

Norse Attacks on England and Arnórr Jarlaskald's *Þorfinnsdrápa*

The life and deeds of Jarl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson of Orkney (c. 1009–1064/5?) are recorded in prose in *Orkneyinga saga* and commemorated in Arnórr jarlaskald Þórðarson's *Þorfinnsdrápa*. The bulk of the latter is preserved in *Orkneyinga saga*, where individual stanzas or sequences of stanzas are interspersed with the prose and cited by the saga author as historical verification of Þorfinnr's power and military campaigns (especially during the years 1023–44). According to the saga (*ÍF* 35, 80–1), Þorfinnr gave up his warlike exploits in 1046 after the death of his nephew Rognvaldr Brúsason. He embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome (c. 1049–50), returned to Orkney, and allegedly spent the rest of his life peacefully building churches and upholding the law. An examination of Anglo-Saxon, Irish, and Welsh historical records, however, shows that the account of Þorfinnr's later days given in *Orkneyinga saga* must be inaccurate. It appears that the jarl of Orkney, in allegiance with his Norwegian overlord, Haraldr Sigurðarson, played an active part in Scottish-Irish affairs throughout his life. Furthermore, the saga author, intentionally or unintentionally, must have cited the stanzas of Arnórr's *Þorfinnsdrápa* out of sequence to create a fictional narrative. Thus the order of stanzas in that poem as presented by the standard editions of skaldic poetry (which follow the chronology of events in *Orkneyinga saga*) is incorrect.

1. Þorfinnr Sigurðarson

Þorfinnr, the youngest son of Jarl Sigurðr Hlǫðvisson, was born around 1009 (*ÍF* 35, 28).¹ He was fostered by his maternal grandfather, King Malcolm of Scotland, who, after Sigurðr's fall in the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, gave the five-year-old Þorfinnr the title of jarl along with two earldoms in Scotland (Caithness and Sutherland; *ibid.*).² When Þorfinnr came of age, he laid claim to a third of Orkney, which at the time was governed by his older brothers, the jarls Einarr rangmunnr and Brúsi (*ibid.* 30–1). In 1020 Þorfinnr went to Norway at the invitation of King Óláfr Haraldsson (St. Óláfr; *ibid.* 32–3). He returned to Orkney the same autumn, and that winter his brother Einarr was killed by Þorfinnr's ally Þorkell föstri Ámundason (*ibid.* 33–4). The next spring (1021) Þorfinnr and his brother Brúsi set out for Norway to have King Óláfr adjudicate in their dispute about the partitioning of Orkney. Óláfr reconfirmed the Norwegian royal claim to Orkney, installed Þorfinnr and Brúsi as his jarls in the islands (*ibid.* 35–42; see also *Islandske annaler* 106; *Flat* III, 506), and Brúsi's ten-year-old son, Rognvaldr, remained with Óláfr as a token of good faith. Þorfinnr and Brúsi ruled jointly in Orkney until Brúsi's death (1030x35; see *ÍF* 27, 174; *ÍF* 35, 52).

According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Þorfinnr embarked on his first military expedition before the age of fifteen (*ÍF* 35, 43; *Þdr* 5), and he was very actively engaged in campaigns during the years c. 1023–44 (*ibid.* 43–52).³ Upon the death of his grandfather, King Malcolm of Scotland, Þorfinnr had a series of skirmishes with an alleged royal usurper, Karl Hundason, against whom he fought two pitched battles (*ÍF* 35, 44–52).⁴ The first took place at sea east of Dýrnes (Deerness), south of Sandvík (Sandwick) in Orkney (*ÍF* 35, 46–8; *Þdr* 6–8; Whaley 1998, 230–6),

¹ Most of the biographical information on Þorfinnr can be gleaned from *Orkneyingasaga*, *Óláfs saga helga* (*ÓHflr*, *ÓH* 1941), and the sagas of Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði (in *Mork* and *Hkr*). For the relationship between these versions (and the no longer extant *Jarlasögur), see Sigurður Nordal 1913. Whaley (1989, 334–5) gives a convenient chronological overview of Þorfinnr's life.

² The identity of King Malcolm is disputed (see the discussion below).

³ Here and *passim*, the numbering, the text, and the translation of the stanzas from *Þorfinnsdrápa* follow the edition of Whaley (1998). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Old Norse and Old English are my own.

⁴ For a discussion of the possible identity of Karl Hundason, see below.

and the second and decisive battle occurred on the Scottish mainland at Fortnes (Tarbatness) south of Ekjall (the River Oykell) (*ÍF* 35, 49–51; *Þdr* 9–10; Whaley 1998, 236–40). After Karl had fled (or fallen), Þorfinnr pursued his army south to Fife and launched a punitive attack on the Scots before returning to Caithness (*ÍF* 35, 51–2; *Þdr* 11; Whaley 1998, 240–2). The following years he harried in the *Vestrlönd*, most likely the Hebrides, Ireland, and the western coast of Scotland (see *ÍF* 35, 93n3), and wintered in Orkney (*ibid.* 52).

