

= Olaf the Peacock =

Olaf the Peacock (Old Norse : Ólafr Pái) or Olaf Hoskuldsson (Ólafr Höskuldsson) (c . 938 ? 1006) was a merchant and chieftain of the early Icelandic Commonwealth , who was nicknamed " the Peacock " because of his proud bearing and magnificent wardrobe . He is a major character in the Laxdæla saga and is mentioned in a number of other Icelandic sources . The son of a slave woman , Olaf became one of the wealthiest landowners in Iceland and played a major role in its politics and society during the latter half of the tenth century . In addition to the Laxdæla Saga in which he takes a leading role , Olaf also is mentioned in Egils saga , Njáls saga , Gunnlaugs saga , Kormáks saga , Grettirs saga and the Landnámabók , among others .

= = Birth and upbringing = =

Olaf was the son of Hoskuld Dala @-@ Kollsson , a chieftain who lived in the Laxardal region . According to Laxdæla Saga , Hoskuld purchased a mute thrall @-@ woman from a Rus ' merchant on Brännö while on a trading expedition to Norway , and made her his concubine while away from his wife Jorunn Bjarnadóttir . When Hoskuld returned home to Iceland , he took the concubine with him . Despite Jorunn 's irritation , the concubine was accepted into Hoskuld 's household , though he remained faithful to Jorunn while in Iceland . The following winter the concubine gave birth to a son , to whom they gave the name Olaf after Hoskuld 's uncle , Olaf Feilan , who had recently died . Landnámabók mentions that Hoskuld and Melkorka had another son , Helgi , but he does not appear in Laxdæla . According to Laxdæla saga , Olaf was a precocious child , and could speak and walk perfectly by the age of two . One day Hoskuld discovered Olaf 's mother speaking to her son ; she was not , in fact , mute . When he confronted her she told him that she was an Irish princess named Melkorka carried off in a Viking raid , and that her father was an Irish king named " Myrkjartan " (Muirchertach) . Shortly thereafter squabbling between Jorunn and Melkorka forced Hoskuld to move his concubine and his son by her to a different farm , which thereafter was known as Melkorkustaðir .

At the age of seven , over his mother 's objections , Olaf became the foster son and heir of a wealthy but childless goði named Thord , who was at the time engaged in complex litigation with the kinsmen of his ex @-@ wife Vigdis Ingjaldsdóttir (another descendent of Thorstein the Red) . Olaf 's adoption complicated the issues in the suit and threatened to lead to a blood feud , but Hoskuld arranged a settlement and compensated Vigdis ' kinsmen with gifts . By fostering Olaf Thord gained the protection of the powerful Hoskuld , and Hoskuld secured an inheritance for his illegitimate son beyond the limited amount he was permitted to leave to Olaf under Icelandic law . Olaf accompanied Thord to the Althing when he was twelve years old , and his fancy clothing earned him the admiring nickname " the Peacock . "

= = Career abroad = =

Around 956 , Olaf , at Melkorka 's urging , decided to go abroad to seek his fortune . Hoskuld was opposed and would not provide trade wares , and the property of Olaf 's foster @-@ father Thord was mostly in immobile goods and land . In part to arrange financing for his expedition , his mother Melkorka married Thorbjorn the Feeble , a farmer who had previously assisted her in the management of Melkorkustead . Melkorka and Thorbjorn had a son named Lambi . Olaf sailed to Norway with Orn , a sea @-@ captain and hirdman of King Harald Greycloak . He gained great honor at Harald 's court , and was a favorite of the king 's mother Gunnhild , who had , according to Icelandic sources , been the lover of Olaf 's uncle Hrut Herjólfsson . When Olaf expressed a desire to find his mother 's people in Ireland , Gunnhild financed his voyage .

Olaf set sail for Ireland with Orm to find his mother 's people , taking with him tokens and gifts from Melkorka to her father and her nursemaid . During the voyage , their ship became lost in a fog . When the fog lifted , an argument arose between Orn and most of the rest of Olaf 's men about the proper course to reach Ireland . When ask if the decision should be put to a vote of the majority ,

Olaf is supposed to have said , " I want only the shrewdest to decide ; in my opinion the counsel of fools is all the more dangerous the more of them there are . " With those words , the matter was accepted as settled , and Orn took charge of the navigation .

Upon arriving in Ireland they were stranded far outside the protection of the Norse ? Gaelic longphorts . The ship was attacked by local Irishmen , despite the efforts of Olaf , who spoke the Gaelic language , to negotiate safe passage with them .

As luck would have it , the local king arrived on the scene , and proved to be Olaf 's alleged grandfather Myrkjartan . Olaf remained with Myrkjartan for a time , and the king , according to Laxdaela Saga , even offered to make Olaf his heir . Olaf , however , ultimately returned to Norway , afraid of provoking Myrkjartan 's sons . Olaf returned to the court of King Harald , where he was greatly honored by both the king and his mother Gunnhild .

