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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the origins of the stave churches of Norway and their relationship to Norse pre-Christian cult-houses. The origin of the Norwegian stave church phenomenon remains enigmatic and much debated. Because of their distinct shape and unique decorative elements, they are often interpreted as a developed Christian architectural form based upon pre-Christian Norse cultic structures. Historically, no pre-Christian cult structures had been recovered archaeologically, and thus no definitive comparison was possible.

Recent discoveries have forced a revision of this situation. This thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach to investigate and compare what excavators identify as pre-Christian ritual structures with the surviving corpus of Norwegian stave churches. Christian and pre-Christian sacred enclosures are examined from the beginning of the Viking era in the 8th century, to the end of the stave church era (c. 1350, the year that the Black Death decimated Norway). Data drawn from archaeological excavations, comparative historical architecture, stylistic evidence, and historical documentation across the North Sea region and Europe is interrogated to determine the influences on Norwegian stave church architecture. For comparative purposes, pre-Christian cult structures from Scandinavia are analysed using a combination of archaeological evidence, historical documentation and literary evidence.

The results demonstrate that Norse pagan cultic structures were of two types, dedicated cult-houses and multi-purpose halls. These structures were built using construction methods and architectural patterns present in vernacular and aristocratic building styles. Stave churches were constructed employing architectural styles influenced by the Roman church, often driven by liturgical necessity. Each of the existing stave church styles can be traced to European predecessors and has contemporaneous non-Norwegian examples. The early Norwegian timber churches contemporaneous with pre-Christian cult structures were based on an insular two-cell church commonly found across northern Europe. Thus the pagan and Christian temple existed contemporaneously as parallel but separate architectural traditions.

**A Comparison of Stave Churches and Pre-Christian Cult-Houses,  
Their Origins and Influences**

Lyle Tompsen

Submitted for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

Department of Archaeology

Durham University

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## **Statement of Copyright**

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In the course of this thesis, I have made extensive use of the various museums and archives. The reference librarians at the British Library, as well as Durham University have been especially helpful. Thanks also to Anne Røsvik of Riksantikvaren for her research skills helping me find my way in the archive library. Scholarly books from Norway are extremely difficult to acquire in the US (Norway does not distribute books there) and works from Denmark and Sweden are only somewhat easier. For this reason, I owe a special thanks to Antikvariat.net. These dedicated



booksellers have been looking for books for me for years and are owed a special debt of gratitude for their hard work on my behalf.

In 2015 and 2016, (and intermittently since then), I did post graduate research at Háskóli Íslands (the University of Iceland at Reykjavik). I had the pleasure of being able to examine first hand the manuscripts at the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar. Not all manuscripts are viewable (some are on display, and a few in deep storage) but I was able to see the majority of them. The Icelanders have done an incredible job in digitalizing these libraries (the web sites are detailed in section 5.2). It is often the case that the scans of the manuscripts online are in fact often clearer than what can be seen when examining the actual vellum. One of the more interesting things about comparing these manuscripts to, for example, the European manuscript tradition is to how differently they were treated. European manuscripts were illuminated and marginalia usually kept to a minimum. It is quite obvious by the marginalia that these Icelandic barebones texts (only later works, probably influenced by Europe, has illustrations) were used by generations of students learning to read and write. To Terry Gunnell, Kolbrún Eggertsdóttir, the University and Árni Magnússon Institute library staff, thank you!

Church wardens and groundskeepers throughout Scandinavia have been most kind. There are too many to mention, but it is comforting to know that these structures are fiercely protected by so many kind, knowledgeable, and helpful individuals. David Tester, the current church warden of Greensted Church in the UK also deserves thanks for allowing the examination of his church, patiently answering questions and providing otherwise difficult to access documents.

Any work such as this stands on the shoulders of giants. Anyone reading this paper cannot help but notice the input provided by the work of modern researchers such as the late Håkon Christie; or encyclopaedists such as Leif Anker and Claus Ahrens. Without their research and commentary, this work would not be possible.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my partner Dorothy Smatana. Without her love, continuous support, editing abilities, and great travel skills, this work would have been far more difficult.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

On the way we visited the old stave church at Borgund; it was the most fantastic site you could imagine, like the whim of some brilliant child, a cockchafer's shell carved by a simple giant with his sheath knife, with simple crosses and arrogant dragonheads, all twists and twirls, louver upon louver. The inside is like a smokehouse dedicated to some mystic cult, where the darkness of the Saga overwhelms the flickering candles of Catholicism, whose shadows fall on the axes of mail-clad peasants and the flowing beards of Viking kings – a sinister experience, quite honestly. The Danish poet Holger Drachmann, upon visiting the Borgund church in 1886 (Hauglid 1977: 5).

This thesis investigates the development of the Norwegian stave churches. It presents an interdisciplinary exploration of the stave church phenomenon, a synthesis of the early architectural influences in Scandinavian Christianity and both an archaeological and documentary analysis of pre-Christian cult structures, to which stave churches have often been assumed to be related. The overarching aim of this investigation is to establish unequivocally if stave churches had any close connections to pre-Christian cult-houses. If the stave church tradition did not evolve from those structures, the second aim is to establish the influences that led to their development.

The Norwegian cultural authorities assiduously maintain a list of substantiated stave churches. There are currently 28 such stave churches (detailed and critiqued in 2.1). This list has been augmented as additional churches have been identified and decreased with the occasional destruction of a church, such as at Fantoft, raised by fire as a political act in June 1992 (Ankar and Havran 2005a: 12-3). The majority of these churches are located in and around southern central Norway (Fig. 1). This geographical limitation though does not demarcate an area that was exclusive in the production of stave churches. Medieval timber churches once existed all over northern Europe, but similarly dated timber churches do not survive in any other Scandinavian country. As a comparative point, the survival of stone churches is far better. There are 300 medieval stone churches in Norway, 900 in Sweden, and 1800 in Denmark (Ekroll, Stige and Havran 2000: 17).

Authorities have long been divided on the origins of the Norwegian stave church. Their unusual shape and decoration appears to have no precedent. The prevalent view was that they were either a local architectural development based on the unique style and abilities of Norwegian craftsmen (Dietrichson 1892: 176; Holan 1990: 115; Norberg-Schultz 1996: 81), or they evolved from a pre-Christian ‘temple’ format (Bjerknes 1948; Bugge 1983: 9; Conant 1993: 83). The date of the earliest Norwegian stave churches and the last pre-Christian structures are within a century of each other. This suggests that a continuity of style between the two forms may be possible.

There has been an on-going reassessment of the timber church tradition and the role of Christian architecture in northern Europe (Ahrens 2001). Several high profile excavations of pre-Christian ritual enclosures have also recently taken place (Rønne 2010; Ullevi 2007 and 2008; Larsson 2004; Nielsen 1997). These modern investigations provide the basis for this re-examination of the evidence for stave churches and their potential pre-Christian precedents.

### ***1.1. Aims, Research Questions and Objectives***

This thesis addresses the contested issue of the origins and form of the Norwegian stave-built church tradition. It explores and challenges two separate models: firstly it contests the long-argued identification of these churches as successors to pre-Christian cult structures and sites; secondly it interrogates the Christian context of these buildings with reference to contemporaneous and earlier structures from the Roman and Orthodox Christian worlds.

Three major research questions underpin this investigation:

1. Do Norwegian stave churches provide evidence for the direct conversion of existing standing pre-Christian cult-houses? From a practical perspective, are there examples where churches appear to have replaced or incorporated preceding pre-Christian structures? If this is the case, do these structures betray any traces of earlier structural settings, forms, or alignments?
2. Are these churches a unique stylistic development from a preceding style of pre-Christian cult structure? Does the unusual shape, ground plan or decorative repertoire contain elements relevant to pre-Christian religious traditions?

3. Or conversely, are we witnessing structures replicating or emulating Christian architectural styles as seen in the Mediterranean and Byzantine world, as well as other Christian societies in northern Europe?

This thesis addresses these questions by means of a thorough reassessment of all the relevant information of the period c. AD 750-1350. Architectural evidence (structural and decorative), documentary evidence and relevant historical narratives are explored and interrogated. The Scandinavian archaeological record is critically examined; where appropriate, comparative data is drawn from other North European societies and from the Christian world of southern Europe. To address these three research questions, the following objectives were identified, these structure the research presented here:

- The creation of a definitive catalogue of standing stave churches was deemed essential. This includes ground plans, phasing related to the medieval structure, comparative typologies, chronometric dating, and a comparative assessment of the earliest church imagery and its current appearance (Appendix A).
- A detailed analysis of the stave church tradition. This includes a history of the tradition (Chapter 2:), defining the architectural and stylistic attributes that make up a stave church (Chapter 3 and 4), highlighting the non-Norwegian influences in the tradition (section 4.1). This technical exploration of the stave churches provides an architectural vocabulary that allows the comparison of stave churches with other traditions.
- A critical exploration and assessment of the wider Christian repertoire of similar structures from northern Europe (the North Sea region), the Mediterranean and Byzantine world, earlier or contemporaneous to the stave church tradition. This provides a comparative framework for assessing the purported uniqueness of the Norwegian stave church tradition (Chapter 5).
- An assessment of previous scholarly work relating to the analysis of Scandinavian ecclesiastical architectural influences. This was necessary to determine where the current research lies in regard to broader Christian traditions and influences. There has been a long tradition of analysing foreign influences (especially in stone cathedrals) in vernacular literature that has only recently been approached in English (section 4.1).

- The collection and critical analysis of European and Old Norse/Icelandic literary documentation that refer to Norse pre-Christian cult structures (section 5.2 and the Source Quotes at the end of the paper).
- A thematic analysis of excavations containing pre-Christian structures identified as having cultic significance was deemed essential. The focus of this analysis is dedicated pre-Christian cult-houses. These are examined with reference to form, material remains and chronologies (Chapter 5).
- Comparative assessment and examination of literary and linguistic data sets to determine their relevance to these studies. These are summarised in the text (section 5.3) with additional data employed in an appendix (called Notes on Translations and Source Quotes).
- The results of the literary and archaeological evidence for pre-Christian cult-houses are then employed for a comparative analysis with near contemporaneous stave church structures (Chapter 6).

The relevant data sets are summarised in the thesis. The appendices serve to provide detailed evidence and support the chapter by chapter discussions. At the end of the thesis is a section (the Notes on Translations and the Source Quotes section that follows it) that provides linguistic and textual data and the relevant quotes referenced in the paper. Appendix A is the Gazetteer, which lists detailed information on each church. Appendix B is dedicated to the plans of the stone churches. Appendix C is a copy of the translation of the Stave Church Homily (the *Kirkjudagsmál*). This difficult to source translation is provided for future researchers.

A staged exploration has facilitated a detailed analysis of the stave church phenomenon and its origins. This has established with some certainty that these distinctive churches were a product of the Roman Catholic traditions that reached Norway in the 11th century and after.

## ***1.2. Methodology***

An interdisciplinary approach was used to examine both the stave churches and the pre-Christian cultic structures. Employing a combination of archaeological resources, historical architectural

information, written sources, and comparative art history; the origins, influences, and similarities of these disparate structures have been explored in full.

This examination entailed extensive site visits of Romanesque and Early Gothic structures throughout Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, France and the United Kingdom. This would come to include stone and brick structures, timber church excavation sites as well as pre-Christian sites. Although no examples exist of standing early medieval timber churches outside of Norway, museum archives preserve some decorative elements and structural remains from the lost examples.

The churches in this thesis have been visited and documented using architectural photographic techniques or technical drawings. These supporting photographs are presented at the end of this paper in Volume two, with Appendix A providing further applicable archival photographs and source materials.

Any approach combining architecture (a visual medium) and archaeology (a text-driven medium) to standing buildings necessitates a number of photographs. I visited each Norwegian stave church (and a large number of stone ones) and documented each structure photographically. Photographs were produced using a Canon 60D with either a telephoto Canon EFS 55-250 mm lens, a wide angle EFS18-55mm zoom or for indoor pictures requiring extreme wide angles, a Canon EF 10-22 mm wide-angle zoom. Vertically corrected photographs were created using a Tilt Shift Canon TS-E 24 mm lens. Indoor photography of these small, cramped and dark churches is difficult. A Canon Speedlite 580EX II flash with a diffuser was the principle light source. Tripod-mounted long exposures of interiors are obvious by their lack of shadows.

In each case the same approach was employed. The external sides were photographed clockwise, beginning from the east. Individual architectural items were photographed on an ad-hoc basis. A similar approach was employed for photographing the interior. This was recorded in a photographic log. This approach was tested and perfected at the stave church copy of the Borgund church (Chapel in the Hills) located in Rapid City, South Dakota. My intention in employing this approach was to create a personal photographic database for future research (although future plans are to make this available on a dedicated website). Most of the



photographs for this work (and seen in the appendix) are my own. However, it must be stated that during the time of my visits many of the churches were (and are) under repair or even reconstruction. Gol Stave church for example was under an enormous plastic bag getting a replacement roof when it was visited (on two separate occasions), and Undrendal was in pieces and being reconstructed! When my images were not the best sources due to scaffolding, deconstruction/reconstruction, incredibly large plastic bags, or simply obstructed views, I have employed photographs from well-known Norwegian sources. These were mainly provided by the Directorate of Cultural Heritage (the Riksantikvaren) and used with their permission.

To determine the wider Christian influences in the North Sea and beyond, other regions were examined for comparative purposes. I initially assumed that France, as the cradle of Gothic architecture, would have had direct influence in Norwegian church design. This is the case, but the majority of French influence in Norway arrived via the Anglo-Norman world. As the research for this thesis evolved, it became apparent that the later well-known Anglo-Norman influences, such as the influence of Canterbury on Nidaros, were preceded by a largely undocumented phase of earlier Anglo-Saxon influence. Site visits to relevant churches in the UK, France, and Ireland have provided the specifics which are explored in the thesis below. Although only briefly examined here, I also made site visits selectively in eastern Europe. The timber church tradition there is extensive and shares many commonalities with the Norwegian stave church tradition.

