr then heads back inland and Górr out to sea again. Nórr conquers all of Norway before coming to Heiðmark, where he finds his sister and accepts the fealty of Hrólfr, the king who abducted her. After marrying Hrólfr's sister, Nórr travels to the seashore for a second time to meet his brother, who has arrived from Dumbshaf after taking possession of all the islands he passed on the way. They divide the kingdom between them, with Nórr getting the mainland from Jötunheim to Álfheim and Górr getting all the islands that lay to the larboard of his ship as he sailed south. The legends thus

differ in every respect: Eiríkr has his brother with him only for the first part of his journey, whereas Nórr and his brother travel separately yet meet periodically and end together; the two Eireks succeed in defending the land they travel to, whereas Nórr and his brother are successful conquerors; Eiríkr finds paradise and returns to the land of his father with a new religion, whereas Nórr finds his sister and returns with a wife to the land he conquered. Eiríkr serves the King of Greece and the King of Heaven and never becomes a king himself, whereas Nórr becomes a king whom other kings serve. He starts off from the ill-defined realms of the east (“Þorri... réð fyrir Gotlandi, Kvenlandi, ok Finnlandi,” Flb. I:22) and arrives in the kingdom of Norway. Eiríkr’s journey, in contrast, is a spiritual one that ends not with the return to Þrándheim but with his corporeal assumption. He starts off from the kingdom of Norway and arrives in the kingdom of Heaven.

Not surprisingly, Eiríkr and Nórr’s acts of cultural foundation are also opposites. Nórr establishes the kingdom of Norway and founds its ruling dynasty, which in turn gives rise to the ranks of the aristocracy, whereas Eiríkr lays the basis for the conversion of Norway and thus may be said to help to found the church. Far from being the father of his country, he is so uninterested in perpetuating the dynasty that he disappears bodily. Indeed, for a narrative that is in many respects modelled on the *fornaldarsögur*, *Eiríks saga* is notable for the absence of any women. Eiríkr’s mother is never mentioned, he has no sister for his blood-brother to marry, and the Greek king has no daughter to distract him from his mission. The contrast between the inescapable proliferation of noble Norwegians in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Eiríks saga*’s refusal of the carnal could not be more striking. *Hversu Noregr byggðist* tells of the establishment of the three axes of (secular) society—the horizontal axis of the political landscape, the vertical axis of the social hierarchy, and the temporal axis of the succession of fathers and sons. Although Eiríkr participates in two filial relationships, being the physical son of Þrándr and the spiritual son of the King of the Greeks, the historical dimension of *Eiríks saga* is marked not by the temporal succession of generations but by the typological pattern of prefiguration and fulfillment. As a fighter and a father, Nórr uses his body to establish a society that starts with him and endures long after he is gone, whereas Eiríkr transcends his body to help establish a Christian society that will not come into being until long after he is gone but that will endure until the end of time. Although his adventures take place early in Norway’s history, their ultimate goal is eschatological.

As with the competing ideologies that inform *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and the þættir added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Eiríks saga* offer their audience competing exempla or models of behavior. Jón Þórðarson describes them both in his afterword to *Eiríks saga*:

The one who wrote this book set this exemplum in it first because he wishes each man to know that there is no true faith except in God, because although heathen men may get

much fame from their deeds of valor, there is a great difference when they end the life of this world, since they have then taken their reward from men's praise for their accomplishments, but they have then the expectation of punishment for their violations and faithlessness when they knew not their Creator. But those who have loved God and had all faith and fought for the freedom of Holy Christianity have nevertheless received greater praise from the wisest men. And this, too, which is greatest, that when they have gone forward through the common door of death, which the flesh may not escape, they have taken their reward, that is to say, the eternal kingdom with Almighty God without end, like this Eiríkr, as was just described.¹⁵