Þorfinnr's nephew, Rognvaldr Brúason, had remained with King Óláfr in Norway in 1021 when the jarls went back to Orkney. He participated in the Battle of Stiklestad (1030) and fled to Sweden and to Russia, where he remained until he returned to Norway with Magnús góði Ólafsson (c. 1035; *ibid.* 53–6). Rognvaldr set out for the Isles when he learned of his father's death (c. 1035), and Þorfinnr, who at that time had severe conflicts with the Irish and the people of the Hebrides, gave Rognvaldr two thirds of Orkney in return for his military support (*ibid.* 56–58). The following summer they harried in the Hebrides, Ireland, and the Scottish fjords, and one battle was fought in Vatnsfjörðr (*ibid.* 38; *Þdr* 13; Whaley 1998, 243–5).⁵ After that battle they returned to Orkney, and the following eight years both jarls stayed in the Isles during the winters and harried in the summers—sometimes on joint expeditions, sometimes separately (*ÍF* 35, 59).

Around 1044 discord arose between Þorfinnr and Rognvaldr, a discord that appears to have been fueled by the Norwegian exile, Kalfr Árnason, who had taken up residence with Þorfinnr (*ibid.* 63–4). Rognvaldr sought refuge with King Magnús in Norway, where he stayed a short time before he returned to Orkney and fought against Þorfinnr in the battle of Rauðabjörg (Robbery; *ibid.* 65–70, 83–4; *Mork* 31–2; *Þdr* 19–20; Whaley 1998, 257–62). Rognvaldr was defeated and again fled to Norway (*ÍF* 35, 70). Later he reappeared in Orkney, made an unsuccessful attempt at Þorfinnr's life, and was eventually killed by Þorfinnr's men, some say by Þorkell föstri Ámundason (c. 1045; *ibid.* 70–5).

Þorfinnr's warlike exploits seem to have culminated in the slaying of Rognvaldr. In the summer of 1047 he allegedly tried to achieve a settlement with King Magnús (*ibid.* 75–7).⁶ After the death of Magnús in 1047, he sent an envoy to Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson to obtain peace and friendship, and in 1048x49, Þorfinnr himself appeared at King Haraldr's court, sealing their alliance (*ibid.* 79–80). From Norway he embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome (via Denmark and Saxony), where he met the Pope and received absolution for his sins (*ibid.*). According to *Orkneyinga saga* (*ibid.* 80), Þorfinnr then returned to Orkney, gave up his raiding, and put his mind to legislation, government, and the promotion of Christianity.⁷ He was married to Ingibjörg, a daughter of the Norwegian Finnur Árnason (the uncle of Haraldr harðráði's wife Þóra Þorbergsdóttir), with whom he had the sons Páll and Erlendr. Þorfinnr died “á ofanverðum dögum Haralds Sigurðarsonar” (‘toward the end of the life of Haraldr Sigurðarson’), and he was buried in Christ Church in Birsay (*ibid.* 82).⁸

⁵ The exact location of Vatnsfjörðr is unclear. Some scholars take it to be Loch Vatten on the western coast of Skye (Whaley 1998, 244). It is, however, also possible that it denotes Waterford in Ireland (so Crawford 1987, 74, 233n74). Waterford saw a lot of internal struggles during the 1030s, and in 1037 it was plundered by Diarmait mac Máel na mBó of Leinster (Maund 1991, 163; *Annals of the Four Masters* 833; *Annals of Clonmacnoise* 176).

⁶ This visit to Magnús is not mentioned in any other source, which casts doubt on the veracity of the mission. Some scholars believe that Þorfinnr at some point stayed in England as a member of the standing English army (the *þingmannalið*; see Crawford 1981, 193, 214; Jesch 1993, 223–4, 230–1, 234). That assumption is based on a somewhat obscure wording in *Orkneyinga saga* (*ÍF* 35, 79), but the corresponding wording in *Hkr* (*ÍF* 28, 25, 132) as well as independent information from the Latin compendium of *Hákonar saga Ívarssonar* (*Hákonar saga Ívarssonar* 39), makes it clear that it was Kalfr Árnason, and not Þorfinnr, who spent time in England.

⁷ He built Christ Church at Birsay, possibly inspired by Irish models (Lidén 1988, 72), and most likely entreated the Pope to consecrate Bishop Þorólfr of Orkney (c. 1050; see Radford 1988, 17–18).