The creation of a catalogue of stave churches, summarised in the thesis, but listed in full in Appendix A, involved the use of published and largely unpublished sources. In Norway these are stored in the Riksantikvaren (Norwegian Royal Archives, mainly in Oslo). These archives contain the original architectural drawings, many over a century old, and records of early investigations of the stave churches. The archives also contain paintings and early photographs illustrating these structures before their alteration or the demolition of redundant churches. These images are owned by the Cultural Ministry of Heritage and are used with their permission. Occasionally these originals were either difficult to source, damaged beyond reasonable use, or no longer existed. In these cases a secondary source has been employed, but the ownership and control by the Cultural Ministry is acknowledged. Excavation reports, various local documentation, and relevant printed material are also stored in these archives. I interrogated this

documentation for information on these early churches. This corpus of material provided not only the dating evidence, but also the stylistic and historical evidence for these structures. These archival sources are summarised and listed in Appendix A. The majority of the technical stave church research is published in Norwegian. This has to be read in the original, and where necessary I have provided translations. Multiple international sources have provided architectural drawings. It is worth highlighting that these are often faded, and occasionally follow drawing protocols from different times and geographies (SI units and commonly accepted architectural scales post-date many of these drawings). When necessary, a graphic scale in metres (in blue) has been provided to demarcate scale. This is employed when: a metre scale is not on the original; measurements were done via scale and no metre scale was provided, or the graphic scale on the original is so faded as to not be easily visible.

I performed a critical analysis of the European and Old Norse/Icelandic source documentation that mentions or describes pre-Christian cultic foci. I used this assessment to determine the value of these sources for historical information. Many early *vitae* detail the conversion of the (mainly) Saxon Germanic peoples and later *vitae* regard the Norse peoples. These have been analysed in their oldest versions for comparative reasons (original quotes are provided at the end of this paper in the Source Quotes, Q:24-Q:35). Descriptions of pre-Christian structures were culled from these sources. Admittedly, these are biased sources and must be utilized cautiously (details in section 5.2). *Vitae* that directly relate to the conversion, including those in Old Norse, in Norway specifically, and Scandinavia in general are the main focus. The Old Norse/Icelandic evidence in the oldest sagas and quasi-historical data was also examined for information. References to cult structures in all this material have been culled and collated to create an historical comparative analysis. In that this thesis is thematic in approach, some repetition of quotes and sources is inevitable. I have striven to minimize this as much as possible.

Several Viking era (8th to 11th century, chronology detailed below) archaeological sites, the majority are located in Sweden and Denmark, have structural remains identified by their excavators as having cultic significance. The majority of this information sources from excavation reports and other technical publications detailing the results of site excavations. Unless the site excavation has international significance, such as Lejre or Uppåkra, the majority of site reports and notes are in the native languages. I have referenced and translated these where

necessary. Although many of the original sites have been visited, today they are most often empty fields, the relevant material remains have been relocated to museum collections or museum stores. The museums and archives visited, and their abbreviations, are listed below.

BM	<i>British Museum</i> (London).
BRM	<i>Bryggens Museum</i> (Bergen Museum).
DKS	<i>De Kulturhistoriske Samlinger</i> (Cultural History Collection of the University Museum of Bergen, Norway).
DKM	<i>Drottens Kyrka Museet</i> (St. Drottens Museum, Lund, Sweden)
GUHC	<i>Gamla Uppsala Historiskt Centrum</i> (Gamla [old] Uppsala Historical Centre, Uppsala, Sweden)
FLM	<i>Færggården Lejre Museum</i> , Roskilde, Denmark (Roskilde Museum, Roskilde Denmark)
HML	<i>Historiska Museet</i> (Historical Museum, Lund, Sweden).
HMN	<i>Historisk Museum</i> (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Oslo Norway)
HMS	<i>Historiska Museet</i> (Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden).
KM	<i>Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum</i> , (Glasgow, Scotland)
MAK	<i>Muzeum Archeologiczne w Krakowie</i> (Museum of Archaeology, Krakow, Poland).
MAN	<i>Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli</i> (Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy)
MET	<i>Museet Erkebispegården</i> (The Archbishop's Palace Museum, the Museum of Nidaros Cathedral).
MRV	<i>Museet Ribes Vikinger</i> (Viking Museum, Ribe, Denmark)
NF	<i>Norsk Folkemuseum</i> (Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, Outdoor building museum, Oslo, Norway).
NMD	<i>National Museet</i> (National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark).
RDM	<i>Roskilde Domkirkemuseet</i> (Roskilde Cathedral Museum, Roskilde, Denmark).
SKS	<i>Skansen</i> , (Outdoor building museum, Stockholm, Sweden).
SMT	<i>Sverresborg Trøndelag FolkeMuseum</i> (Outdoor building museum, Trondheim, Norway)
THB	<i>Þjóðminjasfn Íslands</i> (The National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland)
VM	<i>Vikingskiphuset</i> (Viking Ship Museum, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway)
VAM	<i>Victoria and Albert Museum</i> (London, England)

**Table 1 Museums and archives visited for this thesis.**

### 1.3. Chronology and Geographic Range

The period under study for this thesis is the pre-Christian Viking era to the end of the Norwegian stave church era. Chronologically, the Viking era dates from the mid to late 8th century to the 11th century. The dating presented here is intentionally vague in that there are no clear bookends to this time period (Roesdahl 1998: 9-10; Price 2002: 31-2). Linguistic regionalisms (Old Swedish, Old Danish, and various Old Norse dialects, etc.) become visible in runic inscriptions from about the 8th century onwards (Nielsen 1989: 4-5; Palm 1992).

To assure a clear chronology, it must be recognized that the Scandinavian world dates the beginning of the Middle Ages to the acceptance of Christianity. This date varies slightly depending on what country is being referred to. In this work, the generic Norwegian dating systems (sourcing from Ekroll *et al* 2000: 11) are employed:

- Early Middle Ages (*middelalder*) *c.* AD 1050 - *c.* AD 1150
- High Middle Ages (*høymiddelalder*) *c.* AD 1150 - AD 1350.
- Late Middle Ages (*senmiddelalder*) *c.* AD 1350 - AD 1537.

In Norway, architecturally and artistically, Romanesque [*romansk*] falls into the date range of *c.* AD 1100-*c.*1200 and Gothic [*gotisk*] is seen to begin *c.* AD 1200 (Beate Buckhom 1998: 32). A style called Urnes (type-site Urnes Stave Church) is seen to precede Romanesque, although arguably contains many elements of it (Anker 1970: 394-407; Blindheim 1966: 33-9; Hohler 1999: 37-8, 42, 236).

The 'stave church era' is generally recognized to be from *c.* AD 1130 to *c.*1350. There are issues with this dating. Urnes Stave Church has produced the earliest dendrochronological date so far, of *c.*1129 (Christie, Storsletten and Thun 1999: 148). This is the date is used as the *terminus post quem* of the Norwegian stave church era. This creates a bias towards standing structures. Just because Urnes survives, does not mean there were not stave churches before that. There is significant evidence in the form of archaeological excavations of earlier post churches that predate this (section 3.6). It is possible that these shared architectural traits (like raised roofs, or various carvings) with stave churches, but do not survive. Urnes itself has an older structure underneath it (section 3.6). In any case, this post-dates the conversion of Norway by St Olaf

(Haraldsson) by over a century. No evidence at this point suggests any pre-conversion structural remains are incorporated in any of the standing stave churches

Although Reinli Church is the latest in the data set, ascribed to *c.* 1325 (Thun, Stornes, Bartolin, and Storsletten 2004: 204) the era ends with the devastation caused by the Black Death. This begins in 1349 in Bergen and spreads across the county in 1350 (Larsen 1948: 202-5). The resulting cultural and political upheaval provide the terminus of the stave church era. Churches built after that were of a completely different style (the Møre churches, section 3.4 are examples). Complete details on the dating of each church included in the core data set for the thesis are presented in Appendix B alongside a full and complete list of references.

Norwegian dating differs from the standard British methodologies. The Norman Conquest and Anglo-Norman Invasion of Ireland are not as important for demarcating these temporal ages. The early medieval period in England is comprised of the 5th-7th-century early Anglo-Saxon/post Roman; 7th-8th century middle Anglo-Saxon, and 9th-11th late Saxon-Viking period. This era is very different from that same time period in Norway, which has the Merovingian Age (the late Germanic Iron Age, starting *c.* 6th century), then the Viking era (in the 8th century) during that same time frame. It is common in older Norwegian documentation to not separate out Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman in dating schemes. Especially in regards to artistic styles, late Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman and parts of Early English Gothic, follow the general European classification schemes and is called Romanesque.

Several modern and ancient languages appear in this work. These are abbreviated as: Latin (**Lat**), Anglo-Saxon (**OE**), Old Saxon (**OS**), Old Swedish (**OSw**), Old High German (**OHG**) and Old Norse (**ON**). Modern languages are abbreviated as follows: Norwegian (**Nor**), Swedish (**Sw**), Danish (**Dan**), Icelandic (**Ic**).

#### **1.4. Thesis Limitations**

This thesis touches upon early Christian history and traditions from the North Sea region. It also assesses the evidence; archaeological and documentary, for traditions related to pre-Christian cult-houses throughout Scandinavia and northern Europe. It covers a 500-year period in order to gauge the range of changing influences on pre-Christian and Christian architecture in Norway. Given the length limitations imposed on a thesis, this work can only be comprehensive in

specific areas and must rely to an extent on a selective study and presentation of other relevant topics.

In this respect, I have focused extensively on Norwegian stave churches, and relevant comparative structures in Scandinavia. It can be argued that this ignores a large body of evidence just to the east of Scandinavia. There are comparable timber churches in the eastern European countries and Russia (Fig. 2-3). These are highly regionalized with several diverse styles. They demonstrate a skill-set similar to that seen in Scandinavia. Additionally it is well known that Scandinavian peoples colonised to the east as well as west; the Vikings founded a number of Russian cities. As a background to this thesis, these timber-building traditions were explored, with sites visited throughout the region. A brief analysis of contemporaneous architectural traditions in the region has been included in section 4.7.

### ***1.5. Historical Sources and Their Limitations***

Any study employing a cross-disciplinary methodology must address multiple issues with source materials. Varied disciplines approach source documentation in a way that is acceptable to that specific discipline but anathema to another. An example of this disparity regards the dating of sources. In the case of an archaeology thesis, it is expected that only the latest and most relevant research would be employed, and this approach has been implemented where appropriate. In the case of architectural history, and church architecture specifically, this approach can be problematic. The World Wars demonstrated the ease at which cultural legacies could be destroyed. This provided the impetus to document existing churches in great detail. This documentation resulted in a series of technical works originating throughout Scandinavia consulted for this thesis. It is a truism that interpretations of church imagery, dating of fabric, historical analysis of inventory, etc., have been significantly refined over the course of the past decades. The architectural drawings though have not. As an example, the classical work on Nidaros Cathedral was written in the mid-1960's (Fischer, Gerhard 1964 and Fischer, Gerhard 1965), and its architectural data is used in this thesis. Where interpretations that are more recent are available, that source is employed. As an extreme example, Appendix A employs extensive technical drawings, most a century or more old. If more recent architectural drawings or interpretations exist, these are referenced. As a generalization, these older technical works are the most likely to be used, if only because the buildings no longer exist in their original form. This

approach, although not common in archaeology per se (which prefers the most recent research), is normal in studies related to architecture.

Similar dating issues relate to relevant literary works. With the expectation that the readers of this thesis will likely be English speakers, a special effort has been made to reference English translations of Old Norse/Icelandic works where possible. These are often quite old. The ‘Viking Revival’ of the 19th century resulted in numerous English translations. These are occasionally the only translations undertaken of these works. An example of this is the historically important (King) *Sverris saga*, whose only translation into English is from 1899 (Sephton 1899). The earliest Norwegian laws, the 12th century *Gulathingslova* (Helle 2001 details the various dating schemes) have only been fully translated into English once (Larson 1935). A similar situation exists with regards to the *vitae*. These works, often well known in Scandinavia, are only rarely translated into English in the modern world. The important *Life of Ansgar* (the *Vita Anskarii*) for example currently exists in only one complete English translation (Robinson 1921).

The use of Anglo-Saxon examples for illustrative purposes regarding pre-Christian practices in this paper is, with exceptions, generally avoided. While agreeing with Carver that ‘It would be more productive... to move the whole study of Anglo-Saxon paganism... into a region defined by the Northern Seas...’ (Carver 2010: 5), the unique history of cultural traditions in England in this time frame complicates analysis. These traditions included a mix of Brythonic influences and Roman influences not seen in Scandinavia (Blair 2005: 8-11). To the extent that we can trust Bede, he states that Eadbald the king of Kent (died c. AD 640), was the first king to destroy idols (Ecclesiastical History Book III, Chapter 8,<sup>1</sup> Bede 2008: 122; doubts regarding Bede’s historicity can be found in Church 2008: 162-80). It is suggested that by the time of Bede, paganism or at least references to it, had died out (Blair 2005: 168). This is most definitely not the case in Scandinavia. The centuries between the English and the Scandinavian conversions limits their applicability for illustrative purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Anno Dominicæ incarnationis sexcentesimo quadragesimo, Eadbald rex Cantuariorum transiens ex hac vita...Hic primus regum Anglorum in toto regno suo idola relinqui ac destrui... *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*, Liber Tertius: viii (Henderson and King 1930: 360-2)



### ***1.6. Terminology***

This work involves the comparison of sources in seven different languages and embraces evidence from across 1000 years of Scandinavian history. The varied language and terminology, even for commonly used words, presents significant barriers. For example, the use of the term ‘Germanic’ is generally held to be appropriate to anything based out of the Germanic language groups. This covers such a large swathe of time and place as to render the term effectively meaningless. The term ‘Norse’ or ‘Nordic’ is preferable and commonly used by in academic writing. Gro Steinsland’s *Norrøn Religion: Myter, Riter, Samfunn* (2005) is an example. The term ‘Scandinavian’ and ‘Norrøn’ have historically been associated with pan-Scandinavian cultural movements in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Both terms imply a cultural uniformity and political unity that never existed in reality. Certainly employing these terms in relation to the Roman Iron Age is factually incorrect. It has recently been argued that the concept of ‘Norse’ began in the 6th century (Hedeager 2011: 30-2). In order to create comparative clarity in this thesis ‘Norwegian’ is employed to denote traditions culturally distinct to Norway. ‘Norse’ is used as cognate for ‘Scandinavian’, referring to traditions seen across a broader geographic and cultural range, limited in this discussion to the core countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland. Scandinavia is strictly used as a geographical term, also restricted to Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland.

