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Eastward and northward: a geographical conception of 'Norðmannaland' in *Ohthere's Voyage* and its analogues in old Norse/Icelandic literature

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ABSTRACT

The Old English account known as *Ohthere's Voyage* preserves a ninth-century description of 'Norðmannaland' (the land of the Northmen) given by Ohthere, a sailor from northern Norway, at the court of Alfred the Great. In a little-discussed quirk of terminology, Ohthere's description of the dimensions of Norðmannaland juxtaposes its north (OE *norðeward*) with its east (OE *easteward*), rather than its south. In this article, the phenomenon is compared with similar juxtapositions of east and north in Old Norse skaldic verses and sagas from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, demonstrating that this was not simply an error that crept in with the report's transmission in an Old English context; instead, it is evidence of an Old Norse colloquialism which characterized north-western Scandinavia in terms of its perceived northern and eastern extremities. This colloquialism is compared to similar geographical conceptions found in late- and post-medieval Norwegian texts, such as the division between *nordafjells* (north of the mountains) and *sønnafjells* (south of the mountains); however, it is concluded that the juxtaposition of east and north did not originate in the dividing line of Norway's central mountain ranges, but in the shape of its southern coast.

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Introduction

He sæde ðæt Norðmanna land wære swyþe lang 7swyðe smæl. Eal þæt his man aþer oððe ettan oððe erian mæg, þæt lið wið ða sæ; 7 þæt is þeah on sumum stowum swyðe cludig, 7 licgað wilde moras wið eastan 7 wið uppon, emnlange þæm bynum lande. On þæm morum eardiað Finnas. 7 þæt byne land is *easteward* bradost 7 symle swa *norðor* swa smælre; *eastewerd* hit mæg bion syxtig mila brad opþe hwene brædre, 7 middewearð þritig oððe bradre; 7 *norðeward*, he cwæð, þær hit smalost wære, þæt hit mihte beon þreora mila brad to þæm more, 7 se mor syðþan on sumum stowum swa brad swa man mæg on twam wucum oferferan, 7 on sumum stowum swa brad swa man mæg on syx dagum oferferan.¹

[Ohthere] said that Norðmannaland was very long and very narrow. All that one may graze or plough lies adjacent to the coast, and yet it is very rocky in some places. And towards the east and above, wild uplands lie parallel to the settled land. In those uplands live the Sámi. And the settled land is broadest *towards the east* and ever narrower *further north; towards the east* it

might be sixty *mila* broad or somewhat broader, and towards the middle thirty or broader, and towards the north, he said that where it was narrowest, it might be three *mila* broad to the upland and after that the upland might in some places be so broad that one may cross it in two weeks, and in some places so broad that one may cross it in six days.

These succinct yet evocative words represent the oldest known description of a territory associated with the *norðmenn* (Northmen, eventually 'Norwegians') as a Scandinavian people distinct from Danes or Swedes.² They form part of a reported encounter between a Norse sailor referred to as Ohthere (MNor Ottar) and Alfred the Great of Wessex during the latter's reign (871–899). The report, now called *Ohthere's Voyage*, was included in the Old English translation of Orosius's *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem* (Seven Books of Histories against the Pagans) prior to its preservation in London, British Library, Add. MS 47967 (the Lauderdale or Tollemache *Orosius*) before c. 950.³

This article uses an under-studied peculiarity of expression in this passage – the opposition of the northern part of 'Norðmannaland' (the land of the Northmen) with its east, rather than south – as a springboard to offer insights and nuance previous research into colloquial depictions of Norwegian geography ranging from the ninth to nineteenth centuries. Excerpts from across various medieval Norse corpora – tenth- and eleventh-century skaldic poetry, the twelfth-century *Historia Norvegie*, and twelfth- and thirteenth-century Kings' Sagas – are proffered to demonstrate that, far from being a unique occurrence or an error of translation into Old English, the account's wording reflects a Norse colloquialism which perceived the coastline of Norway by its northern and eastern extremities. This geographical perception is considered with reference to similar perceptions of Norwegian geography, such as the division between *nordafjells* (north of the mountains) and *sønnafjells* (south of the mountains), that are found in late- and post-medieval texts and even in the nineteenth-century writings of Eilert Sundt and Christopher Hansteen.

These are the voyages

Despite the name, *Ohthere's Voyage* is no simple travelogue but also combines elements of ethnography and geography. Ohthere is a self-described Northman, a member of the elite of 'Halogland' (ON Hålogaland, MNor Hålogaland), the northernmost region of Norðmannaland. The report is bookended by two accounts of voyages undertaken by Ohthere (see [Figure 1](#)): one north and east around the Kola peninsula to the territory of the *Beormas* (Bjarmians), and another from the port of 'Sciringeshealh' (Skiringssal, Vestfold) south to the Danish port of 'Hæpūm' (Hedeby, near modern Schleswig).⁴ Sandwiched between these two voyages is an ethnographical account of Ohthere's livelihood and that of the *Finnas* (Sámi) with whom he interacts, followed by the geographical description of Norðmannaland, a list of the territories that surround it, and a rough estimation of the length of its coastline – referred to as 'Norðweg' (the North Way) – in terms of how long it takes to sail from Halgoland to Sciringeshealh.⁵

Although few have doubted the context that *Ohthere's Voyage* provides for itself,⁶ much about its composition remains a mystery. We do not know, for example, precisely when and where the encounter between Ohthere and Alfred took place, how Ohthere came to



Figure 1. Ohthere's Voyages, including abridged ethnographical information from the account.

be there, and in what language he addressed his audience.⁷ The text cannot be divorced from the Anglo-Saxon context in which it was preserved and transmitted, and recent studies have encouraged us to recognize the ways in which both this account and the *Orosius* more generally were shaped to reflect the perceptions, sensibilities, and ideologies of their learned West Saxon audience.⁸ Nevertheless, a great deal of information in the text, much of it linguistic, supports the account's own claim to preserve the words of a ninth-century Scandinavian.⁹ Furthermore, as there is (as yet) no evidence that the report was known in Scandinavia or Iceland (where most of the surviving corpus of Old Norse literature was produced), the text acts as an independent witness to literary traditions otherwise attested primarily in thirteenth-century and later Icelandic manuscripts.

Ohthere's Voyage has long been employed as a source for ninth-century Norwegian and Sámi history. Particular attention has been directed at Ohthere's references to Norðmannaland and Norðweg, which are widely regarded as at least an embryonic, as

yet ununified form of the medieval Norwegian realm.¹⁰ The appearance of *Norðweg* in the text is one of the oldest allusions to the Old Norse term found in later Norse texts as ‘Nóregr’ (MNor Norge; Norway).¹¹ Nevertheless, caution must be taken in drawing connections between Ohthere’s *Norðmannaland* and the later medieval Norwegian polity into which it evolved, the borders and political divisions of which are clearly delimited in twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts.¹² As Steinar Imsen notes,¹³ Ohthere’s account shows little interest in political structures or borders, referring only to vaguely defined ethnic territories – *Norðmannaland*, ‘Beormaland’ (the land of the Bjarmians),¹⁴ ‘Cwenaland’ (the land of the Kvens), ‘Terfinnaland’ (the land of the Ter Sámi), ‘Sweoland’ (the land of the Svear in central Sweden) – and their rough locations. These territories are interspersed with nebulous tracts of ‘weste land’ (wasteland/wilderness) inhabited only by the *Finnas*.¹⁵ No indication is given of the political organization in *Norðmannaland*, which, pre-unification, would have been a patchwork of petty kingdoms.