⁸ The year of Þorfinnr's death cannot be established with certainty, but he was no longer alive when Haraldr harðráði arrived in Orkney in 1066 on his way to England. Because Þorfinnr is said to have died toward the end of Haraldr's reign, his time of death is usually assumed to have been 1064x65.

2. The Alleged Attacks on England 1040x42

Chs 23–4 of *Orkneyinga saga* record two attacks on England by Þorfinnr and Rognvaldr during the years 1036–44 (*ÍF* 35, 59–62). The saga reports that one summer when Þorfinnr was harrying in the Hebrides and Scotland, he encamped at the border between England and Scotland (*ibid.* 59).⁹ He sent men south to England to slaughter cattle for provisions, but his men were routed and their booty taken. The English killed most of Þorfinnr's men, but some were spared and sent back to Þorfinnr to report their misfortune. Enraged and smarting from the derision, Þorfinnr returned to Orkney, and the next summer he joined forces with his nephew Rognvaldr and set out on a massive punitive campaign against the English. In the words of the saga (*ibid.* 61):

Þorfinnr jarl dró her saman um Orkneyjar ok Katanes; hann hafði ok mikinn her af Skotlandi of Írlandi, ok um allar Suðreyjum drósk honum lið. Helt hann her þeim öllum til Englands, svá sem hann hafði heitið þeim. ('Jarl Þorfinnr gathered an army from Orkney and Caithness. He also obtained a large army from Scotland and Ireland, and troops gathered to him from all of the Hebrides. He set out with the entire army to England, just as he had promised them.')

Having arrived in England, they began plundering and fought a fierce battle against the English chieftains who were guarding the borders. Then they marched into English territory and wasted districts with fire and sword. Þorfinnr allegedly fought two major battles in England that summer and was victorious in both (*ibid.* 62). The prose narrative is supported by the following three stanzas from *Þorfinnsdrápa* (sts 16–18; *ÍF* 35, 61–2 and 62n1; Whaley 1998, 251–7):

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| 16. | Enn vas sú's Engla minnir
egghríð, né mun síðan
hör við helming meira
hringdrífr komá þingat. | Bitu sverð-en þar þurði-
þunngor-fyr Mön sunnan
Rognvalds kind-und randir
ranlig folk-ens gamla. |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Then came the blade-/edge-blizzard which the English remember, and never since then will a lofty ring-strewer [(generous) ruler] come there with a larger force. Slender-wrought swords bit the mighty troops beneath their targets, and there, south of Man, rushed forth the heir of Rognvaldr the Old.

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| 17. | Stöng þar jarl at Engla
ætgrund, en næð stundu
-vé það vísi knýja-
verðung ara tungu. | Hyr óx, hallir þurru,
herdrótt rak þar flótta;
eim hratt, en laust ljóma,
limdolgr, nár himni. |
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The jarl bore his standard onto the native soil of the English, and his liegemen reddened straightway the tongue of the eagle. The leader called for banners to advance. Flame grew; halls shrank; the war-band drove [men] to flight there. The foe of branches [fire] flung out smoke, and hurled light against the sky.

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| 18. | Margr vas millum borga
-mildingr þrong at hikki-
horna blóstr, þar's hristisk
hugsterks jöfurs merki. | Vætr brá, 's vígljóst þótti,
vargsteypis her greypum,
-skulfu jóm, en ulfar-
uggs, morgin-hræ tuggu. |
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Many were the horn-blasts between the defences, where the banner of the stout-hearted hero waved. The bounteous one stormed into battle. Not a trace of fear seized the grim troop of the thief-feller, once it seemed light enough for battle in the morning. Iron blades quivered, and wolves chewed carrion.

The prose tells us explicitly that the campaign took place during the reign of Hǫrða-Knútr Knúttsson and that Hǫrða-Knútr was in Denmark at the time (*ÍF* 35, 60–1). Hǫrða-Knútr ascended to the throne of England upon the death of his half-brother, Harold Harefoot (on 17 March 1040; *ASC* E, F, year 1039 [*recte* 1040]) and arrived in Sandwich from Flanders in June of

⁹ "Hann lá flar, sem Gaddgeðlar heita: flar mœtisk Skotland ok England" ('he was encamped at the place called *Gaddgeðlar*, where Skotland adjoins England'). *Gaddgeðlar* has been identified as modern Galloway (see Taylor 1938, 364 at n1 on Ch. 23; *ÍF* 35, 59–60n4).

1040 (*ibid.*). He died at Lambeth on June 8, 1042, after having reigned two years (*ASC E, F* year 1041 [*recte* 1042]; *C, D* year 1042). Following the chronology of *Orkneyinga saga*, then, the incursion into England must have taken place between March/June of 1040 and June of 1042.