The term used by many sources for ancient, indigenous belief systems is ‘pagan’, or ‘heathen’. Caution must be applied because both terms are used in contemporary English differently and each has religious connotations. ‘Pagan’ in modern usage refers to earth-centred, recreated or ‘new age’ religions, and ‘heathen’ to modern recreations of what is perceived as Norse-based or Viking religions. Both words have roots in the countryside. Pagan comes from the Latin *pāgānus*, meaning ‘rustic, peasant, citizen’ (Hoad 1991: 330). The term ‘heathen’ exists in essentially unchanged form in **ON** (*hieðan*, Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957: 245), **OE** (*hæðen*, Clark Hall and Meritt 1969: 166), **OS** (*hēthin*, Onions 1966: 433) and **OHG** (*heidan*, Köbler 2006: 210-11). Modern Nordic languages are also similar: **Nor** (*hedning*, Kunnskapsforlaget 2012: 726), **Sw** (*hedning*, Norstedts 2010: 609), **Dan** (*hedning*, Axelsen and Jones 2003: 406) and **Ic** (*heiðingi*, JPV 2006: 323). The term, meaning ‘dwelling on the heaths’ functioned as a derogatory term for non-Christians. It was also occasionally employed as a derogatory term for Christians that were not a member of the sect of the writer. The earliest record of the term is in

Ulfilas' 4<sup>th</sup> century Gothic bible translation, and its use implies the non-Christian meaning (*haiþno* Mark 7:26, Snædal 2013a: 183; text at Snædal 2013: 28). The etymology is somewhat uncertain although it is suggested it may come from Armenian meaning 'nation' (Barnhart 2005: 471). In either case, the words pagan and heathen are cognate. These terms did not identify a specific brand of pre-Christian religion, but described a religious practice that was not Christian (Palmer 2007: 403-4). Christianity drew a distinction between its urban 'civilized' practices, and the rustic 'uncivilized' practices performed in the countryside. This has ramifications in interpreting the ancient sources and to which persuasion of paganism they are referring. These terms do not represent what these peoples or religions called themselves. The use of a single term (pagan) is problematic in that it suggests a uniformity that is non-existent. There is no reason to believe that pagan practices in non-Norse regions were similar to the pagan traditions followed in Norway. In Norse sources, the term 'heathen' is commonly employed. Scholarly tradition translates this term into English as 'pagan' (Steinsland 2005: 13-4). Although this tradition is occasionally followed herein, to avoid confusion the term 'pre-Christian' is preferred. It is important to stress that this refers specifically to pre-Christian practices in the Norse countries, when referring to pre-Christian practices in other regions this is demarcated. Also, to reiterate, these terms were occasionally used derogatorily against different Christian sects.

Terminology related to timber building traditions is vital to this work. It also presents difficulties in that there is no universally agreed architectural vocabulary. Architectural and archaeological works that define the vocabulary of timber structures often contradict each other. Britain has been in the forefront of timber-building archaeology with its long-standing tradition of investigating barns, guildhalls, houses, and other medieval timber structures. The Council of British Archaeology has produced a more or less, standard terminology around timber architecture (Alcock et al 1996). There are though limitations in the relevancy of this work in that England has only one timber church from the study period (The Church of St Andrew, Greensted-juxta-Ongar, Essex). The terminology, therefore, does not encompass the features seen in Norwegian stave-built churches. There are architectural works in Norwegian that have attempted to codify this vocabulary (for example Christie 1976; Anker and Havran 2005a: 338-41, translated into English 2005: 338-41). These works though are not presented in a coherent standardized form. Works related to eastern Europe and Russia describing architectural forms and vocabulary exist but are similarly complicated by being regionally limited and in several

languages (for example: Драган [Dragan] 2014: 207-398; Cisowski et al 2005; Patterson 2001: 47-54; Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 251-254; Žak and Piecuch 2011; among others). The standard work on the timber church building tradition (Ahrens 2001) is written in German, but tends to use Norwegian-based terminology when referring to stave church traditions. All of these works have suggested some of the terminology used in this thesis, and where this becomes incomprehensible, the terms are cross-referenced to each other to facilitate clarity. The larger issue specifically in the Norwegian stave church tradition is that Norwegian words and the features they describe are sometimes non-existent in English. For example, there is no easy translation of the term *svalgang*. This feature does not exist in other Christian building traditions. It is translated as walkway, pentice, ambulatory, galilee, or side-aisle, and although it has elements of all of these, it cannot be characterised by any one of these terms (as it is detailed in section 4.3). *Kniplingskrave* (literally **Nor** ‘lace collar’, the term was coined by Bugge 1981: 10) has been defined as ‘a sort of “lace collar” of stiffening spandrels, which in concert with the frame of staves, forms a raised baldachin’ (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 83). Although this is accurate, one is not the wiser by knowing it, and the likelihood of recognizing it is no better after reading the definition. As a rule, illustrative photographs are provided when a new term is introduced to the text.

Given that this thesis is a cross-disciplinary work, there are many definitions from different fields that are employed. The most important terms referenced herein are:

**\*(asterisk):** following common usage in historical linguistics, an asterisk (\*) is placed before a word that is not directly recorded in a text, but whose existence can be inferred and reconstructed based on other linguistic sources (usually via comparative linguistics).

**Central Places:** the modern countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark did not exist in the early Viking Age. This era was dominated by what can be described as a rural power centre called a central place. It should be noted that the Norse version of this operates somewhat differently than seen in other parts of Europe (Hamerow 2004: 157). These sites are demarcated from other agrarian sites in that they are artefact-rich sites whose remains can be interpreted in terms of centralized ‘functions of an ideological, political, judicial and economic nature’ (Lundqvist 1997: 179). From a practical perspective, the local kings/queens participated and controlled what were effectively state religions on a small scale (Slupecki 2009: 26). These sites

would reach their zenith between *c.* AD 400 to *c.* AD 900 (Nicklasson 2002: 121-2).

Archaeologically, these sites can be identified by a number of specialized features (Fabech 2006: 27):

- There is a central area usually focused on a hall.
- The hall is often associated with royalty.
- Workshop and production areas are in this central area.
- There are satellite communities around it.
- Ritual sites, such as cult-buildings, sacred trees and cemeteries are part of the central place (see below).
- Often (and controversially, see below) an assembly site is found at these sites.
- Extensive and varied material artefacts, often the result of trading networks, are discovered at these sites.

There is significant controversy regarding this concept and its applicability to Scandinavia (summarised in Sundqvist 2015: 100-2). Among other issues, the most recent research challenges the traditional split between a few central places and numerous peripheral areas. Metal detectorist finds in areas in Sweden not associated with central places, such as Halland (Nicklasson 2002: 111-23) and Östergötland (Rundkvist 2011) suggest that the number of central places, and their respective halls, have been underestimated. The identification of assembly sites archaeologically, in an era with little or no written records, has also proven problematic. Recent work in England and Sweden suggests previous views of apparent shared similarities in form and function, as well as topographical associations, of assembly sites in Europe are overstated (Sanmark and Semple 2008: 245-6). This research suggests that although it is accurate to say there is evidence for places of assembly for large groups, these sites have great variety (Sanmark and Semple 2008: 255-6). It is worth noting that theophoric toponymical elements (especially the term *ve*, *vi* and the later *hov*; detailed in section 5.3) are often associated with central places and this suggests a ritual element (Brink 2012: 63-4; examined in section 5.3).

**Conversion:** the concept of conversion, and indeed its very definition, is complicated and warrants its own detailed analysis (this is presented in section 1.1.3).

**Cult-House:** historically the term ‘temple’ is the commonly used translation for various Old Norse terms in Old Norse/Icelandic literature (detailed in section 5.3). Archaeology has also

inconsistently employed over time, several different terms for similar structures (detailed in section 1.1.2). Following the lead of Olof Sundqvist, I employ the term ‘cult-house’ for a dedicated cultic structure, and ‘hall’ for a multi-functional aristocratic structure (Sundqvist 2015: 5, 108).

**Diplomatic Edition:** this is a printed or online manuscript that replicates, as closely as possible, the original manuscript. There is no normalization of the spelling or letters, no stylistic changes (such as putting in paragraphs where none were in the original), nor are poetic elements spaced out according to modern sensibilities. Most of the commonly used Icelandic reference works are in fact not diplomatic editions. Spelling and formatting is normalized (for example in the *Íslensk Fornrit* editions, or Kuhn’s *Edda*). This approach and its critique is detailed in the section: Notes on Translations.

**External ambulatory (Nor *svalgang*):** this is an enclosed, often narrow, walkway that goes around the entire outside of a church. This feature is described in detail in section 4.3, Fig. 4 provides an image for immediate reference.

**Fabric:** this term is used in the architectural sense, meaning the structural parts of a building. This excludes portable artefacts such as furniture (Curl 2006: 273).

**Fortidsminneforeningen:** this is the Society for the Preservation of Ancient (Norwegian) Monuments. This organization is responsible (among other structures and monuments) for conserving the existing stave churches.

**Guldgubber:** *guldgubber* (Sw), *gullgubber* (Nor) and *guldgubbar* (Dan): means ‘little man made of gold’. These are small stamped gold foil figures, although examples in silver are known. There is a long history of investigating these and they are often found in locations with historical reference to cultic activities, areas with theophoric names, deposition sites in land or water, and associated with central places (Lundqvist: 1997: 184). Although widely interpreted as cultic in nature, their meaning, imagery, and usage has been problematic. Various interpretations have been suggested. Royal imagery in the form of a hierogamos sacred marriage (Steinsland 1990 and 1991), temple money (Watt 1999: 174), votive offerings (Lundqvist 1997: 184), legal related usage and iconography (Ratke and Simek 2006) have all been proposed. The very heterogeneity

of this imagery suggests variant usages and supports regional or localized rationales. One of the Icelandic sagas appears to record a tradition that bears similarities to *guldgubber* usage. The *Saga of the People of Vatnsdal* (Section 10), uses what appears to be a *guldgubber* as a plot device, Igimund is given an amulet by the King. This amulet disappears from his purse. It reappears when he is digging postholes for his cult-house (an abridgement of the relevant parts of that saga are in Q:84).

**Inventory:** this term refers to the portable artefacts located within a structure. For example, chairs, movable fonts, etc. located in a church.

**Medieval popular Bible:** this term is widely used in literary disciplines. It signifies the entirety of biblical material as presented to the lay public, and what they would have been familiar with. The biblical text employed in medieval times was different in different places (and changed over time). The standard bible traditionally employed by scholars when discussing this time frame is the Douai Rheims English translation (1609/1582) of St Jerome's Vulgate (DRB 2011). I have followed this tradition to maintain consistency in source quotes, and because this is as close to the Latin original that would have been recognizable at the time. It is recognized that different textual versions were employed and available in different temporal and geographic regions.

**Post Church (Nor *stolpekirke*):** this term, rather counter-intuitively, is defined somewhat differently in different countries (this is detailed in section 1.1.2). It is best thought of as a timber church with intermittent earth-bound posts (**Nor *stavs***), with a sill between it to support the wall plate.

**Raised central room (Nor *indre reisning*):** a majority of stave churches possess this characteristic. In a stone church this is similar to what would be termed a 'clerestory'. This is a tall nave, with an upper story lined with windows. This is usually supported by an arcade in basilican structures. In these timber structures, the same idea is employed, but there are no windows (Fig. 5).

**Riksantikvaren:** (technically the *Direktoratet for kulturminneforvaltning*): this is the governing body responsible for Norwegian cultural heritage. In the context of this work, they maintain the stave church archives and provide funding for research and upkeep of these structures.

***Sheela na gig*** (the term is Irish, its etymology is a topic of debate): these are graphic representations, usually in stone, of a female exposing her genitals. Their meaning and purpose has been greatly debated. Scholars have interpreted them in various ways, but most commonly as pagan deities (Margaret Murray 1934: 93-100), symbols of luck for childbearing (Freitag, 2004: 68-105) and as graphic representations of the sin of lust (Weir and Jerman 1999: 11-22). *Sheela na gigs* are not a universal feature of catholic imagery, they are geographically found mainly in England, Wales, and Ireland (Fig. 6).

**Stave Church:** the definition of a stave church as defined by the Norwegian cultural heritage authorities is a standing wooden church built between c. 1130 (the date of the current Urnes Stave Church) and 1350 (the date of the black plague in Norway). These structures share many common defining structural elements, including: a post and beam construction situated on a rock foundation with corner posts that are notched together (details after Anker and Havran 2005: 27). I detail and critique this dating and definition in section 1.3.

**Stemma:** this is a document (often displayed graphically) that traces the evolution of surviving manuscripts, with the original manuscript and the relationships of various copies. It can be visualized as a family tree of a particular manuscript.