Here again, it looks as though Magnús is attempting to give the lie to Jón, for *Hversu Noregr byggðist* presents a history of Norwegian kings that is as depaganized as it can be. Descendants of Fornjótr, the king and people of Norway are untainted by any connection with the Æsir, and although the Kvens sacrifice to Nórr's father, Nórr does not bring the practice to his new kingdom. Rather than portraying Nórr as a "good pagan," *Hversu Noregr byggðist* avoids the question of his religion entirely. This strategic silence enables his history of conquest, colonization, and the forcible seizure of power to avoid being condemned as "heathen... deeds of valor." That Nórr's behavior is intended to be understood as exemplary is signalled by the categorization of the text as a *dæmi* (like *ævintýr*, an Old Norse term that translates the Latin *exemplum*): "Nú skal segja dæmi til, hversu Noregr byggðist í fyrstu..." (Flb. I: 22). Just as *Hversu Noregr byggðist* displaces Práendr from the position of "first king," so too does it replace Eiríkr (and by implication Olaf Tryggvason) with Nórr (and by implication Haraldr hárfagri) as the model of kingly behavior.

It is tempting to wonder whether Magnús, with his apparent interest in genealogies, was the one who created *Hversu Noregr byggðist* from *Fundinn Noregr* in order to have a foundation myth with which to counter *Eiríks saga*. But in that case, why would he have omitted the vow to find their sister that Nórr and Górr swear at the beginning of their journey in *Fundinn Noregr*? This would have strengthened the parallelism with *Eiríks saga*, in which Eiríkr's journey also begins with a vow to find something. The omission of Górr's travels through the Baltic to Denmark is easier to understand, for to admit the existence of Denmark before the establishment of Norway would be to make a powerful concession, as superior age always confers superior authority. Moreover, Magnús may have had no wish to portray the creation of Norway as being linked in any way—or even as being geographically proximate—to Denmark, so as to avoid any implication that the Danish claims to Norway had

¹⁵ "En því setti sá þetta ævintýr fyrst í þessa bók, er hana skrifaði, at hann vill, at hverr maðr viti þat, at ekki er traust trútt nema af guði, því at þó at heiðnir menn fái frægð mikla af sínum áfreksverkum, þá er þat mikill munr, þá er þeir enda þetta hit stundliga líf, at þeir hafa þá tekit sitt verðkaup af orðlofi manna fyrir sinn frama, en eigu þá ván hegningar fyrir sín brot ok trúleysi, er þeir kunnu eigi skapara sinn. En hinir, sem guði hafa unnat ok þar allt traust haft ok barizt fyrir frelsi heilagrar kristni, hafa þó af hinum vitrustum mönnum fengit meira lof, en þat at auk, at mest er, at þá er þeir hafa fram gengit um almenniligar dyrr dauðans, sem ekki hold má forðast, hafa þeir tekit sitt verðkaup, þat er at skilja eilíft ríki með allsvaldanda guði utan enda sem þessi Eiríkr, sem nú var frá sagt," Flb. I:37-38.

a historical foundation. If this seems too far-fetched, perhaps we may attribute only the first sentence of *Hversu Noregr byggðist* to Magnús. With its echoes of *Hyndluljóð* and the *Ættartölur*—and perhaps its use of *dæmi* to pre-empt Jón's categorization of *Eiríks saga* as an *ævintýr*—this sentence fits *Hversu Noregr byggðist*'s location in the manuscript as though it were made for it. The second sentence, “Fornjótr hét maðr” (Flb. I:22), is very similar to the first sentence of *Fundinn Noregr* (“Fornjótr hefir konungr heitit,” Flb. I: 241) and was probably the “original” first sentence of *Hversu Noregr byggðist*.

As well as providing additional royal Norwegian genealogies, the *Ættartölur* continue the exploration of some of the themes present in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*. The euhemerization of Óðinn in two of Haraldr's genealogies more or less supports the depaganization of the Norwegian dynasty, although of course the regnal list, with its references to St. Olaf, eventually makes it difficult to escape the historical fact that the country was originally pagan.¹⁶ Similarly, the synopsis of the legend of Hálfðan gamli, which Magnús borrowed from *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 80), does not mention Óðinn. “And when [Hálfðan] became king, he held a great sacrifice at midwinter and asked to live for three hundred years... But he was told that he would live no more than one lifetime, but for three hundred years no man of low degree would be in his family, and no woman.”¹⁷ This excerpt also illustrates the theory of language in which names represent the essential qualities of the things they name. Closely following Snorri, Magnús's version reads, “These nine [i.e., the first nine sons of Hálfðan and Álfný Eymundardóttir] became so renowned that their names have been treated in all records as honorific titles, equivalent to the name of king.”¹⁸