To avoid anachronisms, the use of OE/ON *norðmenn* in ninth- and tenth-century texts is here rendered literally as ‘Northmen’. Although MNor *nordmenn* (Norwegians) derives from the Old Norse term, it has accrued connotations associated with the existence of Norway as a unified polity with clearly defined political (eventually national), linguistic, and ethnic, as well as geographical, boundaries. The timing and process by which the term gained these connotations is hotly debated, but it is unlikely that *norðmenn* had precisely the same meaning to those that bore it in the year 900 as it did in 1200.¹⁶

Easteward and *norðeward*

The opposition of *easteward* (eastward) and *norðor/norðeward* (further north/northward) appears only in the paragraph quoted above. Earlier in the text, Ohthere describes his journey around the northern cape of Scandinavia as heading due north, then east, then south into the White Sea (see [Figure 1](#)). Although these directions are wildly approximate,¹⁷ east is clearly not used in opposition to north here, as that would imply that Ohthere had reversed course. Immediately after the quoted passage, Ohthere even juxtaposes the south with the north: ‘ðonne is toemnes þæm lande suðewardum, on oðre healfe þæs mores, Sweoland, oþ þæt land norðeward’ (then, alongside the land towards the south, on the other side of the uplands, is Sweoland, up until the northward part of the land). He later states that the port of Sciringeshealh is ‘on suðewardum þæm lande’ (in the southward part of the land),¹⁸ and sails there along *Norðweg*, again implying an opposition between north and south.

The inconsistency in opposing north with east and south makes it difficult for the modern observer to reconcile the account’s description with our ingrained knowledge of the Scandinavian coastline. Nevertheless, in 2017, Dagfinn Skre interpreted Ohthere’s use of *easteward* literally, arguing that:

in Ohthere’s account [. . .] it is said that the populated zone of his homeland was narrow, except in the east, where cultivated land was found far from the coast. The same conception of land is provided in greater detail in *Historia Norwegie* [. . .]. There, a distinction is made between two parts of Norway: the *Zona Montana* (the Mountainous Lands, the Uplands) and the *Zona Maritima* (the Coastal Lands).¹⁹

The *Historia Norwegie* to which Skre alludes is an anonymous Latin text composed in Norway in the late twelfth century.²⁰ It opens with a geographical and administrative description of the kingdom of 'Norwegia'; each of the two zones named by Skre is divided into four *patriae* and then further into *provinciae*, corresponding in scale to the medieval Norwegian *þing* (assembly) districts and *fylki* (counties), respectively.

There are several issues with Skre's interpretation, as it is presented. Firstly, although there is a terminological continuity apparent in these texts' references to Norðweg/Norwegia, we must exercise caution in equating the defined borders and intricate system of administrative divisions found in the *Historia Norwegie* with Ohthere's vague, territorial description of Norðmannaland.²¹ The process of political development in the three centuries that separates these texts is indistinct, and we lack datapoints beyond the *Historia* itself for this geographical and administrative schema, which Sverre Bagge regards as highly idealized, rather than a reflection of reality.²² Secondly, the two descriptions are not wholly consistent. *Ohthere's Voyage* makes it clear that all the cultivated land throughout Norðmannaland 'lið wið ða sæ' (lies adjacent to the coast);²³ it is not said to lie 'far from the coast' in the east, as Skre suggests; it therefore does not map onto the *Historia's zona montana*, which is completely landlocked in contrast to the *zona maritima*.²⁴

Consequently, if Ohthere's *easteward* did indeed refer to the eastern portion of the land, it must have included the coast, and therefore the port of Sciringeshealh, which has been identified with Skiringssal (ON Skíringssalr) on the southeastern coast of Norway (see [Figures 1 and 2](#)).²⁵ Yet this port is described as being 'on suðewardum þæm lande' (in the southward part of the land).²⁶ It is thus clear that the account was influenced by multiple, overlapping conceptions of geography. Innumerable instances of similar contradictory conceptions could be cited from across the globe. They are a common consequence of geography being defined socially as much as by physical contours or coordinates: by 'social co-ordinates entering into the physical ("objective") co-ordinates of space', as Kirsten Hastrup puts it.²⁷ One could note, for example, that the modern Norwegian region of Østlandet (Eastern Norway) lies further west than more than a quarter of the country's landmass, which is instead assigned to Nord-Norge (Northern Norway). Given the northern extent of Norse settlement in the ninth and tenth centuries,²⁸ much of Ohthere's Halgoland may also have been further east than even Skre's definition of the 'eastward' part of Norðmannaland.

It is inevitable that a verbal account of geography from an essentially pre-cartographic age would be shaped by colloquialism and socially constructed conceptions, even without considering the reinterpretation of the account by an Anglo-Saxon audience.²⁹ The account's reference to Norðweg is often cited as a socially constructed Norse conception of geography. Most scholars derive Norðweg/Nóregr from ON **norðrvegr* (the North Way), which is assumed to have been the name for the sailing route along the Norwegian coast which later became applied to the land, and ultimately the kingdom, through a process of metonymic transfer.³⁰ If this etymology is accepted,³¹ it would attest to the existence of a route defined by its ultimate endpoint in the far north of the known world.³²

The characterization of a journey by its endpoint was defined by Einar Haugen as 'ultimate' orientation, in contrast to ego-centred, 'proximate' orientation based on observations of landmarks or astrology.³³ Haugen based these definitions on research conducted by Stefán Einarsson, who observed that, in medieval narratives set in Iceland, the

direction of travel between Iceland's four administrative quarters was defined by the quarter to which one travelled.³⁴ Thus, travel to the western quarter was described as travel 'west', regardless of whether the direction of travel was actually due west. Tatjana Jackson interprets **norðrvegr* as part of a similar Norse concept that divided the world into a 'wind-rose' system of four unequal (and unevenly attested) cardinal quarters — **norðrvegr*, **austrvegr*, **suðrvegr*, and **vestrvegr* — which were centred on southern Scandinavia.³⁵

Ohthere's opposition of north and east does not appear to belong to this wind-rose system as it is contained by the (admittedly vague) boundaries of Norðmannaland, which would, according to Jackson's model, fall entirely within the northern quarter. However, the sense that directions in *Ohthere's Voyage* could be defined by their endpoints is hinted at by both the name 'Norðweg' and the tendency within the text to append the element *-weard* to cardinal directions, conveying a sense of motion *towards* these extremities. Such dynamism is a typical feature of the following Old Norse analogues for Ohthere's quirk of terminology.

