



The Prehistory of *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum*: Connections with the *Chronicon Lethrense* and their Consequences

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Accepted: 4 December 2021
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Abstract

The Old Norse origin myth known as *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum*, which claims that Norway was founded by a pair of brothers named Nórr and Górr, is preserved in two distinct variants in the late fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscript known as *Flateyjarbók*. One variant, *Fundinn Noregr*, forms the preface to *Orkneyinga saga* and had therefore come into existence by c. 1230, whereas the other, *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, is not attested before c. 1290. Most scholars have argued that *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is a derivative of *Fundinn Noregr*, which was created to preface *Orkneyinga saga* by the Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson. This article draws attention to hitherto-undocumented parallels between both variants of *Frá Fornjóti* and a twelfth-century Latin text known as the *Chronicon Lethrense* or *Lejre Chronicle*. To explain these parallels, a new hypothesis for the pre-history of *Frá Fornjóti* is formulated: that both variants are independent witnesses to an earlier version of the myth which drew upon the *Chronicon Lethrense* or a shared model. This hypothesis is tested against arguments supporting the consensus that regards *Fundinn Noregr* as the original, taking the myth's ideological underpinnings and analogues in Old Norse literature into account. It is suggested that the hypothesis best explains patterns of shared wording revealed by close comparative readings of passages in both variants, *Orkneyinga saga*, and other contemporary Old Norse texts. The article concludes with speculation about the context in which a previous version of the myth might have been composed.

Keywords Medieval · Old Norse · Intellectual history · Origin myths · Iceland

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Introduction

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw an explosion in vernacular history-writing in Scandinavia and Iceland, as a burgeoning intellectual elite blended their recently acquired knowledge of learned European trends with motifs gleaned from Norse folklore. This article explores one such infusion of traditions in a sparsely attested origin myth collectively referred to as *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum* (“Concerning Fornjótr and his kinsmen”, henceforth *Frá Fornjóti*).¹

The myth is preserved in two variants in the fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscript *Flateyjarbók* (Reykjavík, Árni Magnússon Institute GKS 1005 fol.). It traces the ancestry of the elite dynasties of Norway and the Orkney Isles through the brothers Nórr and Górr to a primordial being named Fornjótr, whose sons personify and rule the elemental forces of sea, fire, and wind. One variant, *Fundinn Noregr* (“Norway founded”, henceforth *FN*), forms the preface to *Orkneyinga saga* (henceforth *Orkn.*), an account of the ruling dynasty (the jarls) of Orkney completed by c. 1230. The second, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* (“How Norway was settled”, henceforth *HNB*), existed by c. 1290. Current consensus maintains that *HNB* was adapted from *FN*, which itself is generally regarded as a derivative of *Orkn.* and the work of the saga’s probable redactor, the Icelandic chieftain and scholar Snorri Sturluson.

This article highlights a previously unacknowledged connection between *Frá Fornjóti* and a Latin text from twelfth-century Denmark, the *Chronicon Lethrense*, which itself drew upon learned European origin myth motifs. It considers the implications of this connection for understanding the development of the myth. The arguments employed to support the current consensus are re-examined and tested against a new hypothesis: that the variants are independent witnesses to a previous version of the myth that was not associated with the production of *Orkn.*

The Variants: Context and Consensus

FN and *HNB* mirror one another in narrative structure. Both begin by naming Fornjótr and his sons Hlér (or Ægir), Logi, and Kári, who rule the sea, fire, and wind, respectively. Kári’s descent is traced through generations of wintry personifications such as Snær *inn gamli* (“Snow the old”) to Þorri, a ruler of Finnland, Kvenland, and Gotland, who shares his name with a winter month in the pre-Julian Norse calendar. Þorri fathers two sons, Nórr and Górr, and a daughter Gói (another winter month). One winter, Gói goes missing. The brothers search for her, Nórr skiing overland to the western coast of Scandinavia and Górr travelling by sea. When they reunite, they divide the lands they have subdued *en route*, so that Nórr receives the mainland, which is henceforth called “Nórvegr” (ON *Noregr* “Norway”), and Górr the coastal islands. Nórr finds Gói in the Norwegian interior along with her abductor, Hrólfir í *Bergi* (“in the mountain”). Honour is satisfied with the agreement that Hrólfir will

¹ All translations from Old Norse are my own; Latin translations are borrowed or adapted from the bilingual editions cited.

marry Góí and Nórr will marry Hrólf's sister. Both variants conclude by tracing the mythical founder generation to significant “historical” representatives. *FN* traces the descent of Górr's son Beiti to Jarl Rognvaldr of Mœrr, the progenitor of the Orkney jarls, whereas *HNB* focuses on Nórr's descendants. Each of Nórr's three sons, Þrándr, Garðr-Agði, and Raumr, is an eponym for one or more regions of Norway, respectively Þrándheimr, Agðir, and both Raumaríki and Raumsdalr. They beget a host of regional dynasties and historical descendants, the most prominent among whom is Haraldr *hárfagri* (“Fairhair”), the unifier of Norway in medieval tradition.

Dissimilarities in the style and format of the variants attest to their wildly different histories prior to their inclusion in *Flateyjarbók* in the 1380 s (Rowe, 2005, p. 11). *FN* was attached to *Orkn.* by c. 1230 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. xv; Mundal, 2013, p. 38). *Orkn.* probably drew on genuine Orcadian traditions but was first compiled in Iceland before c. 1200 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1993, p. 206; Mundal, 2013, p. 38). It has been linked to the Icelandic Oddaverjar family (based at Oddi) who, along with the Orkney jarls, traced their descent from Jarl Rognvaldr (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1993, pp. 296–207). The saga was revised in an effort attributed to Snorri Sturluson and dated to c. 1225–30. Snorri used the saga as a source for his own vast compilation of sagas of the Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla*, which is dated to c. 1220–1230 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. xiv; Finlay and Faulkes, 2011, p. ix). The best witnesses to the saga postdate Snorri's revisions (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, p. cxxvi), and it is rarely possible to sort his additions from the material found in his exemplar.