### ***Linguistic and Translation Issues***

Modern Norwegian names, terminology and especially place-names, can be confusing. Norway has two languages, *Nynorsk* (also called New Norwegian or *Landsmål*) and *Bokmål* (also called Dano-Norwegian or *Riksmål*). Additionally, ligatures and certain letters (like Å) can be spelt out using different vowels. Older documents are written in a Norwegian that is heavily based in Danish. This makes Norwegian spelling appear inconsistent. English does not tolerate variant spellings. Rather than change all these spellings to be internally consistent and thereby modify source document quotes, the tendency employed is to use the original spellings as they appear in the source documents. The kings in Scandinavia are known by various names in each country and often these names were nicknames and changed over time. There has been an attempt to employ the more commonly known name as recognizable to an English speaker. A cross-over list of the variant names is provided in the Notes on Translations. Also included is a summary of the methodology for choosing particular translations, as well as the linguistic rules imposed on source translations.

This work makes extensive and repeated use of a full range of written accounts. In order to maintain the intellectual flow, only partial and relevant parts of a quote are employed. The full text of pertinent excerpts from literary sources are presented as an annotated hand-list section called Source Quotes, at the end of the thesis. These are referenced with a ‘Q’ with a number for the specific quotation.

In any work of this nature it is necessary both to translate from, and employ translations out of, many languages. Many of these have been translated by the author from the original or from the Norse transcriptions of the original medieval documents. If a translation is not referenced, it has been translated by the author. Employing translations from multiple sources can be problematic. Often words that are different in the source documents become the same term in English. A good example of this is the numerous terms translated as ‘temple’. Another example is all of the different meanings implied by the terms translated as post or column (detailed examples of this are provided in the Notes on the Translations). Translations from one language or architectural tradition, often uses vocabulary that means something different in another translation. A medieval church built of stone, mortar and perhaps covered in concrete will in Norway be called a stone church, a similar built structure in Russia is called a masonry church. Where necessary, I have provided clarity in these cases by providing annotations in square brackets. It should be noted that while I have attempted to employ the best known scholarly English translations, I have occasionally erred on the side of clarity and chosen less well known, but easier to comprehend, translations.

Translating Old Norse works is problematic for a number of reasons. The most obvious is the well-known complexities of kennings and their poetic language and imagery. Not as well-known are the seemingly endless metrical variety recorded in this literature. In translating, or occasionally clarifying existing translations, the poetic element is ignored to stress clarity. Any work employing Old Norse documentation must address the issue of naming conventions. There are a number of idiosyncrasies specific to Icelandic and Old Norse grammar that are normalized in this thesis. In general, forms familiar to an English speaker are employed in the commentary. Deity and personal names have had centuries of differing orthographies and geographies distilled and are presented as the names commonly known (except in direct quotes). Similarly, the use of the nominative for proper names in the commentary has been avoided because of its general



unfamiliarity. Spelling conventions around proper nouns in the genitive are similarly ignored. Nicknames in Icelandic literature normally written in lower case are usually capitalized in English translations. This paper contains a number of characters that are not native to MS Word. In general, runic transcriptions and Old Norse/Icelandic characters are written using Gullskoe and Junicode fonts. These fonts are widely available on the internet.

### ***1.7. Organization of Thesis***

This study divides into three parts with each part dealing with a specific genre of evidence and following a distinct research theme. Part I comprising Chapter 2-4, addresses Stave churches and their details. Part II comprising Chapter 5, examines pre-Christian cultic structures and their evidence. Part III, Chapter 6-7, provides a direct comparison of the stave churches and cult-houses and the conclusions based on a comparative and critical analysis of the full data sets. The chapters in detail are:

Chapter 1 presents the format and details of the structure of this thesis. This includes necessary terminology and historical background to detail the issues located within.

Chapter 2 introduces the stave churches. This details what precisely makes a structure a stave church, and information related to their discovery and interpretation.

Chapter 3 presents more detailed and nuanced look at the stave churches as they exist today. This includes a technical assessment of the architectural details as well as a critique on the way stave churches are analysed today.

Chapter 4 presents a critical and historical approach to the origins of stave churches in general, and specifics related to the origins and influences seen in stave church design. The chapter ends with an examination of stone churches and a critical examination of Russian (Kievan) wooden church design.

Chapter 5 details and critiques the literary and archaeological evidence for cult-houses. This includes a critical summary of the major sources for the written documentation, as well as a general historical analysis and critique of this evidence. Architectural precursors to pre-Christian cult-houses are similarly examined and their origins placed in vernacular and aristocratic dwellings.

Chapter 6 critically examines the relationships between stave churches and pagan cult-houses. A direct comparison is performed between the pre-Christian and Christian cultic structures.

Chapter 7 is a discussion of the proceeding evidence, and the conclusions reached. The conclusion drawn suggests that these represent two separate but parallel traditions. They were contemporary, yet unrelated.

These chapters are supported by additional data sets, which are located in the Appendix. A sections details the Notes on Translations. A separate section has the appropriate quotes in full, and three appendices detailed above are included. Volume Two presents photographic and diagrammatic evidence.

### ***1.8. Historical Background***

This overview provides details relevant to interpreting Christian and pre-Christian architecture in its historical context.

#### ***1.1.1. Origins of Country Boundaries***

By the time of the stave church era, the boundaries of Norway were more or less, set. The unification of Denmark and Sweden also, with some minor changes, resulted in solidifying their modern boundaries. There is no inherent reason to believe that before these Scandinavian countries were unified under their respective early kings, that they saw themselves as anything but separate tribal entities. It has been argued that in the Viking era people did not see themselves as Norwegian, Swedes, or Danes (Svanberg 2003: 92-9). In that the evidence of Norse pre-Christian cultic structures is scattered across Scandinavia, and these countries have different Christian histories, it is valuable for comparison purposes to provide an overview of the geographic and cultural terminology involved.

#### ***Sweden***

The term Sweden, as a patronymic with various spellings, is found in Latin as well as many medieval languages and sources. Tacitus provides the earliest identifiable reference to Sweden. In the late 1st-century text *Germanii* he states 'Next are the states of the Suiones, in the midst of the Ocean itself, whose strength in addition to weapons and men lies in fleets... (Tac. Ger. 44.2,

Rives 1999: 95]. The term likely originates from the Proto-Germanic \**swe* meaning ‘self’ (Kroonen 2013: 496). This was Latinized to *Suiones*. The 6th-century Roman historian Jordanes employs this term in his work *Getica* (a summary of Cassiodorus’ lost *History of the Goths*). This later appears in Anglo-Saxon as *Swéon* (Old Norse ‘*Svíar*’, Rives 1999: 311) and is mentioned in *Beowulf* (line 2922, Klaeber 1950: 110) as *Swēoðēod*. Alfred’s 9th-century version of Orosius says ‘Their land is *Swēoland*’ (or *Svealand*, Hall 1960: 330).

## ***Denmark***

The etymology of the term Denmark (*Danmark*) has historically revolved around the meaning of the term *dan*. Various ancient sources (such as Saxo Grammaticus’ *History of the Danes*, Book 1 and the *Lejre Chronicle* section 1-3) relate that there was an individual named Dan who unified Denmark. The people were named *Dani* after him. Modern Danish etymologies (Nielsen 1989, 85–96; de Vries 1962: 73) interpret *dan* as deriving from a Germanic word related to ‘flat’, with the word *mark* related to a borderland. The earliest mention of Denmark as a kingdom appears to be in the late 9th century. King Alfred’s (attributed) translation and rewriting of the *Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri Septem* by Orosius (Book 1, Chapter 1.16-22. Godden 2016: 36-45) details that *Ohthere* passed islands owned by Denmark. The Danes themselves consider the earliest mention of Denmark to be on the Jelling Rune Stones. These are located in a churchyard in Jelling (Fig. 7). Similar to the Norwegian examples, they link the identity of the Danish state with kingship and Christianity (Berend 2007: 82-3). There are two stones, one erected by King Gormr and the second erected by his son, Harald Bluetooth. Both mention Denmark, but the relevant reference is on the second stone. The inscription reads ‘King Haraldr [Bluetooth] ordered this monument made in memory of Gormr, his father, and in memory of Thyrvé, his mother; that Haraldr who won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian.’ (this translation is the standard one, Rundata DR 42).

## ***Norway***

Although Norway is mentioned on the Jelling Stone in Denmark (detailed below), the first mention of Norway in a Norwegian context is on a rune stone dated to c. AD 1034 (Fig. 8). The stone was discovered on the island of Kuløy (located in north-western Norway). The dating has been controversial. It is based on a dendrochronological date of an assumed contemporaneous

adjacent bridge that had collapsed, (Spurkland 2005: 111; Winroth 2012: 116). This has occasionally been questioned, and placed at an earlier date, usually near the end of the 10th century (dating issues are summarised in Spurkland 2005: 110-11). The stone reads ‘Þórir and Hallvarðr raised this stone in memory of Ulfljótr (?) ... Christianity had been twelve winters in Norway...’ (RunData stone N 449, this is the currently accepted translation). The importance of the inscription, if the dating is correct, is not only that it is the first mention of the name Norway (the inscription says ‘Nóregi’) it is also the first mention in Norway of the word ‘Christian’ (Spurkland 2005: 109-11). The inscription though is worn, and there has been controversy around the interpretation of the both the reading of the word Christian, and what event this refers to (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 103; Winroth 2012: 116; Spurkland 2005: 109-11). The stone is seen in contemporary studies of the history of Christianity as a propagandist statement. Supporting chronometric evidence for the term and date can be found in English in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (year 1028) where the term ‘Norwege’ (identifiable as Norwegian) is employed (Dumville 2012: 357).

### *1.1.2. Timber Building Methodologies*

To present an architectural comparison of pre-Christian structures with Norwegian stave churches necessitates a brief synopsis of timber construction methodologies. This is admittedly complicated by vocabulary differences between languages (i.e. the use of the same word, but with minor differences in meaning that can be consequential).

There is a long history of timber constructed buildings in the Germanic world. The similarities of these structures, from the Bronze Age, to the medieval period, has long been noted (summarised in Karlsen 2012: 151-70; Zimmermann 1988: 465-88). A conservative approach to wooden building construction is observable, even today. The *loft* seen in medieval structures preserved in skansens in Sweden and Norway, can still be found in the countryside in Norway, virtually unchanged (Fig. 9). The ancient roofed out-structure called a *grindbygget* can be seen, writ large, in the 15th-century Møre-style churches (detailed in 3.4). These types of out-building are still constructed today.

This thesis will only examine the buildings and construction methodologies most relevant to the study of cultic structures. This involves some specific issues related to translations. For example, there exists (as detailed below) an important structure called a ‘hall’. Hall-like structures can be

seen as early as the Bronze Age (Fig. 10) and are geographically diverse (Fig. 11). A long-house can be looked at as a hall structure, with partitions. It is often stated, with minor reservations regarding individual variation, that the long-house structure evolved into the hall (Hamerow 2004: 15-21; Schmidt 1994: 36). The structures were often multi-purpose. There is a structure called a *naust* (**Nor**) that was used for storing ships (Fig. 12). It is recorded that the king's coronation was held in one because it was the largest hall-like building at the time (*Saga of Hakon Hakonsson*, chapter 248-252). This suggests that a monolithic approach to interpreting these structures and their function proves unwise. Adding to this complexity is that archaeologists and historians have not applied any consistency in how they use this term. Herschend attempts to provide clarity and direction in his work with a definition of halls as seen in central places (Herschend 1999: 415, detailed in section 1.6). But, the terms *hall*, *salr*, *hus* (the Lejre halls are consistently called 'house' in the excavations, Christiansen 2010) are used quite variably in Nordic and English literature.

In that this analysis is from a very high level, and only as they relate to Iron Age and medieval structures, we look at these hall structures as similar and related. These structures share a similarity in construction and design methodologies. This is, of course, a broad generalization and simplification of an area with many complexities to it. The Fyrkat halls seen in Fig. 13 shares many features seen in both (often contemporary) pre-Christian cult-houses as well as stave churches. Examples include the curved, ship like walls as seen in cult-houses (such as Uppåkra and Tissø, cult-houses, Fig. 43, 48). The wall and roof braces (**Nor** *skorder*) prevent the walls from bowing outward (Schmidt 1994: 98, 102) and are similar to those seen in several Møre-type stave churches (the *skorder* are circled in the hall in Fig 13, the church and modern examples can be seen in Fig. 14). Similarities to post-type constructions (detailed below) can be seen in these structures as well. It is possible, the point is debated, that the roof structure of this hall is supported by the walls (debate summarised by Schmidt 1994: 96-104; Schmidt 1973: 52-77; Schultz, 1942: 17-30). In these types of late Viking era halls, there is no evidence of internal columns that support the roof. Conversely, the pre Iron Age structures (such as long-houses and halls) had interior columns, and an exterior support structure to hold up the roof. But, as a generalization, during the Viking era, there was a movement away from this, toward structures where the weight of the roof was supported by the walls (Schmidt 1994: 108; Hamerow 2004:

15-8; this chronological progression can be seen in Fig. 10). It is clear that there is a continuity in construction methods employed in building halls that is evident in these other structures as well.

Similar to the issue with the term hall, inconstancies and inaccuracies related to vocabulary complicate the data set. Although the term 'post church' or 'post structure' is used commonly, the definition of the term has great variation. Many Norse and English sources employ this term, and even subdivide this into types (such as Christie 1976; Brunskill 1999: 24-6). These subdivisions are however different from source to source and language to language. This can be somewhat confusing in that the terms such as palisade, post, and stave are often confused and conflated (examples include: Alcock et al 1996: 33; Schmidt 1994: 98). From a practical perspective, which term applies correctly relates to archaeological excavation (if this has been done). Because this is an examination of stave churches, the common Norwegian descriptive methodology (seen in various Norwegian sources such as Christie 1976; Hauglid 1976) is followed. I employ the three general breakdowns in the method of timber construction: palisade, post, and stave. It should be noted that building with 'staves' (using the term generically and cognate with 'posts') is not the same thing as stave-construction (an internal framed construction technique known most commonly in stave churches). Particulars on stave church construction as described in Norwegian sources are detailed below. There were many variations on these construction methodologies, and these individual styles were all being built contemporaneously. They do not, in our time frame, represent an evolutionary typology where one style evolves into another.

