

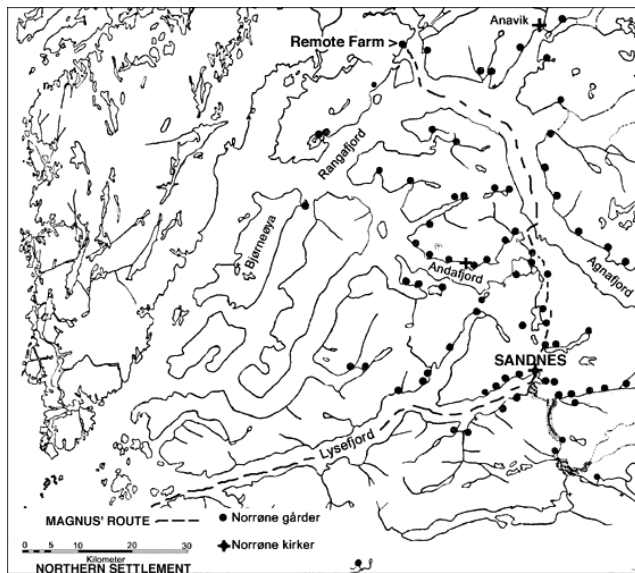
STORIES
of
MAALAN AARUM

MAGNUS

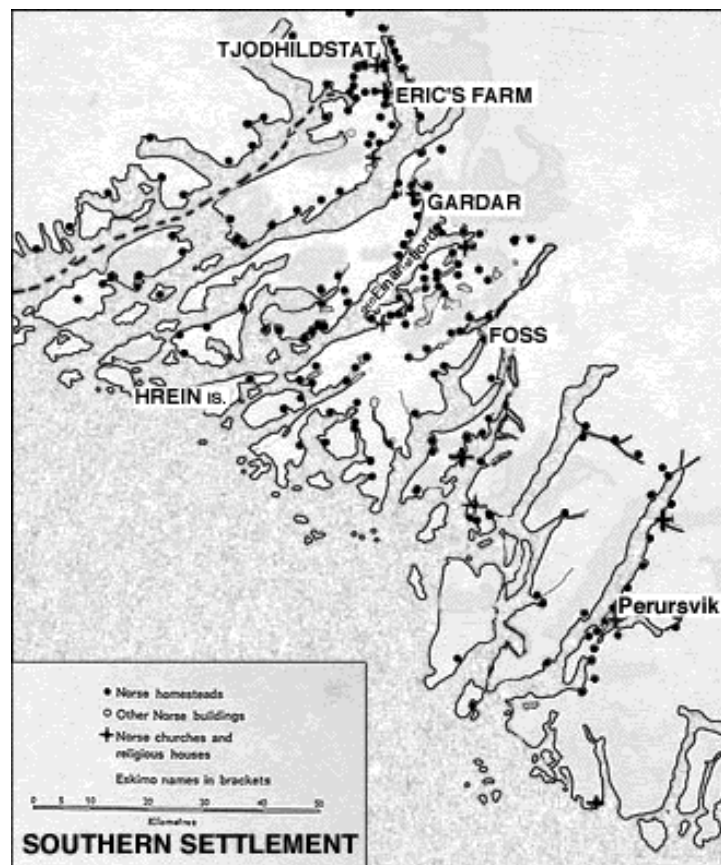


E. S. 3:11

THE FLIGHT OF MAGNUS



SIX
DAYS
ROWING



MAGNUS

At Tjodhildstat King Haakon left his agent, Magnus Bjarnarson, behind with Bishop Olaf.¹ ~ A bodyguard, a housekeeper, and a food gatherer accompanied Magnus. Magnus found pleasure in cooking for the small group; but having a food gatherer gave him more freedom to do his duties for the king.

