

Norway Before the Vikings

by

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Part I - From Glacial Times to the Stone Age

Ten thousand years ago, the sun that shone down on Norway seemed even weaker and farther away than it does today. A numbing cold gripped the land and all but the highest mountains in the south and a narrow fringe of rocky seacoast bordering the Arctic Ocean were covered by a thick mantle of glistening ice. The high southern mountains had escaped because, although the glacier was well over a mile in thickness, they were high enough to stick up through it like the jagged nunataks that punctuate the Greenland Ice-Cap today. The Arctic coastal fringe had escaped because it lay well north of the center of the ice-sheet, where the air was so cold and so dry that it brought little replenishment of snow to the seaward-thinning glacier. If the surrounding seas themselves were not locked in ice, it was only because a feeble current of water -- itself scarcely above freezing -- managed to cleave off the wasting edges of the stagnant ice-sheet and drift them away. Such life as there was -- both plant and animal -- clung tenaciously to the scattered patches of bare rock or open water, and even the birds that circled above the vast whiteness of the glacier looked to the sea for their food and to the rocks for their nesting places.

Bleak, forbidding, and austere as this scene must have been, the worst was definitely over. This was not the first time that Norway and the north of Europe had been engulfed in a mass of ice, for it had happened on at least two, and possibly three, earlier occasions. Each time the glacier had been born in the highlands of north-central Scandinavia and spread out in all directions. However, due to the southeastward slope of the land, most of its energy had been funneled in that direction, and at the peak of its advance it reached as far south as the mouth of the Rhine river, the uplands of central Germany and southern Poland, and the edges of the Ukraine in Russia. But on this occasion, the ice had scarcely gotten beyond the limits of the Scandinavian Peninsula itself, grinding to a halt over what today is the peninsula of Jutland (Jylland) in Denmark and the southern coastal margins of the Baltic Sea. Indeed, the jumbled ridges of glacial debris that make up the hilly "backbone" of Jutland and of the Baltic Heights along the north coasts of Germany and Poland mark the terminal moraine of this last glaciation.

From this line of furthest advance the ice had begun a slow and spasmodic retreat toward the north as the climate grew warmer and its nourishment of snow could no longer be maintained. From Jutland, where the ice probably stood as recently as 14,000 years ago (12,000 B.C.), its front had contracted into the area of central Sweden and the southern coastal fringes of Norway and Finland by about 8,000 B.C. -- roughly a distance of 600 kilometers (360 miles) in 4,000 years. (See map 1.) But there, thanks to a temporary cold-spell, it managed to make one desperate "last stand", fighting a "holding action" for as long as 800 years. The evidence of this mighty struggle is seen today in the

great ridges of sand and gravel that run through these areas -- the largest and most continuous recessional moraines in Scandinavia. They are especially apparent in the lowland of southern Finland where they form the most conspicuous features in the landscape -- arc-like ridges known as the Salpausselkä which run entirely across the country from west to east about 20-40 miles north of Helsinki. In the hillier, more broken terrain of central Sweden, the ridges are not nearly so continuous or conspicuous, and in the mountainous south and west of Norway they become simply a series of separate arcs in the individual valleys. However, in the lowlands on either side of Oslofjord they are preserved as two well-defined arcs, broken only by the fjord itself at the narrows between Moss and Horten. In Norway, these great glacial ridges that mark one of the final "battle fields" of the Ice Age, are known as raer (singular, ra).

Once the battle of the Salpausselkä and the ra had been lost, the backbone of the glacier's resistance was broken, and its subsequent retreat was both rapid and chaotic. In the higher mountains of Norway, where the ice was thinner to begin with, larger and larger areas were laid bare, but in the broad, open valleys of eastern Norway, great tongues of stagnant ice, now completely cut off from any reinforcement from the plateaus above, languished in their death throes. It was the end of an era, and as ice became water, the immense load of debris the glacier had been carrying slumped down -- most of it dropping in place as a completely unsorted mass of sand, gravel, and boulders. Likewise, much of it was washed out of the ice by torrential streams of melt-water to become finely-sorted deposits of sand, silt, and clay in ice-dammed lakes or in the sea itself. The sights and sounds of running water were everywhere, as finger-like lakes were impounded temporarily behind the remaining masses of ice, only to rush out catastrophically as the last barriers gave way. Of course, where the glacial scouring was especially deep and/or the morainic barrier especially massive, such lakes have persisted. The eastern front of the Norwegian mountains is today lined by a score of long, narrow bodies of water, including the four deepest lakes in Europe -- Hornindalsvatn (1686 feet deep), Tinnsjøen (1509 feet deep), Mjøsa (1473 feet deep; also the country's largest in area, 142 sq. mi.), and Salsavatnet (1460 feet deep). (Lake Como in northern Italy ranks as Europe's fifth-deepest lake and was formed in the same way -- by alpine glaciation.) However, in western Norway, where the mountains fall much more abruptly into the sea, the torrents of meltwater hurled themselves over the lips of hanging valleys into chasm-like glacial troughs, most of which had been inundated by the rising sea to form fjords. Here, the erosive power of the ice had been so concentrated in the narrow defiles that in most places the floor of the trough lay many hundreds of feet below sea level. In Boknafjord, for example, the deepest known spot is 2340 feet, while in Hardangerfjord it is 2720 feet below sea level. But nowhere was the glacial gouging more severe than in Sognefjord, for near the outer end of this sinuous, 125-mile long trough a depth of 4300 feet has been measured. (As might be expected, close to the mouths of the fjords are "shallow" thresholds formed by the terminal moraines that extend to within 300 to 600 feet of the surface. Obviously they pose no difficulty to navigation, but they do seriously impede the exchange of bottom water between the fjords and the open sea.) Just as the over-steepening of the valleys in western Norway resulted in the creation of hundreds of spectacular waterfalls, so did it give rise to conditions favoring massive land slides. The