It is often the case that the local conditions determine the building materials. For example, wattle and daub were commonly used for wall structures. With the advent of structures that required walls that supported roofs, timber, in the form of staves, was chiefly used (especially in Norway and Sweden with their extensive forests). Iceland, having been deforested by early settlers, occasionally employed driftwood (such as seen at Hrísbú church, Guðmundsdóttir 2013: 7). Although the building material is adapted, and minor changes may be made for climatic conditions, the plan of the structure is usually easily recognized. This continues through time. Examples are provided of domestic structures that remain similarly styled from the early Bronze Age, to the early medieval era. In that the pre-Christian structures in our research time frame (the early Viking Age to the end of the stave church era) are timber, the focus is on

buildings constructed of wood. Norwegian medieval stone churches, and Scandinavian brick structures, followed a different trajectory, and are analysed in section 4.6.

The construction techniques used are often ancient. The carving in the image in Fig. 15 depicts a battle scene from Section XX of the late 2nd-century Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome. The scene on the relief represents the destruction of a German village (Beckmann 2003: 235). The structure in question is rectangular, and consists of upright tree trunks supporting a roof. The log ends are placed directly into the ground. If one looks carefully at the top of top of the walls, there appears to be a rope intertwined with the top of the logs to bind them together. The structure clearly employs palisade construction, bound together with rope (Hauglid 1976: 23). This imagery shares a similarity to structures that were built a thousand years later.

### ***Palisade Construction (Nor palisadeverk)***

The field characteristic of palisade structures is that the vertical logs are placed into the ground (Fig. 16). The key point to note is that the wall structure supports the roof. This is important, because other earlier structures, such as long-houses and halls, had interior columns, and often exterior support structures to hold up the roof

Although this type of structure has a long history, it is known that this design has technical limitations. The posts are in direct contact with the ground which causes the posts to rot over time. There were many differing approaches attempted to alleviate this issue. Sometimes posts were placed in stone-lined pits (the stones both keeping the base of the staves away from the dirt, as well as attempting to provide drainage). Occasionally a large trench was carved and lined with stone or other material. However, in all cases, this would only marginally extend the lifespan of the structure. Using the archaeological data (detailed in the Gazetteer) it appears that stave churches (such as Urnes) would typically last 50 to 100 years before being rebuilt. Of course climate and soil conditions played an extensive influence on their longevity. Archaeologically, these structures are often easy to identify because the postholes are all next to each other forming a wall.

No palisade church survives in Scandinavia. But, in the UK, a lone exemplar still stands. Greensted Church (The Church of St. Andrew) is located in Chipping Ongar, Essex, England. This church, dendrochronologically dated to c. 1063x1100 (Tyers 1996: 7) is the only medieval

wooden church still standing in England, and the oldest wooden church in Europe (Fig. 17). It has been used as a comparison point with stave churches since the late 19th century (Dietrichson 1892: 155-62). The nave of the church is composed of the original supporting posts. In 1849 the church was elevated and the rotting bottoms of the supporting staves were removed and the church put on a brick foundation (Ray 1871: 12-3).

As stated, there is no surviving palisade church in Norway. There is though, an intriguing possibility. In examining Røldal Church, researcher Jørgen Jensenius noticed some unusual features. First, the east wall, had posts that appeared to go into the ground. Although hard to tell without excavation (the floor and outside ground level has risen over time) he noted the possibility that this may be remnant of a palisade or post wall. Second, the proportions of the structure were unusual. Jensenius suggests that this may have originally been a post or palisade church (and the only evidence this type of standing structure in Scandinavia) or that this was originally another type of building converted to a church in a later period (Jensenius 1998: 131-45).

### ***Post Construction (Nor stolpekirke)***

One of the important variations seen in these timber-built structures involves the use of a ‘sill’ (**Nor. *svill***). This is a horizontal beam, often with a groove in it, which lies between two vertical posts (Fig. 18). Posts are set into the ground (‘earthset’) at a fixed distance from each other with the sill between them. Vertical timbers or wood planking are placed onto this sill forming a wall plate. Hence, although the posts in the ground support the roof directly, the ends of the individual planks in the wall plate do not lie directly on the ground (Fig. 19). Churches built of this construction are called Post Churches (**Nor *stolpekirke***). There are many variations on this design. Sometimes the sill is placed on stones, sometimes the sills are interlocked at the corners and placed on a buried post as a foundation (presaging stave construction) or, a sill is placed directly on dirt. There is also great variability in the distance between the supporting posts. The advantage of this style is that it uses less wood, requires less digging, and therefore is somewhat cheaper to construct. Archaeologically, these structures are easy to identify because what is left in the record are evenly spaced postholes that have either a remnant of the sill as an imprint, or appear to have nothing between the postholes (the sill not having been preserved). Examples and plans of post churches can be seen in Fig. 62 and further details are provided in section 3.6.



### *Stave Construction (Nor stavverk)*

An important field characteristic of Norwegian stave construction relates to the corner staves. These are the posts that reside at the cardinal points. In these constructions, the sills are integrated (by various means) into the base of these corner posts. There is variety in exactly how this is done, but usually the corner sills are interlocked, and a post (carved with indentations in the bottom, like a cap) is placed over it (Fig. 20 demonstrates this, and compares this to what is seen in a post construction). The corner post is then placed on a stone structure off the ground. The sills are usually also placed on a stone foundation. The wall plates and entrances are supported, not only by the vertical posts, but also by a beam (or lintel) on top. This construction, two posts with a beam on top, creates a very strong wall structure. Stave construction employs less wood than the either palisade or post construction (Fig.21 compares the three construction styles). The interlocking, elevated frame provides protection from both the elements and wood rot. This may be a contributing factor to the survival of the stave churches throughout time.

Fig. 22 (the *Vastveitloftet* storehouse SKS, Sweden) provides an example of stave construction. This image is of a 14th-century *loft* originally from Telemark, Norway. The supporting superstructure has interlocking beams in the cardinal posts. The entire structure is supported on stone, no wood touches the ground. This allows the water to run underneath it, and maintains a dry environment conducive to the preservation of the wood. The upper story wall plates rest in a sill, and also interlock at cardinal second-story posts.

#### *1.1.3. Early Conversion History*

The study of Scandinavia's conversion is a treacherous exercise, given that we are faced with either an all-but-impenetrable darkness or the dazzling glare of false knowledge (Abrams 1995: 214).

The early history of Nordic Christianity is convoluted and controversial. It is acknowledged that these varied conversion histories, reliant on documentary accounts, are disputable and complex (Carver 2003: 3-4). The documentary and archaeological evidence can appear contradictory. In order to bring clarity to these issues, it is necessary to address some key ideas and definitions. Among them, what is meant by conversion, how do you define it, and what evidence documents its completion (i.e. at what point does a people become Christian?).

### *Definitions:*

*Pre-Christian:* This is the indigenous belief system practised in the Norse world. It is generally interpreted as cultic beliefs and practises associated with the *Æsir* and *Vanir* and traditions recorded by Snorri Sturluson and handful of other Medieval chroniclers (detailed in section 5.2). Contrary to the presentation of a seemingly codified Norse belief system presented by Snorri, all of the evidence suggests a local cult focus. This localized religion had its own rituals, beliefs, cultic areas as well as dedicated, and multi-purpose ritual structures (Schjødt 2009: 9-22; Slupecki 2009: 23-44).

It is not known what these individuals called their own belief systems. In studies of this topic, language and Christian cultural bias negatively influences our perceptions. There is no Old Norse word for 'religion' (Gräslund 2008: 249; Andrén, Jennbert, and Raudvere 2006a: 12; Price 2002: 26). By the time the Icelandic material is committed to writing, the term used for the pre-Christian practises was *forn siðr* (Andrén, Jennbert and Raudvere 2006a: 12). *Forn* translates readily to old or ancient (Zoëga 2004: 144). *Siðr* is somewhat more obscure in English, being variously translated as traditions, customs, or ways. The implication of the term is a fusion of religious practises and daily life (Gräslund 2008: 249). The modern Norwegian term *sed* preserves this meaning (Haugen 1974: 347) and its cognate (Bjorvand and Lindeman 2007: 931) is *skikk*, meaning traditional custom or practise. Nordeide notes that the term implies action (Nordeide 2011: 17). This suggests that active participation was required. This is different from the intellectual and more philosophical idea present in the modern usage of the term religion. This term appears to change little in meaning through time. It originates in Old Germanic as *\*saiða* (m) meaning charm, or spell (Kroonen 2013: 421).

*Christian:* This is an individual (or people) who practise Christian rituals and self-identify as Christian. In Scandinavia what constituted being a 'Christian' was occasionally different in comparison to its European rendition. Archaeological and documentary evidence suggests Christian practises and rituals were introduced over the course of three centuries in Scandinavia (Pluskowski 2003: 47; Lager 2003: 506-7; Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 100-12). Occasional evidence implies a syncretic fusion of pre-Christian and Christian beliefs (Fig. 106 provides several possible examples). This is a broad area of study and the evidence has proven difficult to interpret and controversial (summarised in Nordeide 2011: 41-2). Artefacts with religious

symbols are often obtuse with little understanding of how they were interpreted by their owner (detailed in a general context by Hodder 1982: 10-12, 185-6, 206-7, 210-11; Bell 2009: 61-8; Bell 2009a 30-46, 182-7; Hedeager 2011: 50-165 provides an overview of pre-Christian traditional symbolic artefact interpretations). An additional complication is that the identification of individual Norse deities in imagery has in and of itself proven difficult and controversial (Price 2006 179-88). What can be confirmed in the post-conversion period however, is the wholesale integration of several pre-Christian referents, and their reinterpretation in Christian guise (detailed in section 2.6).

*Conversion:* For the purposes of this thesis, this definition is employed in its simplest form, i.e. conversion can be said to be the point when a nation has adopted Christianity and self-identifies as Christian. There are complex and controversial issues around this process (a summary is provided by Urbańczyk 2003: 16-26; Berend 2007: 1-10; Sanmark 2004: 13-5; Russell 1994: 11-104 provides a detailed sociological and historical approach). In the Norse world, this involved the aristocratic elites self-identifying as Christian and supporting Christianity as a de facto state religion (Brink 2012a: 622-5). Some problematic examples around identifying as a Christian population can be recounted. There are several examples of the kingship identifying as Christian, but the people do not take up Christianity (as is the case in early 9th-century Denmark, with Ansgar and Harald Klak, and several Norwegian kings who were not successful in their conversion attempts, detailed below). Although assigning a date for the actual conversion may be difficult and debatable, the penultimate proof (the ‘official’ conversion) in the Nordic world that Christianization was complete, was the founding of archdioceses. The date of these archdioceses are:

- Lund (Denmark) founded in 1104, with initial control of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.
- Uppsala (Sweden) founded in 1164 (Lindkvist 2012: 671).
- Nidaros (Norway) founded in 1154 (Krag 2012: 649).

Regardless of which date is chosen to represent the actual conversion to Christianity, it is clear that missionary monks and kings had long been in the region attempting conversion.

### ***Conversion Methodologies and Overview***

The documentary evidence (examples are provided in the Source Quotes: Conversion Quotes) suggests a ‘top down’ conversion orchestrated by the church, i.e. convert the king and the people will follow (Sawyer and Sawyer, 1993: 60-1; Gelting 2007: 110-11; Blomkvist et al 2007: 204-5). The written evidence, in the form of the saga of St. Olav (var. Olaf), clearly suggests this approach was used in Norway. This conversion methodology is an old one, perhaps its best known Germanic example is that of Charlemagne (Dubois 2008: 13; Sanmark 2004: 35-7). A ‘bottom up’ approach of converting the people is suggested by some documentary and archaeological evidence (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 100-3; Winroth 2012: 6-11; Staecker 2003: 464-7; Lager 2003: 503-7; Sanmark 2004: 87). The existence of Christians in Scandinavia long before the conversion is also recorded via ecclesiastical evidence (Ansgar records Christians in Birka as early as c. 830, VA: 11, Robinson 1921: 49) and as detailed below, archaeological evidence as well. This seeming contradictory evidence suggests one simple monolithic approach to conversion history is untenable (Carver 2003: 3-12). The top-down and bottom-up approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They may be reflective of different viewpoints, although the lack of documentary sources and the biased nature of the extant sources, prevent a clear picture of the conversion process.

The problematic nature of the source documentation is illustrated in accounts by Adam of Bremen. This author exaggerated the role of Hamburg-Bremen by downplaying the role of the early Anglo-Saxon missionaries and obscuring the role of Cologne (GHEP Book 1-2; Staecker 2005: 3-28; Winroth 2012: 121-9). A political battle over who would control the conversion of Denmark had been fought between Bremen and Cologne (Gelting 2007: 80-2). This bias is exemplified by the omission of reference in the written accounts of Harald Bluetooth’s baptism by Cologne’s future archbishop Poppo (otherwise known as Folmar), as well as his recording of Olav Trygvasson as a lapsed Christian (Gelting 2007:80-1; Winroth 2012: 122-4).

### ***Regional Differences: Denmark and Sweden***

Denmark hosted the earliest recorded missionaries. As early as the first half of the 8th century, Alcuin (c. 735-804) recorded in the *Vita Willibrordi Archiepiscopi Traiectvenis* that in c. 710, the Anglo-Saxon Willibrord (c. 658-739) visited King Osgar to attempt his conversion (VW 9, Noble and Head 1995: 198-9). The best known, although ultimately unsuccessful, conversion

attempt was that undertaken by Ansgar of Bremen. Rimbart describes a conversion attempt by the deposed King Harald Klak in c. 826. In what proves an often-repeated pattern, in exchange for converting he receives military help from the Frankish king, Louis I of Germany to regain his throne. He returns and brings the monk Ansgar with him (VA VII, Robinson 1921: 38-43, Q:1).