The battles are documented in both prose and poetry, and Arnórr states explicitly that they occurred in English territory (st. 16 “Then came the blade-blizzard which the English remember,” “south of Man”; st. 17 “The jarl bore his standard onto the native soil of the English”). The wording shows that Arnórr, who had been present at the battles of Vatnsfjörðr and Rauðabjörg (see sts 13, 20, the prose at *ÍF* 35, 66–9, and Whaley, forthcoming), did not accompany Þorfinnr on this expedition to England. That could account for the lack of specific detail and the rather stereotyped battle-imagery. Yet there is little reason to doubt that the hostilities between the men of Orkney and the English actually took place.

The problem is that there are no other records of an Orkney attack on England during the reign of Hǫrða-Knútr. If Þorfinnr (and Rognvaldr) had arrived in England with a formidable army from Orkney, the Hebrides, Scotland, and Ireland, surely such an event would not have gone unnoticed in English and Irish chronicles. In fact, there is no mention of foreign hostile activity during that period in any English, Welsh, or Irish source. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Hǫrða-Knútr, whose reign in England must have been rather unpopular, spent the year 1041 ravaging Worcestershire in revenge for two of his stewards who had been killed while they were exacting taxes (*ASC C, D*), and the same year his half-brother, Edward, joined him in England (*ASC C, D* year 1041; *E, F* year 1040 [*recte* 1041]). Moreover, Hǫrða-Knútr never left England during his tenure as king, so the saga’s contention that he was in Denmark when the campaign occurred has no basis in reality.

Hǫrða-Knútr did indeed stay in Denmark during the reign of his half-brother, Harold Harefoot (1035–40), but again there is no evidence of foreign incursions on English soil during that period.¹⁰ Scholars have never questioned that the Orkney raid on England in 1040x42 actually took place (see Taylor 1938, 108; *ÍF* 35, xxxiii; *ESSH* I, 583n2; Crawford 1987, 75; Jesch 1993, 223; Whaley 1998, 251–7, 335), yet clearly that campaign cannot be dated to the reign of Hǫrða-Knútr. Nor is there any indication that it occurred prior to 1044 (the Battle of Rauðabjörg, described in *Pðr* 19–20), and there is no support in the poetry to the effect that Rognvaldr participated in the raid. Thus, the prose surrounding stanzas 16–18 in *Orkneyinga saga* must be fictional, and furthermore, these stanzas must have been cited out of sequence in the saga. If Þorfinnr’s “famous raid on England in 1042” (Crawford 1987, 74) indeed did take place, the question is then when, where, and why did the Orkney army descend on England?

3. The Norwegian–Orcadian Campaign in 1058

Orkneyinga saga has little to say about Þorfinnr’s life after his return from Rome (c. 1050x51), and the author only emphasizes the peacefulness of his reign and his ecclesiastic and legislative endeavors. As Whaley puts it (1998, 335): “Last years either more pious and peaceful or not adequately covered by sources” (see also Taylor 1938, 64, 108). Unfortunately, the other Scandinavian sources covering the years 1050–62 are equally silent as far as this period is concerned. *Haralds saga harðráða* in *Mork and Hkr*, for example, only states that, after 1050, Haraldr raided Denmark every summer (*Mork* 160; *ÍF* 28, 112). *Mork* provides a wealth of anecdotes from the reign of Haraldr, but neither *Mork* nor *Hkr* have much to say about his foreign policy and his relations to foreign dignitaries between 1050 (the killing of Einarr þambarskelfir) and 1062 (the Battle of the River Niz). According to Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, the chronology of

¹⁰ There were instances of Hiberno-Scandinavian aggression in Wales during this time, none of which can be associated with the alleged Orkney attack (see Maund 1991, 162–3). In 1039 the Welsh had a clash with the English and killed Eadwine, the brother of Earl Leofric, and the king’s nobles, Thurkill and Ælfgeat (Maund 1991, 123–4), but again, this event cannot be connected with Þorfinnr’s activities.

events between 1048 and 1062 in *Haralds saga harðráða* is notoriously obscure. He adds laconically that, most likely, there must have been a lull in Haraldr's campaigns to Denmark during this period.¹¹ The saga of Sveinn Ulfsson in *Danakomunga sögur* has no information at all on the years 1047–1062 (*ÍF* 34, 133). Adam of Bremen (on the authority of Sveinn Ulfsson?) recounts fanciful voyages of discovery conducted by Haraldr during his later years, once in the company of the Danish jarl "Ganz Wolf" (i.e., Galiza-Ulfir; Adam of Bremen, 32–3, 62–3). Thus it seems that the relations between Norway and Denmark, for example, cannot have been as hostile as the kings' sagas lead us to believe, and it is clear that we must turn to other sources for information about Porfinnr's alleged campaign.