ice itself died quietly, but in its wake came the roar of rushing water and the thunder of collapsing mountains.

The change that took place in Norway following the "battle of the ra" went on at a rate and to a degree which is scarcely comprehensible in terms of modern human experience. As the glacier melted, a large body of fresh water, the so-called Baltic Ice-Lake, filled the basin of the Baltic Sea. But, as the ice withdrew past a low hill known as Billingen in central Sweden, the waters of the Baltic Ice-Lake rushed into the sea, an arm of which penetrated to within a few miles of Billingen on the west. Through the channel that the floodwaters of the Baltic Ice-Lake cut, the rising sea sent a counter-surge of water eastward, turning the entire Baltic basin into a brackish arm of the open ocean -- the so-called Yoldia Sea. (See Map 2.) Only the higher hills of southeastern Norway stood above sea level at this time, a rocky archipelago stretching northwestward from the moraine-strewn South Swedish Highland. It was onto these barren islands and headlands, almost within the shadow of the ice-sheet, that Norway's first human settlers moved nearly 9000 years ago.

Who were these people and where did they come from? From a study of their tools and settlements, it is clear that they were hunters, fishermen, and gatherers, living off the land and from the sea by whatever means they could. They collected mussels and clams from the tidal inlets and birds' eggs from the rookeries on the rocks. They speared fish in the shallow bays and hunted seals and walrus on the outer headlands. Their artifacts were of stone, especially flint, which is abundant in the limestones of Denmark and southern Sweden. Their shelters were nothing more than lean-tos, protected from the cold winds blowing off the ice to the north by having their openings face south towards the sun and the sea. During the time that the ice front had stood over Denmark and the southern margins of the Baltic, these people had roamed the tundras of the North European plain as hunters of the reindeer and the woolly mammoth. Then, as the climate grew warmer, not only did the ice begin to retreat on the north, but the forest began to advance from the south. The animals on which they had come to depend for their sustenance began an instinctive withdrawal toward the colder northlands, and man, the hunter, had little choice but to follow, reaching what is today the county of Østfold in southeastern Norway sometime about 9000 years ago. There, on a hill known as Høgnipen (elevation 625 feet), his earliest campsite has been found. Today it lies 500 feet above sea level and 9 miles inland, but then it lay on the coast itself -- only a few feet above the waves. Although the skeletal evidence is meager, what little has been found suggests that these early hunters were people of "Alpine" stock -- relatively short, broad-headed, and probably with dark hair and eye color. Culturally, they have been labeled the "Fosna" group, after another of their major campsites discovered near Kristiansund on the west coast. On Map 2, the distribution of the more important Fosna sites is shown.

Examination of map 2 reveals, however, that post-glacial Norway was accessible not only from the southeast (by way of Østfold) but also from the northeast, through the county of Finnmark. Geographically, therefore, it comes as no great surprise that some of the oldest settlement sites in the country have been discovered along the shores of the Arctic Ocean. Named from a mountain near the town of Alta where it was first identified

in 1925, the Komsa culture differed from the Fosna complex in being entirely sea-oriented. There were no inland mountain sites where the hunting of the reindeer took place, perhaps because the reindeer had not yet reached this far northerly latitude in its retreat from the south. Instead the Komsa people seem to have been specialized seal-hunters who lived in the inner fjords most of the year but moved to their outer ends to hunt and fish during the summer. If their tools were somewhat clumsier than those of the Fosna people, it was because they lacked the flint with which to make them, having to substitute inferior local stone instead. (Even the Fosna culture was handicapped by the paucity of flint, as we shall see later.) Although the Komsa culture shows little affinity with any group to the east, save possibly the Askola culture identified near Helsinki in Finland, the wide geographic gap between their settlement sites and those of the Fosna people hardly suggests that they were a northern offshoot of the latter. In any case, unlike the Fosna culture whose continuity can be traced into historic times, the Komsa culture seems to have disappeared about 2000 B.C.