The Christianization of Denmark was highlighted in 963 with the conversion of Harald Bluetooth (ruled c. 958-986). The limited evidence does not imply a violent, popular conversion, but an aristocratic one as the first and major stage of Christianization (Gelting 2007:80-1; detailed by Widukind, *Res Gestae Saxonicae* Book Three, Section 65, Bachrach and Bachrach 2014: 139-140). Pre-Christian belief systems appear to have initially co-existed with Christianity (Gelting 2007: 85). The latter appears to have cemented its place as the majority religion after baptism was required as a pre-requisite for inheritance, possibly as late as the second half of the 12th century (Gelting 2007: 84-5). Significantly, although church attendance is well documented in literary sources, Denmark lacks churches and ecclesiastical structures dating to the conversion. Gelting (2007: 86) suggests that up until the 11th century, the halls of the aristocracy were used for religious purposes. If this is the case, this mirrors the pre-Christian use of aristocratic halls for religious activities. Ultimately, an archdiocese was created in 1104 at Lund (in Skåne, then part of Denmark). This archdiocese had authority over the churches in Sweden, Iceland, and nominally, Norway.

The documentary evidence for the conversion of Sweden is sparse and open to interpretation (Lindkvist 2012: 668; Sanmark 2003: 551). The main ecclesiastical source is that of Adam of Bremen (GHEP, Tschan 2002) and the *Life of Ansgar* (VA). Rune stone evidence though is extensive, beginning c. AD 1000 (Blomkvist, et al 2007: 178; Gräslund and Lager 2012: 634-8), and exemplifying several phases and regionally distinct traditions (Lager 2003: 497-507). The conversion of secular rulers plays an important part of the conversion process and Adam highlights a number of attempts at conversion in Sweden (Sanmark 2003: 551-9). Perhaps the best known is the ultimately unsuccessful founding of a Christian community in 829 by Ansgar (at Birka/Björko GHEP Bk 1:17; VA XI). King Erik Segersäll (ruled 970-995) was the first of many royal converts. His baptism is recorded in Denmark (GHEP Bk 2 36, Tschan 2002: 80) but is more likely to have occurred in England, executed by Bishop Sigfrid (Blomkvist et al 2007: 181-2). He reverted to paganism on his return to Sweden but remained married to a Christian

princess and thus allowed missionaries into Sweden. King Olof Erikson Skötkonung (ruled 995-1022) baptized in Husaby in 1008 and King Anund Jakob (ruled 1022-1050) both of Uppland, attempted to convert Sweden. Both introduced coinage with Christian symbols (Blomkvist et al 2007: 180). Adam of Bremen states that ultimately the conversion of the Swedish people was by common consent (*communi sententia* GHEP Liber IV, Cap. XXII: 8). Sanmark has argued that secular rulers used a combination of rewards and ultimately legislation to promote evangelization (Sanmark 2003: 551-8). In 1104, the archdiocese in Lund was granted supra-regional power including Sweden. In 1164, Sweden would receive its own archdiocese in Uppsala (Lindkvist 2012: 671).

#### *Conclusion:*

Although not officially a state religion until later, Denmark and Sweden had a strong Christian presence from the 9th to 10th centuries. This included missionary activities and royal support.

#### *Norway*

Norway's conversion history was different and judging by the literary sources, more violent than Sweden and Denmark. No early *vitae* survive and as far as can be determined, no missions were attempted (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 129). In contrast with other regions, 'missionary kings' would attempt to unify the various kingdoms in each country while simultaneously enacting a forced conversion. This marked difference is evident in the written accounts: the *vitae* of Denmark and Sweden are in Latin but Norway's documents were executed in the vernacular (Bagge 2004: 356-7).

Legendary accounts such as the *Íslendingabók* (Prologue and Chapter 1), several mentions in the *Heimskringla*, the *Historia Norwegie* (Chapter XI provides the most details) and other purported historical accounts suggest that Harold Fairhair first unified Norway and ruled between c. AD 885 to his death in c. AD 935 (Finlay and Faulkes 2015: 272) His dates, the nature of his so-called kingship and accomplishments have proven contentious. The only contemporary evidence of him is in a skaldic reference to a battle in Hafrsfjord (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 128-9). These references suggest his kingdom was probably limited to western Norway (Krag 2003: 185-9). Outside of this one reference, there is no definitive documentary or archaeological evidence to confirm his reign or influence. Material and literary evidence of the Danish kings who ruled the southeast part of the country make no reference to, nor imply any evidence of, this dynasty

(Bagge and Nordeide: 2007 127-9). What is clear, is that this unification, if it actually occurred, was short-lived and had no Christian impulse (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 129).

Archaeological evidence does exist for a Christian foothold in the 10th century on the west coast between Rogaland and Song og Fjordane. This is in the form of 93 Anglo-Saxon influenced stone crosses dated from c. 950-1031 (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 130; individually described in Birkeli 1973). A number of early Christian cemeteries have provided similar dates including a 10th-century cemetery, with a possible church, on the island of Veøy in Romsdal (detailed in Solli 1996); St Clemens Church in Oslo has early 11th-century graves (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 132); and an 11th-century cemetery in Tønsberg (detailed in Brendalsmo 1989; 2003). Although this may support the idea of early attempts at conversion, the evidence remains controversial (summarised in Nordeide 2011: 8-15). This upsurge of Christian focus is supported by Adam of Bremen's (GHEP Book 2, Section 23) mention of a Danish bishop, Liafdag of Ribe, preaching in Norway in the mid-10th century.

### ***Kings and Conversions***

The 'missionary kings', with the backing of the (usually Anglo-Saxon) church attempted a century long, often violent 'top down' conversion in Norway (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 139-40). The unification of Norway as a country is intimately tied to its conversion history, with conversion being employed as an ideological tool (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 140-51; Sanmark 2004: 82-83). The majority of documentary evidence comprises ecclesiastical sources and sagas.

These are the missionary kings and the details of their rules (dating sources from Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 135-148). King Håkon Haraldsson (ruled 934- 961) was the first ruler to follow a pattern pertinent to many Norse kings. Raised in England by King Athelstan, he was the first king to attempt to unite Norway under a Christian banner. He brought missionaries as well as an army with him to Norway (Berkeli 1960: 113-36). Although he had some success with his peaceful conversion on the west coast of Norway, it did not result in a country-wide acceptance of Christianity (Sanmark 2004: 82). Norwegian sources have long linked the early archaeological remains from this period to this early conversion attempt (such as Berkeli 1973, however there is some controversy around the chronology, summarized by Nordeide 2011:73-4). King Harald Greyhide (ruled 961-970) followed Haraldsson. He too attempted to convert the population to

Christianity and met with little success. Olaf Tryggvason (ruled 995-1000), baptized in England, would prove the most important of the early attempts at conversion. Employing mainly Anglo-Saxon missionaries, his forced conversion attempts also did not result in a country-wide conversion. However, his conversion attempts were immortalized in several propagandist sagas. In the reign of St Olav Haraldsson (ruled 1015-1028) Christianity was introduced at the thing of Møster (Sanmark 2004: 82-3). Olav was baptized in Rouen in 1013 and is accepted as the first ruler of all of Norway (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 135). He imported priests and bishops from England and created ties with Hamburg-Bremen. His violent forced conversion (as described in *St Olaf's Saga*), and his death in battle in AD 1030 assured his sainthood and contributed to the conversion of Norway (Sanmark 2004: 89-90). Within the next five years, his death was already immortalized in the skaldic poem *Glælognskviða* (Mortensen and Mundal 2003: 354-6).

### ***1.9. Conclusion***

The documentary and archaeological evidence of the conversion demonstrates that the top-down conversion history of Norway was different than that of Denmark and Sweden. The virulence of the conversion would be expected to have impacts on the ecclesiastical and pagan structures. The Christianity brought by the missionary kings to Norway sourced from England (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 138-9; Nordeide 2011:75-9). These early kings not only had church support, but were aligned to the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman world. The earliest churches in Norway date to this period, with the remains of several of these timber churches lie under the current stave churches (detailed in section 3.6).

The early conversion history of Scandinavia is complex and difficult. Written sources and archaeology present a varied picture. The written sources suggest a top down conversion, although artefact evidence hints at a bottom up approach. Material remains demonstrate that Christianity existed as a minority religion in the Norse countries during the Viking era. Although this evidence must be approached cautiously, in that artefacts recovered in funereal contexts can imply Christian belief or usage but may also represent treasure or plunder (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 131-2). The evidence though suggests that Norway's conversion history, based on missionary kings, was different and more violent than Denmark or Sweden's.



## **Chapter 2: Stave Churches**

This chapter introduces the stave churches. It begins with precise description of what a stave church is, and examines how many have survived in comparison to their original extent. The narrative then passes to the rediscovery and popularisation of the timber Norwegian churches as a cultural phenomenon. The combination of various social, political and historical influences have had a significant impact on how these structures have been interpreted and presented.

### ***2.1. Introducing the Stave Churches***

The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage assiduously maintains a list of ‘official’ stave churches (this is the base list seen in Anker and Havran 2005a: 102-336; Anker is a stave church researcher for the Riksantikvaren). Currently, that list is the 28 churches listed below.

Stave Church	Region	Medieval Diocese	Notes
Borgund Stave Church	Sogn	Bergen	
Eidsborg Stave Church	Telemark	Hamar	
Flesberg Stave Church	Numedal	Hamar	
Garmo Stave Church	Gudbrandsdalen	Hamar	Currently in Lillehammer
Gol Stave Church	Hallingdal	Stavanger	Currently in Oslo
Grip Stave Church	Nordmøre	Nidaros	
Haltdalen Stave Church	Sør-Trøndelag	Nidaros	Currently near Trondheim
Heddal Stave Church	Telemark	Oslo	Largest stave church
Hedalen Stave Church	Valdres	Stavanger	
Hegge Stave Church	Valdres	Stavanger	
Hopperstad Stave Church	Sogn	Bergen	
Høre Stave Church	Valdres	Stavanger	
Høyjord Stave Church	Vestfold	Oslo	
Kaupanger Stave Church	Sogn	Bergen	
Kvernes Stave Church	Nordmøre	Nidaros	
Lom Stave Church	Gudbrandsdalen	Hamar	
Lomen Stave Church	Valdres	Stavanger	
Nore Stave Church	Numedal	Hamar	
Øye Stave Church	Valdres	Stavanger	Reconstruction of found parts.
Reinli Stave Church	Valdres	Stavanger	
Ringebu Stave Church	Gudbrandsdalen	Hamar	
Rødven Stave Church	Møre og Romsdal	Nidaros	
Røldal Stave Church	Hordaland	Stavanger	
Rollag Stave Church	Numedal	Hamar	
Torpo Stave Church	Hallingdal	Stavanger	
Undredal Stave Church	Sogn	Bergen	
Urnes Stave Church	Sogn	Bergen	
Uvdal Stave Church	Numedal	Hamar	

**Table 2 The authorized list of Norwegian Stave Churches.**

I have included in this list the currently location, and if the church has been moved, this is noted. The dioceses information sources from Hohler 1999: V1.

This list represents the stave churches generally recognized in most works regarding the topic. These 28 churches represent the core data for this thesis. The qualifications for a church to make this list are: it must be a standing wooden structure, located in Norway, date to the medieval era (specifically 1130 to AD 1350), and have its stave super structure mainly intact. It must be stated

that there are many limitations and inherent biases to this list. This list is clearly derived from nationalistic ideology (detailed in section 2.1). Ambiguities exist in any classification system and this holds true in the case of stave churches:

*Standing structure:* This listing details standing structures. It does not list archaeological evidence in the form of church excavations. This is important, because there are cases of stave churches being excavated (such as Nes Stave Church, documented by Christie 1979) that do not make this list. Another example is Fantoft Stave Church, burned (and subsequently rebuilt) in 1992. Once included on the list, it was removed when it burnt down. In other words, this lists represents churches you can visit, not a classification system of a church type.

*Located in Norway:* This list is exclusively in Norway, and therefore excludes churches, even Norwegian ones, located in other areas. A good example of this is Vang Stave Church (also known as Świątynia Wang), originally from Valdres, currently located in Karpacz, Poland (its complex history is detailed in the Gazetteer). Whether Greensted Church (Chipping Ongar, in Essex, England) is considered a stave church has been argued for over a century (detailed below). Sweden has both ruins and one standing structure (Hedared Stave Church, Borås Municipality, Västra Götaland, detailed in the Gazetteer). Although a bit of a stretch for stylistic reasons, even France has Église Ste-Catherine (Honfleur, Normandy).

*Dates to Medieval era:* as detailed in section 1.3, the beginning of the stave church era has some randomness to it. However, the end is not in doubt. After the plague in 1350, churches were built differently. Three of the churches on this list (Rødven, Grip, and Kvernes), will be demonstrated to have been built later than this time period, and serve as examples of what churches looked like after the stave church era ended (detailed in section 3.4).

*Super structure mainly intact:* Vågå Church (Gudbrandsdalen, Oppland) is excluded from the list because it was constructed as an amalgam of several stave churches (Hohler 1999: 257). Yet, the widely accepted Haltdalen Stave Church (in the Trøndelag Folkemuseum) is a combination of the original church supplemented by the torn down Ålen Stave Church (Dietrichson 1892: 390).

Defining what exactly a stave church is has been a problematic exercise through time.

## 2.2. *Defining a Stave Church*

A starting point of this research is providing a precise definition of the architectural characteristics that define a Norwegian stave church. This is important because, as detailed in section 1.1.2, the use of the term ‘stave church’ has gradations of meaning and is used somewhat differently in different languages. Ahrens’s (2001) encyclopaedic work in German uses the word *stavekirche* simply as a church made out of staves. That same term in Norwegian (*stavkirke*) implies a series of stylistic, decorative, and chronological attributes that are not seen in the other ‘stave’ built structures. This has an immediate and controversial impact on these studies. For example, whether St. Andrew’s in Greensted, Essex is considered a ‘stave church’ or is related to Norwegian stave churches depends on how the term is defined.