Austr í Vík

The few researchers to comment upon the juxtaposition of east with north in *Ohthere's Voyage* have compared it to, as Janet Bately puts it, 'the Norse practice of describing a traveller going to the south coast of Norway (the area from Lindesnes to the inner end of the [Oslofjord]) as travelling "east"'.³⁶ Irmeli Valtonen more explicitly compares the account's wording to the formulae *austr í Vík* (east in/to Vík) and *austan ór Vík* (from the east out of Vík),³⁷ referring to the land surrounding the Oslofjord and its entrance (see [Figure 2](#)). These formulae are regularly used in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Kings' Sagas both to denote journeys to or from Vík (MNor Viken) and to provide a static setting. Thus, for example, we might be told that 'þá [. . .] Eysteinn [. . .] fóru inn í Sogn, en þaðan austr í Vík' (then Eysteinn travelled into Sogn, and thereafter east to Vík),³⁸ or that 'bræðr tveir bjoggu í Vík austr' (two brothers lived east in Vík).³⁹

Vík is by far the placename which appears most often in these formulae. The strength of this association is highlighted by the translation of Vík into Latin as 'sinus orientalis' (the Eastern Gulf) in the *Historia Norwegie*.⁴⁰ In *Heimskringla*, a Kings' Saga compilation attributed to the Icelandic magnate Snorri Sturluson and dated to around 1230,⁴¹ these two formulae are used nearly fifty times in conjunction with Vík, accounting for almost half of the total number of references to this regional name. In *Fagrskinna*, another compilation produced in the decade prior to *Heimskringla*,⁴² the twenty-five appearances of the formula account for over 60% of all references to Vík.

Given Vík's location in south-eastern Norway, it is broadly accurate to say that a voyage to Vík from the coast of western Norway (such as Sogn, above; see [Figure 2](#)) was a journey to the east, even if it primarily involved sailing south and then northeast around Norway's southern coast. On this basis, Jackson concluded that travel within Norway is described in *Heimskringla* and other thirteenth-century sagas using a separate, proximate system (which she refers to as 'cartographic') that employed cardinal directions 'correctly'.⁴³

That we are dealing with a distinctive perception of Norwegian geography is only indicated by the rare occasions when the start- or endpoint of the journey is northwest or even directly north of Vík. A clear example of this can be found in a narrative about the royal pretender Sigurðr *slæmbidjárn* in *Fagrskinna*, which states that 'þá fór Sigurðr inn í

Vága [...]. Þaðan fór hann í Vík austr' (then Sigurðr travelled into Vágur. Thereafter he travelled east to Vík).⁴⁴ Vágur (MNor Vågan) was a trading site located in the Lofoten archipelago in northern Norway,⁴⁵ 900 km north (and in fact slightly east) of the Oslofjord (see Figure 2). Such bearings cannot be described as cartographic.

With the phrase *austr í Vík*, we thus have Old Norse examples of 'east' being used in contexts where south might be more appropriate. However, there is little here to suggest that this is evidence of the same phenomenon found in *Ohthere's Voyage*, and these textual traditions are separated by 350 years. We require more datapoints in order to establish whether these two colloquialisms represent a shared geographical conception and must look further back in time for more contemporary Old Norse analogues. We must therefore turn to the corpus of skaldic poetry.

East and north in skaldic verse

Despite its abundance in the sagas, *austr í Vík* is not widely attested in skaldic poetry. It first appears in *Nesjavísur*, a poem composed by the Icelandic skald Sighvatr Þórðarson to commemorate the Battle of Nesjar, which took place in 1016 between (soon-to-be) King Óláfr Haraldsson and Jarl Sveinn Hákonarson of Hlaðir (MNor Lade). The battle probably took place in the coastal waters off Langesund, just west of the traditional district of Vestfold (see Figure 2).⁴⁶ From the poem itself, we can deduce that Óláfr sailed to the battle from Vík, whereas Sveinn arrived from the opposite direction. According to *Heimskringla*, Sveinn had brought his army around the southern coast, having started out from Þrándheimr (MNor Trøndelag),⁴⁷ and indeed the poem alludes to this, envisaging the disappointment of a 'snotr innþrænzka mæri' (wise maiden of inner Þrándheimr) at the performance of her menfolk in battle.⁴⁸ The stanza containing the collocation reads as follows:

Fór ór Vík á vári
válaust konungr austan,
– þeir kníðu bló þáðir
borð – en jarl kom norðan.

The king set forth, without doubt, from the east out of Vík in the spring, and the jarl came from the north; they both urged on the black planks.⁴⁹

The term *austan* in this context is not cartographically incorrect if the battle did indeed take place near Langesund; the lie of the Vestfold coastline makes it reasonable to state that Óláfr had sailed directly from the east out of Vík. Similarly, the statement that the jarl had come from the north makes sense given that his journey began in Þrándheimr, even though he must have sailed into battle from the southwest. Yet it is interesting to note that east and north are juxtaposed in the stanza as the respective starting points of the battle's participants. We are thus given a faint glimmer of a parallel with *Ohthere's Voyage*.

The connection is strengthened by three verses dated to the tenth century. One is found in *Háleygjatal*, a fragmentary poem attributed to the Norwegian skaldic poet Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* that enumerated the ancestry of the jarls of Hlaðir. The verse is thought to date from shortly after c. 985, the date given for the Battle of Þrungavágr



Figure 2. Norway south of Trøndelag, with relevant Old Norse place names.

(MNor Hjørungavåg), victory at which allowed Jarl Hákon of Hlaðir (d. 995) to extend his direct control along the Norwegian coast. Hákon is referred to in the poem as if he is still alive, suggesting 995 as a *terminus ante quem*.⁵⁰ Eyvindr concludes the poem by noting that:

Þeims allt austr
til Egða býs
brúðr valtýs und bægi.

Under [Hákon's] arm the bride of the slaughter-god [LAND] lies all the way east to the territory of the *Egðir*.⁵¹

Here *austr* is unambiguously used in a context where we would expect to find *suðr*: the *Egðir* are the inhabitants of Agðir (MNor Agder), at the southernmost tip of Norway west of the Oslofjord (see Figure 2). Archaeological finds have demonstrated that the tenth-century power centres of this community were located in the vicinity of the Lindesnes (ON Líðandisnes) peninsula – the extreme southern tip of the coastland. There would have navigated on his way to Sciringesheath – throughout the Viking Age.⁵² In other words, the *Egðir* lived as far south as it was possible to be in tenth-century Norway.

The poem *Vellekla*, also in praise of Jarl Hákon and apparently pre-dating his death in 995,⁵³ similarly refers to Hákon's conquests in the 'east':

Mart varð él, áðr, Ála,
austr lǫnd at mun banda
randar lauks af ríki
rœkilundur of tœki.

Many a storm of Áli [BATTLE] came about before the tending-tree of the leek of the shield [WARRIOR] took the lands in the east by force at the will of the gods.⁵⁴

This reference is slightly more ambiguous than *Háleygjatal* as the term *austr lǫnd* is not associated with a specific location. However, the verse is quoted in *Haralds saga gráfeldar* in *Heimskringla* in the context of Jarl Hákon's early skirmishes with King Haraldr *gráfeldr*, whose power bases lay in southwestern Norway.⁵⁵ *Heimskringla* suggests that Hákon's control was mostly limited to the western seaboard of Norway, and there is nothing in the poem to contradict this.⁵⁶ Indeed, the purported composer of the verse, Einarr *skálaglamm*, repeatedly emphasizes the maritime nature of Hákon's control, embedding sea-related kennings and metaphors in almost every stanza. Numerous coastal regions are mentioned, such as Mœrr (MNor Møre) and Sogn, but there is no reference to any location in eastern Norway beyond 'Dofrar' – the Dovrefjell mountains which formed the southern boundary of Þrándheimr (see Figure 2).