The Norway that the Fosna and Komsa peoples inhabited was much like Greenland is today, apart from the fact that the ice-sheet was literally disappearing before their eyes. It was, however, the lingering presence of the ice, as well as the nature of their economy, that helped to explain the choice of the Fosna people's settlement sites. On the one hand, their sites were concentrated on the most exposed islands and headlands along the coast, in what today would seem to be the least desirable locations imaginable. Indeed, the Fosna people seem to have consciously avoided the long, low stretches of sandy beach afforded by Lista and Jaeren on the southwest, no doubt because such areas impeded their access to deep water and the animal life on which they depended for subsistence. Similarly, they rejected the sheltered inner ends of the western fjords as being lacking in both the variety and quantity of marine life they had based their livelihood upon. In the same way, the lower eastern valleys of Norway either cradled rotting remnants of ice or were inundated by melt-water lakes or arms of the rising sea, so the only other place the Fosna people could live was on the upland plateaus, or viddas. While we tend to think of the viddas as barren today, they then held the only other source of sustenance available to Stone Age man -- the reindeer. As a consequence, most Fosna sites on the vidda were strategically located near reindeer migration tracks. In this connection, one is also tempted to question whether the woolly mammoth had indeed been a casualty of the last (warmer) inter-glacial period as most sources suggest, or if he did survive to retreat northward into the Norwegian mountains for his own "last stand." If he did not in this manner find his way into the dim recesses of the Norwegian folk experience, it must be regarded as a strikingly curious coincidence that the trolls, who, according to age-old legends, were supposed to have inhabited the Norwegian mountains, were traditionally described as giant, lumbering, and dull-witted creatures with long hair and even longer noses!

In at least one important regard Stone Age man found the resource base of Norway inferior to that of the North European Plain from which he had come in the south. This was in terms of his primary tool-making material -- stone, for while there was much more naked bedrock exposed on every hand, little of it was as well suited for fashioning the artifacts on which he depended for hunting as was the flint his culture

utilized. In his northern migration, Stone Age man had unwittingly crossed the boundary between the younger sedimentary formations of the North European plain and the age-old crystalline rocks that make up the basement of the Fenno-Scandian Shield. Southeastern Norway, together with most of Sweden and all of Finland comprise parts of one of the most ancient landmasses on earth. As such, their bedrock consists principally of granites, gneisses, and schists, all of which lend themselves rather poorly to tool-making. The volcanic rocks which the Fosna hunters found west of Oslofjord were certainly no better, and not until he got into the higher mountains and the western coastal districts did he find younger, metamorphic rock associated with the Caledonian Revolution. The latter was a great mountain-building process that convulsed much of the North Atlantic region, changing earlier deposited limestones, sandstones, and shales into marble, quartzite and slate. It was the latter two types of stone, together with quartz and greenstone that constituted Fosna man's chief raw materials. Indeed, he valued these so highly that when he did find an outcrop of particularly useful stone, he spared little effort to extract it. A case in point are the Stone Age quarries discovered on Hespriholmen, an exposed skerry which lies west of the island of Bømlo on the country's southwest coast. There, by means not yet fully understood, he quarried a fine-grained greenstone which he ferried to Bømlo for dressing, and then widely exported the finished products throughout southwestern Norway.

In the thousand years between 7500 and 6500 B.C., Norway took on much more of the configuration by which we recognize it today. (See Map 3.) However, the lower-lying regions of eastern Sweden, western and southern Finland, and most of Denmark still had very different outlines than those we now know. This is because the former areas lay beneath the waters of a new and larger melt-water lake, while in the latter area the sea had not yet reached the level at which it stands today. In both instances, however, the cause was the same, for it was the now-largely vanished ice-sheet that was responsible. Indeed, only a few small masses of dead ice languished on the slopes of Lappland at the time.

The disappearance of the Scandinavian ice-sheet had two very different results. In the first place, as it melted, the water that it had locked up for thousands of years (together with the continental ice-sheets that covered North America) flowed back into the ocean, ultimately raising sea levels by as much as 300 feet. At the same time, the crushing burden of its weight having been removed from the land, the depressed block of the earth's crust beneath the glacier's center began bouncing back to its former elevation - - more slowly than the oceans rose, but continuing for a longer time. (In fact, the isostatic rebound of the Scandinavian peninsula has not yet been completed, for in the Oslofjord region the land continues to rise at the rate of about 1 foot per century and in the Umeå district of Sweden -- in the immediate vicinity of the ice-sheet's center -- at the rate of 3 feet per century) Between 7500 and 6500 B.C., this land-rise had progressed to the point where the central areas of Sweden had been uplifted far enough to cut off the Baltic basin from direct contact with the open ocean. The large melt-water lake that occupied the basin (the Ancylus Ice-Lake) gradually freshened, and as its level rose, it began spilling across the threshold at Billingen again, this time through a narrow channel which has been called the Svea River. Emptying into the basin of Lake Vänern, it then overflowed

along the present course of the Göta River into the Kattegat. However, the rebound of central Sweden was proceeding at such a rate that the Svea River soon was no longer low enough to serve as an outlet. Probably several centuries passed before the water in the Ancylus Ice-Lake reached such a level that it again began overflowing, this time spilling out between some low, morainic hills in what is today eastern Denmark. The so-called Dana River ran south of the present islands of Falster and Lolland, and then turned sharply northward through what is now the Great Belt into the Kattegat.