The Irish *Annals of Tigernach* (399) list the following event under the year 1058: "A fleet (led) by the son of the king of Norway, with the Foreigners of the Orkneys and the Hebrides and Dublin, to seize the kingdom of England; but to this God consented not." Further information on this naval expedition is provided by the Welsh chronicle *Brut y Tywysogyon* (27) under the same year: "...and then Magnus, son of Harold, king of Germany [*sic*] came to England, and he ravaged the kingdoms of the Saxons, with Gruffudd, king of the Britons, as a leader and a help to him." The *Annales Cambriae* (25) refer to the same campaign under the year 1055 (*recte* 1058): "Magnus filius Harald, vastavit regionem Anglorum, auxiliante Grifino rege Britonum" ('Magnús, son of Haraldr, wasted the lands of the English with the help of Gruffudd, King of the Welsh'). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle D* records under the year 1058 that Earl Ælfgar of Mercia, who had been banished that year by King Edward, was reinstated with the help of the Welsh king Gruffudd ap Llywelyn and a Norwegian naval force:

Her man ytte ut Ælfgar earl. ac côm sona inn ongean. mit strece. þurh Gryffines fultum. 7 her com scyp here of Norwegian. hit is langsum to atellanne eall hu hit gefaren wæs.
(‘This year Earl Ælfgar was exiled, but he came back right away with force with the help of Gruffudd. And a fleet came here from Norway. It is tedious to tell everything as it happened.’)

John of Worcester has a fuller account of this event (II, 584-5):

Algarus, Merciorum comes, a rege Eaduardo secundo exlegatus est, sed regis Walarorum Griffini iuuamine et Norreganice classis admiculo, que ad illum uenerat ex improuiso, cito per uim suum comitatem recuperavit.
(‘Ælfgar, earl of the Mercians, was outlawed by King Edward a second time, but with the help of Gruffydd [ap Llywelyn], king of the Welsh, and the support of a Norwegian fleet, which joined them unexpectedly, he quickly recovered his earldom by force.’)

The Norwegian army that appeared in the Irish Sea in 1058 as recorded in Irish annals must be the same army that, according to English sources, joined forces with Gruffudd and Ælfgar and ravaged English territory. Furthermore, the Irish and Welsh annals agree that the leader of this army was the son of the king of Norway, and *Brut* and the *Annales Cambriae* state explicitly that his name was Magnús, son of Haraldr.

Haraldr harðráði had two sons, Magnús (d. 1069) and Óláfr (d. 1093), by Þóra Þorbergsdóttir, the daughter of Þorberg Arnason and the cousin of Ingibjörg Finnsdóttir, the wife of Porfinnr of Orkney. Þóra, who was born c. 1025 (*ÍF* 27, 245), ‘married’ Haraldr around 1048 (the year after the death of Magnús Óláfsson), and Magnús was their oldest son.¹² Very little is known about Magnús. He participated in the Battle of the River Niz in 1062 as the commander of

¹¹ *ÍF* 28, xxxv: "...líklega hefir orðit hlé á herferðum Haralds til Danmerkr." We know for a fact that Haraldr sent envoys to King Edward in England in 1048 to negotiate an alliance (*ASC D*, year 1049 [*recte* 1048]), but there is no mention of this mission in Norse sources.

¹² *ÍF* 28, 112. Haraldr was already married to Ellisif (Elisabeth), daughter of King Yaroslav of Russia. He had two daughters with her, Mária and Ingigerðr. There is therefore reason to doubt the legitimacy of Haraldr's marriage to Þóra (see also *ÍF* 28, 112n2).

a ship in Haraldr's fleet, and on that occasion the saga writers comment on his youth (*Mork* 213–16; *ÍF* 29, 269; *ÍF* 28, 154–5). He was also present on Haraldr's campaign to Gautland (c. 1063; *Mork* 233–4; *ÍF* 28, 165), but when Haraldr set out to conquer England in 1066, he brought with him his younger son, Óláfr, and left Magnús as the regent of Norway. After Óláfr's return to Norway in 1067, the brothers ruled jointly for two years until Magnús's death in 1069.¹³ Magnús was survived by a son, Hákon, who was fostered by Þórir Þórðarson of Steig, Haraldr's cousin on his mother's side.