Several of the verse's editors have argued that this reference to the western coast of Norway as *austr lǫnd* is a manifestation of Einarr's Icelandic perspective.⁵⁷ Icelandic Einarr may have been, but he was composing in praise of a Norwegian ruler to enhance that ruler's prestige and ambitions within his own political arena. It is unlikely that Einarr would inject such a clear Icelandic perspective into his work – to the extent of using a colloquialism only relevant in Iceland – particularly as Icelanders had not yet come to dominate skaldic circles as they would in the eleventh century.⁵⁸

If *Vellekla's* *austr lǫnd* refers to the coastal territories that lay south of Þrándheimr, another stanza takes on new significance:

Nú liggr allt und jarli
(ímunborðs) fyr norðan
(veðrgæðis stendr víða)
Vík (Hǫkunar ríki).

Now everything north of Vík lies under the jarl's rule; the realm of Hákon, the increaser of the storm of the battle-board [WARRIOR], stretches far and wide.⁵⁹

It seems that Hákon's new coastal territories lie 'east' from his heartlands but 'north' of (and seemingly not including) Vík: another echo, if less direct, of the juxtaposition of east and north.

We come finally to *Haraldskvæði* (also called *Hrafnsmál*), stanzas of which are variously attributed to Þjóðólfr ór Hvini and Þorbjörn *hornklofi* in the sagas. Both are associated with Haraldr *hárfagri*, the unifier of Norway in popular tradition. The cohesion of the poem is debated, but R. D. Fulk cautiously dates its core, comprising twelve stanzas which all share the same metre, to around 900, making it roughly contemporary to Ohthere's report to Alfred.⁶⁰ The following examples are taken from these twelve stanzas. Six of these stanzas describe the Battle of Hafrsfjörðr (MNor Hafrsfjord), at which – according to subsequent saga tradition – Haraldr subdued his enemies and gained overlordship of the petty kingdoms of Norway. The following stanza describes the movement of Haraldr's enemies towards the battle:

Heyrðir þú, i Hafrsfirði
 hvé hizug barðisk
 konungr inn kynstóri
 við Kjötva inn auðlagða?
 Knerrir kvómu austan
 kapps af lystir

Have you heard how the high-born king fought with Kjötvi the Wealthy there in Hafrsfjörðr?
 Ships came from the east, eager for battle.⁶¹

It is made explicit in another stanza that the ships referred to are those of Haraldr's opponents.

Austan cannot be taken literally in this instance, as Hafrsfjord can only be entered from the northwest. Consequently, Bjarni Aðalbjarnason glossed this term as *sunnan* (from the south) in his edition of *Heimskringla*.⁶² Although it has also been suggested that the opponents referred to here are Danes from Vík,⁶³ there is not much in the verses themselves to support this. This interpretation arises from the saga-endorsed view of the Battle of Hafrsfjörðr as one of 'national' significance that delivered Norway into Haraldr's hands.⁶⁴ Recent historians have been inclined to narrow Haraldr's power base down to the southwestern coast, with debatable overlordship over neighbouring coastal regions such as Moerr and Þrándheimr.⁶⁵

It is therefore striking that the twelve stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* under discussion are localized geographically to a small area stretching from the southern entrance of Hardangerfjorden to the lowland coastal plains of Jæren (ON Jaðarr), which lie between Hafrsfjord and the lands associated with Agðir at Norway's southern tip (see Figure 2). The enemies of Haraldr that are named in the poem, Kjötvi and Haklangr, were, according to the context provided by *Heimskringla*, the ruler of Agðir and his son.⁶⁶ If this context taps into a genuine Viking Age tradition, then it would once again appear to locate Agðir in the 'east'. This possibility is further corroborated by the poem itself, which states that:

Æstusk austkylfur
ok of Jaðar hljópu
heim ór Hafrsfirði
ok hugðu á mjöðdrykkju.

The east-cudgels [Haraldr's enemies] were stirred up and ran across Jaðarr, homewards from Hafrsfjörðr, and concentrated on mead-drinking.⁶⁷

If Haraldr's opponents, here characterized as eastern, were indeed from Agðir, it would make sense for them to flee south across Jaðarr to their home, in which case the east is once again conflated with the south.

Like *Nesjavísur* and *Vellekla*, *Haraldskvæði* also provides an opposition of the east and the north. Haraldr is first described as 'þann es á Kvinnum býr, dróttin Norðmanna' (the one who resides at Kvinnar, lord of Northmen);⁶⁸ in another stanza he is called 'allvalds austmanna, es býr at Útsteini' (the ruler of Eastmen who resides at Útsteinn).⁶⁹ Modern English translations often render *austmenn* as 'Norwegians' or even 'Northmen',⁷⁰ but this is highly anachronistic. *Austmenn* is a common term for Norwegians in twelfth-century and later Icelandic literature wherein it is clearly the product of an Icelandic perspective.⁷¹ We cannot expect a Norwegian poet at the court of a king in southwestern Norway some three decades after the Norse began to settle Iceland to have used a term born of such a perspective. As with the rest of the poem, we must assume that the terms had local relevance, in which case the locations associated with the Northmen and Eastmen, respectively Kvinnar and Útsteinn, become significant.

Kvinnar can be identified with the area now known as Kvinnherad, just south of the entrance to Hardangerfjorden (see [Figure 2](#)). Útsteinn (MNor Utstein) refers to a site that lies on the island of Klosterøy, just north of modern Stavanger. Within the context of the poem, these locations may be intended to represent power centres at the extremities of Haraldr's political heartland,⁷² from which the poem extends his overlordship (whether real or symbolic) over the people who dwell beyond them. Kvinnar is certainly the more northerly of the two sites; yet for Útsteinn to be regarded as east, we must once again conclude that 'east' is being used in a situation where we would expect 'south'.

Anomalous usages of terminology associated with the east would therefore appear to be consciously juxtaposed with references to the north in some skaldic verses, just as they are in *Ohthere's Voyage*. In addition, the reference found in *Nesjavísur* offers a clear link between the north/east juxtaposition and the phrase *austan ór Vík*, suggesting that we should return to the sagas to seek further evidence of this opposition.