In Norway, the rise in ocean level had outpaced the isostatic rebound of the land, and most of the melting of the dead-ice tongues in the lower valleys of the southeast took place directly into the sea. The ra itself was most likely deposited beneath or at the very margin of the sea. In any event, as the ice disappeared, the sea advanced far up into the eastern valleys, a fact evidenced by the floor of marine clay that now extends nearly up to Lake Mjösa, some 80 miles inland. The same thing occurred in the region of Trondheimsfjord in central Norway, where the highest post-glacial marine limit can be found some 20-30 miles inland. In the latter area the land had subsequently risen from 400 to 600 feet (depending on how far in the fjord one takes his measurements), while at Grefsen on the northeast side of Oslo, the maximum post-glacial rebound for any part of Norway has been recorded as 725 feet.

In its own way, the isostatic rebound of the Scandinavian Peninsula has provided a useful yardstick for dating some of the major stages in the human occupancy of the land. As we have seen, the Fosna people arrived on the scene when the sea level (relative to the land) stood some 500 feet higher than it does today. Consequently, no settlement would have been possible at that time below the present 500 contour. However, between 5000 and 4000 B.C., the land had risen by at least 300 feet, for settlements of the Nøstvet culture (named for a site about 12 miles southeast of Oslo) have been identified about 200 feet above the present sea level. Moreover, the climate had changed to such a degree that the tundra environment known to the first settlers at Høgnipen had been supplanted by a thickening forest in which both conifers and deciduous trees were represented. Thus, unlike the Fosna and Komsa cultures, the Nøstvet complex was a forest culture, based as much on the hunting of deer and moose and fishing in inland lakes and rivers as it was on the harvesting of the riches of the sea.

Although the Nøstvedt culture was perhaps more sophisticated and versatile than the Fosna it by no means displaced the latter. On the contrary, while the Nøstvet represented a response to the forest, the Fosna peoples found ample opportunity to continue their age-old means of livelihood simply by moving higher into the mountains and farther to the north. Both were Mesolithic hunting societies whose artifacts continued to be fashioned from the only raw materials that were familiar to them -- stone, bone, and horn. Whether the Nøstvet culture represented a new infusion of people into Norway from the southeast, or merely a new response to a changing environment is not wholly clear. What is clear, however, is that after five millennia in which hunting, fishing, and gathering provided the only means of human subsistence, the stage was being set in Norway for more advanced forms of livelihood.

Part II - Norway in the Bronze Age

It can scarcely be regarded as a fortuitous coincidence that the post-glacial climatic optimum and the beginnings of agriculture in Norway both date to about 2500 B.C. At that time, temperatures averaged from 2-3 ° C. (3.5-5° F.) warmer than they do now, and coniferous forests clothed all but the highest mountain tops in the south. (See Map 4.) The presently barren yiddas supported an extensive cover of pine, and in the lower, warmer valleys of the east and the interior fjord regions of the west there were liberal admixtures of such broadleaf trees as the oak, elm, ash, linden, maple, and beech. Indeed, the climate in southeastern Norway at the time would have been directly comparable to that of northern France today, representing a latitudinal shift of nearly 10°! Under such conditions, it is fully understandable why the reindeer sought refuge in the highest mountains of the south and in the few remaining tundra barrens along the Arctic coast. and why the seal (on whom the Komsa people were so overwhelmingly dependent) may have forsaken Norwegian waters altogether, accounting for the abrupt and otherwise mysterious demise of this far northern culture.

By the same token, it becomes apparent why man's first faltering steps toward agriculture in Norway should have been taken in the far southeast, for this region was not only the most accessible to innovations stemming from the European mainland, but it was also the most auspicious climatically, as well as in terms of terrain and soils. Of necessity, the primitive farmer viewed Norway through very different eyes than did the early hunter, fisherman, and gatherer. As a result, the challenges he faced and the responses he made were on an altogether different plane.

As has already been noted, the settlement sites most highly esteemed by the hunter and the fisherman were those located on the more exposed coastal fringes and on the upland plateaus, for the single criterion by which they were judged was their ready access to an abundance of fish and game. For the pastoralist and the farmer, however, a variety of considerations presented themselves when the choice of a settlement site was being made. Among the more important determinants were access to water, to natural meadows, and to productive, easily worked soils, as well as the degree of slope, the adequacy of drainage, the exposure to wind, sun, and frost, and the kind and density of vegetation cover which a given place possessed. Because the agriculturalist's needs were so different from those of the hunter and the fisherman, he did not supplant the earlier livelihood with his own but instead moved in alongside of it, and then only in the most geographically favored areas. Consequently, the farmer's earliest and most extensive inroads were made in the broad, open valleys of interior Østlandet and sometime later spread to such low-lying coastal districts as Lista and Jæren, the inner fjords of Vestlandet, and the lowlands surrounding Trondheimsfjord in central Norway. (See Map 5.) Nevertheless, Norway's first agriculturalists found the environment so marginal that they depended far more on pastoralism than they did on tilling the soil for their sustenance. Moreover, not only did they retain a measure of semi-nomadism by practicing transhumance (the seasonal movement of livestock from the lowlands to the

mountains and back), but not infrequently they also found it necessary to rely on hunting and fishing to insure their survival. To him, the kind and density of vegetation cover was of primary importance, for the greater the extent of the natural grasslands, the larger the herd of livestock he could maintain and the easier his means of sustaining them were.

