

The Story of Håkon Håkonsson and His Descent from the Earliest Norwegian Kings

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HISTORY'S BEGINNINGS

Håkon Håkonsson was tenth in a line of male heirs beginning with Harald Harfågre (Fair Hair), the first king of a united Norway. This line of male heirs ended with Håkon V Magnusson's death in 1319, which led to Norway's absorption into Sweden under Magnus Eriksson. For Norway and Europe this 500-year period was a time of Viking conquest, of dramatic cultural and religious change, of economic expansion and exploration, and, for the state and monarchy, one of gradual growth in power, legitimacy, and permanence. At the beginning of the tale, Norwegian kings were little more than charismatic adventurers seeking blood and booty. Toward its end they were leaders, lawgivers, and aristocrats of the highest order.

Snorri Surlisson, an Icelandic chronicler and author of the *Heimskringla* saga, began his account with Harald Harfågre, a Norwegian king of the 800s who may have been the first to unite the territory under one rule. But the sagas, which provide coverage up to the 1200s, were not derived from written records. Furthermore, they appear to contain material designed to legitimize the then-serving monarchy, which would have had a keen interest in

proving its descent. The time periods and events the sagas describe are dominated by disputes over possession of the throne. The main form of evidence used to establish descent in the sagas, aside from common knowledge, was the ritual ordeal. In this context, there is no reason to accept the sagas as more than myth. One modern author has written, with some exaggeration, that the only true facts a reader can take from the sagas are “that the book is printed by the Central Printing Company, Oslo, and that any reprint of the illustrations is illegal.”

Accurate or not, the sagas were accepted as a leading mythological basis for the contemporary monarchy, much as Alexander had variously claimed descent from Heracles or Malkert, depending on the audience. Given that Håkon Håkonsson’s lineage was all but endorsed by the *Heimskringla*, it seems this is the history the king would have wanted his contemporaries and descendants to hear.

SIGURD SYR TO HARALD THE SEVERE

The story of Håkon’s descent begins with Sigurd Syr på Ringerika. According to the *Heimskringla*, Sigurd Syr was a grandson of Harald Harfågre through his fifth wife, Åshrid of Ringerika. One commentator suggests that the story of Sigurd Syr’s descent from Harald is accurate, since Sigurd was made chief of Ringerika. The saga also states that Harald bequeathed to his descendants by Åshrid the valley of Gudbrandsdal and the Hedmark—the commentator suggests these points were inserted for propaganda purposes.

Sigurd Syr married Åsta Gudbrundsdotter, mother of St. Olav, the Norwegian king most credited with bringing Christianity to Norway. While Norway was unified in theory at this time, in practice it was ruled by multiple kings, who often spent their time campaigning abroad.

Sigurd's son, Harald, began his career campaigning in the Viking armies of St. Olav, who in addition to being an inveterate promoter of Christianity was an able warrior who had allied himself with the Danish King Canute and fought the Saxons in England. Harald was wounded in the very battle in which Olav lost his own life, and undoubtedly Harald himself was convinced that kings were made for glory on the battlefield.

After St. Olav's death, Harald's thirst for adventure led him to Constantinople, where he allied himself with the Byzantines who were fighting adversaries on a wide variety of fronts throughout the Mediterranean. Queen Zoe and King Michael Catalactus first saw in Harald an excellent expedient for combating piracy, which had overtaken the Aegean. Soon, however, Harald was off to the wars in Sicily, where the sagas attribute to his leadership a string of military conquests whose romantic details seem exaggerated at the very least.

In one of his victories, Harald encountered a fortress whose walls could not be taken by force. When Harald noticed that pigeons made their nests in its thatched roof, he suggested capturing the birds and then dangling burning pitch from their legs with string. The terrified pigeons carried the fire to the castle, and the ensuing conflagration forced Harald's desperate enemies to sue for peace.