Magnus quickly learned the risk of being the agent of a king from across the sea. The Norse in Greenland had been ruling themselves for two and a half centuries. Each year they met at an *Althing*. The *Althing* was a gathering of the powerful men in Greenland. The men stood in a circle around the Bishop, a local priest who could write, and the local powerful landholder because there was no building large enough to hold the crowd.² ~

The powerful landowner asked Bishop Olaf to speak first at the *Althing*. Bishop Olaf gave a long prayer. Then he relayed greetings from the Holy Popa in Rome. He scanned the scowling faces. Bishop Olaf wisely decided to skip the part about the Popa in Rome expecting all peoples to give ten percent of their earnings to their local church. Also, he skipped the part about the Popa in Rove expecting to receive ten percent of the local kirke's income.³

He started into a sermon on the Ten Commandments. A low murmur sifted through the crowd. Men begin to shift and talk. A shout of "Next!" came from the men in the circle followed by a patter of "Stop." "Enough." "Next." As the patter changed to a rousing chorus, the local powerful man stepped up and said something to Bishop Olaf. Bishop Olaf raised his arms to get a reduced roar, and he quickly shouted, "I expect to see you all in kirke this Sunday, when I shall continue this message." Then he stepped back to stand beside the local priest. The muttering chorus died away.

The local powerful man introduced Magnus, the king's agent. Because Magnus had seen the previous blunt, brusque exchanges, he took only moments to relay the greetings from King Haakon before saying, "From this moment on, King Haakon directs you to call this country the Eastern Settlement of Haakon's Man."⁴ ~

The men at the *Althing* took only seconds to generate a loud and sustained chorus of "No! No!" A very burly, big man stepped into the circle. The crowd

¹ Bishop Olaf

² *Althing*

² Word Meaning

grew quiet. Magnus had faced men with weapons in battle lines advancing toward him. As the man stepped toward him, Magnus felt the familiar throbbing in throat, the tightening of his stomach, and his own increased alertness.

The man jabbed his right forefinger close to Magnus's nose and shouted, "We have not ever had a king! This country is called Greenland! It will always be Greenland!"

Then the mob used a tactic they learned from previous *Althings*. Someone in the edge of the circle shouted "Move." Most men repeated the word. The powerful landowner pointed toward Magnus's back. The whole circle of men moved in that direction. The segment of the circle approaching Magnus's back parted. The men flowed around Magnus and the burly, big man. When the men had passed, the scowling burly, big man lowered his arm, turned away from Magnus and rejoined the circle.

Then Magnus was standing alone outside the circle. He suddenly felt like an outlaw. He knew speaking up again for the king's order was not wise. He did not have a boatload of Norvege men to help him, because King Haakon had been sure there would be no trouble with Norse people. He did not have a powerful family with big brothers for protection in Greenland. So enforcing the king's order to make the Greenland people call themselves "the Eastern Settlement of Haakon's Man" was, basically, committing suicide. But waiting for the king to come back and find nothing changed was also very unwise.

Magnus decided that living in remoteness was a better choice than the ones the king and the *Althing* handed him. He had heard about the Northern Settlement of ninety farms. The Northern Settlement was six rowing days away from the Southern Settlement. Magnus, the king's agent, signed papers of ship's passage home for his team of three. He advised them to divide up his meager personal belongings and to catch a ship to Norvege if "something" should happen to him. A few days later, Magnus pulled an oar on the next six-oared boat going north. He "forgot" to tell anyone where he went.



The farthest farm on the northeast extension of Ranga Fjord was located three miles inland from a narrow passage formed by a projecting peninsula. The other nearest farm was three miles away, across the small bay. The next nearest farm could be reached by walking five miles toward Ranga Fjord. To the east next to

the remote farm was land beside the glacier. The ground near the glacier was good for escape on foot. Over the ridgeline to the west, another branch of the fjord could be used for a getaway. There were no farms on that bay. A thicket of small trees at the marshy end of the bay could conceal a person for awhile.

Magnus was impressed with the location. Everything looked like what he wanted. But, unfortunately, similar to all useful land in Greenland, it was occupied.

He decided to check out the people inside the earthen house. Greenlanders were famous for being kind to travelers. Magnus decided to sample the kindness. He knocked. No response. He knocked louder. No response. He rapped with his knife, hilt first, on the door. The door opened. An unkempt man with white hair studied him. The man leaned out the door and looked both ways. He saw no one else. His eyes searched Magnus's face and clothes. He reached out to take the knife handle. Magnus realized an invitation to go into the house required giving up the knife temporarily. He handed it over with reluctance. Then the unkempt man turned and limped back inside, leaving the door open. When the man realized Magnus was not following, he raised his right hand, with the knife in it, to signal "follow me" by swinging the point forward.