No doubt the innovations of farming and stockraising were first brought to Norway by Megalithic seafarers who ultimately traced their origins to the eastern Mediterranean. Moving northward along the coasts of Denmark and western Sweden, they seem to have reached the limit of their wanderings in southeastern Norway, for the country's sole megalithic site is located near Skjeberg in Østfold. Thus, their impact was not only areally restricted but also probably of short duration, for about the same time the archaeological evidence suggests the arrival in Norway of other groups of people moving overland from the southeast.

These were most likely the “Aryans”, who first appear to have lived as nomadic herdsmen in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea. As the post-glacial climate grew warmer, a progressive desiccation of their pastures obliged them to abandon the Central Asian steppes, with some moving southward through the Khyber Pass into India and others retreating westward into the moister, maritime margins of Europe. As a herding people, their livelihood was based on cattle, sheep, and goats, and the most attractive areas for settlement were those affording abundant pasturage for their livestock. In the thickening forests of western Europe, such places were to be found only as riverine meadows, as open glades in the deciduous woodland, and in areas where, in the vegetation succession following the disappearance of the ice-sheet, the persistence of a grass and herb cover was so favored by local conditions of soil, exposure, and drainage as to have precluded its replacement by trees. In the moister forest regions, of course, the cultivation of the soil became a further possibility that did not exist in the drier grasslands, so the “Aryan” economy was modified in that direction as well. However, by the same token, it was the “Aryans” who initiated the human modification of the Norwegian environment, for, with the help of flint axes and fire, they began an alteration of the landscape which has continued with few interruptions to this day.

There is considerable scholarly disagreement as to whether these invaders from the southeast were in fact “Aryans”. Some, using philological evidence, argue that they were; others, noting that they lacked the horse, are just as convinced that they were not. In any case, the actual numbers of “Aryans” who reached Norway must have been extremely small, for geographically this marked the very outer limits of their expansion. And they certainly did not arrive as a triumphant army but more likely as small groups of livestock drovers pushing their way up along the river valleys in search of clearings where they might pasture their animals and till the soil.

By using linguistic and place-name evidence, the philologist Andreas Hansen builds a strong case for the agricultural settlement of Norway having been accomplished by the “Aryans”. As an inland people, they had no word for “fish” in their language, he points out, and, apart from their very oldest settlements -- which usually carried monosyllabic names descriptive of topographic features such as Berg (mountain), Ås

(ridge), Dal (valley), Nes (peninsula), etc. -- their early settlements in Denmark have suffixes such as -løv, -løse, and -inge, all of which relate to grassy areas or meadows, Similarly, the oldest compound place names in Norway all have the suffix -vin, which originally meant "a place where one found himself satisfied", as of cattle in a meadow. Hansen argues further that there is a striking correspondence between -vin place names and the distribution of such herbs as wild marjoram, and he correlated both of these with areas of fertile, well-drained soils derived from limestones and shales of Cambro-Silurian age. He shows statistically that of the nearly one thousand -vin farmsteads in Norway, almost 2/3 are located in the valleys of Østlandet, and that they inevitably occupy the most central and congenial settings. From these original nuclei, agricultural settlement spread into progressively less desirable surroundings, first exemplified by place names ending in -heim (whose meaning evolved from "world" to "home" or "residence"), and later by farmsteads with the suffix -stadir (meaning simply "place", or "stopping-place" in a nomadic context). The geographic spread of agricultural settlement is revealed by Hansen's place name statistics in that, with the addition of -heim names, the total of Norwegian farmsteads rises to almost 2,000, of which less than 3/5 are located in, Østlandet and the greatest relative increases are recorded in Sørlandet and Vestlandet. (See Map 5.)

Hansen makes a further observation with respect to place names that strongly supports the notion that the Aryan pastoralists and farmers found an 'alien' people already inhabiting the coasts and uplands of the country when they arrived. These people the Aryans called "Finns", a name which no doubt had much the same connotation for them as the word 'barbarian' did for the ancient Greeks. The failure to appreciate how early this word came into use has led to considerable subsequent confusion, not the least of which has been its mistaken association with the Lapps, who seem not to have reached Norway until about 1000 A.D. (It is ironic, but not altogether beyond comprehension, that this name was ultimately applied by the Scandinavians to their chief non-Germanic neighbors in northern Europe, the people now known to the rest of the world as the Finns.) Hansen points out that although "Finn-" names occur in almost all parts of Norway, four-fifths of the total are found in the valleys of Østlandet, where the first confrontations between farmer and hunter took place. Actually, the only areas in which they are absent are precisely those in which the Lapps came to reside much later! (See Map 6.) Hansen further maintains that Germanic agriculturalists and non-Germanic hunters continued to reside side by side in Norway, as distinct economic and cultural entities, until as recently as Viking times. In support of this contention he cites the fact that both the Borgarting and Eidsivating laws had strong prohibitions against "traveling to the Finns to foretell the future". This fact is doubly interesting because it reveals that the "Finns" were not only regarded as having supernatural powers, but that they also were very much in evidence in southeastern Norway, where the two laws applied, as late as the tenth century of the Christian era. On the other hand, similar provisions seem to have been lacking in the Gulating and Frostating laws, which applied to Vestlandet and Trøndelag respectively.