Sigurður Nordal (1913–1916, pp. xlvii) believed that *FN* derived from an origin tradition associated with the dynasties of Mœrr and/or Orkney, which he compares to the Viking Age dynastic poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, but this cannot be corroborated. Conversely, Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965, pp. xv–xvi) argued that *FN* was created by Snorri as a legendary preface akin to the one he crafted for *Heimskringla*. Most subsequent scholars have accepted this conclusion. However, John McKinnell (2021, p. 425) has recently suggested that the concepts found in *Frá Fornjóti* circulated prior to their appearance in *FN* and the works of Snorri (see also Krag, 1991, p. 54; Faulkes, 1998, p. xxv). He proposes that the myth represents the marriage of two twelfth-century traditions; a variant of the “summer king and winter princess” folktale that told of the abduction of Góí was combined with the story of Nórr's conquest of Norway. McKinnell does not suggest that these traditions were merged prior to their appearance in *FN*.

Several researchers have argued that *FN*'s myth of origins supports the interests of the Orcadian dynasty whose deeds were celebrated in *Orkn.* (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. xi; 1993, p. 210; Meulengracht Sørensen, 1993, pp. 218–221; Beuermann, 2011, pp. 116–117). By giving the jarls mythical origins rooted in Scandinavia, they were contrasted with the kings of Norway, who traced their ancestry to the Swedish Ynglingr dynasty. In *Heimskringla* and the *Prose Edda*, compiled between 1220 and 1241 (Faulkes, 1998, p. xi), Snorri extended these Ynglingr origins back to Óðinn, whom he portrayed as an immigrant from Troy. This replicated a tradition that had taken root in Iceland at least a century earlier but drew upon ancient European origin-myth motifs (Faulkes, 1978–79, p. 96–97; Reynolds, 1983, p. 376). Conversely, the dynasty of Nórr and Górr in *Frá Fornjóti* derives its origins from the

frozen north and thus allowed the jarls to portray themselves as “more ‘Norwegian’ than the kings of Norway” (Beuermann, 2011, p. 117).

HNB cannot concretely be traced earlier than c. 1290, when it inspired the preface of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (Rowe, 2005, p. 317). This version of the variant was probably markedly different from the one we know from *Flateyjarbók*, as it has been extensively updated with genealogical material borrowed from various Old Norse literary traditions (some fourteenth-century). Nevertheless, the pre-1290 version probably included four or five generations after Nórr (Allport, 2021, p. 59; 2022 [forthcoming]). Further changes may have been made when it was incorporated into *Flateyjarbók* (Rowe, 2005, p. 321; Allport, 2021, p. 52).

Current consensus regards *HNB* as a derivative of *FN* (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, p. xi; Rowe, 2005, p. 317; McKinnell, 2021, p. 417). Sigurður Nordal (1913–1916, p. xlvi) first reached this conclusion due to the inclusion of younger material now associated with subsequent expansions. Few scholars have explicitly argued the contrary: they include Finnur Jónsson (1898, pp. 658–659), who dated *HNB* to around 1200, and Jan de Vries (1967, pp. 264–65), who gave no explanation for his conclusion.

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe (2005, 321–322) suggests that “*Hversu Noregr byggðist* ... abbreviates *Fundinn Noregr* in some places but in other places expands upon it”. She draws attention to “blind motifs” in *HNB* that assume knowledge of *FN*. For example, in *HNB* we are told that the Kvens’ annual midwinter sacrifice was named after Porri, but that after Góí disappeared it was held a month late and this month was subsequently named after Góí. No explanation is given for this delay, whereas in *FN*, it is explained that the additional sacrifice was held to hasten Góí’s safe return. Rowe also points to differences which alter the nuance of the narrative. In *FN* Nórr and Hrólfr fight before coming to terms, but in *HNB* Góí intervenes before the fight begins and secures Hrólfr’s submission to Nórr. Additionally, *FN* describes conflict between the sons of Górr and of Nórr, which is not mentioned in *HNB*. Given *HNB*’s piecemeal development, we cannot be certain when these changes were made.

Fornjótr and his Elemental Offspring

The narrative into which the names of Fornjótr and his sons, Hlér/Ægir, Logi, and Kári, are woven in *Frá Fornjóti* is unique to the myth, although references to these beings (both collectively and as individuals) are dotted throughout Old Norse poetic tradition. Margaret Clunies Ross (1983, pp. 51–57) compares their appearance in *Frá Fornjóti* to the myth of the primordial being Ymir in Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* and suggests that Snorri’s theoretical framework accommodated the depiction of primal elements as Norwegian progenitors.

Fornjótr, whose name may mean “depriver of use” or “ancient inhabitant”, is a mythological figure of impressive antiquity (Clunies Ross, 1983, pp. 47–49; McKinnell, 2021, pp. 417–419). He first appears in the (possibly) ninth-century skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* and even finds a parallel in the Old English herb-name “Fornetes folm” (“Fornet’s palm”). In *Ynglingatal* and several subsequent verses, “Fornjótts sonr/synir” (“the son/s of Fornjótr”) appear as kennings for the elemental forces

of fire and wind, which are also personified as brothers along with the sea-being Ægir in lists of poetic circumlocutions in Snorri's *Edda* (Faulkes, 1998, p. 39). Poetic appearances of Hlér are somewhat rarer. The kenning “Hlés vita” (“beacon of Hlér [=gold]”) (Sigurður Nordal, 1933, 149) appears in a *lausavísa* (“loose verse”) attributed to Egill Skallagrímsson in *Egils saga*. If the attribution is correct, this dates the verse to the tenth century, but it may equally be the invention of the saga author in the thirteenth.

Hlér's name appears with Ægir and Fornjótr in the three surviving fragmentary verses of *Norðrsetudrápa*, which Finnboði Guðmundsson (1965, p. xvi) regarded as inspiration for the mythical opening of *Frá Fornjóti*. The poem, which describes the fierce weather conditions off western Greenland, is attributed to the mysterious Sveinn and has been dated to the late eleventh century. The kennings “élreifar ... Ægis dætr” (“storm-glad daughters of Ægir”) and “dætr Hlés” (“daughters of Hlér”) are employed to refer to waves, whereas “ljótir synir Fornjóts” (“the ugly sons of Fornjótr”) denotes winds bringing blizzards (Clunies Ross, 2017, pp. 398–400).

Whereas the elemental associations of Ægir, Logi and Kári can be discerned from their names, the etymology of Hlér is less straightforward (Clunies Ross, 1983, pp. 57–61). The medieval scholar Óláfr Þórðarson (d. 1259), nephew to Snorri Sturluson and author of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, connected it with ON *hlé* (shelter/protection) and *hlýja* (to shelter/protect), but consequently assumed its use in *Norðrsetudrápa* must be ironic: “her er sær kallaðr hlér, þvíat hann hlýr allra minzt” (“here the sea is called Hlér, because it protects least of all”) (Björn Magnússon Ólsen, 1884, p. 114). Clunies Ross (1983, pp. 58–60) and McKinnell (2021, p. 420) agree that this etymology is unlikely, as it lacks the elemental association present in other literary references to the being. Clunies Ross instead proposes that the name was derived from the Irish tradition of Mannanán mac Lir, the mythical eponym of Mann whose patronymic means “son of *ler* (‘sea’)”.