The exclusion of women from Hálfðan's descendants is a curious anticipation of the absence of women from *Eiríks saga*. At first glance, it also recalls the abduction of Góa, which is the motivation for Nórr and Górr's travels of conquest. However, the role of women in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is quite different from both that in the legend of Hálfðan and that in *Eiríks saga*. Insofar as Góa has been abducted to be the wife of a king and her loss is compensated for by the king's sister, who becomes Nórr's wife, *Hversu Noregr*

¹⁶ *Ættartala Haralds frá Óðni* (Flb. I:27) says that Óðinn Ásakonungr was the grandson of King Burri, who ruled over Tyrkland. *Ætt Haralds frá Adam* (Flb. I:28) names “Tror, whom we call Þórr” as the grandson of Priam of Troy. For a study of the genealogies that trace human descent from the pagan gods, see Faulkes (1978-1979).

¹⁷ “Ok þá er [Hálfðan] tók konungdóm, gerði hann blót mikit at miðjum vetri ok blótaði til þess, at hann skyldi mega lifa þrjú hundruð vetra. En fréttin sagði honum svá, at hann mundi lifa ekki meir en einn mannsaldr, en þat mundi vera þrjú hundruð vetra, at engi mundi ótiginn maðr í hans ætt ok engi kona,” Flb. I:25.

¹⁸ “Hét einn Þengill, er kallaðr var mannaþengill, Ræsir, Gramr, Gylfi, Hilmir, Jöfurr, Tiggri, Skyli ok Harri. Þessir nú, er sagt, at allir væri jafngamlir ok urðu svá ágætir, at í öllum fræðrum eru þeirra nöfn höfð fyrir tignarnöfn ok konunganöfn,” Flb. I:25. Faulkes (1987:146-147) translates these names as follows: *þengill* means “prince,” *ræsir* means “impeller, ruler,” *gramr* means “fierce one,” *hilmir* means “helmet,” *jöfurr* means “prince,” *tiggri* means “noble,” *skyli* (*skuli*) means “protector,” and *harri* (*herra*) means “lord.”

byggðist is describing a traditional exogamous exchange of women between different families. Moreover, women are found elsewhere in Nórr's family; his father has sisters, and he himself numbers several women among his descendants. The inclusion of *Skáldskaparmál*'s account of Hálfðan is probably due to his place in the genealogies, rather than to any overt desire to provide a further response to *Eiríks saga*. However, the proximity of the two texts encourages comparison. A typological explanation might be that the legend of Hálfðan provides the "pre-Christian" version of the Christian exclusion seen in *Eiríks saga*, especially as the sacrifice is not made to any heathen deity. However, as Magnús prefers to structure his histories in terms of genealogy rather than typology, it may be more appropriate to consider the issue as one of dynastic succession, so that whereas in *Eiríks saga*, the absence of women is a symptom of Christian theology, in the legend of Hálfðan it is a providential solution to a political problem. I say "political," because this legend gains an interesting resonance in the context of the events that may have led to Magnús's being asked to work on *Flateyjarbók* in the first place. Ólafur Halldórsson (1990a:430-431) suggests that the manuscript was originally intended as a gift for the current king of Norway, Olaf Hákonarson, who had ascended to the throne as an eleven-year-old boy when his father Hákon VI Magnússon died in 1380. Unfortunately, Olaf died in 1387, the very year that work on the manuscript began, and with him the Norwegian royal dynasty came to an end. His mother Margareta, daughter of King Valdemar of Denmark, had been ruling Norway in her son's name, and now she became the ruler of Norway in her own right. Margareta had no claim on the Norwegian throne under the official law of succession, but the only other candidate was Duke Albrecht of Mecklinburg, whose mother's mother was the daughter of Hákon V of Norway, and Margareta was able to persuade the Norwegian Riksråd to disqualify him because of his wars against Magnús and Hákon. The death of young Olaf and Margareta's consolidation of power must have been a sad blow to the Icelanders, who had no love for the Danes and who now saw the center of government move even further from them than before. There was no point in giving a manuscript glorifying the reigns of the first two Norwegian Olafs to Margareta, and so Jón Þórðarson left the project. Evidently Jón Hákonarson later decided to keep the manuscript for himself and had Magnús Þórhallsson expand it with two more kings' sagas. As Magnús copied the legend of Hálfðan into the manuscript, he may have wished that the Norwegian dynasty had been granted six hundred years' worth of noble male descendants instead of only three.