As concomitants of the new economy came a new level of technology and a new religious faith. Although the techniques of fashioning stone became more sophisticated, there seems to have been no knowledge of pottery (a fact which likewise tends to support

a pastoral origin rather than an agricultural origin for the "Aryans"). The innovations in religion that accompanied the Neolithic revolution in Norway included both a belief in an after-life, as evidenced by large burial mounds with elaborate grave goods, and the appearance of fertility cults, with veneration of the sun and a female "Mother Goddess". Although the Neolithic Revolution was triggered by the arrival of new people and ideas, its main thrust in Norway was an internally generated expansion growing out of the increase in population. In any event, pollen analyses reveal that a radical transformation in the vegetation cover took place at this time, due to the extensive burning and clearing which were then underway.

In a setting such as Norway, terms like "Stone Age", "Bronze Age", and "Iron Age" have little real meaning, because the dimensions of time and space overlap. Just as Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) hunting and fishing continued alongside of Neolithic (New Stone Age) farming and grazing, so did the use of stone tools continue long after the first introduction of metal into Norway. Since the country lacked both the copper and the tin that were needed to make bronze, the Bronze Age in Norway is characterized by a relative paucity of finds. Although some recasting of bronze objects was done in Norway itself, as evidenced by the discovery of beautifully made soapstone molds, all of the 'raw materials' had to be imported, usually from a considerable distance. The richest Bronze Age finds in Norway are the helleristinger, or rock carvings, of which there are several thousand depicting people, farm implements, ships, fish, game, and religious symbols. Such pictures have been found as far north as 68° latitude, although North Norway otherwise seems to have altogether lacked a Bronze Age in the conventional sense..

Trøndelag, on the other hand, boasts the largest single Bronze Age burial ground in the country. But due to its peripheral location, Trøndelag represents the third and last center of Bronze Age settlement to evolve within Norway, having received its impetus from Østlandet by way of Gudbrandsdal. The inner valleys of Østlandet were themselves the recipients of Bronze Age impulses from Rogaland and Lista on the southwest coast, which emerged as the country's first and most important centers of metal culture. The large burial mounds of Jæren, Karmøy, and Lista contain objects with unmistakable affinities to the Danish peninsula of Jutland, suggesting that the stable and prosperous agricultural society of which they were manifestations most likely embraced a wide area of Western Europe. However, ironic as it may seem, there is little doubt but that the only surplus, and hence exportable, commodities which existed within Norway with which to pay for the imports of bronze artifacts and other luxury items were those products derived from hunting and fishing, such as seal skins, walrus tusks, and live falcons.

Part III - Norway in the Iron Age

Sometime about 500 B.C., the climate of Northern Europe took a sharp turn for the worse. Within the span of one or two generations the average temperature declined by as much as 3 ° C., and there was a dramatic increase in the annual precipitation. In Denmark, millet would no longer ripen and in Norway the cultivation of wheat became all but impossible. On the mountain sides the tree line receded more than 300 meters (1000 feet) and in the valleys the broadleaf forests disappeared from all but a narrow band along the southwest coast and in the Oslofjord district.

Obviously, this deterioration in the climate had severe repercussions on the economic life of Norway, causing a marked contraction in the geographic extent of agriculture and a correspondingly marked increase in the relative importance of hunting and fishing. It is likely that all cultivation northward of about 62° N. latitude was abandoned, while many interior districts of Østlandet, including Solør and Hadeland, were completely depopulated at this time. Where a dependence on agriculture remained possible at all, the emphasis shifted decidedly to stock raising. However, now the livestock were no longer able to forage about all year long in the open, but had to be quartered in substantial shelters and stall-fed during the winter. Indeed, it was the construction of adequate shelters for both man and his animals, together with the provision of sufficient feed during the long winter months that strained the technology of the times to its utmost limits. For most farmers, harvesting hay and leaves for winter-feed was done with flint-edged sickles at best and by pulling them up (or off) by hand at the worst. But because the amount of forage which could be harvested in this way was sorely limited, every autumn the herds were of necessity reduced virtually to the minimum breeding stock. By the same token, the number of people who could be supported by stock raising declined sharply and in most parts of the country it was only through a reversion to hunting and fishing that the survival of at least some of them was possible. For most of the others, the choice came down to leaving Norway or starving.

Ironically, just at the time when agriculture in Norway was undergoing this catastrophic reversal, a new technological innovation was beginning to appear on the scene that would ultimately help to counter this drastic retreat. This was the introduction of iron from Western Europe, which at first was considered to be as exotic a metal in Norway as bronze had been. Because the method of producing it from bog ore did not become generally known for several centuries, the depopulation of Norway continued apace during that entire time. As a result, the stability and prosperity that had characterized Norwegian agriculture during the Bronze Age had now been supplanted by a poverty so complete that the only finds from the early, or Celtic, Iron Age in Norway stem from a narrow zone stretching along the south coast from the Swedish border to the vicinity of Bergen. (See Map 6.)