Although Magnús's raid on England in 1058 is not recorded in any Scandinavian source, there is no reason to doubt that a Norwegian fleet was active in the Irish Sea in that year and that Magnús was part of that expedition. Magnús was not born before 1048, however, and he cannot have been more than ten years old at the most in 1058.¹⁴ Scholars have not failed to take notice of the Norwegian campaign of 1058, but very few have picked up on the incongruity of a ten-year-old boy leading a naval force to launch an attack on England.¹⁵ Undoubtedly someone else must have been in charge of the expedition, and the most likely candidate to take command of the fleet would have been the seasoned warrior Þorfinnr Sigurðarson of Orkney, Magnús's kinsman and Haraldr's ally.¹⁶ The *Annals of Tigernach* (399) report that Magnús's fleet consisted of ships from Orkney, Hebrides, and Dublin, and Þorfinnr would have been the only person with the power to raise such a levy in 1058. It is also striking that the constituency of the 1058 fleet is almost exactly the same as that of the naval force he allegedly summoned for the attack on England in 1040x42 (ships from Orkney, Caithness, Scotland, Ireland, and the Hebrides; *ÍF* 35, 61).

John of Worcester states that the Norwegian fleet appeared unexpectedly, and he, as well as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*D* year 1058), *Brut* (27), and the *Annales Cambriae* (25) report that this fleet joined the Welsh king Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. Welsh sources, which were best informed on this event, confirm that the alliance wasted English territory. This accords well with *Þorfinnsdrápa*, which places the raid south of the Isle of Man (st. 16) and in English territory (sts 16–17). I would like to suggest therefore that the raid on England described in *Þorfinnsdrápa* in reality refers to the Norwegian–Orkadian expedition of 1058 and not to an alleged punitive campaign launched against the English by Þorfinnr and Rognvaldr in 1040x42. Whether the author of *Orkneyinga saga* fabricated the prose because he had no knowledge of the later expedition or whether he did it intentionally to make Þorfinnr's later years appear more peaceful than they really were, is a question that must be left open. What remains to be answered is why the ten-year old son of a Norwegian king and the jarl of Orkney would appear suddenly with a naval force in the Irish Sea in 1058. The last section of this paper will attempt to shed some light on that question.

¹³ According to *Mork* (282) and *Hkr* (*ÍF* 28, 202), Magnús succumbed to illness ("reforma" 'ergotism'). He died 27x28 April, 1069 (see *ÍF* 28, 202n1).

¹⁴ Although the date of the 'marriage' between Haraldr and Þóra mentioned above (n12) is not written in stone, the fact that Magnús was given the name of his cousin indicates that he must have been born after the death of Magnús Ólafsson. Furthermore, *Mork*, *Fsk*, and *Hkr* all comment on his youth at the Battle of the River Niz in 1062, and *Mork* (215–16) relates a rather confused anecdote about Magnús being carried in a tunic by one Þórólfr Mostrarskegg all the way from the River Niz to Viken. If Magnús had been born 1048x49, he would have been 13x14 years old in 1062 and 20x21 years old at the time of his death in 1069.

¹⁵ See *EHHS* II, 1; Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1966, 137–8n1; Crawford 1987, 86; Maund 1991, 131, 165, 166; Jesch 1993, 225. The one exception is Munch 1860, 49.

¹⁶ So Munch 1860, 49. Whaley (1998, 335) leaves that possibility open, and Jesch (1993, 225) emphasizes that there is no evidence that Þorfinnr participated in this campaign, but, as we have seen, *Orkneyinga saga* is notoriously silent on this period in Þorfinnr's life.

4. The Historical Background

The Norse force provided Gruffudd and Ælfgar with the help they needed to get Ælfgar reinstated as Earl of Mercia after his banishment, but the fleet seems to have had no prior connection with the Welsh–Mercian alliance.¹⁷ The Irish and Welsh sources do not mention Ælfgar at all, and there is no reason to believe that the original intent of the campaign was to come to the aid of the Mercian earl. The *Annals of Tigernach* (7) state that the fleet came “to seize the kingdom of England” but, as Maund correctly observes (1991, 166), “...it must be said that if this fleet had intentions simply on England, the Irish Sea is a very odd starting place... .” Nor can we put any credence in the reasons for the attack found in *Orkneyinga saga*, because Haraldr would hardly have sent his young son to Orkney to help Þorfinnr avenge an insult from the English. An examination of the Scottish internal political affairs in 1058 and in the years leading up to it, however, may enable us to solve that puzzle.