Norwegian stave churches are considered a unique contribution to medieval architecture (Hauglid 1977: 11; Holan 1990: 51; Christie *et al* 1979; Bugge 1983: 14). This has served to segregate these structures from broader comparison. There is a long history of finding ‘uniquely Norwegian’ architectural elements in stave churches and then realising they are not unique (summarised in Bugge 1983:7-18). Over a century’s worth of research (Dietrichson 1892 to Anker and Havran 2005) from different disciplines has provided varied defining elements of Norwegian stave churches. All categorize the buildings based on their stylistic appearance and/or various architectural and decorative elements. These varied approaches more often demonstrate the diversity of the backgrounds of those who have studied the buildings, rather than any special Norwegian set of characteristics. A precise definition is necessary however, in that it allows analysis of the Norwegian stave church tradition to determine what makes them unique in medieval architecture and enables cross-comparison with other timber church traditions in Europe.

The most concise definition, and the one followed in this thesis, is provided by Anker and Havran who set out the following criteria (2005: 27, Fig. 23 provides images):

- A post and beam construction on a rock (enrockment) foundation.
- The lower wall frame consisting of a sill notched or mortised into the corner posts.
- The upper wall frames are placed into recessed grooves at the top of the corner post.

- Walls consist of vertical planks (smooth on both sides) connected to each other via tongue and groove, with their ends fitted into a groove in the floor sill, or wall plate.
- The corners and various angle joints are supported by quadrant brackets made from tree trunks.

This definition appears to mirror the definition above for stave work construction (a side by side comparison of secular and church construction techniques is presented in Fig. 24). Stave churches are however a level of complexity higher. They present a series of post and beams all locked together forming a strong internal frame construction (Holan 1990: 124-5). Other scholars have focused on other defining structures unique to churches. Bugge demarcated the defining characteristic of a stave church as the ‘Raised central room surrounded on all four sides by a lower [external] ambulatory with a sloping roof’ (Bugge 1981: 8). This stress on the raised central room as a defining feature has a long history. Hauglid noted the ‘scissors-beam roof structure’ as being a characteristic of all stave churches (Hauglid 1977: 12, 56). Conant was most impressed by the ‘chassis’ lifting the super-structure off the ground (Conant 1993: 83). Norberg-Schulz suggested that the interlocking ‘lace collar’ (*kniplingskrave*) was a defining characteristic (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 83). Most importantly for historical comparisons, it should be added that the basic plan implicit in these definitions consists of, or is based upon, a rectangular nave with a smaller, square chancel. Some stave churches hardly resemble what is expected of a stave church, yet closer examination reveals the necessary details. Undredal Stave Church underwent extensive renovations from 2011-2013. This allowed the normally inaccessible stave superstructure to be clearly seen (Fig. 25).

In addition to the properties defined above, there are several distinctive, and occasionally controversial, attributes noted by scholars and popular commentators. These do not contribute to an architectural definition of a stave church but they frequently feature in discussions of this building tradition.

The unusual shape and structure of the stave church often evokes the appearance of an organic, or even animistic, building. This is responsible for the fact that since their discovery, these have been categorized separately from other churches. Architectural historians have long used emotional language to describe these structures. Conant (1993: 86) speaks of the ‘extraordinary

verve of their exteriors', Lindholm (1969: 9) describes them as a 'legendary animal of mythical times transformed into a house'. Danish architect Martin Hansen describes them as 'demonically agitating, diabolically confounding' (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 80). These vivid descriptions align to a subtle and difficult to define characteristic demonstrated in these churches.

No medieval architectural descriptions or plans detail how or why these Norwegian churches were designed to evoke this response. But, I can provide a modern analogy that illuminates the process. Deconstructivism is an architectural style that originated in the 1980s. It concentrates on manipulating the surface structure and using shapes that are non-rectilinear and/or non-continuous (Curl 2006: 228). The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain is the most famous example of this style (Fig. 26). Built in 1997 by the Canadian-American architect Frank Gehry, it employs this technique to create buildings whose avowed purpose is to invoke feelings and emotions (Isenberg 2009: 130). This work shares many of the characteristics seen in stave church architecture and is often described in similar ways. In Bilbao the structure is built with a visible internal skeleton in the design (Friedman 2002: 27). Straight and parallel lines are avoided, only curves are visible. This asymmetrical structure, influenced by the vivaciousness of fish, is covered with piscine-like titanium scales (Isenberg, 2009: 126-9). In this manner Gehry successfully animates a non-living structure. A similar approach can be detected in the Norwegian stave churches. The internal skeleton, in this case the stave superstructure, is unconcealed and forms an integral part of the visual effect. Extensive dragon imagery on gables and portals, as well as scale like roof tiles enhance the animistic appearance. The wood construction, with its imperfections and asymmetrical surface imparts a 'living' quality. As the building ages and settles, this becomes more apparent; thus creating the antithesis to the geometrically precise stone building. Stave church researchers have long noted this organic element (Holan 1990:62-3). The Norwegian architectural historian Norberg-Schulz demarcates this animistic approach as the defining characteristic of the 'Nordic' mind-set in architecture (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 6-23). Unfortunately, in that no standing pre-Christian cult structure exists, it is lost to history if these buildings also shared this feature.

This subjective, sensory experience has been enhanced in other ways as well. Upon entering the building, the smell of tar and old wood mix to assault the nose. The eyes, coming in from the outside, struggle to adapt to the dark. Unlike the windows of the Romanesque and early Gothic

stone structures, these buildings are windowless with only candles providing illumination. As the eyes adapt to the dim light, they are drawn upwards toward the vertical cave-like ceiling of the raised central room. Then one notices the carvings against the dark walls and pillars. In the time when these were illuminated by candle flame, the images would have seemed to dance in the light. These churches are designed to exist in a country with highly variable weather. They are constructed in such a way that when the changing wind blows through them, they are flexible enough to bend with the wind. All of these: sounds, smells, and imagery contribute to give the impression of a building that seems alive.

The extant Norwegian stave churches have design features and artistic elements not seen or at least not preserved, in other North Sea traditions (Conant 1993: 79). Even within the Norwegian tradition, there are many variations and no one definition encompasses all existing churches. 'Norwegian stave churches' as a category is something of an artificial creation. They are only classified together because they are all timber structures, were contemporaneous, and together survived the ravages of time.

### *2.3. Quantifying the Corpus*

An essential question is how representative is this surviving group of structures, with the original corpus of medieval stave-built churches? The year of the Black Death in Norway, starting in Bergen in 1349, demarcates the chronological terminus of the Norwegian High Middle Ages (Larsen 1948: 202-5). The tradition of building these churches did not continue past this point. It is widely quoted that before the Black Death approximately 900 church parishes are documented in Norway (Anker and Havran 2005: 14). However this figure can at best only be seen as an approximation that has several inherent errors (it sources originally from Dietrichson in 1892: 36-7). This number equates mentions of a church site to a parish (i.e. one church to one parish). In that little is known about early church organization this is a premature conclusion. Additionally, the idea that only one church existed in a parish is demonstrable false (evidence from Trøndelag is detailed below, Brendalsmo 2003: 223-53). Similarly, estimates of the total number of churches has varied widely from about 2000 (Hohler 1999: 9) to 1300 (Hauglid 1977: 6) to about 1000. The latter is a generally accepted number (Anker and Havran 2005: 14; Beate Buckholm 1998: 32). About 300 of these are believed to have been later constructed in stone (Ekroll *et al* 2000: 17), but current evidence suggests these were preceded by timber structures

(Beate Buckholm 1998: 32-9). These figures exclude private chapels. Recent analysis of the number of churches in Trøndelag suggests that this exclusion has created a dramatic underestimation of the total number of churches (Brendalsmo 2003: 223-53). If this is the case across Norway, the original number of stave churches could be far higher than currently suggested. Using a conservative number of 1000 churches, the 25 remaining structures represent a sample size of 2.5%. This suggests that --at a minimum, for every 40 churches pulled down, only one survived. This small sample size dictates extreme caution in drawing conclusions about these structures based on the extant evidence. Any detailed analysis regarding typologies and regional styles will always be incomplete and speculative given the number of churches lost across the centuries.

There is no 'official' listing of the many Norwegian stave churches known to have been torn down (the map in Fig. 27 shows the location of known structures as dots). Dietrichson provides a list of churches mentioned in documentary sources, although these are often only a churches name mentioned once with no detail (Dietrichson 1892: 442-512, with updates provided by Hohler 1999: 11-2). The most up-to-date listing currently available is maintained online.<sup>2</sup> There is a research point related to Dietrichsons listing. As can be seen on Fig 27, the wooden churches are mostly seen in rural areas. This has been used to suggest that wooden churches were built in the country, and stone churches were built in more urban areas (such as Anker 1970: 393). This is somewhat simplistic. First, as we detail below, most stone churches were predated by wooden ones. Also, rural stone churches (as detailed in section 4.6) were common, albeit built a century later.

#### ***2.4. Discovery and Documentation***

The rescue and preservation of the remaining stave churches can be attributed to the landscape painter Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857). While travelling the Norwegian countryside he became enamoured with these structures. He was the first to bring these structures to public light in a large format book in 1837 (Dahl 1937; Fig. 28). This work included a series of accurate drawings of the Borgund, Urnes, and Heddal churches. The dissemination and popularity of this

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<sup>2</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_archaeological\\_sites\\_and\\_dismantled\\_stave\\_churches](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_archaeological_sites_and_dismantled_stave_churches)> [Accessed 08 August 2016]



work served to bring the plight of these disappearing churches to public attention. In 1844 Dahl founded the Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindesmerkers Bevaring (the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments) dedicated to saving these churches and other ancient monuments from destruction (Anker and Havran 2005a: 16-7). The society was instrumental in preserving the remaining churches and documenting those being torn down. This organization still exists, and its archives provide much of the documentation for this thesis.

The art historian Lorentz Dietrichson was the first to create a technical work on the stave churches (Dietrichson 1892). This encyclopaedic work examined all known Norwegian stave churches providing a stylistic and architectural analysis. Emil Ekhoff (1914) completed a similar undertaking, cataloguing timber church remains in Sweden. Both works are still widely used for research purposes.

### ***2.5. Nationalism, History, and Stave Church Rediscovery.***

Norway considers its remaining stave churches national treasures and an important part of its national identity. As previously noted, it is often stressed, implicitly or explicitly, in the Norwegian literature that the medieval Norwegian stave churches are unique in world architecture (Hauglid 1977: 11; Holan 1990: 51; Christie et al 1979; Bugge 1983: 14). The idea that these structures are unique is a complex reflection of political and social ideals with roots in the 19th century. The impacts of romanticism and nationalism on archaeology are well studied and documented (Kohl and Clare 1995 and Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996 provide extensive bibliographies; Trigger 1995: 263-79 summarises the relevant ideas). Scandinavian research has not been immune to these issues (Krag 2012: 646; Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: XI-XII).

The discovery, popularization and ‘restoration’ of stave churches occurred during the Norwegian Romantic Movement of the mid to late 19th century. The nationalistic ideals embodied in this movement had broad impacts on the cultural landscape and would ultimately create the concept of the ‘Norwegian stave church’ (detailed below). Norway was under Danish control for four centuries. It was politically administered from Copenhagen and used Danish as its language for official documents and literature. Ibsen famously referred to the lack of creative output in this time frame as four hundred years of rule by repressive monkeys (Peer Gynt, 1867, Act 4, Scene 13).

In 1814, Norway separated from Denmark and gained a partial independence by aligning with Sweden. It would later, in 1905, separate peacefully from Sweden. Independence inspired a nationalistic agenda that flowered between c.1840-c.1870 (Larsen 1948: 423-53). This provided an impetus to research what was ‘uniquely’ Norwegian (*norskheds-bevægelsen*, or Norwegian ‘ness’ Falnes 1933: 27) and not shared with Sweden or Denmark. An artistic and cultural blossoming followed; termed (in English) the Norwegian Romantic Movement. This in fact comprised several separate movements that had cultural, political, and economic agendas. Paradoxically, this occurred simultaneously with another movement (called *skandinavisme*) or Pan-Scandinavianism that sought to create a unified Nordic identity (Falnes 1933: 21-87; Larsen 1948: 423-53). Many of the best-known Norwegian cultural achievements date to this period. This includes the works of writers such as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen and musicians such as Ole Bull and Edvard Grieg.

A main tenet of the Romantic Movement (**Nor** *nationalromantikken*) was that uniquely Norwegian cultural traditions would be discovered in rural regions (Falnes 1933: 55). This resulted in unprecedented investigations in folklore and regional customs. The collections of rural traditions by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe’s fairy tales, Magnus Brostrup Landstad’s Hymnary (1869), Olea Crøger’s collection of folksongs and Ludvig Matthias Linderman’s collections of folk tunes (1852) all belong to this period. The future stave church researcher Lorentz Dietrichson, published works related to the unique abilities of Norwegian folk wood carvers (1878). Linguistically, Ivar Aasen in 1848 would attempt to remove Danish influences from the Norwegian language by reverting to Old Norse forms and rural dialects: his dictionary and grammar became the origin of Nynorsk (New Norwegian also known as Landsmaal). Most significant for this topic is the work of artists such as Johan Christian Dahl, Hans Gude, and Adolph Tidemand. These artists travelled and painted the rugged countryside; stave churches became a subject for their works (Fig. 29).

### *Conclusion:*

The idea that Norway’s stave churches are both a unique part of its national identity, and unique in the history of architecture, is a result of two factors. First, the age of Romanticism, which looked back at an idealized rural past for examples of how to live in the present. Second, Norway was going through a nationalistic phase caused by its separation from Denmark and Sweden.

This resulted in an examination of folk traditions as a pattern for what was unique in Norwegian life (in contrast to the rest of Scandinavia). The surviving Norwegian stave churches presented an ideal subject for the theme of Norwegian uniqueness because these structures existed intact no-where else.