In a second escapade, Harald faced yet another impregnable castle. Harald called off siege operations and retired early to his tent complaining of illness. Soon word was put about that he had died, and the Norwegians humbly sought permission to hold a funeral inside the castle grounds before departing. The castle's lords—little abiding famous Greek legends—agreed. Needless to say, none of the mourners was the least surprised when Harald suddenly vaulted from his coffin to rejoin the ranks of the living. On cue, the intruders opened the gates, and the Norwegian troops poured in. Another castle, another victory for the young prince.

Not satisfied with Sicily, Harald moved on to Jerusalem, where he fought robbers and bandits and reestablished public order in the holy lands, then still under Byzantine control. Exhausted from years of fighting, at last Harald returned to Constantinople and gave notice to his overlords that he and his troops would shortly depart for Norway. Queen Zoe would not hear of it, and promptly ordered his arrest. Foolish impetuosity! Harald lost no time in again displaying his ingenuity, escaping his captors with the help of a noble lady. Rejoining his men, he ordered them to their boats in the Golden Horn. One obstacle yet remained: the heavy chain blocking the harbor entrance. Harald directed his men to overload the sterns of his flat-bottomed boats and then row as quickly as possible for the chain. As the bow of his own boat came over the chain, Harald and his men rushed to the front, tipping the craft neatly into the waters on the other side. The other boats

did the same, with only one craft lost after it split in two on the chain. The Norwegians were on their way.

Norway was at that time ruled by Magnus the Good, who had taken over following the reign of St. Olav. When Harald arrived in 1045—his boats laden with the booty of the East, his ranks swelled with troops gained through an alliance with King Svein of Denmark—Magnus saw what was good for him and granted Harald and his men rule over half the kingdom. Harald was not satisfied, and quarreled with Magnus over the agreement. After all, said Harald, St. Olav had united Norway and crushed his opposition at the expense of numerous petty nobles—the “small kings”—including Harald’s own father, Sigurd Syr. Yet despite the hostility between the two men, the peace was not broken, and the death of Magnus brought Harald control over the whole kingdom without a fight.

Harald quickly got down to business. He established Oslo as a great commercial and military center, levied troops, and made plans for war. His enemies knew of his preparations: “The Danes were everywhere in fear, for the dread foray every year.” Soon Harald was leading his men south, using all his old stratagems and ferocity to compel the Danes to do his bidding. Yet his course was not without setbacks. Once, after the Danes surprised his fleet in a fog, defeat seemed imminent. Harald ordered his men to throw their booty and provisions overboard for the Danes to plunder.

Svein drove his foes from Jutland’s coast,
The Norsemen’s ships would have been lost,

But Harald all his vessels saves,
Throwing his booty on the waves.
The Jutlanders saw, as he threw,
Their own goods floating in their view;
His lighten'd ships fly o'er the main
While they pick up their own again.

His enemies distracted, the Norwegians again made good their flight.

Harald Hadråde's main contribution to world history centers on his ill-fated expedition to England in 1066. This invasion is recounted both in the Icelandic sagas and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It began with the accession of Harold Godwinsson to the throne of England, which provoked both William of Normandy and Harold's own brother, Tostig, to seek his overthrow. Tostig fled England and sought to raise forces abroad. His made his first effort in Denmark, where he contacted some of his royal relations and suggested an expedition to conquer England for himself, with the Danes to be recompensed with control over the old Danelaw region. The Danes refused—they were sufficiently occupied holding off the Norwegians and declined to embark on foolish errands of foreign conquest. So Tostig, his enthusiasm undimmed, continued on to Norway, where he ultimately convinced Harald Hadråde that England was ripe for revolt and would welcome foreign influence.

Before the Norwegians set sail, ominous signs began to worry his men. Perhaps Halley's Comet was seen as one such portent. When the army reached England, Tostig's

total lack of popular support became clear. Indeed, whatever affinity the English may have had for Tostig was dispelled by his alliance with the brutal Norwegians. Negotiations for the surrender of York failed, and the invaders were forced to take the town by force. After a siege and fight, the Norwegians won York's surrender by promising to spare the lives of its nobility in exchange for permission to take hostages to guarantee the town's loyalty. Soon after, the invaders received intelligence that Harold Godwinsson's armies were on the march.