It was not until about the time of the birth of Christ that the domestic production of iron in Norway began to reach such proportions that the local demands for tools and weapons could be met. By then it was well appreciated that the upland bogs constituted a virtually unlimited source of ore which could easily be smelted by using the abundant and adjacent copses of mountain birch for fuel. Thanks to the general availability of iron, it became possible not only to build more substantial shelters for man and beast alike but also to harvest both hay and leaves for forage in larger and more dependable quantities. Furthermore, for the first time the farmer could assault the forest with other than a stone axe, allowing him to clear land far more readily than had ever been possible before. Thus, during the later, or Roman Iron Age, (0-500 A.D.) the tide of agricultural retreat was not only halted but reversed. Indeed, coupled with a trend toward a slightly warmer and drier climate, the agricultural settlement of Norway reached such proportions as to lead one writer to assert that “with the later Iron Age one can (therefore) say that Norway had

become Norwegian and that the boundary for a European-dominated culture form had been established about where it goes today". A strong, internally generated migration began to 'reconquer' the lands lost to farming during the Celtic Iron Age, accompanied by a dramatic increase in the population, Now it was the farmer who was on the offensive and the hunter who fell back. And this time their roles had been exchanged, not so much as a result of a modification in the natural environment as to an improvement in the agriculturalist's means of dealing with it. Heretofore, the spatial distribution of the two societies was for all intents and purposes mutually exclusive, and as such, was passively accepted by both, Now, for the first time the farmer could and did actively expand his domain at the direct expense of the hunter. Consequently, if the farmer and the hunter had never come into open conflict with one another earlier, during the Roman Iron Age all the archeological evidence suggests that the two societies met head on in a military confrontation, Indicative of this are several large, circular encampments in Rogaland and North Norway that each housed a couple of hundred persons, apparently on a paramilitary basis. Likewise, scattered over all of Norway south of Harstad are hundreds of stone forts and other defensive installations dating to this period. The bulk of them are located in the higher valleys of Østlandet, clearly suggesting that it was in this region that the most exposed frontier between farmer and hunter was located, (Here reference is made to Hansen's observation of "Finn-" place names, most of which also come from this area.) Furthermore, not only is there more than a ten-fold increase in the number of grave finds dating from the Roman Iron Age as opposed to the Celtic Iron Age, but they are also dominated by 'warrior graves', revealing the presence of a strong military caste within Norwegian society at the time. That this warrior caste was in fairly intimate contact with the Roman Empire is shown by their faithful emulation of weapon styles then in use by the legionnaires, Older grave finds contain the short, broad, one-edged sword first developed by the Romans, while later ones contain the long,, narrow, double-edged swords which superceded them. Indeed, contacts between Norway and the Roman Empire in the later Iron Age were not restricted to weapons, but demonstrate a lively trade involving bronze goods, jewelry, and glass as well. That this trade had rather well defined hinterlands is seen from that fact that distinctive items seem to have had their own patterns of spatial distribution. Thus, of about 80 Scandinavian finds of a given metal vessel --apparently of Italian origin--- almost half have been found in Østlandet, leading this particular vessel to be known as the "Østlandet pot". Similarly, about 130 finds of another style vessel have been found in Northern Europe, ostensibly from a producer near Aachen, and of these 100 were located in Vestlandet, giving rise to the so-called "Vestland's pot". To pay for the imports of bronze, jewelry, and glass, however, Norway's agricultural and/or military elite were obliged to export the only surplus commodities their country possessed, namely items of the chase. Consequently, their struggle with the hunting people of the mountains and northern coasts may have been as strongly motivated by the desire to forcibly incorporate them into a 'commercial' economy as it was by the wish to annex their lands for pastoral use.

The earliest political 'unit' within Norway was the farm. Its boundaries were demarcated by four specially marked wooden posts, and its 'territory' embraced both fenced and unfenced land. Within the fence lay the house and garden (including all cultivated land), while outside the fence were the pastures, forests, hunting and fishing

areas on which the farm depended for its subsidiary support. The farm was likewise a religious center, with the farmer-noble serving both as temporal and spiritual leader of his small community. As the population grew, more land was cleared, and older farms were subdivided, the political and religious functions tended to remain geographically associated with the original site, not only for reasons of inertia and tradition but also because the earliest farms were almost inevitably located on the most extensive, productive, and accessible lands in the district, and thus constituted something akin to 'natural' centers for their respective regions.

Place-name evidence sheds considerable light on the political and religious significance attached to the earliest farms. Among the oldest of farm names are those referring to sacred meadows and fields (-vin, -vang, and -åker), a sacred grove of trees (-lund), or individual trees for which a special reverence was felt, as to the oak, ash, and spruce (-eik, -ask, and -gran, respectively). Similarly, many early farms were named for the stone altar (-horg), place, of sacrifice (-hov), or holy character (-ve) that was associated with a given deity. On the other hand, the name of many an early farm was inspired by more mundane considerations, some of the oldest being -heim (which originally meant 'world' and later became synonymous with 'home'), -gard (which first meant 'fence' and then 'farm'), and -bø, or -by (which meant simply 'a place of residence').

The farmer-noble was not only the pater familias of his own family or clan but he was also the supreme local authority to whom the original hunting folk ('Finns') were obliged to give their allegiance, out of fear if not out of respect. Whether the 'Finns' were truly enslaved or became attached to the farms as feudal dependents is really a question of semantics. What is most likely is that they constituted the lowest and most subservient class of a three-tiered society, headed by the farmer-nobles, and rounded out by an intermediate group of free landholders composed of younger sons and newer settlers.