Once inside Magnus was not at all pleased with the odor or the cleanliness of the room. A visitor to a Greenland home had a traditional duty to share the host's food. The old woman of the house made the traditional invitation to Magnus. But the cooking of the woman did not inspire Magnus. The farm's owner was a silent recluse. He made no decent, sustained conversation. Despite the lack of cleanliness, the silent white-haired old man and his unkempt wife had, apparently, raised one eldest son and three daughters.

The eldest son, just reaching manhood, troubled Magnus. The son was the eldest child. He was sure to inherit the farmhouse. Magnus realized that his own chances of ever being the head man on the farm looked very slim—almost none.

The younger girls were more talkative than the stony-mouthed father, the eldest son, and the surly mother. Later that evening, around the boiling stew pot with caribou ribs to gnaw upon, Magnus skillfully asked questions. He started by asking, "How many people live in an earthen house like this?"

The youngest, brightest girl said, "Anywhere from ten to eighteen. Most people think the average is fourteen."

"Goodness," exclaimed Magnus, "Your mother has had twelve children?"

The middle daughter laughed and said, "No, there are two families in this house, similar to most houses in Greenland. Actually mother has had eight children, but three died. So our family of seven meets the average.

"I see only six of you," said Magnus, "Is someone away?"

The youngest girl replied, "Our younger brother is staying with the livestock family."

"With what family?" Asked Magnus.

The youngest girl answered, "The livestock family. Every farmhouse has, basically, two families living in it.¹ ~ One family tends the livestock and one family hunts for meat. In the summer, the livestock family prefers to stay in tents in the pasture near the livestock."

The middle daughter chimed in; "Men in the household can do both tasks. We women cook, prepare food, keep house, weave and tend livestock too. It is natural that one family chooses to be the livestock tenders. The other family develops into the hunters. Both families will help the other as needed. We all depend on everybody else.

Magnus took another ladle of stew and then asked, "Who decides who will be the hunter or the livestock tender?"

The middle daughter continued, "Oh, there is a lead family in every house. The oldest siblings of the lead family get to make their choices first. Everybody else must adjust."

Magnus studied the silent white haired man and his equally silent eldest son. He guessed, "I take it that your father is the hunter and the leading man in the house."

The eldest son was spurred to speak; "Well, yes. You are correct. We are the lead family. I have decided I will still be the head of the hunting family, when father dies."

Magnus asked, "Does the livestock family stay in different rooms in the winter?"

The talkative young daughter responded, "Yes, but we all eat together around the boiling pots here.² ~ The livestock man and his two daughters do not crowd us. He is very old, but he must still be alive today because his daughters have not come for help yet."

The middle daughter said, "The livestock man is very feeble. We do not think he will live the summer."

Magnus asked, "When he dies will his wife and daughters still tend the livestock?"

The eldest son held up a hand to silence his sisters. He said, "The old man lost his wife long ago, during childbirth. But his three children were old enough to help him tend the livestock. The old livestock man's son knew that Aud, here,

¹ Inheritance

² Boiling pots

would likely want to marry a man who would be willing to tend the livestock. So, the son went to Marrike and never returned."

Magnus swung his gaze in the direction the young man pointed. Aud was bent over a boiling pot, trying to get the flame going again. From his viewpoint in the dim light, Magnus thought she resembled the backsides of a fat cow, except that cows had trimmer legs.

Magnus turned back to ask, "What will happen to the girls of the old livestock man?"

The young man responded, "We will let them tend the livestock until Aud's children get old enough."

The young talkative daughter said, "The oldest girl already has a proposal to marry the eldest son of a family down the fjord. She hopes her father will die soon, or she might miss her best chance for a better life."

Magnus said, "Let me see if I can understand this. Aud has already decided she wants to be the wife of the livestock tender. That man will secure his life's role by marrying her. Does she have suitors?"

The talkative girl replied, "Here at the remote farm, not too many men know of the coming opportunity or Aud. Very few men have come visiting. Maybe more will come after the freeze this fall, especially if the old livestock man is truly dead."