When the two armies met at Stamford Bridge in September, more bad omens followed, including Harald Hadråde's fall from his own horse within sight of the English king. Initially the battle was fought to a draw, at which point Harold Godwinsson offered to allow the Norwegians to retreat to York unmolested—allowing Hadråde to continue his campaign another day. The Norwegians rashly refused the terms. Hadråde's forces were exhausted, and their ensuing defeat was decisive. According to the sagas, Hadråde himself was killed with an arrow through his neck—the man whose favorite motto in life was *land-ravager* had finally met his just end. The perfidious Tostig was also left dead on the field. As for the battle of Stamford Bridge, it marked the end of the Viking era. Harald Hadråde's English campaign was the last serious Norwegian attempt to conquer England. Stamford Bridge also bottled up Godwinsson's forces while William of Normandy was landing unopposed on the English shores. When Harold's army at last met William's at Hastings in the south, his forces were battle-weary and

depleted from days of forced marches. The Norman Conquest was a pushover.

OLAV KYRRE TO MAGNUS BERRFØT

With the death of Harald Hadråde, the throne passed to his son Olav, who ordered an immediate return to Norway. The decision was a foregone conclusion under the circumstances. It is said, though, that the battle had a profound effect on Olav, who became known as Olav Kyrre (the Peaceful). Yet the sagas recount that when King Knute of Denmark suggested a joint expedition and invasion of England, Olav offered his best troops, declining only to lead the force. The army duly assembled under Knute, but a mutiny among the Danes scotched the plan.

Olav's reign was one of economic prosperity and large-scale building projects. Olav initiated construction on the Nidaros cathedral in Trondheim, as well as other "St. Olav churches" around the country. The saga relates that the population of Norway grew by 50 percent during this time, and more areas came under cultivation while existing lands grew in value. German traders were permitted to establish permanent residence in major towns, and trade with Europe grew steadily. Style and manners changed as well. Casting off the ascetic habits of the Viking era, Norwegians began wearing finer garments and lavish ornamentation. This included "pointed" shoes, a stylish adoption from European courts that was regarded as a scandalous innovation by the more conservative classes.

As trade, prosperity, and religion increased, the crown was strengthened as well. Naturally, some of Olav's subjects were dissatisfied at the changes. One point of contention was the lavish trappings of Olav's royal court. Some nobles were quick to complain that the king had more appointees than the law allowed. Olav answered by saying that his habits and predilections, far from being excessive, had set a good example for the country and helped bring Norway the prosperity it now enjoyed.

Olav's peaceful rule ended with his natural death in 1093. In stark contrast with his father, King Magnus Berrföt was mainly interested in making war on his neighbors. Once, when his courtiers complained of his endless levies of troops, he replied: "Kings are made for honor, not long rule." Yet Magnus was hardly a great warrior. He was stout, probably fat, and he was dazzled by foreign customs. After one raiding campaign in Scotland, Magnus adopted the practice of wearing a kilt with no shoes—hence his derogatory appellation, Berrföt.

The *Heimskringla* saga suggests Magnus's campaigns brought little glory to Norway. In a running border conflict with Sweden, Magnus invaded his neighbor without pretext, only to be compelled to withdraw by a superior Swedish force. Bloodied but unbowed, Magnus returned the next year for a surprise raid. Not only was his enemy wise to his tactics, but the Swedish troops easily recognized the person of the king among his men, and began to target the stout, yellow-haired, red-cloaked warrior. Magnus was only saved by the actions of a trusted duke, who rode

madly off with the king's red cloak, an artful ruse. With the enemy thus hoodwinked, Magnus took flight yet again.