Clunies Ross (1983, pp. 58–60) associates knowledge of Hlér's origins with the milieu at Oddi and the works of Snorri Sturluson. She suggests that “[Hlér's] currency never passed beyond a small circle” as his elemental associations were apparently unknown to Óláfr Þórðarson, who was not affiliated with the milieu. As Clunies Ross observes, *FN* glosses Hlér with the phrase “er vér kōllum Ægir” (“whom we call Ægir”) and later refers to him as “Hlé inum gamla af Hlésey” (“Hlér the old of Hlésey”) (Finnboði Guðmundsson, 1965, pp. 3–4), referring to the Danish island of Læsø. The same notion is found in *Skáldskaparmál* in Snorri's *Edda*, which begins: “E[inn ma]ðr er nefndr Ægir eða Hlér. Hann bjó í ey þeiri er nú er kōlluð [Hlé]sey” (“There was a man named Ægir or Hlér. He lived on that island which is now called Hlésey”) (Faulkes, 1998, p. 1). Clunies Ross compares the etymological association with Læsø with the same impulse in the tradition of Mannanán mac Lir.

However, Mikko Heikkilä (2012, pp. 102–113) suggests that Hlér shares the same Proto-Scandinavian root (**χlewaz*) as the Finnic giant name Kaleva (see de Vries, 2000, p. 237). Defining the root as “good conditions for sailing”, Heikkilä suggests that the term was borrowed into Finnic (with epenthesis) before c. 500 A.D., implying that the mythological associations already existed at this time. He suggests that a separate being in Finnic mythology, Liera, reflects a subsequent, Viking Age borrowing from ON Hlér. If accepted, either of these conclusions suggests that

the mythological Hlér was a well-established, even archaic feature of mythography across the Norse world, which at least fits with his appearances in skaldic poetry.

Nórr and Górr

Frá Fornjóti is not the only tradition to refer to an eponymous founder named Nórr or Nóri. Researchers have previously noted that a Nóri appears in Oddr *munkr* Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and almost certainly featured in the Latin *Historia Norwegie* (Clunies Ross, 1983, p. 61; McKinnell, 2021, p. 423). The former survives in Old Icelandic but was originally composed in Latin in the late twelfth century at Þingeyrar in Iceland (Ármann Jakobsson, 2005, p. 393). The relevant passage notes that “sá var konungr forðum, er Nóri hét, er fyrst byggði Noreg” (“there was formerly a king called Nóri who first settled Norway”) (Guðni Jónsson, 1957, p. 72). The *Historia Norwegie* was written in Norway in the third quarter of the twelfth century (Ekrem & Mortensen, 2003, pp. 15–23). The opening sentence contains an unfortunate lacuna but probably read as follows: “Norwegia igitur a quodam Re[ge, qui Nor/Nori] nuncupatus est nomen opti[nuisse dicitur]” (“Norway is said to have taken its name from a king called Nórr/Nóri”) (Ekrem & Mortensen, 2003, pp. 52–53). Neither text refers to Górr, Gói, or the *Frá Fornjóti* narrative.

The etymology of Górr is uncertain. De Vries (2000, p. 183) noted that it could be related to MNor *gosa* “draught” or MNor *gorre* “lad”, but McKinnell (2021, p. 423) suggests that Górr is simply an imitative masculine form of Gói. The last option seems most feasible and suggests that the name was merely invented to complement Nórr, casting Górr as the proficient but less successful founding sibling who by comparison heightens his brother's grandeur: the Remus to Nórr's Romulus; the Horsa to his Hengist.

These comparisons are not trivial. Despite differing markedly from Snorri's euhemeristic myth of eastern origins, *Frá Fornjóti* drew upon motifs typical of Classical and medieval European origin myths. These connections, thus far underacknowledged in scholarship, are illustrated through the variants' ties to the *Chronicon Lethrense*.

The Chronicon Lethrense

The *Chronicon Lethrense* or *Lejre Chronicle* is an early Latin account of Danish history embedded in the *Annales Lundense*. It is usually associated with 1170 s Roskilde (Gertz, 1917–18, pp. 34–7), although Niels Lindow (2016, pp. 26–29) proposes a composition date as early as the reign of King Eiríkr *eymuni* (“the Memorable”) from 1134–37. The text sparsely narrates the foundation of the Danish kingdom by a legendary ruler named Dan and the exploits of his descendants, providing a framework that was heavily adapted by subsequent Danish historiography. The *Chronicon* may have been known to the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, whose *Gesta Danorum* was completed between 1208 and 1219 (Friis-Jensen, 2015, p. xxxiv; Lindow, 2016, p. 29).

There are several arresting parallels shared uniquely between the narrative of the *Chronicon* and both variants of *Frá Fornjóti*. The first and most obvious of these is the appearance of Nóri as Dan's brother within the narrative: “fuit enim in Upsala ciuitate Suethie rex quidam, Ypper nomine, tres filios habens, quorum unus Nori, alter Østen, tercius Dan dicebatur” (“for in the city of Uppsala there was a king of the Swedes called Ypper, who had three sons, one called Nóri, the second Østen, and the third Dan”) (Newlands, 2007, p. 314–315). Even if Lindow's early dating of the *Chronicon* is not accepted, the lacuna in *Historie Norwegie* and the text's uncertain dating make this the oldest verifiable reference to Nórr/Nóri in the written record. As the first three (of five) appearances of Nórr/Nóri in medieval literature are therefore found in twelfth-century Latin traditions (albeit translated into Old Icelandic in the case of *Óláfs saga*), we can be confident that the mythical founder figure originated in Latin learned writings of this century, of which eponymous founders are a well-established feature (Reynolds, 1983, pp. 375–377).²

The second parallel with *Frá Fornjóti* is the structure of the same passage, in which an eponymous founder fathers three sons whose names reflect the realms they inherit. Dan and Nóri's father is Ypper, a back-formation from Uppsala, the Swedish city from which he rules. The name of their brother Østen appears to denote “eastern lands”, in apparent reference to Sweden itself (Newlands, 2007, p. 315 n. 3). This structure is echoed in the names of Þrándr, Garðr-Agði, and Raumr, the three eponymous sons of Nórr in *HNB*. In the *Chronicon*, Dan's son Ro gives his name to Roskilde, a city within his father's realm; in *HNB*, sons of Garðr-Agði and Raumr—such as Hörðr and Hringr (Fig. 1)—found and give their names to the regions they inherit. In both texts, genealogy is combined with a geographical and social hierarchy, as each subsequent generation gives their name to a further subdivision of the founder's realm. Rowe (2005, pp. 322–323) suggests that in *HNB* this impulse is an extension of the philosophy that underscores the myth of Fornjótr and his sons. Yet although an etymological dimension is apparent in the elemental names of Fornjótr's offspring, only Kári is depicted (by quite some remove) as a progenitor of peoples or realms. The much closer parallel between the sons of Nórr and those of Ypper echoes a motif of altogether more ancient roots.