Magnus asked, "Suppose a man married into a house to be a livestock tender. Could his children ever become the leading family of the house?"

The middle daughter smiled and said, "Let me tell you of two cases where that very thing happened." The rest of the evening slipped away with tales of who married whom and the events of their lives.



As Magnus lay on the stone floor that night, he got very little sleep. Magnus had seen the beautiful maidens in the king's court. He had hoped for beauty in his life. None of the daughters in the remote farmhouse would ever be good looking. There seemed to be no difference in their dull personalities. The eldest daughter, Aud, did seem to work the hardest. She hardly spoke to Magnus because she was always doing something. Aud had the biggest shoulders and the broadest hips. Her name meant "wealth." She would be a good mother, if only she could cook. Still, Magnus thought, "Beauty is nice but staying alive is better."

Magnus invented reasons to stay a few more days. He was lucky. The first severe freezing temperatures came while he was visiting the remote farm. He, willingly, fed the sheep in the pasture pen, mucked out the cow room, and took his turn as milker. The families were willing to share food with another working mouth. Magnus told delightful stories. Aud began to sit and listen to them.

The next spring Magnus and Aud went to the Anavik church to be married at Easter. New furs concealed Aud's four-month pregnancy, but the covering made only a slight difference. All the women at the ceremony saw, by looking at her face and eyes, what the sharp-eyed hunters and the bored house-builders did not notice.



Aud was eager to learn to be a better cook. As the years went by, Magnus and Aud visited many other farmhouses. The women were amused with Magnus's questions for cooking details. Magnus and Aud learned about the nine types of roots and three types of algae used by Greenland women. Some of the roots could be stewed with seal to make the seal taste better than old liver. Aud found four of the roots near their own farmhouse. There were plenty of the other five roots in the thicket by the fjord over the ridgeline. Magnus found the algae along the seashore and in the land near the glacier. Humans could eat the same algae caribou ate. So following the caribou was doubly rewarding. Besides the meat, Magnus always carried home an armload of algae.

The other women also showed Magnus and Aud how to vary the menu by using dried seaweed to wrap fish or use as a base for butter or cheese spread. They learned how to sun dry and store fish. They learned that all types of flesh can be sun dried, but the dried red meats were more desirable. Aud was thrilled to learn better methods to store the caribou bones to be chewed for marrow. She had developed a liking for caribou bones as a young girl. Aud was also delighted to learn how to clean seal intestines, stuff them with blubber, and cut them up in thumb-width pieces. These tidbits, which tasted better than the rancid butter, were the highlight of any meal of seal.¹ ~ In Magnus' house the eyes and the layer of fat under the skin were reserved as treats for the children.

All meats were boiled in soapstone cooking pots elevated over a lamp fired by seal oil. During their visiting to the other farmhouses in the Northern Settlement

¹ Seals

to learn better ways to cook, Magnus came across a different lamp near the Sandnes church. The lamp was loaded with seal blubber, not the seal oil used by most lamps. The lamp wick was arranged so that the cooking flame also changed the blubber into oil. A few days after Magnus returned home, the remote farm had two blubber lamps in operation.

Blood was collected and frozen if the weather permitted. Frozen and fresh blood was boiled before drinking. Blood was mixed with water for a refreshment drink. The original words “blod vann” meaning “blood water” were shortened by repeated use to “bva” Sometimes, a thicker soup was made with blood and water. In the brief summer moon, bird’s eggs were eaten either raw or boiled.

Magnus was thankful for his experiences as a boy on a large dairy farm in Norvege and as a camp cook. Most of the women in the Northern Settlement households knew less about handling milk than he did. Magnus started to give “milk talks” when they visited farmhouses. His talks were mostly about keeping things clean while handling milk. Throughout the Northern Settlement skyr, a curdled milk, improved in taste. The rancid butter, kept in reserve and sometimes used for trading, tasted better longer. Some observers spread the word that Magnus’s lessons on cleanliness drove the bad spirits away.

Being a good cook was a high honor among the farmhouse women. As her cooking fame grew, Aud became a more capable woman. She was still big and still not beautiful, but she was, as Magnus told every visitor, “a good wife.”