Unperturbed, Magnus affected a treaty with Inge, the Swedish king, thus freeing himself for further expeditions to Wales, Scotland, Holland, Heligoland, the Hebrides, and Ireland. After a series of fierce battles with the English king, Magnus subdued most of Wales, albeit temporarily, before setting sail for newer objects of conquest. His reign ended appropriately in a lost battle on foreign soil—Northern Ireland. Outnumbered by superior enemy forces, Magnus signaled a retreat, only to find his own escape route cut off by an unseen bog. When the Norwegian troops realized his blunder, they panicked and fled in every direction. Magnus was cut down by an Irishman, and was left to die alone on the field.

SIGURD THE CRUSADER AND CIVIL WAR

Magnus had three sons: Olav, Øystein, and Sigurd, all of whom became king. According to the sagas, at this time Norway was inundated by tales of wealth and fame won through crusades. More enticing than the wealth were the stories of vast luxury and exotic lifestyles enjoyed by the people of the East. Groups of young men begged the kings to support and lead a crusader army to Jerusalem and its bounty. Yielding to adventure, Sigurd agreed, leaving his brothers to rule in his stead. He set sail for Jerusalem via the straits of Gibraltar. Crusader armies were easily distracted by the conflicts they encountered along the way, however, and Sigurd soon found his army embroiled in the

fight against Moorish Spain. The Norwegians subdued large swaths of Iberia, and brutally sacked Lisbon.

After a year fighting in Spain, Sigurd's fleet sailed into the Mediterranean—the first Norwegian fleet to do so—and on to Jerusalem, which was in Christian hands. King Baldwin made Sigurd his own guest, and gifted to Norway a piece of the true cross as a gesture of hospitality. After participating in battles on the crusader front, Sigurd and his men made their way to Byzantium, again allowing for a lengthy stay. When the troops were fêted by the local population, the proud Sigurd ordered his men to hold their heads high and not betray their origins by appearing to notice the lavish trappings of the city and its inhabitants. From there, Sigurd made his way home overland through Austria, Poland, and Russia.

No doubt Sigurd's epic made him the most popular of the brother-kings, but unfortunately he was unable to keep himself together. Somewhere between the blood and treasures of the East his mind had become unhinged, and one day while bathing alone he was overcome by a fit of laughter. His servants subdued him with effort. For the next decade Sigurd's rule was marked by occasional bouts of insanity. The sagas also note that his relations with the brothers deteriorated. Once, Sigurd became enraged at Øystein over a perceived insult to his servants. The matter was submitted to a *ting* for arbitration, and after three appeals the matter was decided in favor of Øystein. A frustrated Sigurd raged at the legal technicalities of the case, saying that minutia could not prevent a king from regaining his honor—through civil war. Finally the

supposedly-besmirched servant himself calmed the king and convinced him the matter had been blown out of proportion.

In the later years of Sigurd's rule, after Øystein and Olav had died, a fourth son of Magnus Berrföt arrived on the scene: Harald Gille. Harald had spent his youth in the Hebrides, and it is clear that many thought him a poor pretender. Nevertheless, Harald passed an excruciating ordeal—he supposedly walked across several ploughshares of red-hot iron without burning his feet—and was accepted by Sigurd as a legitimate heir.

Naturally, Sigurd's own son, Magnus, was hardly pleased at this development. A rivalry arose, with Magnus taking every opportunity to denigrate Harald and his foreign manners. Harald seems to have been none too modest either. In one colorful episode, Harald boasted that in the Hebrides people could run faster than elsewhere, swifter even than any animal. Taking the bait, Magnus immediately suggested a wager. Harald coyly demurred. Perhaps, Harald admitted, what he had seen only applied in the Hebrides. Magnus was adamant. When the race was run, Harald beat the horseback Magnus by a nose. The result was repeated when Magnus demanded a handicap. And when a further test was run, Harald beat Magnus so handily that he lay on the ground while waiting for his adversary to catch up.

