

The dynastic background of king Haraldr Halfdanarson of Nóreg

The kings' sagas relate that Haraldr "Fairhair" (*hárfagri*), who allegedly united Norway to one kingdom in the late ninth century, was the son of a petty king in Eastern Norway called Halfdanr the Black (*svarti*) and his wife Ragnhildr, the daughter of a certain Sigurðr hjörtr. Further, this Halfdanr is connected to the royal line of the so-called *Ynglingar* in Vestfold, even though he is not mentioned in the main source for these kings, the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* (c. 900). As Claus Krag (1990) has demonstrated, the connection to the Vestfold kings is most likely an invention of the Icelandic historians, probably made sometime early in the twelfth century. There is also reason to believe that the placement of Haraldr's father Halfdanr as a petty king in Eastern Norway is a part of the "national" strife to establish Haraldr's claim to the whole country. Most historians today (e.g., Krag 1995, Bagge 2010) regard Haraldr Halfdanarson as a purely Western Norwegian king, a limitation which is also implied by the place of the royal estates mentioned in the kings' sagas, which are situated within the districts Hordaland and Rogaland.

What may, then, be said about the background of Haraldr? This paper will draw attention to the information that can be inferred from the study of names (*Haraldr*, *Halfdanr*) and contemporary skaldic poetry, foremost the report on the decisive battle of Hafrsfjord, *Haraldkvæði*, but also Egill Skallagrímsson's *Arinbjarnarkviða* (c. 960). Furthermore, an emphasis will be placed on explaining *why* exactly some of these poems have been transmitted down the centuries, and not others, assuming a certain affiliation with the different ruling dynasties of Norway. Combined with the scant information we get in Anglo-Saxon sources, and some of the probably relatively reliable pieces of information about Haraldr's relatives and connections in the kings' sagas, this will be used to produce a totally new picture of the background of Haraldr in some of the royal families of Denmark and the British Isles.

Literature

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