East and north in saga literature

Although not as common as *austr í Vík*, there are at least twelve references in *Fagrskinna* to a complementary phrase *norðr í Þrándheimr* [north in/to Þrándheimr]. On one occasion the two formulae are used directly in opposition to one another: 'þá fór Eysteinn í Vík austr, en Ingi norðr í Þrándheimr' (then Eysteinn travelled east to Vík and Ingi north to Þrándheimr).⁷³ Nor is this the only example of east and north being opposed in this way in *Fagrskinna*. In the following chapter, we are told that 'en sumarit eptir hittusk konungar í Seleyjum, ok kom Ingi norðan, en Eystein austan' (and the following summer the kings

met one another in Seleyjar, and Ingi came from the north and Eysteinn from the east).⁷⁴ The same opposition can be found throughout *Heimskringla*. In *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, for example, we are told that ‘fór konungur um sumarit norðr til Þrándheims. Dvöðusk þar um sumarit, en fór aptr um haustit austr í Vík’ (in the summer the king travelled north to Þrándheimr. He dwelt there throughout the summer, and afterwards travelled east to Vík in the autumn).⁷⁵ In *Sverris saga*, composed in two stages in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries,⁷⁶ we are told that ‘Eysteinn konungur hafði farit norðan ok austr í Vík’ (King Eysteinn had travelled from the north and east to Vík). The phrases *norðr í landi* and *austr í landi* are frequently juxtaposed.⁷⁷

In *Heimskringla*, we also find references which use ‘north’ in ways as unexpected as the examples of ‘east’ already mentioned. Snorri twice refers to ‘Norðr-Agðir’ (north Agðir) when describing coastal journeys heading west around the southern coast. The first reference is found in *Hákonar saga góða*: ‘er hann kom suðr á Stað, þá spurði hann, at Eiríkssynir váru þá komnir á Norðr-Agðir’ (when [King Hákon] came south of Stað, he then learned that the Eiríkssons had then reached Norðr-Agðir).⁷⁸ A few lines later, the term ‘Austr-Agðir’ is associated with the Eiríkssons’ return journey.⁷⁹ In the second instance, we are told that King Óláfr Haraldsson ‘fór [...] svá allt til Líðandisness. Þá spurði hann, at Erlingr Skjálgsson hafði samnað mikinn. Dvalðisk hann þá ekki á Norðr-Ögðum, því at hann fekk hraðbyri’ (travelled thus all the way to Líðandisnes. Then he learned that Erlingr Skjálgsson had assembled great numbers of men. He did not dwell in Norðr-Agðir, because he got a fair wind).⁸⁰ It is peculiar to find Líðandisnes – the Lindesnes peninsular at Norway’s southernmost tip – thus described as part of ‘Norðr-Agðir’. Conversely, a passage in *Sverris saga* notes that King Magnús Erlingsson raised an army ‘austan frá Líðandisnesi ok norðr um Agðir’ (from the east from Líðandisnes and north throughout Agðir).⁸¹

Further examples relating to Agðir resemble the *austr í Vík* formula. On one occasion in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, King Haraldr sends his errant son Guðrøðr *Ijómi* from Moerr ‘austr á Agðir’ (east to Agðir), despite Agðir lying south from Moerr (see [Figure 2](#)).⁸² In *Óláfs saga ins helga*, the death of Erlingr prompts a host to be raised ‘austan um Agðir’ (from the east throughout Agðir).⁸³ Conversely, there are two instances in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* where the king sails from Vík ‘norðr á Agðir’ (north to Agðir).⁸⁴ From a cartographic perspective the direction of this journey can only be described as south-westerly. Similarly, in *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*, an expanse of territory is described as ‘Víkina alla norðr til Rýgjarbits’ (all the Vík north to Rýgjarbit).⁸⁵ The precise location of Rýgjarbit, also named as the boundary of Vík in *Historia Norwegie*,⁸⁶ is unknown, but it was likely a coastal landmark between the headland of Gjernessen and the Levang peninsula (see [Figure 2](#)).⁸⁷ This would therefore make it the south-westernmost point of Vík.

There are enough examples of east being explicitly contrasted with north in Old Norse depictions of north-western Scandinavia to suggest that the opposition of *easteward* and *norðeward* in *Ohthere’s Voyage* is not an isolated incident, some error of translation or transmission. Examples may be few and far between, but they attest to a colloquialism in continuous use from the ninth century to at least the thirteenth. However, unveiling the geographical conception that lay behind this colloquialism is no easy task. As Jackson’s analyses demonstrate,⁸⁸ many saga references to directions of travel operate in more cartographically accurate ways or appear to conform to other models, such as the wind-rose system, attesting to the ability of different, socially constructed perceptions of

geography to cheerfully coexist, overlap, and perhaps even merge with one another. This becomes clear when we turn to consider similar terminological quirks in written sources from the late medieval and modern periods, some of which seem to preserve the legacy of Ohthere's colloquialism up to a millennium after its first appearance in the written record.

Nordafjells and sønnafjells

The historian Knut Helle drew attention to several conceptual divisions seemingly based along the long line of the Scandinavian mountain range that runs parallel to Norway's western seaboard.⁸⁹ This division is expressed most literally by the terms *nordafjells* (north of the mountain) and *sønnafjells* (south of the mountain), with the dividing line meeting the coast at a point which varies between Lindesnes and Åna-Sira (see Figure 3). These terms are first attested in written sources from the late fifteenth century and remained in use until at least the eighteenth century, when scholars such as Bishop Erik Pontoppidan of Bergen introduced the terms 'Øster-landet' (MNor Østlandet, 'Eastern Norway') and 'Vester-landet' (MNor Vestlandet, 'Western Norway').⁹⁰

Helle suggested that evidence for the *nordafjells/sønnafjells* division could be found as early as the 1270s in the law code *Hirðskrá*, which contains a record of a royal decree of Magnús *lagabætir* dated to the summer of 1273. This decree was issued at a meeting in Bergen to which were summoned 'hofðingiar. lenðr menn oc systlumenn aller norðan or lanðeno' (all the chieftains, landed men, and sheriffs from the north of the land). The decree lists the regions regarded as 'norðar i lanðet' (in the north of the land), beginning with 'egðafylki' (Agðir).⁹¹ No opposition of north with either south or east is found in this text, but, as Helle noted, a decree of Hákon Magnússon from 1308 refers to land 'fyrir sunnan Liðandisnes ok Dofrafjall' (to the south of Líðandisnes and Dofrafjall, i.e. Dofrar) and distinguishes explicitly between 'þeir sem fyrir norðan eru Liðandisnes . . . en þeir sem fyrir sunnan eru Nesit' (those who are north of Líðandisnes . . . and those who are south of that headland).⁹² This offers a possible bridge between late medieval examples which position Lindesnes at the division between north and east and early modern attestations of *nordafjells/sønnafjells*, suggesting that we should factor this mountain-based division into our thinking.

Already in Helle's work one can read the implication that Ohthere's Norðmannaland can be equated with *nordafjells*. The comparison was voiced explicitly by Dagfinn Skre in a 2015 article, in which he refers to the Northmen as those who lived 'in the land north of the great mountains'.⁹³ This interpretation fits reasonably well with the account's description of the geography of Norðmannaland, which is said to have 'wilde moras' (wild uplands) lying 'wið eastan 7 wið uppon' (to the east and above), although the two concepts were clearly not completely equivalent, as Sciringeshealh lies 'on suðewardum' (in the southward part) of Norðmannaland but is unambiguously *sønnafjells* by late- and post-medieval reckoning.