Just as Haraldr hárfagri is the ending point for the genealogies tracing his ancestry from Höðr, Álfr hinn gamli, Óðinn, Adam, and the rest, so is he also the starting point for the regnal list, which lists his descendants (not all of whom were kings) down to Olaf Hákonarson in 1387. The list then proceeds to give the kings of Norway in reverse order from Olaf Hákonarson back to Haraldr.

The lists of Haraldr's descendants and the kings of Norway reveal some of Magnús's personal biases. He does not draw any attention to Óláfr Tryggvason, whose name appears without comment between Hákon jarl and Hákon blótjarl hinn ríki. However, Magnús calls the Danish Sveinn Alfífuson, whom Knútr installed as king after the defeat of St. Olaf, *óforsynjukonungr* ("a king not to be endured"). And to King Magnús Eiríksson, whom St. Birgitta knew as having the nickname *smekki* ("the ingratiating" or "the caressing prince") and whom she eventually condemned in the strongest terms, he gives the cognomen *góði* ("the good").¹⁹ Finally, we may note that Margareta's ascent to the throne as ruler in her own right does not qualify her to be listed among the kings of Norway. Although this list was written down during her reign, Magnús excludes her from it, recapitulating Hálfðan's genealogy and—in a manuscript with hundreds of pages devoted to the past rulers of Norway—relegating the information about the current sovereign to a single sentence.

Magnús's preference for chronicle, annal, and genealogy over Jón's typological interpretation of history is consonant with the theory of language that he borrows from Snorri, in which words transparently reveal the essential natures of their referents. His use of literal language and "straight" representation stands in contrast to Jón's interlaced texts, deferred meaning, and metaphorical use of language, which work by indirection and a displacement that is at once literary, linguistic, and familial. Literary displacement occurs when Jón's þættir employ the fantastic and entertaining for spiritual purposes, a risky practice that makes narratives vulnerable to being willfully misread, with audiences listening to them for their entertainment value alone and ignoring their ethical content. Linguistic displacement occurs when the þættir recount the process by which two unrelated men metaphorically become "father" and "son," and familial displacement occurs when Icelandic sons are substituted for Norwegian princes. This substitution interrupts both lineages when Óláfr Tryggvason is defeated at Svöldr, and the failure of the proper royal succession ensures that extending typological relationships into the past is the only way in which writing can continue. Thus *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* may be (metaphorically) said to engender *Eiríks saga víðförla*, a story of a royal Norwegian who prefigures Óláfr, just as Óláfr Tryggvason prefigures St. Olaf. Magnús escapes these dangers by his insistence on the mimetic nature of language and is thus able to write "forwards" history, updating the Icelandic church annals with current events and the royal genealogies with the last of the Norwegian kings.

Magnús's avoidance of metaphor and his insistence on proper linguistic and familial relations may be read as symptoms of an anxiety aroused by the ending of the Norwegian royal dynasty. This anxiety does not appear to be felt by

¹⁹ This is apparently derived from the annal; Flateyjarannáll is the only annal that adds to the notice of King Magnús's death in 1375 "ok kalla menn hann helgan" (Storm 1888:411).