King Sigurd was not amused at his son's antics, and took him to task: "Thou callest Harald useless; but I think thou art a great fool, and knowest nothing of the customs of foreign people. Dost thou not know that men in other countries exercise themselves in other feats than in filling

themselves with ale, and making themselves mad, and so unfit for everything that they scarcely know each other?”

Conflict was inevitable. As the sagas relate: “[Magnus] was a great drinker, greedy of money, hard, and obstinate. Harald Gille, on the other hand, was very pleasing in intercourse, gay, and full of mirth; and so generous that he spared in nothing for the sake of his friends.” Upon Sigurd’s death, in 1130 the kingdom was divided, but a civil war immediately broke out. The result was great loss of life and property on all sides. After five years of warfare, Harald’s followers captured Magnus, tortured and mutilated him, and gouged out his eyes. Broken and close to death, Magnus entered a monastery. Yet Harald’s future was hardly undisputed. In 1135 a young man named Sigurd Slembe arrived in Norway identifying himself as Magnus’s son. Magnus promptly offered his support. In 1136 Slembe traveled to Bergen to negotiate with Harald Gille, and demanded to share the throne. Harald dithered, offering no decision, and instead suggested arbitration. That night, Slembe’s men broke into the royal chamber and murdered Harald. The civil war was immediately renewed, and lasted another two years. At its height, Oslo was sacked and burned by Sigurd Slembe’s marauding army. The rebellion was finally crushed by Inge, the eldest son of Harald Gille.

THE CIVIL WAR’S SECOND GENERATION

Following the death of Magnus and Sigurd Slembe, the dual monarchy of Harald Gille’s two sons (Inge and Sigurd) was peaceful. The peace even survived the arrival from England of Øystein, a third brother, who was

promptly given his own slice of the kingdom. This unwieldy system broke down in 1155, when a brawl broke out between the followers of Øystein and Sigurd. A conference was held to resolve the conflict, but the two brothers could only agree that the eldest brother, King Inge, should be forced into retirement.

Hearing that his half-brothers were cutting him out, Inge and his aggressive adviser Gregorius Dagson marched on Bergen, the seat of King Sigurd. Again, a *ting* was called, but the meeting devolved into a shouting match between Sigurd, who pleaded innocent of usurpation, and Gregorius, who urged his benefactor Inge to fight rather than accept a cash settlement and continued joint rule. Inge left the meeting and prepared for war. Sigurd, meanwhile, was half-convinced his brother would not attack, and retreated to the house of a noble lady, where he began to drink heavily. That evening the house was assaulted by Gregorius Dagson's men, who cut down neighboring buildings and bribed Sigurd's followers to defect. Øystein had a fleet offshore, and may have wanted to come to Sigurd's aid, but he sailed off after learning of Sigurd's defeat and death.

A two-year peace followed, during which time Øystein and Inge conspired against each other continually. Øystein sent a raiding force north to burn Gregorius Dagson's house and ravage his property, but Gregorius himself escaped injury and again counseled Inge to declare war. A third conference was called, and again a cash settlement offered to Inge—Øystein would pay 12 gold coins for the damage to Gregorius Dagson's property. For once Inge

accepted, but the terms led immediately to dispute. In 1157 Inge and Gregorius sent a fleet of ships and men to attack Øystein, whose forces were known to be weak and disloyal. Øystein's closest advisers were split, and one refused to fight at all, suggesting instead that Øystein "send his chests of gold" to battle instead of men. As Inge and Gregorius's superior force bore down on Øystein, his last supporters disappeared into the forests. Gregorius's men were sent in pursuit. One of them, Simon Skakke, discovered Øystein hiding behind a willow bush, and the king was at last compelled to surrender. But Øystein dithered over his execution. He requested to undergo an ordeal, which was refused, and asked for a mass, which was granted. Finally, Simon ordered a lackey to cut Øystein down, saying: "He has crawled upon the ground for too long."