Of course, the more conventional opposition of north and south in the *nordafjells/sønnafjells* division offers no explanation for the juxtaposition of north with east in Old Norse sources or Ohthere's *Voyage*. However, in his discussion of *nordafjells/sønnafjells*, Helle also notes that:

East of Langfjella, from Setesdalen to Hallingdal, the area from Rogaland to Sogn og Fjordane was reckoned to be ‘the Northland’. One travelled there ‘north over’ the mountains, and from there came ‘Northmen’. Over Hardangervidda one travelled along ‘the Northmen-roads’, past Nordmannslågen (Northman’s water) and along Nordmannsslepene (Northman’s towpaths). Conversely, folk east of the mountains were called ‘Eastmen’ on the west side. To Røldal they came down Austmannalia (the slope of the Eastmen). Along the southernmost stretch of coast [in Agder], Eilert Sundt found that there was a corresponding division between the Northland and Eastland at Eigersund. [. . .] Folk east of this division [. . .] were called Eastmen to distinguish them from the Northmen along the western Norwegian coast (my translation; see Figure 3).⁹⁴



Figure 3. The mountain-based divisions of Norway in late- and post-medieval sources.

This division is expressed in almost identical terms to the medieval opposition of north and east but is found in placenames and the writings of the nineteenth-century sociologist Eilert Sundt. Nor is his the only nineteenth-century testimony to this division. In 1821 the astronomer Christopher Hansteen travelled west from Uvdal in Numedal to Hardangerfjorden (see Figure 3). Bemused by the locals' tendency to refer to this as a journey north and describe the residents of Hardangerfjorden as 'Normänner' (Northmen), Hansteen grumbled that 'Det Opdalske Compas, skulde man tro, havde en Misvisning af 90° mod Vest' (one might believe that the Uvdal compass had a misalignment of 90° towards the west).⁹⁵

Helle acknowledged one analogue in Old Norse literature, comparing the colloquialism with the division between Northmen and Eastmen in *Haraldskvæði*. He suggested that, in the latter, 'the Northmen were here probably the people from the western Norwegian area in the north whom [Haraldr *hárfagri*] had subjugated before the battle, whereas the Eastmen were the opponents over whom he had triumphed at Hafrsfjord' (my translation).⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Helle seemed to equate the *nordafjells/sønnafjells* and *nordmenn/austmenn* divisions as evidence of a single phenomenon that was expressed in all the medieval and post-medieval examples he cited, whereas the full range of medieval examples listed herein suggest that the picture was more complicated.

Ways north and east

All the examples considered conform to an apparent bipartite division of Norway which is expressed with an opposition of cardinal directions: varying north/east and north/south. In all cases, motion across the boundary is described by the perceived endpoint, conforming to Haugen's concept of ultimate orientation. Variations in cardinal direction aside, there are two key differences between the medieval and post-medieval examples. The first is that *nordafjells/sønnafjells* and *nordlandet/austlandet* are, for the most part, explicitly based upon the dividing line of the Norwegian mountains or expressed in relation to journeys crossing them. The only exception to this is Eilert Sundt's distinction of *austmenn* and *nordmenn*, which was used by local fishermen.

Explicit evidence of a mountainous context is lacking in any of the medieval examples cited prior to 1308. In *Ohthere's Voyage*, the description of Norðmannaland effectively precludes the possibility that the mountains were the dividing line between *easteward* and *norðeward*; the 'wild uplands' lie 'wið eastan 7 wið uppon, emnlange þæm bynum lande' (towards the east and above, parallel to the settled land) of Norðmannaland, and 'is . . . on oðre healfes þæs mores, Sweoland' (on the other side of the upland is Sweoland).⁹⁷ Although a division based on the mountain ranges is compatible with most of the examples cited from Old Norse literature, there is nothing to explicitly suggest a connection. On the contrary, when a context is mentioned, the overwhelming tendency is for it to be maritime: from the naval battles of Hafrsfjörðr and Nesjar, the coastal locations of *Haraldskvæði*, and the nautical language of *Vellekla* to the various voyages 'north' to Agðir or Rýgjarbit in *Heimskringla*. Around three quarters of the appearances of *austr í Vík* in *Heimskringla* are used to describe journeys, rather than static circumstances, and all but two of these journeys are explicitly stated or contextually implied to be by boat. In *Fagrskinna* over half of the usages of the formula describe journeys and all appear to be by boat. Given that Ohthere was a sailor who described the coast of Norðveg in nautical

terms, the same perspective may also be present in his own use of *norðeward* and *easteward*.

Secondly, the post-medieval divisions are static and territorial, whereas the medieval juxtapositions are often dynamic and situational, defined by literal or conceptual motion in either direction along a fixed span between north and east. Regardless of the position of the start- or endpoints along this span, motion in one direction is described as north and in the other is east (see Figure 4). This is illustrated by the sweeping phrase ‘allt austr til Egða býs’ (all the way east to the territory of the *Egðir*) in *Háleygjatal*,⁹⁸ which assigns the quality *austr* to a large expanse of territory within the area later defined as *nordafjells* by virtue of the endpoint in *Agðir*, itself only the boundary to the lands east/south of the mountains. Similarly, Sigurðr *slembidjákn* travels *austr* from *Vágar* to *Vík* in *Fagrskinna*, assigning this cardinal quality to over a thousand kilometres of Norway’s north-western coastline. Heading in the opposite direction, Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla* sails *norðr*



Figure 4. The coast-based conception of Norwegian geography, defined by its eastern and northern extremities.

from Vík to Agðir along a *sønna fjells* coastline on a bearing southwest. Snorri Sturluson could use the phrase ‘Víkina alla norðr til Rýgjarbits’ (all the Vík north to Rýgjarbits) in *Heimskringla*,⁹⁹ despite Rýgjarbit marking Vík’s southwestern border. The composer of *Haraldskvæði* could claim that Haraldr *hárfagri* was lord of both Northmen and Eastmen by projecting his symbolic authority from the royal manors that lay at the northern and ‘eastern’ extent of his heartland.

What, then, defined these northern and eastern extremities? In a rare (if laconic) consideration of the phrase *austr í Vík* from 1930, the Swedish linguist Nataniel Beckman suggested that Vík and Konungahella (now Kungahälla, a former Norwegian royal manor located in modern Bohuslän, Sweden; see [Figures 2 and 3](#)) could be regarded as east because they were the primary conduits for travel east from Norway to Sweden and beyond:

Viken in the sense of Bohuslän is Norway’s southernmost part, but in common perception it played a greater role: it was the most important contact point with the neighbouring land to the east. Therefore, one sees *austr í Vík*, *austr í Konungahellu* (my translation).¹⁰⁰

Beckman does not explain why travel east to Sweden would loom larger in the Norwegian geographical consciousness than the route south to Denmark, and his interpretation fares poorly against the evidence gathered here; Agðir cannot be considered a contact point with Sweden, nor Rýgjarbit a portal to travel north beyond Norway. Yet the emphasis Beckman placed upon communication routes in the construction of this geographical perception is instructive. Taking into account the maritime connotations found in the medieval examples cited above, it seems reasonable to conclude that it was the sailing route around the coast of Norway – and thus the coastline itself – that dictated this colloquialism.