The motif of a founder father begetting three progenitors belongs to a venerable origin tradition known as the “table of nations” (Fig. 2). This appears in the Old Testament account of the sons of Noah and was subsequently developed in influential medieval texts such as Isidore's *Etymologiae* in the seventh century. Noah's sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth are portrayed as the progenitors of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Europe, respectively (Barney et al., 2006, pp. 192–193; Reynolds, 1983, p. 376). A variant of the motif appears in two Latin traditions: the sixth-century *Frankish Table of Nations* and a derived passage in the *Historia Brittonum* from ninth-century Wales. This myth derives the peoples of Europe from three sons of Alaneus: Hessitio, Armeno, and Negue. In the *Historia*, the

² Eponymous figures are rare in Old Norse literature before the twelfth century. The most notable example is Hǫlgi, an eponym for Hálogaland who appears in *Haraldskvæði*. This poem is often dated to c. 900 but some regard the verse in question as a twelfth-century imitation (Fulk, 2012, pp. 91–2 and 108).

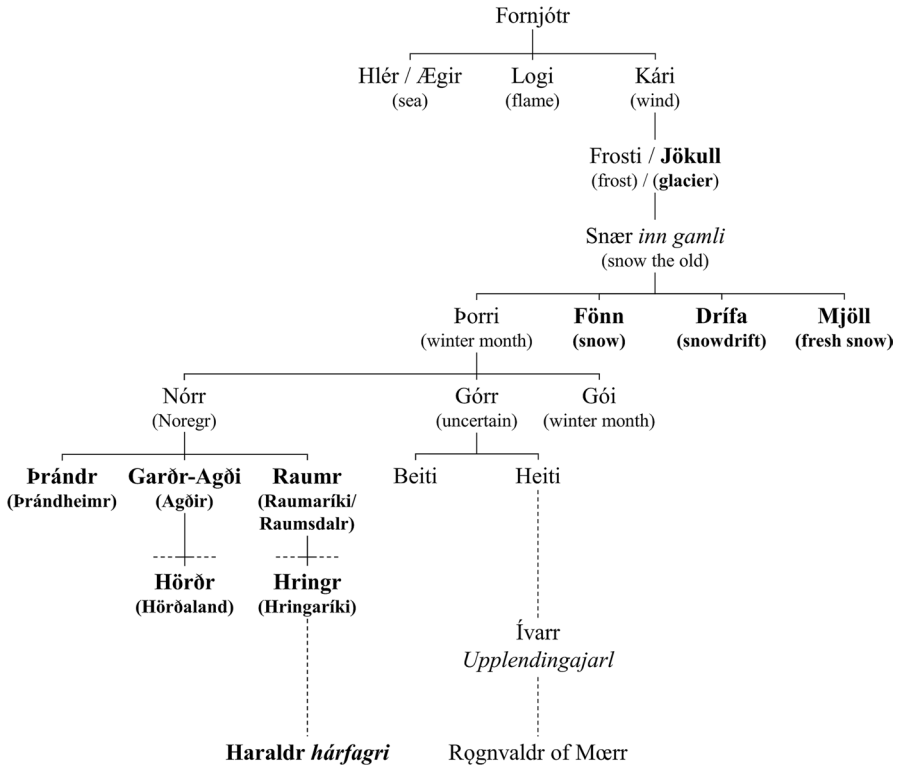
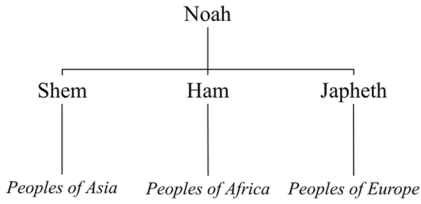


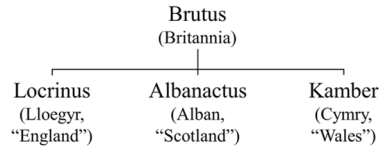
Fig. 1 Genealogical summary of *FN* and *HNB* (with dynasts unique to the latter in bold)

grandsons of Alaneus are eponyms for various European peoples. Hessitio, for example, fathers Francus, Romanus, Britto, and Albanus (Goffart, 1983, pp. 110–112).

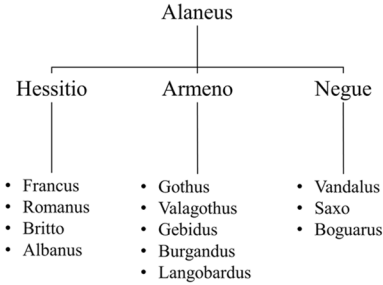
This structure had an unclear impact on Icelandic literature. An echo of the “table of nations” may be found in the six sons of Óðinn in Snorri’s *Edda* and the dynasties they disseminate (Faulkes, 2005, pp. 5–6; Fig. 2). The three Scandinavian dynasties in Snorri’s model, the Ynglingar, Skjöldungar, and Háleygir (descended from Yngvi, Skjöldr, and Sæmingr) were also grouped in a genealogical tradition known to Snorri and preserved in AM 1 e β II fol. (Faulkes 1978–79, p. 96). However, the use of the motif in the *Chronicon* and *Frá Fornjóti* more closely resembles its appearance in the highly influential *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, which was completed by 1139 and quickly made its way to Scandinavia and Iceland, where it was partially translated in c. 1200 at Þingeyrar (Reeve, 2007, pp. vii and 31; Kalinke, 2015, p. 9). In the *Historia regum*, etymological associations are added at every genealogical level. Britannia’s eponymous founder Brutus fathers three sons, Locrinus, Albanactus and Kamber, who divide their father’s realm into Lloegyrr (“England”, according to contemporary Welsh tradition), Alban (“Scotland”), and Cymry (“Wales”). Their