Gradually within a given district, valley, or fjord, measures became necessary for communal action on a larger scale. For example, in some of the valleys of eastern Norway -- notably those where the earliest agricultural settlements had taken root -- tribal loyalties served to weld the individual farms and farming districts (bygd) into small 'kingdoms'. Typically of these were Romerike ('the kingdom of the Raums'), Ringerike ('the kingdom of the Rans'), and Hedmark ('the district of the Heids'), all of which must have been in existence in the early centuries of the Christian era. During the Great Migrations (about 400 A.D.), new tribes (the Ryger and the Hords) arrived by sea in western Norway from the south, subjugating the earlier inhabitants and giving their names to the present counties of Rogaland and Hordaland. Thus, whether by internal accretion or external subjugation, larger regional groupings of farms and districts had begun to take shape within Norway long before the dawn of the Viking Age, and in each of them a district chief (hirse) or petty king represented the embodiment of physical and spiritual authority.

It is important to recognize, however, that such chiefs held power only by consensus and that their 'rights' were carefully spelled out in laws passed by the district councils or assemblies (ting) which were periodically convened for such purposes, as well as for resolving disputes and administering 'justice'. Such heimsting or heradsting, as they were called, can hardly be thought of as democratic, for obviously only the interests of the large landowners were represented. Nevertheless, they did constitute a first step toward representative government because no one farmer-noble (including the hirse himself) or district was likely to be able to impose his/its will on all the others.

The next higher level of 'government' that evolved in Norway was the fylkesting, or what might be called the county council or provincial assembly. At least as early as the beginning of the Viking period, twenty-nine such entities had come to be recognized within the country, each having its geographic focus in a given valley or fjord, (See Figure __.) Even so, the need for yet larger spheres of interest soon impelled the convening of regional assemblies. For example, the Gulating, the regional assembly for western Norway, was first convened about the year 900 at Gulen, near the mouth of Sognefjord. The laws it promulgated were in force along the entire coast Norway from Telemark to Sunnmøre, and also included such inland districts as Setesdal, Hallingdal, and Valdres. The political orientation of the latter valleys is explained by the fact that access to them was far easier across the treeless viddas, or mountain-plateaus (called fell in Scottish, from Norse word fjell for mountain), from the west than it was through the dense forests of the eastern valleys. Similarly, accessibility -- or lack of it -- helps to explain why the valleys of eastern Norway were oriented to two different centers -- the coastal districts to the Borgarting (located at modern Sarpsborg) --and the interior districts to the Eidsivating (located at Eidsvoll near the southern end of Lake Mjøsa). The Trøndelag region of central Norway was governed by the provisions of the Frostatinglaw, named for the assembly site located on a peninsula jutting into the middle of Trondheimsfjord.

While the legislative and judicial matters of the various regions were looked after at the annual tings, the executive power remained diffused through the individual valleys and fjords in the persons of district chiefs or petty kings. Within their respective districts, all political and religious authority reposed in them -- a sovereignty which they guarded as long and as jealously as they could. The association of temporal power with religion was seen in the mysticism attached to 'literacy' and the knowledge of runes. Persons who knew how to read and write in the runic alphabet were called erilaR, a word that eventually evolved into jarl, or English earl,

The unification of Norway on a national scale is historically attributed to Harald Hårfagre ('the Fair-Haired') who defeated a coalition of petty kings at the battle of Hafursfjord, near Stavanger, in 872. However, many western farmer-nobles preferred to forsake Norway rather than give their allegiance to Harald, thereby giving rise to an exodus that initiated the Norse settlement of Iceland (874). There, accompanied by their retinues, they could continue to serve as the political and religious leaders of each of their respective districts. Nonetheless, within Norway itself, national unification was not really consummated until the triumph of Christianity, for although Harald had succeeded in

drawing most of the political power into his own hands, the local 'kings' retained a strong hold over the people as long as they remained the spiritual leaders of their respective districts. Not until the battle of Stiklestad and the canonization of Olav Haraldsson (the son of Harald Hårfagre) in 1030 did Norway have one faith as well as one king. But now temporal and religious authority were no longer combined in one person, for the church became an independent third-force equal to and at times more powerful than either the crown or the land-owning nobility.

Scandinavian Place Names in a Temporal Context

< 1700 BC)	Ås, Eid, Berg, Dal, Voll, Haug, Li, Vik, Sund, Lund, Åker, Gård
1700-1200 B.C.	-leif, -løse, -inge
1200-400 BC	-vin, -heim, -tun, -em, -um, -åm, -ei
400 BC-1000 AD	-stadir, -bø, -by, -sta, -tuna, -måla, træl, -torp, -bølle., -skov
1000-1350 AD	-rud, -ryd, -hult, -holt, -land, -set, -rø, -ru, -boda
>1500 AD	-vik, -våg, -nes, -øy

(Note: Sound-changes in the Germanic languages from P to B, from K to G, and from T to D took place about 500 BC).

[\(Back to Table of Contents\)](#)