Specifically, we must assume that the sharp curve of the coastline of Agder in southern Norway, as it swings from a course that is broadly east-west to one that is north-south, lay at the heart of this coastal conception. The central role of Agðir in the examples considered is impossible to ignore. ‘Egða býs’ (the territory of the *Egðir*) is explicitly mentioned as early as *Vellekla* and is the implied home of *Haraldskvæði*’s ‘austkylfur’ (east-cudgels),¹⁰¹ who were themselves cudgelled by Haraldr *hárfagri*’s forces at Hafrsfjörðr. It is described in terms of motion towards both north and east, with Líðandisnes, Agðir’s southernmost point, being regarded as part of ‘Norðr-Agðir’ in *Heimskringla* and in the east in *Sverris saga*.

That the curve of the coastline is perceived in terms of these two cardinal directions is supported by twelfth- and thirteenth-century descriptions of the Norwegian realm. *Historia Norwegie*, for example, says that Norway ‘qui in oriente [ad Albia], magno flumine, incipit, uersus occidentem u[ero] uergit] et sic circumflexo fine per aquilonem regirat’ (starts in the east from the Great River, but bends towards the west and so turns back as its edge circles round northwards),¹⁰² and *Fagrskinna* claims that ‘Óláfr konungr enn digri lagði þá undir sik allan Nóreg austan frá Elfi ok norðr til Gandvíkr’ (King Óláfr the Stout subjugated all of Norway from the east from Elfr and north to Gandvíkr).¹⁰³

Journey's end

The evidence of Viking Age skaldic poems and medieval sagas attests to the fact that the use of *easteward* and *norðeward* in *Ohthere's* description of Norðmannaland was not some error of translation or transmission, but a Norse colloquialism that defined north-western Scandinavia by its perceived northern and eastern extremities. In Old Norse sources, we see more explicitly that this colloquialism was dictated by literal or conceptual motion towards these extremities, such that movement in one direction was 'north' and in the other was 'east', even when this bore no relation to the direction of travel or the immediate lie of the land. This conception was shaped by the abrupt curve of the southwestern coast in the area associated with Agðir. Thus, when *Ohthere's Voyage* uses the term *easteward*, it does not refer to any subdivision of Norðmannaland whose parameters could be plotted on a map. It simply refers to the area that lies towards one extreme of a spectrum between north and east.

As this concept was based primarily on the curve of the Norwegian coastline it was apparently unaffected by changes in, or the emergence of, political boundaries further along the coast. In *Ohthere's Voyage* we cannot know whether the loose ethnic territory of Norðmannaland extended much beyond Sciringeshealh in the sailor's perception. In *Haraldskvæði*, the terms are used in a localized setting limited to the southwestern coast of Norway. The references to Kvinnar and Útsteinn appear to mark out a territory or a political heartland for Haraldr *hárfagri* but tell us little about the actual extent of his power. Nevertheless, his symbolic influence is projected over the people living to the north and to the east. Whether *Haraldskvæði's* concept of Northmen corresponded to *Ohthere's*, and whether the poem's Eastmen had any life beyond the framing of the poem,¹⁰⁴ is unclear. By the time *Nesjavísur* was composed, Vík had begun to be incorporated into the materializing concept of the Norwegian realm, giving rise to phrases such as *austr í austan ór Vík*.

As *Ohthere's Voyage* itself demonstrates, colloquialisms based on wholly different geographical conceptions could happily coexist. It is therefore unclear whether the much-debated concept of 'Norðweg' should be connected with the north/east coastal conception. If the Old English term accurately reflects the etymology of ON Nóregr, it seems to be a similar instance of ultimate orientation, but it is used to describe the coastline between Halgoland in the north and Sciringeshealh 'on suðewardum þæm landum' (in the southward part of the land), juxtaposing north with south. As Jackson's research indicates, the existence of the terms *austurvegr*, *suðurvegr*, and *vesturvegr* suggest that **norðurvegr* may have belonged to a broader geographical concept.

Just as geographical conceptions could coexist, we must also assume that they were liable to change, even if the colloquialisms that expressed them remained the same. The localized survival of a distinction between nordmenn and austmenn or Nordlandet and Austlandet in nineteenth-century Norway may attest to an impressive continuity in the opposition of north and east. Yet, much as Norðweg may have begun life as the name of a sailing route before crystallizing as the name of the lands that lay along it, the concept of the north/east divide was transferred from the coastal route to the land itself. This process is revealed by the less frequent static uses of *austr í Vík* in the Kings' Sagas. Consequently,

the point of division between east and north became attached to the mountains that split Norway along its length, perhaps encouraged by an emerging concept of *nordafjells* and *sønnafjells*. The Norwegian mountains undoubtedly played a key role in the conception of Norðmannaland and ultimately of the Norwegian kingdom, as the 'wilde moras' of Ohthere, the *zona montana* of the *Historia Norwegie*, and the *nordafjells/sønnafjells* division indicate. Yet at every stage prior to 1308, these conceptions do not wholly fit the juxtaposition of northward and eastward. They deserve their own in-depth study.

Notes

1. *Old English Orosius*, 15 (emphasis mine). All translations are my own, excepting translations from skaldic poetry and from Latin, which are adapted from the bilingual editions cited.
2. Ninth-century Latin sources, such as the *Royal Frankish Annals*, used 'Nordmannia' to refer to Scandinavia as a whole (see Gazzoli, "Denemearc," 36, and Garipzanov, "Frontier Identities," 124–5). To Ohthere's West Saxon audience, OE *norðmenn* was interchangeable with *Dene* (Danes) as a term for the Vikings, a faceless foe known for their hostile activities in the British Isles rather than their origins (see Allport, "Home Thoughts," 278–9, and Downham, "Anachronistic Ethnicities," 141–3).
3. Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 227, and Godden, "Old English Orosius," 9. Due to a lost gathering, the passage quoted above is absent from the Lauderdale *Orosius*, along with the remainder of the account, another interpolation known as *Wulfstan's Voyage*, and several chapters of the *Orosius* itself. These passages are first preserved in London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B I (the Cotton *Orosius*), which dates to the first half of the eleventh century and shares an exemplar with the Lauderdale *Orosius* (Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 294 and *Old English Orosius*, xxiii – xxiv and xxxiii). Given the close agreement of the two manuscript witnesses prior to the break, there is no reason to think that the version of *Ohthere's Voyage* upon which they were based was substantially different.
4. For these identifications, see Brink, "Geography," 67–68 and 72.
5. This passage does not refer to any specific voyage along this coastline undertaken by Ohthere, although he may have made this journey many times.
6. For an exception, see Tristram, "Ohthere," 167.
7. Bately, "Ohthere and Wulfstan," 26.
8. See, for example, Allport, "Home Thoughts"; Appleton, "Northern World"; and Leneghan, "Translatio imperii."
9. Bately, "Ohthere and Wulfstan," 35–36, and Townend, *Language and History*, 95–97.
10. See, for example, Imsen, *Land og folk*, 138; Krag, "Early Unification," 188–189; and Helle, "History," 244.
11. Although note that this, too, is only preserved in the Cotton *Orosius*.
12. Jackson, "Old Norse System," 74–75.
13. Imsen, *Land og folk*, 26.
14. Although 'Beormaland' is not explicitly mentioned in the text, the concept is implied by the phrase 'þa Beormas hæfdon swiþe wel gebud hira land' (the Bjarmians had very extensively settled their land); *Old English Orosius*, 14.
15. *Old English Orosius*, 15. Irmeli Valtonen (*The North*, 504) notes that the account leans on the medieval conception of a division between the ordered lands settled by humanity and the wilderness beyond their control.
16. For an overview, see Imsen, *Land og folk*, 9–13, 27–31, and 145. See also Krag, "Early Unification," 188–9, and "Norway at the Threshold," 347–348, but Helle, "History," 241–4.
17. On the dangers of holding Ohthere's approximations to the standards of modern cartography, see Derolez, "Orientation System," 256, and Korhammer, "Shifted or not?" 266.