King Malcolm II of Scotland died in 1034 and was succeeded by his daughter’s son, Duncan.¹⁸ Duncan reigned from 1034–40, when he was killed in battle at Pitcanevy on August 14 by Macbeth, mormaer of Moray, the son of Findlaech. Macbeth subsequently ruled most of Scotland until 1057, but his reign was quite turbulent. After Duncan’s death, his sons, Malcolm and Donald Bán took refuge in Northumbria and in Ireland, respectively, and in 1054, Siwarth, Earl of Northumbria, invaded Scotland at the instigation of King Edward, and he defeated Macbeth in the battle of Dunsinnan Hill. Macbeth fled to the north, and Duncan’s son Malcolm Canmore was acknowledged king over most of southern Scotland. On August 15, 1057, Macbeth was killed in the Battle of Lumphanan against Malcolm, and Macbeth’s step-son Lulach was elected king by Macbeth’s supporters. Lulach’s reign did not last long, however. He was killed in battle on March 17, 1058, and Malcolm assumed the reign of Scotland.

Throughout his life, Þorfinnr had close ties to Scotland and the Western Isles. According to *Þorfinnsdrápa* (st. 21), his dominions extended from Dublin to *Pursaker* (possibly The Skerries in Shetland), and *Orkneyinga saga* states that he was in possession of nine earldoms in Scotland as well as the Hebrides and parts of Ireland (*ÍF* 35, 81).¹⁹ Þorfinnr’s mother was the daughter of King Malcolm of Scotland, and Malcolm fostered Þorfinnr and gave him two earldoms in Scotland. The identity of Malcolm, King of Scots, however, is in dispute.²⁰ Malcolm II, the son of Kenneth II, ruled Scotland from 1005 until his death in 1034, but the title of “King” is also applied during this time to Malcolm, the son of Maelbrigte, of the Moray family.²¹ This Malcolm died in 1029, a date that suits the chronology given in *Orkneyinga saga* somewhat better than 1034.²² Malcolm MacMaelbrigte was the cousin of Macbeth, and in 1020 Malcolm and his brother Gillacomgain killed Macbeth’s father, Findlaich (*ESSH* I, 551). The feud appears to have continued between the members of the Moray family, because three years after Malcolm’s death in 1029, Gillacomgain was burned along with fifty of his men and Macbeth subsequently married Gruoch, Gillacomgain’s widow.²³ The following year (1033), Malcolm II attacked and killed Gruoch’s father, Boite (*ibid.* 571–2n7), and in 1040 Macbeth killed Malcolm’s grandson Duncan and installed himself on the Scottish throne.

¹⁷ See Maund 1991, 165. For a thorough discussion of the Welsh and Mercian affairs, see Maund 1988; 1991, 120–41.

¹⁸ For these and the following events, see Barrow 1981, 25–50. *ESSH* II, 551–602 provides the pertinent documentation and the most complete discussion of the period.

¹⁹ For the location of *Pursaker* see *ÍF* 35, 81–2n2, Crawford 1987, 75–6; Whaley 1998, 263. The nine earldoms in Scotland under Þorfinnr’s control cannot be identified (Taylor 1938, 367 at n1 on Ch. 32; *ÍF* 35, 81n2).

²⁰ See Munch 1860, 45–49; Crawford 1987, 64; Donaldson 1993, 2–3; *ÍF* 35, 27n1, 44n1.

²¹ *ESSH* I, 551n4. See the genealogies in *ESSH* I, 580.

²² The saga places the death of Malcolm, Þorfinnr’s grandfather, before the death of Brúsi (*ÍF* 35, 44, 52), and, according to Snorri (*ÍF* 27, 174), Brúsi died a little after the Battle of Stiklestad (1030), during the reign of Knútr (d. 1035). We do know that he was dead by 1035 when Rognvaldr returned to Orkney at the news of his father’s death.

²³ *ESSH* I, 571. The names of the perpetrators are not given. See also *ibid.* 571n4.

As we have seen, Þorfinnr launched a campaign against a usurper of the Scottish throne, Karl Hundason, after the death of his grandfather. That person is entirely unknown, but he has been identified variously as Duncan, as Macbeth, or as an unknown mormaer of Moray.²⁴ As Crawford correctly points out, the identification of Karl Hundason with Duncan runs into chronological and geographical problems (Crawford 1987, 72; see also Taylor 1938, 361 at n. on Ch. 20). Duncan did not become king until after 1034, and it is unlikely that the king of the Scots would have been fighting in the northern parts of Scotland and in Orkney at this time. Both Crawford (*ibid.*) and Anderson (*ESSHI*, 499n1) favor the view that Karl Hundason was Macbeth, and they call attention to the fact that, according to *Njáls saga* (*ÍF* 12, 206–7), Þorfinnr's father, Sigurðr, fought a battle against the Scottish earl "Hundi" who would appear to be the same as Earl Finnleikr (Findleach, Macbeth's father) in *Orkneyinga saga* (*ÍF* 35, 24–5).