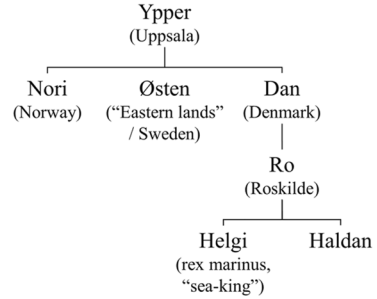
The Biblical *Table of Nations*



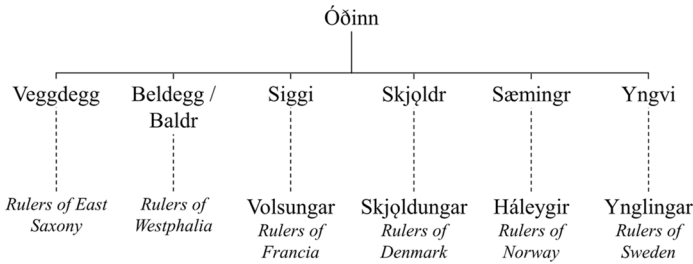
Historia regum Britanniae



The Frankish *Table of Nations*
(following *Historia Brittonum*)



Chronicon Lethrense



The *Prose Edda*

Fig. 2 Examples of the “table of nations” origin-myth structure

descendants give their names to various British cities, providing a clear parallel with Ro in the *Chronicon*. This systematic etymological element is lacking from the “table of nations” structure (such as it exists) in Snorri’s *Edda*.

Thirdly, in the *Chronicon*, Ro’s sons Helgi and Haldan divide his realm such that “alter terras, mare possedit alter” (“one possessed the land, the other the sea”) (Newlands, 2007, pp. 318–319).³ This mirrors Nórr and Górr’s division of their conquests between the mainland and the coastal islands. Górr and Helgi are

³ I am indebted to Isobel Boles for drawing my attention to this and the following feature of the *Chronicon Lethrense* in a paper delivered at the “Mythology as a Branch of Learning” workshop in Bergen, November 2019.

even given the same title of sea-king (albeit in Old Norse and Latin respectively): Górr is a “sækonungr”, Helgi a “rex marinus” (Newlands, 2007, pp. 318–320). In both the *Chronicon* and *FN*, the sea-kings are ascribed piratical tendencies. Górr’s sons Heiti and Beiti “váru sækonungar ok ofstopamenn miklir. Þeir gengu mjök á ríki sona Nórs, ok áttu þeir orrostur margar” (“were sea-kings and very oppressive men. They strove often against the Norr’s sons’ kingdom and fought many battles”) (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, p. 6), whereas Helgi “rex erat marinus et multos ad se traxit maleficos ...; diuersas partes, quasdam pace, quasdam autem piratia, petisse peribetur” (“was a sea-king and attracted many evil-doers He sought out various regions, sometimes in peace, but sometimes by piracy”) (Newlands, 2007, pp. 318–319).

Finally, the *Chronicon*’s reference to “gygas quidam, nomine Læ, in insula, que uocator Leshø” (“a giant called Læ, dwelling on the island called Læsø”) (Newlands, 2007, pp. 320–321) is a clear analogue to *FN*’s Hlér *inn gamli* “ór Hlésey” (“of Hlésey”). This need not imply that *FN* preserves a direct borrowing from the *Chronicon*, although at least the reference to Hlésey may have been inspired by it. A borrowing would require prior knowledge of the names of both Hlér and Hlésey for their Latinized forms to be recognized. Icelandic awareness of the former is confirmed by Hlér’s appearance in *Norðrsetudrápa*, and the association with Hlésey may have been common in twelfth-century Norse tradition. In any case, Hlér was clearly known well beyond the milieu at Oddi.

These parallels indicate that *Frá Fornjóti* drew directly upon the *Chronicon* or a shared model. In either case, the parallels add an important caveat to discourse which has presented the myth as an expression of “Nordic self-esteem and pride ... that ... provided a counterpart to the [Trojan] immigration theory which got its inspiration from the continent” (Meulengracht Sørensen, 1993, p. 219; Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1993, p. 210; Beuermann, 2011, p. 116). Nordic self-esteem and pride may well be central to the myth, but it is inescapable that *Frá Fornjóti*’s most significant analogue is a Latin text heavily inspired by European traditions.

Furthermore, the parallels pose a challenge to the consensus that *HNB* was derived from *FN*. The appearance of the “table of nations” structure in *HNB* but not *FN* has three explanations of varying feasibility. Accepting the consensus, we must assume that either:

1. It is pure coincidence. The compiler of *HNB* borrowed a structure from elsewhere (e.g. the *Historia regum*) that happened to be central to the *Chronicon*, *FN*’s probable model, but was not in *FN* itself, or;
2. The compiler of *HNB* reborrowed the information from the *Chronicon* in the decades after *FN* was completed, despite the *Chronicon*’s lack of wider impact on Icelandic literature.

Such happenstance cannot be ruled out, but the simplest explanation is that *HNB* was not dependent upon *FN* but was instead derived from a common source: an earlier version of the myth which contained all the features shared with the

Chronicon. If so, the *Frá Fornjóti* myth could not have been created simply to preface *Orkn*. The remainder of the article tests this hypothesis.

The Prehistory of Frá Fornjóti

The consensus that *HNB* is a derivative of *FN* has primarily been based upon the assumption that *FN* was created to preface *Orkn*. Only Rowe's analysis considers the relationship between the variants on a textual level. Her identification of blind motifs is insightful but does not demonstrate conclusively that *HNB* was adapted from *FN*, as these motifs could equally be explained by derivation from a shared antecedent.

Indeed, it is striking how little wording is shared between the two texts, with most correspondences being limited to generic phrases. Even integral plot points are worded differently; for example, where *FN* states that “Hrólfur hafði numit á brott af Kvenlandi Góí Þorradóttur” (“Hrólfur had carried Góí Þorradóttir off from Kvenland”) (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, pp. 5–6), *HNB* has “Hrólfur í Bergi hafði tekit Góí ok gengit at eiga hana” (“Hrólfur í Bergi had captured Góí and proceeded to marry her”) (Guðni Jónsson, 1950, p. 76). If *HNB* was derived from *FN*, the former did not so much revise as wholly rewrite the latter. These changes could not have been made in the interests of space, as the wording of *HNB* is frequently more verbose. It is more likely that the variants' authors simply took different liberties with a common exemplar.