Magnus appreciated the hunting skill of his brother-in-law and learned from him. Magnus’ own stature as a hunter grew. So Magnus Bjarnarson lived, contentedly, in the household of the remote farm around the peninsula separating the little bay from Ranga Fjord.



Vignette ten

IMPORTANT THINGS

Pitolo stopped at the top of the steps. He turned to look toward the Big House. Actually, his gaze was on four maidens in a sunny spot of grass. They were sewing deer skin clothes.

Azon came up beside him. Azon asked, "Are those clothes for us?"

Pitolo said, "I guess so. What is she like?"

Azon asked, "Do you mean my sister?" Pitolo nodded his head. Azon continued, "Oh, I do not know. Dependable, I guess. Like my mother."

Pitolo said, "Your father was a powerful man when he married your mother. Is you sister thinking of marrying a powerful man?"

"Well, yes. She said that as we were bedding down last evening." Said Azon, "I heard her tell her sister that she knew the important man she wanted to marry. She hopes to get his attention before other eligible men came around and force her to make a lessor choice."

Pitolo spun around. He swung at a tuft of grass with his footless leg. He said curtly, "We better get to Maalan Aarum. He looked weaker last night. He said it would be a long story today."

Pitolo started up the path at a fast gait. Azon asked, "Did you hear anything to go with the last engraved stick?"

Pitolo said, "Nothing. There was some talk of freezing, but nothing useful. But Maalan Aarum said to wait until after the 'Brave, Little Bull' story."

Maalan Aarum was seated cross-legged in front of his backrest. His head was down, but he raised it as Azon and Pitolo stepped through the door.

Maalan spoke first. He said, "The story about our ancestor, Magnus, was really to inform the people about how the old people lived in the land to the east. The listeners, especially the women, seemed to enjoy the story about the food they cooked."

Pitolo said, "Maalan Aarum, I have the belief that important things were happening at other places while our ancestor was teaching his wife to cook."

Maalan Aarum lowered his head again. When he raised it, he said:

"You are correct Pitolo, but I know only a few details from the land in the east and the country to our south. I will tell you what I know. I hope you can learn about the rest sometime.

"About thirteen summers after Magnus came to the remote house..."



ENGRAVED STICK 3:11

FACTUAL FICTION

ALTHING

The *Althing* meeting was the great parliament. A *Thing* was a regional parliament. The *Althings* described in the story are similar to descriptions of historical political gatherings in Greenland.

The actions of the characters at the *Althing* are fictional although the story follows Ingstad's description of the *Althing* grounds and general activity surrounding the meeting place. (Ingstad, 1966, pp. 41–2)

(Return to Althing place)

BISHOP OLAF

Bishop Olaf landed in Greenland in 1247. He was "charged by the Norwegian King Haakon Haakonsson, IV to bring the Greenlanders under the Norwegian Crown." (Ingstad, 1966, p. 201)

His encounter with the *Althing* is conjecture. **(Return to Bishop Olaf Place)**

BOILING POTS

Ingstad shows a rectangular soapstone boiling-pot in a photograph of Greenland relics. He writes, twice, of the Greenlander's craft with soapstone. The soapstone industry was well established in Norway before the Greenlanders adapted the ancient tradition and improved upon it. Cooking pots are the first items in the lists of soapstone items made. (Ingstad, 1966, Plate 8, Fig. 8, pp. 71, 270)

Oxford students found one soapstone boiling-pot in Ungava Bay in 1931. (Cox, 1960, Plate D, Fig. 5)

Lee collected six boiling-pots on the east shores of Ungava Bay. (Lee, 1968, Fig. 36A & B, 37A & B, and 38A & B)

Boiling-pots are on display as Indian artifacts in the Deerfield, MA, museum. (Personal observation, 2001)

The major source for soapstone in northeast America, and possibly Greenland (?) was located in New York. The wide distribution of rectangular, soapstone boiling-pots in North America, may be more indicative of Norse penetration than Inuit or Indian influence.