In life, Øystein seems to have had few allies, but after his death he was considered a saint. Legend holds that a fountain sprang forth from where his blood covered the ground, and a shrine was constructed on the site.

With Øystein's death the flames of war rose higher. Supporters of Øystein and Sigurd regrouped and declared their loyalty to Håkon, Sigurd's ten-year-old son by Tora, a commoner Sigurd had met briefly while traveling. This new army took to the field largely for booty. The troops burned and pillaged their way across the land, fleeing whenever King Inge's forces approached. Håkon, the child claimant, put out that he asked only to rule a third of the kingdom as his father had. It was probably sheer propaganda, for this was war to the knife.

After four years of looting, Inge and Håkon finally confronted each other in a naval battle. Gregorius and Inge both lost their lives, and Håkon became known as Herdebreid (broad-shouldered). Yet the war continued. Inge's remaining followers, urged on by his widow, fought on. Håkon met his end only a year later, at age 15.

SVERRE'S DYNASTY

Various partisans followed, and still the war went on. The rule of the kingdom ultimately descended upon Sverre, ostensibly son of Gunhild and King Sigurd and founder of a new dynasty. Sverre's claim to the throne was dubious. Probably the son of a comb-maker, Sverre hailed from the Faroe Islands. Only after he had become a bishop did his mother announce that he had royal blood, an implausible claim given Sverre's age. Probably because of their doubts, the church opposed Sverre's election. After Sverre's excommunication by the pope in 1177, the civil war renewed. Papal opposition aside, Sverre's forces prevailed in the seven-year struggle. Apparently, all sides were finally exhausted, for fifty years of peace ensued.

From this point on, Norway had but one ruler, a system that was both cause and consequence of peaceful and undisputed succession.

During this period construction on many of Norway's great churches began. The church also took a more important role in legitimizing state power through the hailing of kings. Prior to around 1200, Norway's kings had hardly been true sovereigns, but rather first (or sometimes second and third) among nobles. They were accorded

privilege of presiding over assemblies when present, but power was decentralized and local chiefs held greater immediate power than kings. The chief form of assembly, the *ting*, was a freewheeling parliament of nobles, which, according to some scholars and Snorri's account, met on sandbars or piers near Bergen and Norway's other major cities. Laws gradually gained the edge over custom and pragmatism. Norse legend speaks of people haunted by supernatural ghosts who obtain peace by bringing a lawsuit against their tormentors. The word "law" itself derives from the regulations laid down by the early *tings*.

HÅKON HÅKONSSON'S LONG PEACE

Håkon Håkonsson presided over the longest period of peace and independence Norway had ever known, and it was Norway's last long period of peace and independence until the 19th century. Håkon's early years were auspicious. Legend holds that as a young prince Håkon was spirited away from would-be usurpers by birchmen, itinerant hunters who wore birch around their legs for protection from the elements. The birchmen traveled on skis, a means of transportation used in Norway for perhaps thousands of years. The legend grew in significance in the late 1800s when skiing was first popularized in Norway as a form of recreation. Monuments to the prince's ski-born rescuers can be found at ski areas around Norway today, and the legend has often been a part of Olympic literature and promotion.

Until Håkon was 13, Norway was ruled by Regent Skule, Håkon's half-brother. In 1217 the Øyrating named Håkon king, after a contested election. Dispute followed:

On the day the Øyrating was to be held, a throng of yeomen from the countryside came into the town, as they were wont to do when a king was to be chosen. The people were assembled out on the sandbanks together with the trumpeters, as was the custom. Then they sent men in to the chapter priests to bring out the Shrine of St. Olav. But when the men came to Christ Church, it was locked, and the clerk said that the priests would excommunicate any man who broke into the church and took out the shrine. When this was reported to the assembly, they took counsel and proclaimed Håkon king according to lawful practice, and the man who did this was named Skjerbald, and was from the Gauldalen valley. Håkon was then accorded land and free subjects, and all the men of Trøndelad pledged him fealty and service as fully as if he had sworn his oaths to them and they to him. So ended the assembly.