Considered in this light, certain passages in *FN* appear to abbreviate concepts expressed more fully in *HNB*. The most significant example is a passage which Rowe regards as the inspiration for *HNB* but which could equally be a hasty synopsis of *FN*'s proposed antecedent:

Þaðan sneri Nórr aptr norðr til ríkis þess, er hann hafði undir sik lagt; þat kallaði hann Nórrveg. Réd hann því ríki, meðan hann lifði, en synir hans eptir hann, ok skiptu þeir landi með sér. Ok tóku svá ríkin at smættask sem konungarnir tóku at fjölgask, ok grindusk svá í fylki (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 6)

(From there, Nórr turned back north to the kingdom he had subjugated. He called it Norway. He ruled the kingdom while he lived, and his sons after him, but they divided the land between them. And so the realm diminished as the kings increased and was divided into regions.)

This passage creates the conditions that necessitate Haraldr *hárfagri*'s unification, which makes more sense in the context of *HNB*, in which Haraldr himself appears. Norway is already united in the chapter of *Orkn*. that follows *FN*, going from fragmented to whole without explanation.

FN and Orkn

The arguments that *FN* was conceived to preface *Orkn.* can be summarized as follows:

1. Mythological beings and thematic underpinnings that appear in *FN* are elsewhere found in the works of Snorri Sturluson, associating *FN* with the same milieu or with Snorri himself (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, pp. xv–xvi; Clunies Ross, 1983, p. 55);
2. The myth supports the ideology of the Orkney jarls by portraying them as “more ‘Norwegian’ than the kings of Norway” (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1993, p. 210; Meulengracht Sørensen, 1993, p. 221; Beuermann, 2011, p. 115–121);
3. A passage concerning Górr’s son Beiti in *FN* is adapted from an episode about King Magnús *berfættr* (“Barelegs”) in *Orkn.* ch. 41 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, pp. xiii–xv).

The first argument assumes that the appearances of beings and themes across textual traditions associate those traditions with the same intellectual milieu or even the same author, which is precarious when our view of the period is dictated by so few surviving texts. Clunies Ross (1983, p. 55) is undoubtedly correct to argue for “demonstrable thematic and intellectual cohesion between *Fundinn Noregr* and Snorri’s *Edda*”, but Rowe (2005, p. 323) demonstrates that the same principles underscore the unique sections of *HNB*, and no-one has suggested it was the work of Snorri or the Oddi milieu. As with the *Chronicon* and *Frá Fornjóti*, shared features can indicate a relationship between two traditions but do not imply shared authorship.

Thus, although Snorri’s role in updating *Orkn.* and his shaping of *FN* is not here disputed, and the Icelandic scholar clearly knew of Fornjótr and his sons from skaldic poems such as *Norðrsetudrápa*, it does not follow that *Frá Fornjóti* must have been his work. His quotation of these verses attests simply to the contemporary circulation of traditions related to these mythological beings, as does the appearance of Læ in the *Chronicon Lethrense*. The link between the *Chronicon* and *Frá Fornjóti* itself represents one channel through which contemporary European ideas or motifs could have reached Snorri.

The presence of Orcadian ideology in *FN* also does not conflict with the suggestion that it was adapted from *Frá Fornjóti*. The implied contrast between a native regional aristocracy and an intrusive royal dynasty (the latter conspicuously absent from *FN* itself) undoubtedly suited the interests of the Orkney jarls but is not out of place in *HNB*. Indeed, *HNB* explores this dynamic more explicitly, weaving the Ynglingr Haraldr *hárfagri* into the genealogies through marital ties. *HNB*’s rendition of the myth presents a subtler, less hostile vision of Norwegian royal power, but nevertheless stresses the autochthony of Norway’s regional aristocracy. This balancing of royal authority and aristocratic autonomy can easily be connected to twelfth- and early thirteenth-century ideological struggles unfolding throughout Norway itself, of which the Orkney dynasty’s relationship to royal power is merely one facet.

As Roland Scheel (2021, pp. 274–275) notes, these struggles found expression in contemporary Icelandic literature. *HNB*'s structure could easily have belonged to an antecedent which did not share *FN*'s specific Orcadian slant.

Certain aspects of *Frá Fornjóti* make more sense if it is regarded as a myth of primarily Norwegian, rather than Orcadian, origins. *FN* is unique among European origin myths in that Górr, the legendary progenitor of the tale's Orcadian subjects, is not its primary protagonist. Nórr receives a greater share of the narrative and is solely responsible for resolving the central conflict of Góí's abduction; in *FN*, Górr is not even present for this resolution. It is also unique that Górr does not found a lasting polity and is never connected to his descendants' realm, the Orkneys. Both variants associate his island domain solely with offshore islands along the Norwegian coast (see quotations below). There is no indication that this realm exists beyond the lifetime of his sons; indeed, the epithet of one descendant, Ívarr *Upplendingajarl* ("jarl of the people of Uppland"), associates him with Norway's landlocked interior. As a result, *FN* "vedkommer ikke det mindste Orknøerne ... [og] Norges bebyggelse har intet med den øvrige Jarlesaga ... at gøre" ("does not in the least concern the Orkneys ... [and] Norway's settlement has nothing to do with the rest of [*Orkn.*]") (Finnur Jónsson, 1898, pp. 648–659). The Norwegian perspective in *Frá Fornjóti* is plain to see, but even in *FN*, Orcadian interests, although present, require more thorough excavation.

Beiti Górrson and Magnús berfættr

To establish the present hypothesis as a feasible (if unprovable) alternative to the consensus, we need only address the third argument: that *FN* had derived its account of Beiti Górrson from *Orkn.* ch. 41's narrative of Magnús *berfættr*. Even this possibility does not prevent the core structure of the foundation narrative—Nórr's creation of Norway and its division among his offspring—from being older than *FN*; the parallels with *Orkn.* ch. 41 pertain to relatively minor story elements. However, it does challenge the idea that a previous version of the myth contained much the same features as those found in our surviving variants. The parallels in question are found in the following lines of *FN*:

Þá skiptu þeir lǫndum með sér bræðr. Hafði Nórr meginland allt, en Górr skal hafa eyjar þær allar, er hann ferr stjórnföstu skipi milli ok meginlands. ... Beiti lagðisk inn í Þrándheim ok herjaði þar; hann lá þar, er nú heitir Beitsær ok Beitstøð; þar lét hann draga skip ór Beitstøð innanverðri ok norðr yfir Eldueið; þar gengr Naumsi at norðan. Hann settisk í lypting ok helt um hjámunvölinn, ok eignaðisk hann land allt, þat er þá lá á bakborða, ok er þat margar byggðir ok mikit land (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, pp. 5–7).