One author suggested the soapstone boiling-pots were carved rectangular because the first boiling-pots of the Greenland Norse were made of metal from Europe. Metal manufacture in the thirteenth century would have favored sheet metal folding and crimping end plates. The result would have been a rectangular pot. When the metal pots wore out in Greenland, they may have been replaced with soapstone pots.

(Return to Boiling pots place)

INHERITANCE

Very early in the settling of Greenland, decent pasture space limited housing to about 280 farmhouses. In many cases, the Norse moved into the houses left behind by the fleeing Albans. Then the Norse expanded and modified them. By Magnus's time, the people in Greenland had been on the same land for about ten generations. Normally, a couple had about ten children with five of them surviving to adulthood. So, if the two older siblings of the leading family stayed at home, if they married two spouses, and if both families raised five children, there were fourteen people per farmhouse plus the older parents who had not died yet. The evidence indicates that fourteen to eighteen people did live in each farmhouse.

What happened to the other six to ten children from each house? They could not all have inherited the farm. They might not have had room to live with their own families in their childhood farmhouse or to marry spouses with inheritance rights in other houses.

The spouses of the eldest two siblings came to live in the farmhouse. The eldest boy of the primary family in the household usually inherited the farm and his children were considered the primary family. An elder daughter and her husband often stayed on the farm, sharing the work. They were usually the secondary couple.

When the children of the secondary couple grew up, they had to eventually find spouses or work on other farms. Many of the second,

third, or younger brothers, unlucky in love, sailed away to Leif's River or to Norumvege leaving many younger women without marriage prospects.

Often hunters returned to Greenland to court a blue-eyed girl. A hunter could easily court young blue-eyed women in a country where eligible men were hard to find. But they did the courting under the watchful eye of parents, aunts, uncles and the priest of the local kirke. Most of the returning hunters had already lain with agreeable women, either in Norumvege, Eastman's Land, or in the Blond area west of James Bay. So after a quick look around, many hunters embarked on the next boat going west.

The hunters who did wed in Greenland boarded the westbound boats taking along a young woman who was desperate for an escape from a life of drudgery in a mound of freezing earth. The women who left Greenland never came back.

Greenland had two nunneries. Many women who did not catch the eye of a homebuilder or a hunter chose to go to the nunnery. It beat mucking out the cow room. **(Return to Inheritance place)**

SEALS

Most meals were of seal. The household ate a seal nearly every day. All of the seal was eaten except the flippers, any extra fat, the water around the lungs, and the skin. Seal bones were cracked and chewed for the marrow.

The seal harvest came two times, once in late spring and another in the fall. The seal harvest in late spring lasted for two moons. The fall seal harvest lasted four moons. The seals were found along the edge of the ice where there was open water so they could come up to breathe. They were clubbed to death as they lay resting on the ice. Normally, the longest time between seal harvesting was four moons. So prudent households kept many seals in cold storage. The preferred method was to keep the seal unfrozen until the meat became tainted. Usually the meat was tainted in five days. Then the seals, with the belly pierced, were stored near the permafrost with stones covering the cache. The seal meat was good for up to a year. The favorite parts of the seal were the meat, the liver, eyes, the

layer of fat in contact with the skin, the contents of the stomach, and cleaned intestines.

The eyes and small intestines chopped into small pieces were often given to the children for treats. **(Return to Seals place)**

WORD MEANING

[Words can be viewed via the BOOKMARKS Click on the triangle in front of WORD MEANING. If the definition of a word is too long, point at the word and hold . The full definition should appear.]

"Aud" means, "wealth."

.

"Bva" is a conjectured contraction of "blot vann" meaning, "blood water". Later in the story "bva" morphs into historic "bji", a drink in America.

"Harkon's Man" means, "Harkon's people." One definition of "man" in Norwegian is "people." **(Return to Harkon's Man place)**

"Kirke" is Norwegian for "church".

.

"Magnus" means, "Big". The original name was a nickname of Viking-chiefs living in England from the year 900. In American colonial times (c1675) an Indian woman had the name "Magnus".

"Olaf" means, "forefather descendant". Used for over a millennium.

"Papa" is Old Latin for Pope.

.

"Tjodhildstat" is "Tjodhild's place". The actual location is unknown, but the conjecture is that Tjodhild, Eirk's wife, had a place near Eirk's farm.