= = Return to Iceland = =

Olaf returned home around 957 with great wealth . Upon his return , his father Hoskuld arranged a marriage for him with Thorgerd Egilsdottir , the daughter of Egill Skallagrímsson . Thorgerd was initially reluctant to marry the son of a slave , refusing to believe that Olaf 's mother was a princess . However , she ultimately agreed to the match after an hours @-@ long private conversation with Olaf . At the wedding Olaf gave Egil an ornate sword from Ireland . Olaf and Thorgerd lived happily together at Hoskuldstead for some time . Around 962 Olaf 's foster father Thord died , leaving Olaf his property and goðorð Olaf bought land and built a new homestead at Hjardarholt , which , according to the saga , he had to cleanse of the draugr of its former owner , Killer @-@ Hrapp . As time went on people began to settle near Olaf 's hall and regarded him as their goði . Olaf 's ever @-@ increasing wealth caused jealousy from Hoskuld 's wife Jorunn . Around the same time Olaf and Thorgerd had a daughter , Thurid . Hjardarholt was renowned for its rich decorations ; some two decades later , the skald Úlfr Uggason composed the famous poem Húsdrápa , about certain mythological scenes illustrated on the walls of Olaf 's hall .

Olaf 's half @-@ sister Hallgerd Hoskuldsdottir married Gunnar Hámundarson , a chieftain who lived at Hlíðarendi in southern Iceland , during this period . Olaf and Gunnar became close friends .

Hoskuld died around 965 , leaving Olaf a full mark of gold , causing tension between Olaf and Hoskuld 's legitimate sons , Bard and Thorleik . As an illegitimate son , Olaf was entitled to one mark of his father 's wealth ; this was , however , customarily understood to be a mark of silver and not gold . Olaf eased the tension by paying one @-@ third of the communal funeral feast for Hoskuld .

Olaf and Thorgerd had a number of children after Thurid , the sons Kjartan (named after King Myrkjartan) , Steinthor , Halldor , Helgi , and Hoskuld and the daughters Thorbjorg , Thorgerd and Berghora . The ill @-@ fated Kjartan would be his father 's favorite .

= = Second expedition to Norway and aftermath = =

Around 975 , over his wife 's objections , Olaf went on a second expedition to Norway . There he stayed with a Viking named Geirmund the Noisy and visited Haakon Jarl , the latter of whom gave him a cargo of timber to take home as a gift . On his return Olaf reluctantly brought Geirmund with him. and Geirmund fell in love with Olaf 's daughter Thurid . Though Olaf was opposed to the match , Geirmund bribed Thorgerd to be his advocate , and Olaf relented . The marriage was an unhappy one , and after three years Geirmund decided to return home without leaving any money for the support of his ex @-@ wife and daughter . Enraged , Thurid boarded his ship before he departed , stole his famous sword " Leg @-@ Biter , " and left their infant daughter Groa on the ship . Geirmund cursed the sword , and on his return to Norway he and all of his shipmates , including little Groa , were drowned .

= = Later years = =

During the closing years of the tenth century , Olaf 's kinsman and friend Gunnar became embroiled

in a blood feud with several neighboring landowners . A settlement was reached whereby Gunnar would accept " lesser outlawry , " a three @-@ year exile , but after agreeing to the settlement Gunnar refused to leave Iceland . Olaf tried to protect his kinsman but was unsuccessful , and Gunnar was killed by his enemies . Olaf 's favorite son Kjartan traveled abroad with his beloved cousin Bolli Þorleiksson . The two were very close . Ultimately , however , they grew apart when Bolli married Kjartan 's lover Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir . According to Oddr Snorrason , Olaf had predicted that strife would ensue between Kjartan and Bolli . Tensions between the cousins grew until a full @-@ blown blood feud ended with Kjartan being killed by Bolli in 1003 . Ironically , Bolli killed Kjartan with the sword " Leg @-@ biter , " which had been given to him as a gift by his cousin Thurid , Kjartan 's sister . Olaf refused to prosecute Bolli for the killing , and arranged for him to pay a fine instead ; by sharp contrast , he had Gudrun 's brothers , who had goaded Bolli to fight his cousin , driven into exile . Jesse Byock contrasted Olaf 's magnanimity towards Bolli with the blood feud mentality of his wife Thorgerd :

Olaf knows that Kjartan , who was involved in a love triangle with Bolli and Bolli 's wife Gudrun Osvífrsdóttir , caused his own downfall by acting aggressively . In Icelandic terms , Kjartan had surpassed the acceptable limits of immoderation . Whereas Olaf wants to maintain the solidarity of the larger family , keeping workable relations with his siblings and their children , Thorgerd 's concerns are different . She focuses more narrowly on the honour of her nuclear family .

Olaf died in 1006 , and Olaf 's widow Thorgerd subsequently directed a number of revenge @-@ killings herself , including that of Thorkel , a man who had witnessed Kjartan 's death but been indifferent to it and had not intervened . Bolli was killed by Olaf 's sons and their allies in a raid led by Thorgerd . Some twelve years later , Gudrun , with the help of her friend Snorri Goði , had a number of Bolli 's murderers killed in revenge .