(Then the brothers divided the land between them. Nórr had all the mainland, but Górr would have all the islands, wherever he could travel between them and the mainland with a fixed-rudder ship. ... Beiti laid a course into Þrándheimr and raided there. He anchored in the places which are now called Beitsær ("Beitstadsford") and Beitstøð ("Beitstad"). There he had his ship dragged out of Beitstøð inwards and north to Eldueið ("Namdalseid") to where

Naumsi (“Namsen”) flows from the north. He sat in the aft and held the tiller and laid claim to all the land which then lay to port, and that is a large and well-settled land.)

The equivalent passages in *HNB* show the variant’s most protracted correspondence in wording with *FN* (in italics):

Þá skiptu þeir bræðr ríkinu með sér, svá at Nórr skyldi hafa meginland allt norðan frá Jötunheimum ok suðr til Álfheima, þat heitir nú Noregr, en Górr skyldi hafa eyjar allar, þær er lágu á bakborða elliða hans, er hann færði norðan með landi ... Beitir sækonungr fór með elliða inn í Þrándheim ok inn í Beitsjó. Hann lét gera skipsleða undir elliðann, en snjór var mikill ok sleðfæri gott. Þá settist Beitir í lypting ok lagði stýri í lag ok lét draga upp segl ok lét menn sína draga elliðan norðr um Elliðaeið til Naumudals ok eignaði sér land allt þat, er lá á bakborða (Guðni Jónsson, 1950, pp. 76–77).

(Then the brothers divided the kingdom between them, such that Nórr should have all the mainland from Jötunheimr in the north and south to Álfheimr—this is now called Norway—but Górr would have all the islands which lay to the port side of his ship, when he travelled north along the coast ... Beitir the sea-king travelled with his sailing ship into Þrándheimr and into Beitsjó (“Beitstadsfjord”). He had a ship-sled put under the sailing ship, and the snow was heavy and good for sledging. Then Beitir sat in the aft and shipped the rudder and had the sail hoisted, and had his men drag the sailing ship north over Elliðaeið (“Ship-isthmus”) and laid claim to all the land which lay to port.)

The episode in *Orkn.* ch. 41, which also shares wording with *FN* (in italics), runs as follows:

Þá kómu í móti honum sendimenn Melkólms Skotakonungs ok buðu honum sættir, sögðu svá, at Skotakonungr vill gefa honum eyjar allar, þær er liggja fyrir vestan Skotland ok fara mætti stjórnföstu skipi milli ok meginlands. En er Magnús konungr helt sunnan at Sátíri, lét hann draga skútu yfir Sátíriseið. Konungr helt um hjálmvöl ok eignaðisk svá allt Sátíri; þat er betra en in bezta ey í Suðreyjum nema Mön (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, pp. 98–99)

(Then messengers of Malcolm, king of the Scots, came to meet [Magnús], asked for reconciliation, and said thus: that the king of the Scots would give him all the islands which lie to the west of Scotland wherever one might travel between them and the mainland with a fixed-rudder ship. But when King Magnús came from the south to Sátíri (“Kintyre”), he had his skiff dragged over Sátíriseið (“the Tarbert isthmus”). The king held the tiller and thus laid claim to all Sátíri, which is better than the best isle in Suðreyjar (“Mann and the Hebrides”) apart from Mön (“Mann”).)

As Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965, pp. xiii–xiv) noted, the appearance of two so-similar episodes in a single saga undoubtedly implies a relationship, even in a saga with as complicated a production history as *Orkn.* Beiti’s act provides a venerable antecedent and thus adds legal and ritualistic weight to Magnús’s; such appeals

to antiquity are typical of medieval literary and legal practice (Landro, 2010, pp. 189–191). Consequently, the appearance of Beiti's act of expansionism in both variants would appear to confirm that *HNB* was derived from *FN* and that *Frá Fornjóti* was associated with the creation of *Orkn*.

Finnbogi further noted that *Heimskringla*'s version of the Magnús episode, which mostly follows *Orkn*. ch. 41, also includes wording found only in *FN* (in italics): “Konungr sjálf settisk í lypting ok helt um hjálmunvöl ok eignaðisk svá landit, þat er lá á bakborða. Saltíri er mikit land (“the king himself sat in the aft and held the tiller and thus laid claim to the land which lay to port. Saltíri is a great land”) (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 1951, p. 224). For Finnboogi this was decisive evidence of Snorri Sturluson's authorship of *FN*. He suggested that Snorri adapted *Orkn*. ch. 41 to create *FN*, before consciously combining different aspects of both episodes in his account of Magnús in *Heimskringla*. The decision to combine the two episodes in this way is improbable unless Snorri was intimately familiar with *FN* and its parallels to *Orkn*. ch. 41. Finnboogi took it for granted that the Magnús episode belonged to *Orkn*'s first production phase and became known to Snorri when he updated the saga, but the possibility that Snorri added both episodes to *Orkn*. cannot be ruled out.

The Magnús episode also appears in two Kings' saga compilations whose initial composition is dated to the 1220 s: *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* (Ármann Jakobs-son, 2005, 395). At least the former was known to Snorri and itself drew upon *Orkn*. (Gade and Andersson, 2000, p. 21; Finlay and Faulkes, 2011, p. 10). The passage in *Fagrskinna* is a close copy of *Morkinskinna*. The wording of the *Morkinskinna* variant differs significantly from *Orkn*. ch. 41 and *Heimskringla*. Although there are enough correspondences to suggest a common source, close textual readings argue against identifying *Orkn*. ch. 41 as this source.⁴

Firstly, the *Morkinskinna* version of the episode, which is almost twice the length of the variants in *Orkn*. and *Heimskringla*, contains details which are not found anywhere in those texts, such as the placename Sátirismýla (“the Mull of Kintyre”) (Finnur Jónsson, 1932, p. 321). Details requiring knowledge of the local toponymy in western Scotland are unlikely to be subsequent embellishments. Secondly, there are features shared by *Heimskringla*, *Morkinskinna* and the *Frá Fornjóti* variants which are absent from *Orkn*. ch. 41, such as the phrase “settisk í lypting” (“sat in the aft”) (Finnur Jónsson, 1932, p. 321). Snorri does not seem to have derived the former phrase from *FN*, as Finnboogi supposed, as *Heimskringla* accords with *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* in prepending the word “sjálf” (“[him]self”), which *FN* lacks. In addition, every passage barring *HNB* and *Orkn*. ch. 41 describes the claimed territory as “mikitt land” (“a large land”) and notes that the ship was dragged northwards.⁵ *FN* echoes *Morkinskinna* in using ON *leggja* (“lay [a course]”) to describe

⁴ The most protracted correspondence is the sequence “allar eyjar fire Scotlandi þær er hann meyti fara i milli oc meginlanz stiornfosto scipi” (“all the islands off Scotland where he could travel between them and the mainland with a fixed-rudder ship”) (Finnur Jónsson, 1932, p. 321).