Yet, it is really of no consequence which Malcolm was the grandfather of Þorfinnr. The identification of Karl Hundason with Macbeth is certainly tempting, but it is impossible to prove. The fact remains, however, that both Malcolms were at odds with Macbeth, because Malcolm MacMaelbrigte killed Macbeth's father, and Malcolm II killed Macbeth's father-in-law. We may conclude, therefore, that Þorfinnr's campaigns in the 1030s and his need for military assistance from Rognvaldr in 1035 must have been caused by the unrest that characterized this period of Scottish history. Furthermore, it is clear that Þorfinnr could not have been an ally of Macbeth, as some scholars have surmised (Munch 1860, 47–8; Donaldsson 1993, 2–3). Rather, and despite his possible connection with the Moray family, he must have aligned himself with the family of Malcolm II (*ESSHI* I, 577–8n, 586n; Barrow 1981, 26; Crawford 1987, 74). That alliance is certainly reflected in the fact that, upon Þorfinnr's death, his widow, Ingibjörg Finnsdóttir, married Malcolm Canmore of Scotland.²⁵

We have no direct evidence of Þorfinnr's involvement in internal Scottish affairs during the turbulent 1050s. The *Annals of Ulster* (I, 491, year 1054) lists a certain "Doilfinn son of Finntor" among the English casualties at the Battle of Dunsinann Hill in 1054. Some scholars have suggested that "Finntor" is a transposition of "Þorfinnr" and that a son of Þorfinnr lost his life in this battle (Munch 1860, 48), but because Þorfinnr is not known to have had a third son, that connection is tenuous.

The reign of Macbeth came to an end on August 15, 1057, when he was killed in battle against Malcolm. However, the situation was still unresolved for Malcolm and his allies, because the former followers of Macbeth elected Lulach king. Under the circumstances, it would come as no surprise if Þorfinnr, wanting to strengthen and confirm his foothold in the north, called on his kinsman and overlord, King Haraldr of Norway, for support. Haraldr, who at the time was (at least nominally) at war with Sveinn Ulfsson of Denmark, could not himself have left Norway, and he must have sent his son, Magnús, as the representative of Norwegian royal authority. If emissaries from Orkney had reached Norway after the Battle of Lumphanan in August of 1057, the Norwegian constituency would have reached Orkney in 1058.

Lulach was killed on March 17, 1058, and there is no evidence of Norwegian–Orkadian participation in that battle. It is likely, then, that the Norwegians arrived to find Malcolm sole sovereign of Scotland. It is, of course, also possible that the call from Orkney went out after the death of Lulach, and that Þorfinnr wanted Norwegian royal support to reconfirm the extent of his dominions in the Northwest. In any event: with the Scottish situation stabilized and with Malcolm on the throne, Þorfinnr must have summoned a levy, and, with his Norwegian allies, he must have set out on a journey to establish the boundaries of the Orkadian–Norwegian dominions (the

²⁴ See *ÍF* 25, 44n1, Whaley 1998, 231, Crawford 1987 71–2, and the literature cited there.

²⁵ Some scholars claim that Ingibjörg would have been too old to wed Malcolm, and that the person he married must have been a daughter of Þorfinnr, rather than his widow (see Donaldson 1993). For the offspring of Malcolm and Ingibjörg, see *ESSHII*, 25–6n2.

Hebrides, the Isle of Man [?], parts of Ireland).²⁶ That would account for the presence of the fleet in the Irish Sea in 1058, and the encounter with the Mercian–Welsh alliance would, as Maund puts it (1991, 166), “have provided a good opportunity for acquiring plunder in England.”

5. Summary and Conclusion

Although *Orkneyinga saga* explicitly places Þorfinnr’s raid in English territory during the reign of Hǫrða–Knútr, the discussion above has shown that the battles recorded in stanzas 16–18 of *Þorfinnsdrápa* could not have taken place in 1040x42 as previous scholars have assumed. Rather, these stanzas apparently describe the battles fought in England in 1058 by the joint forces of Þorfinnr, Magnús, and the Welsh king Gruffud ap Llewelyn. As such, they ought to be placed after stanzas 19–20, which detail the Battle of Rauðabjörg in 1044. Furthermore, it is clear that Þorfinnr, whose ecclesiastic and legislative endeavors should certainly not be underestimated, could not have spent his later years completely divorced from the Scottish and Norwegian political arenas. Unfortunately, all Scandinavian sources are silent on the political machinations that went on during the 1050s. One can only lament that the Icelandic authors of the kings’ sagas seem to have been infused with the same spirit as the redactor of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle D*: “it is tedious to tell everything as it happened.”

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²⁶ There is no direct evidence that the Isle of Man was part of Þorfinnr’s realm (see Crawford 1987, 74), but the 1098 campaign of Magnús berfœtrr seems to confirm that the island was regarded as part of the Norwegian dominions.

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