18. *Old English Orosius*, 16.
19. Skre, "Viking Age Economic Transformations," 20.
20. Ekrem, "Essay on Date", 162 and 217–8, and Mortensen, "Introduction," 15 and 21–23.
21. Imsen, *Land og folk*, 28. Skre himself ("Norðvegr – Norway," 35) had previously emphasized that "when using [the term 'Northmen'] Ohthere was neither referring to a country nor a kingdom and its inhabitants [. . .]. At that time [Norðmannaland] was a geographic zone not a political entity."
22. Bagge, "Division and Unity," 149.
23. *Old English Orosius*, 15.
24. Lat. *oriens* (east) never appears in the *Historia's* description of the *zona montana*, but is used of 'sinus orientalis' (the Eastern Gulf, i.e. Viken), part of the *zona maritima*; *Historia Norwegie*, 54.
25. See note 4 above.
26. See note 18 above.
27. Hastrup, *Culture and History*, 55–57.
28. Storli, "Ohthere and his World," 82–83.
29. See note 8 above.
30. Brink, "Geography," 66. Going by Adam of Bremen (*Gesta Hammaburgensis*, 263), the conceptions of 'Norguegia' (Norway) and 'Nortmannia' (the land of the Northmen) were becoming interchangeable by the late eleventh century, although the wording of Ohthere's account suggests that this process had already begun by the late ninth.
31. For contrasting views on the etymology of ON *Nóregr*, see Myrvoll, "Skaldedikt som kjelda," and Heide, "Vegen mot nord."
32. If nothing else, this is presumably how Ohthere's audience understood the term.
33. Haugen, "Semantics," 451–3, and Hastrup, *Culture and History*, 55–57.
34. Stefán Einarsson, "Terms of Direction."
35. Jackson, "Norway and the Islands," 9–10.
36. *Old English Orosius*, 191.
37. Valtonen, *The North*, 326.
38. Íslenzk fornrit XXIX, 340.
39. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 302.
40. See note 24 above.
41. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, xxix.
42. Ármann Jakobsson, "Royal Biography," 395.
43. Jackson, "Old Norse System," 76.
44. Íslenzk fornrit XXIX, 333.
45. Storli, "Ohthere and his World," 89.
46. Krag, "Early Unification," 193. The 'traditional districts/regions' referred to herein are modern concepts and far younger than the period under discussion.
47. Íslenzk fornrit XXVII, 58.
48. *Nesjavísur*, 573.
49. *Ibid.*, 558.
50. *Háleygjatal*, 195.
51. *Ibid.*, 211–212.
52. Stylegar and Grimm, "Das südnorwegische Spangereid," 81, and Skre "New Campaign," 50.
53. *Vellekla*, 282.
54. *Ibid.*, 292–293.
55. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 207–11.
56. *Ibid.*, 240.
57. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 210; *Beginnings*, 128, note 327.
58. Gade, "Poetry," 75–76.
59. *Vellekla*, 304.

60. *Haraldskvæði*, 91; de Vries, *Altnordisches Literaturgeschichte*, 137–9.
61. *Haraldskvæði*, 100.
62. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 116.
63. Titlestad, *Viking Norway*, 71–73 and 79–83.
64. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 115–7. See Andersen, *Samlingen*, 42.
65. Krag, “Early Unification,” 187–188; “Norway at the Threshold,” 346; Helle, “Norway,” 10; and “Down to 1536,” 24.
66. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 114.
67. *Haraldskvæði*, 106.
68. *Ibid.*, 98.
69. *Ibid.*, 103.
70. *Ibid.*, 103–4 (with caveats); *Beginnings*, 67.
71. Jackson, “Norway and the Islands,” 17, and Imsen, *Land og folk*, 47–48. For an overview of later applications of the term, see Ellis, “Degrees of Separation,” 9–10.
72. The possibility that poetic and saga references to Kvinnar, Útstein, and several other western Norwegian manors – most notably Qgvaldsnes (MNor Avaldsnes) – reflect the parameters of Haraldr’s core realm has become conventional wisdom in historical treatments of his reign; see Helle, “Down to 1536,” 23–24; Kruse, “The Norway to Be,” 214–7; Skre, “Norðvegr – Norway,” 37–38; and contributions to Skre, ed. *Avaldsnes*.
73. Íslenzk fornrit XXIX, 338.
74. *Ibid.*, 339.
75. Íslenzk fornrit XXVIII, 158.
76. Ármann Jakobsson, “Royal Biography,” 392–394.
77. *Konunga sögur*, 13–15 and 22.
78. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 173.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Íslenzk fornrit XXVII, 73.
81. *Konunga sögur*, 81.
82. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 130.
83. Íslenzk fornrit XXVII, 319.
84. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 303 and 312.
85. Íslenzk fornrit XXVIII, 375.
86. *Historia Norwegie*, 54.
87. Masdalen, “Rygjarbit,” 80–81 and 97.
88. Jackson, “Old Norse System,” 76–78, and “Norway and the Islands,” 9–10 and 14–15.
89. Helle, “Ei soge,” 11–15.
90. *Ibid.*, 12. According to Helle, Pontoppidan also uses the term ‘Vestenfields’ (west of the mountains). *Vestafjells* and, more commonly, *østafjells* (east of the mountains) remain in use today.
91. *Hirdskræen*, 138.
92. *Lovgivningen*, 78 and 80.
93. Skre, “Norðvegr – Norway,” 35. This interpretation was presumably superseded by Skre’s aforementioned equation of *easteward* with the *zona montana* in *Historia Norwegie*, as the two explanations are incompatible. It is unambiguous in *Ohthere’s Voyage* that *easteward* is used to describe part of Norðmanneland and equally clear from the *Historia* that the *zona montana* lies wholly within the area regarded as *sønna fjells*.
94. Helle, “Ei soge,” 12–13.
95. Hansteen, *Reiser-Erindringer*, 23, and Helle, “Ei soge,” 14–15.
96. Helle, “Ei soge,” 14.
97. *Old English Orosius*, 15.
98. See note 51 above.
99. See note 85 above.
100. Beckman, “Nordbornas väderstreck,” p. 254.

101. See note 67 above.
102. *Historie Norwegie*, 52.
103. Íslenzk fornrit XXIX, 178. The Great River/Elfr refers to the Göta river in Sweden, which flows past Kungahälla. Gandvíkr refers to a vaguely defined location in the far north.
104. A verse attributed to Þorbjörn *hornklófi* in the fourteenth-century *Skálda saga Haralds konungs hárfagra* refers to the poet and his companions as Eastmen. If the attribution is correct, this offers a connection to *Haraldskvæði*, but the term could equally be evidence of a subsequent Icelandic forgery. *Lausavísa*, 117.

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