⁵ *Morkinskinna* says that the ship was dragged to “ens nørþra siavarins” (“the more northerly shore”) (Finnur Jónsson, 1932, p. 321).

antecedents; Snorri simply adapted or transcribed the Magnús episode on two occasions, with slight variations, at different stages of his career and separately adapted *FN* from *Frá Fornjóti*.

This interpretation rests on the supposition that the Beiti episode in *Frá Fornjóti* was closely and consciously modelled on the Magnús tradition prior to the appearance of both traditions in *Orkn.* This is, of course, pure speculation, but as the episode provides a venerable precedent to Magnús's act of land-taking, it is hardly impossible. Sigurður Nordal (1913–1916, p. xlvii) believed that the Magnús episode derived from Orcadian tradition, but this is far from certain. Magnús was a Norwegian king, and the purported event takes place in western Scotland, beyond the Orcadian polity. A lost saga of Magnús, perhaps even an oral tradition, may be more likely; even the earliest phase of *Orkn.* is thought to have sourced material from lost sagas of Norwegian kings, which are credited in early witnesses to the text (Jesch, 2010, p. 162).

The “common ancestor” model also makes better sense of the appearance of the two episodes in *Orkn.*, which does not obviously suit the narrative or its Orcadian ideology. To the contrary, it legitimizes the expansionism of a Norwegian king, which seems antithetical to the interests of the jarls.⁶ There is no condemnation of Beiti's act, and as neither a son of Nórr nor an ancestor of the jarls (who descend from his brother), the land-taking does not provide the latter with any inherited claims. The pairing of the episodes is far more supportive of Norwegian territorial ambitions and therefore of a shared ancestor of *FN* and *HNB* which lacked *FN*'s more overtly Orcadian perspective.

Conclusion

In summary, the clear parallels between the origin schemas of the *Chronicon Lethrense* and the *Frá Fornjótr* myth offer an insight into a twelfth- and early thirteenth-century learned milieu which spanned the Old Norse world. Of these parallels, the etymologized table of nations found in both the *Chronicon* and *HNB* suggests that the structure of the latter may preserve elements of an older version of the myth than the seemingly abbreviated account in *FN*. This challenges the consensus that *FN* is the original version of the myth and that *HNB* is its derivative. The strongest barrier to this “common ancestor” model is *Frá Fornjótr*'s apparent adaptation of the Magnús episode in *Orkn.* ch. 41. However, a close textual reading of the different versions of this episode in *Orkn.*, *Heimskringla*, *Morkinskinna*, and *Fagrskinna*, as well as in *Frá Fornjótr*, suggests that it was not original to *Orkn.* but circulated independently, possibly in a lost saga of Magnús *berfætr*. As the *Chronicon* itself demonstrates, the division of territory between land and sea realms was a motif already

⁶ It could conceivably support the pretensions of several Icelanders who claimed descent from Magnús *berfætr*, including members of the Oddaverjar (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1993, p. 206).

established in twelfth-century Scandinavian historiography and could thus have influenced such a saga. The Beiti episode could even have been developed to complement this hypothetical tradition, as it serves to provide Magnús's purported act of land-taking with a legendary precedent.

Although these arguments do not conclusively demonstrate that *FN* and *HNB* share a common ancestor, they are at least as substantial as the foundations upon which consensus has hitherto been built. If this hypothesis fails to convince, we must instead concede that *HNB* probably originated in the same timeframe (the early thirteenth century) and milieu as *FN* in order to draw upon the same literary models, which may have included the *Chronicon*, and to make the connection between *FN* and *Heimskringla*.

If a common ancestor existed, we may begin to speculate about the milieu that produced it. Oddi is possible, although the only remaining basis for this is Snorri's knowledge of the myth, which is hardly a compelling link.⁷ A more likely option may be Þingeyrar. This centre is well-known for its history-writing and knowledge of European traditions in the twelfth century. *Sverris saga* was begun in the 1180s by Þingeyrar's abbot, Karl Jónsson, under the supervision of its subject, King Sverrir of Norway, and Geoffrey's *Historia regum* was known there by 1200 (Ármann Jakobsson, 2005, pp. 392–394; Kalinke, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, Oddr munkr's *Óláfs saga* demonstrates the centre's awareness of Nórr/Nóri. Is it possible that the *Chronicon* was known there in the late twelfth century? Or should we even look beyond Iceland for the genesis of the tradition? The *Historia Norwegie* almost certainly alluded to Nórr/Nóri and shares a curious parallel with the *Chronicon* in a folktale about beaver "slaves" otherwise found only in Gerald of Wales' *Itinerarium Cambriae* from 1191 (Dimock, 1868, p. 115; Ekrem & Mortensen, 2003, p. 60; Newlands, 2007, pp. 320–322). If this shared anecdote attests to a link between the milieus that produced the *Historia Norwegie* and the *Chronicon*, could *Frá Fornjóti* have originated in Norway itself?

Further study of the Norwegian ideology of the *Frá Fornjóti* myth might clarify its early history. Nevertheless, the revelation of its connections with the *Chronicon* transfigures our perception of the myth and its prehistory. Rather than an inconsistent account of Orcadian origins, we must consider the possibility that an earlier version of the myth bore more resemblance to its younger child, *HNB*, and presented a schema for Norwegian origins that explained Norway's regional diversity and prepared it for unification.

Acknowledgements This research was conducted at the University of Bergen and was made possible by the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust. My thanks go to Dr Synnøve Midtbø Myking, Dr Tom Grant, and to my anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

Author contributions The preparation of this manuscript and the research it contains was carried out by Dr Ben Allport.

Funding Open access funding provided by University of Bergen (incl Haukeland University Hospital). This research was made possible by the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust.

⁷ Finnboði Guðmundsson (1993, pp. 207–211) even questioned *Orkn.*'s association with the centre in later works.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declares that there are no conflict of interest.

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