Magnús himself, who seems to have identified most strongly with the historians of Þingeyrarklaustur rather than having any sort of personal attachment to the monarchy. Magnús instead seems to have been provoked by what he found in the first part of *Flateyjarbók*. However, his strong answer to Jón Þórðarson foregrounds questions of dynastic failure and female rule that were unescapable for Icelanders involved in the power plays and politics of the royal appointees controlling their country. The gesture of recuperation of origins and “real” genealogy that is the second generation of *Flateyjarbók* would thus seem to be evoked by feelings of loss on the part of Jón Hákonarson, whose grandfather, Gizurr galli, was a retainer of Hákon V. Not only does this layer of the manuscript memorialize the great Norwegian kings of more recent times, but it provides them with an origin legend that looks to neither European classical historiography nor Christian typology for its authorization. Such cultural independence is all the more unusual for its defiance of late-fourteenth-century realities. While Magnús was imagining a Norwegian monarchy gloriously independent from the rest of Scandinavia and the church, Margareta was forging Norway, Denmark, and Sweden into the Kalmar Union and promoting the canonization of her foster-mother’s mother, Birgitta of Vadstena.

References

- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1983. “Snorri Sturluson’s use of the Norse origin-legend of the sons of Fornjótr in his *Edda*.” *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 98:47-66.
- . 1987. *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson’s “ars poetica” and medieval theories of language*. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, vol. 4. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Faulkes, Anthony. 1978-1979. “Descent from the gods.” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11:92-125.
- , ed. and trans. 1987. *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*. London: Everyman.
- Flb., see Nordal.
- Guðmundsson, Finnbogi. ed. 1965. *Orkneyinga saga, Legenda de Sancto Magno, Magnúss saga skemmri, Magnúss saga lengri, Helga þáttir ok Úlfs*. Íslenzka fornrit, vol. 34. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur. 1990a. “Af uppruna *Flateyjarbókar*.” In *Grettisfærsla: Safn ritgerða eftir Ólaf Halldórsson, gefið út á sjötugsafmæli hans, 18. Apríl 1990*, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Stefán Karlsson, and Sverrir Tómasson. Rit 38. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Pp. 427-431.
- . 1990b. “Á afmæli *Flateyjarbókar*.” In *Grettisfærsla: Safn ritgerða eftir Ólaf Halldórsson, gefið út á sjötugsafmæli hans, 18. Apríl 1990*, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Stefán Karlsson, and Sverrir Tómasson. Rit 38. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Pp. 196-214.
- Jónsson, Guðný, ed. 1949. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Nafnaþulur og Skáldatal*. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.
- Nordal, Sigurður, et als., eds. 1944-45. *Flateyjarbók*. 4 vols. Akranes: Flateyjarútgáfan.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman. 1998. “Cultural Paternity in the *Flateyjarbók Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.” *Alvíssmál* 8:3-28.
- . 1999. “Absent Mothers / Abducted Princesses / Ensorcelled Sisters: Monarchist Ideology in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*.” In *Cold Counsel: The Women of Old Norse Literature and Myth*, ed. Karen Swenson and Sarah M. Anderson. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Storm, Gustav, ed. 1888. *Islandske annaler indtil 1578*. Christiania: Det norske historiske kildekriftfond.

Myter som kilder til ritualer - teoretiske og praktiske implikationer

Jens Peter Schjødt

Institut for Religionsvidenskab, Aarhus Universitet

I årtierne omkring år 1900 var den mest indflydelsesrige religionshistoriske skoledannelse den såkaldte *Myth and Ritual school*. Med Jane Harrison i spidsen udviklede der sig navnlig i Cambridge en gruppering af forskere (bl.a. A.B. Cook, F. Cornford og G. Murray), der primært arbejdede med klassisk græsk religion. Jane Harrison mente, at hovedparten af de myter, vi finder i den klassiske litteratur var bearbejdnings af gamle rituelle temaer, hovedsageligt ritualer, der drejede sig om død og genfødsel i forbindelse med naturens årlige regeneration. Hun var således influeret af J.G. Frazer, der i sit imponerende værk *The Golden Bough* forsøgte at vise, at dette tema var kernen i de fleste ritualer (og myter) over hele verden. Dette syn på, hvad ritualer “drejede sig om”, og synspunktet, at der altid er en forbindelse mellem myte og ritual, som kan siges at være minimumsdefinitionen på myte-ritual-teorien, blev dominerende i forskningen inden for græsk og nærorientalsk religion, sådan som det også blev mere generelt i de følgende års teorier om “primitiv”