Apparently the church had still not accepted Håkon's election—possibly over lingering doubts on the legitimacy of his line—and wished to block him by withholding the rite of coronation.

In 1239 Skule Bårdsson took up arms against Håkon and had himself hailed king at a specially convened Øyrating. The revolt was swiftly put down by Håkon's forces. Shortly thereafter, Håkon had his own son Magnus hailed as lawful successor, and new laws of succession were passed to reduce the threat of usurpation.

Håkon's rule ended unhappily after the aging king embarked on an unwise expedition to Scotland, where the

locals had been raiding Norwegian possessions. When his 200 ships and 15,000 men reached Scotland, they were eager to plunder, and fell prey to the deceptions of their enemies. Alexander Stewart, the founder of the kingdom of Scotland, enticed Håkon to attack in the Firth of Clyde, which is beset by gales in the fall. On September 30 the gale hit, destroying part of Håkon's fleet. The rest was defeated in a four-day running battle with the Scots. At last, the king requested a truce and retired to Kirkwell in the Orkney Islands. Badly discouraged, he grew ill.

During his sickness, he ordered the Bible and Latin authors to be read to him. But finding his spirits were too much fatigued by reflecting on what he had heard, he desired Norwegian books might be read to him night and day: first the lives of saints; and, when they were ended, he made his attendants read the chronicles of our Kings from Halfdan the Black, and so of all the Norwegian monarchs in succession, one after the other.

The King still found his disorder increasing. He therefore took into consideration the pay to be given to his troops, and commanded that a mark of fine silver should be given to each courtier, and half a mark to each of the masters of the lights, chamberlains, and other attendants on his person. He ordered all the silver plate belonging to his table to be weighed, and to be distributed if his standard silver fell short. At this time also letters were written to Prince Magnus concerning the government of the nation, and some things which the King wanted to have settled respecting the army.

King Haakon received extreme unction in the night before the festival of St Lucy. Thorgils Bishop of

Stavanger, Gilbert Bishop of Hamar, Henry Bishop of Orkney, Abbot Thorleif, and many other learned men were present; and before the unction all present bade the King farewell with a kiss. He still spoke distinctly; and his particular favourites asked him if he left behind him any other son than Prince Magnus, or any other heirs that should share in the kingdom, but he uniformly persisted that he had no other heirs in the male or female line than were publicly known.

When the history of all the Kings down to Sverre had been recited, he ordered the life of that Prince to be read, and to be continued night and day, whenever he found himself indisposed to sleep. The festival of the Virgin Lucy happened on a Thursday, and on the Saturday after, the King's disorder increased to such a degree that he lost the use of his speech; and at midnight Almighty God called King Haakon out of this mortal life... Immediately on the decease of the King, Bishops and learned men were sent for to sing mass. Afterwards all the company went out except Bishop Thorgils, Brinjolf Johnsson, and two other persons, who watched by the body, and performed all the services due to so illustrious a lord and prince as King Haakon had been.

HÅKON'S OFFSPRING

Håkon's death ended nearly 50 years of rule, marked by grand construction projects and increased state legitimacy. His son Magnus also ruled peacefully, and he became known as the lawgiver. His sons Eirik and Håkon V each became king in turn. In 1319, Norway was left without a direct male heir, and the crown passed to Magnus Eriksson, great-great-grandson of Håkon Håkonsson and

son of a Swedish duke. Unfortunately, Magnus lacked character, and the legitimacy of his rule of both Norway and Sweden suffered as a result. In 1355 he was forced to cede rule of Norway to young Håkon VI and his manipulative ministers. Upon Håkon's death, rule passed to his regent mother, Margrete of Denmark. This marked the end of an independent Norway and a beginning to union with Denmark, which lasted until the reorganization of Europe by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when Norway was stripped from Denmark and attached to Sweden.

—*Anders Hove*
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THE KINGS OF NORWAY: 1015-1319