## ***2.6. Stave Church Mythology***

...a tension latent in the interplay between old, native tradition on the one hand and strange innovations on the other, the struggle between the Dragon and the Cross, a struggle in which two worlds, two ways of life, clash (Hauglid 1977: 5)

Although no specific investigation has analysed the romantic influences on stave churches, Norway's romanticism parallels that seen in other European regions. One of the impacts of nationalism is to interpret the archaeological record as a history of the national or ethnic group. This serves to lengthen the 'pedigree' of the national group, and glorifies that group by drawing attention to the special achievements of the culture (Trigger 1995: 269). This is evidenced in several themes noted in literature related to stave churches. Norway, having been under Danish rule for centuries, associated its churches and their imagery with pre-Christian predecessors. This connection to its pagan past served to associate Norway with a perceived glorious and powerful Viking past.

In common with many national treasures, the stave churches have a number of conceptions and legends that have coalesced around them. Although anachronistic from an art history point of view, one cannot discuss stave churches without recognizing the decorative elements and iconography often interpreted as pre-Christian survivals. These elements, such as the dragon-headed gables, animal and human heads, are stated to be pagan in origin (Hauglid 1977: 5, 16; Lindholm 1969: 31-2). Although often presented as evidence of the survival of pre-Christian ideas and influences, these themes derive from common Romanesque and Gothic artistic motifs.

An example of this misunderstanding can be seen in a bracket mask from Hegge Stave Church (Fig. 30). This mask has been identified as Odin (Leiren 1999: 2; Lindholm 1969: 31). The left hand side of the pillar is worn, providing the illusion of a missing eye. This is actually a 'tongue protruder' (employing the vocabulary of Weir and Jerman 1999: 102-4) and numerous contemporaneous examples exist across the North Sea region (Fig. 31).

Faces carved on top of the supporting staves are also suggested to be imagery of the Norse deities (Lindholm 1969: 32). The classic example of this can be seen in Borgund Stave Church (Fig. 32 is from just inside the main entrance of the Chapel in the Hills, S.D. this copy of the Borgund Stave Church has a lighter colour allowing a clearer photograph). The circles demonstrate the number of faces, human and animal, peering at you upon entry. This imagery, often interpreted in a pre-Christian milieu, has strong Christian associations. The twelve pillars that hold up the roof of the church all have heads carved on top of them (in Fig. 32 the human heads are circled at the upper part of the photograph, Fig. 33 provides a close up detail from Borgund). It is likely that these faces represent the apostles, and this is supported by a 12th-century **ON** Homily on Church Dedication which says ‘The foundation timbers of the church signify the Apostles of God, who are the foundations of Christianity’ (*Kirkjudagsmál*, Turville-Petre 1972: 95). This iconography is an old one and not unique to Norway. It is documented as early as Eusebius of Caesarea’s 4th-century description of Constantine’s Basilica which was ‘ringed with twelve columns to match the number of Apostles of the Saviour...’ *De Vita Constantini*, Book III 38 (Cameron and Hall 1999: 136). Abbot Suger describes the twelve pillars in the ambulatory of St Denis in a similar fashion (Bandmann and Wallace 2005:62).

Biblical rationale for carvings of this nature is extensive. In brief, the church was interpreted as a literal and metaphorical recreation of heaven on earth (specifically, the Temple and Tabernacle of the New Jerusalem, this is detailed more in section 3.3). I discovered an example of how biblical scripture was interpreted iconographically in Borgund Stave Church.

In the *Vulgate* Ezekiel describes the Temple of Jerusalem:

And [in the buildings] there were cherubim and palm trees wrought, so that a palm tree was between a cherub and a cherub, and every cherub has two faces. The face of a man was toward the palm tree on one side, and the face of a lion was toward the palm tree on the other side: set forth through all the house round about. From the ground even to the upper parts of the gate, were cherubim and palm trees wrought in the wall of the temple. Ezekiel 41:17-20 DRB

Borgund preserves a quite literal interpretation of ‘The face of a man was toward the palm tree on one side, and the face of a lion was toward the palm tree on the other side’ (Fig. 34).

Perhaps the most common element in the popular imagination associated with stave churches is the use of dragons as a motif. This imagery appears throughout stave churches, most often on gables and carved into portals. The quintessential Norse hero is Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. His legend is recorded in a number of Norse and Germanic legends and iconography. Its pre-Christian provenience is unquestioned, with its most complete version in the *Völsunga saga*. This motif can be witnessed in many Christian settings. The best known iconographic representation of this legend occurs on the church portal from the no longer extant Hylestad Stave Church (Fig. 35). This carving initially appears as an unabashedly pre-Christian narrative. The extensive use of this imagery in Christian contexts though suggests a different interpretation is being utilized. The Nordic Sigurd story is likely being articulated as a Christian analogy. Sigurd is saved by sucking the blood on his thumb. I interpret this an allegorical invoking of the Eucharist (i.e. the saving of souls by the taking in of blood). The ritual of the Eucharist was taking on a special importance and becoming one of the most Christian rituals at this time period (detailed in section 4.2). The birds that warn him of impending doom would be interpreted as the Holy Spirit (birds often represented spirituality in early Christian iconography, Ferguson 1961: 12). The betrayal by a close loved one (in this case Regin, his foster father) would serve as a reminder of the betrayal by Judas. This interpretation is supported by the Sigurd story as seen in Anglo-Saxon versions where it also appears in Christian contexts (Saul 2011: 16; Baily 1980: 116-25, 138-42). There may also have an element of political aggrandizement incorporated in these carvings. According to Snorri's *Heimskringla* (the *Saga of Hálfðan the Black*, Hollander 1964: 54), Sigurd's daughter Áslaug was married to Ragnar Lothbrók, a legendary Viking hero and ancestor of the Norwegian Royal family.

Evidence, originally applied to similar church motifs in Sweden, may be relevant to the Norwegian examples as well. Nordanskog hypothesises that in the decades around 1200, there was a rebirth of interest in Viking era iconography (Nordanskog 2006, summarised in 364-72). Effectively a Viking Revival, 600 years before the one that would occur in the 19th century. This idea is well supported by stave church carvings with pre-Christian motifs, as well as the contemporaneous interest in recording and employing Norse mythological topics in Old Norse/Icelandic literature.

These carvings are comparable with contemporaneous Romanesque and Gothic decorative sculpture. At the time of the building of these churches (c. 1130x1350) the carving of heads and dragons in churches was common. Hence, there is no need to invoke long term, underground, and otherwise unrecorded flourishes of paganism. Early ecclesiastical sources strongly condemned paganism in all its forms. It would seem unlikely that the same individuals who killed pagans on a consistent basis (such as recorded in *St. Olaf's Saga*) would allow pagan artistry in their churches. Additionally, this imagery is created centuries after the conversion of the Nordic countries.

### **2.7. Conclusion**

The remaining stave churches appear to generally share several architectural characteristics. This include a post and beam construction with sills notched into the corner posts, on an enrockment foundation. This allows us to create a definition that allows comparison to other wooden building architectures. The building of these structures are all occurring between c.1130 and 1350, often called the 'stave church era'. Although a precise dating of individual churches can be problematic, the fact that they are occurring within this time period is not questioned. After that date, stave churches in this style are no longer built.

History and cultural conditions have played an important role in stave church survival and interpretation. The romantic view that stave church decoration preserves pre-Christian thematic material is a misinterpretation of Romantic and Gothic influences. At the time of the building of these structures, animal and human heads, as well as dragon imagery, were common and interpreted in a Christian milieu.

## Chapter 3: Elucidating the Stave Church Tradition

This chapter provides a detailed technical analysis of the Norwegian stave church tradition. This is done via an examination of architectural documentation, historical sources, and archaeological evidence. Methodologies related to dating and interpreting these structures is detailed. An overview of the accepted church styles as well as the earliest church evidence is provided.

### *3.1. Preservation and Restoration*

As detailed above, the original corpus of medieval stave churches is conservatively thought to have amounted to about 1000 structures. This number diminished due to the natural decay of these ancient buildings. In the 17th century, 270 churches were recorded but only 60 were extant in 1850 and only 30 remained in 1880 (Christie 1981: 186-7). The death knell to the stave churches came in 1851. A church law was enacted requiring churches to have seating for three tenths of the congregation. These small structures were pulled down and replaced by bigger churches (Christie 1981: 187). One of the last stave churches destroyed, unique in being well documented in 1855, excavated in 1965 and published in 1979, was Nes Stave Church (Christie 1979). It was pulled down in 1864 and replaced by a nearby larger church.

Any critical analysis of stave churches must contend with the methodology employed for demarcating the remaining structures for preservation. When a church with an apparent medieval structure was slated for destruction, it was purchased by the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments. The society often only purchased the medieval parts of the building. The church was disassembled; the more recent parts sold as scrap and the medieval section ‘restored’. The relatively unaltered Borgund Stave Church was, and still is, interpreted as a type-site for the medieval stave church (Lindholm 1969: 14; Bugge 1983: 64; Valebrokk Thiis-Evensen 2001: 17-8; Anker 1970: 226). This provided the design employed for ‘restoration’. Many of the current churches do not resemble what they looked like a century ago. They have been reconstructed to resemble the Borgund church.

Hopperstad Stave Church provides an example of the difficulties inherent in analysing these structures (details from Anker and Havran 2005: 128-7). The church as it exists today is a product of the deconstruction and restoration strategies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This structure over time has been the wealthiest church in Sogn, an active regional seat, an abandoned building,

and a barn. The medieval parts were purchased by the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments. The post-medieval rooms and furnishings were dismantled and sold. Architect and engineer Peter Blix in the 1880s was hired to ‘restore’ the church. The first step was to clean and scrape off the decorative paintings on the inside, including the medieval ones. Little remained of the medieval structure and its original appearance remains unknown. Blix created the stave church based on what little evidence he could gather from the structure itself, but as Fig. 36 demonstrates, this was accomplished by employing Borgund Stave Church as an architectural model.

There were important historical reasons why these restorations were done in this manner. There was a time lag of about two or three decades between the 1851 church laws requiring the churches to be torn down and the public recognition in the late 19th century of the importance of these structures. Effectively, the preservationists were a generation too late. In a desire to return things to their medieval form, they allowed romantic enthusiasm to supersede architectural research. Borgund Stave Church with its dragon headed gables and ‘pagan’ carvings was interpreted as the most complete original church and was used as a model. This is a major reason for the apparent consistency in design of so many stave churches. This romantic idealization was not rooted in any architectural reality. Stave churches certainly follow predictable patterns and have similarities, but most exemplify regional stylistic traditions. Figs. 37-39 demonstrate the often dramatic differences between the churches currently extant, and their appearance before preservation (Appendix A documents further examples). The most common modifications include: changing or adding the raised central rooms; removing the spires; and the addition or alteration of external ambulatories. These are the very architectural features used to differentiate the stave church tradition from other international church-building traditions.

#### *Conclusion:*

The implications of these preservation methodologies are clear. Of the estimated 1000 original churches, only 30 or so were left by the time preservationists became aware of them. These remaining 30 were often in a decrepit state, or so altered over time as to have their original medieval parts long removed. Under the guise of restoration, they rebuilt these structures, often based on the same architectural model (Borgund Stave Church). This results in the modern appearance suggesting that all stave churches share similar features. Typological and stylist



analysis is complicated by this artifice. Current church appearance is not necessarily an accurate representation of how it appeared originally. The gazetteer presents examples of the earliest graphic representation of all of the stave churches, as well as their modern appearance.

### ***3.2. Dating a Stave Church; Difficulties and Realities***

One of the important qualifications demarcating a stave church, is that they preserve their medieval stave superstructure and possibly medieval fabric. Confirming this dating has proven difficult. Accurate dating has been a priority in recent research. The standard chronometric methodologies employed for dating standing buildings have often proven problematic with stave churches. Several stave churches have not been accurately dated and some may not be datable. Every methodology employed for dating evidence has been demonstrated to have significant inaccuracies. Examples are provided below.

**Documentary evidence.** Church documents, runic inscriptions, and occasionally sagas, mention churches, if only briefly. Initially, this evidence often appears accurate, but closer examination often reveals inconsistencies. An example of this can be seen with Garåmo Stave Church. Textual sources link this church to the 11th century and St. Olaf (Anker and Havran 2005: 94; Valebrokk and Thiis-Evensen 2001: 91). Mention of this structure survives in the 13th-century legal instrument recorded in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (DM, under the year: 1204-1240). This details a medieval dispute regarding fishing rights. The testimony records that the church was founded by Thorgeir Gamla. He converted as a result of St Olaf's missionary activities in Lom and Vågå (c. 1021 as documented in *St. Olaf's Saga*). This appears definitive and being documented in a legal dispute implies it was believed at the time. However, the church contains neither fabric nor inventory that dates from this time period (Anker and Havran 2005: 294).

Likewise, saga evidence can be contradictory and contentious. The burning of the town of Kaupanger is described in the *Sverris saga* (Section 82, in English: Sephton 1899: 102-4). It narrates that the people of Sogn killed the king's bailiff in 1183x1184. In response, King Sverre burned the town down. Archaeologists recovered a buried church in a burnt stratum and used this historic event to provide a precise dating scheme (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 11, 27-8). Coin evidence supported that date (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 27). The dating though proved controversial. The same saga specifically says they avoided burning the church (Sephton 1899:

104) and other dendrochronological dates do not support it (the controversy is summarised in Anker and Havran 2005: 124-5).

On rare occasions a dedicatory or similar inscription suggests possible dating evidence (such as at Høre and Undredal stave churches). Stave church inventory, fabric, and even superstructure were widely traded (Appendix A provides information on specific churches) and this complicates the evidence. With the regular and extensive restorations employing components from other structures it is often not possible to confirm which parts of a church are original.

Stave Church	Date	Methodology	Documentation	Dating Reference
Flesberg Stave Church	1163-1189?	Inscription and Portal cross-dating	Inscription on Portal	Anker and Havran 2005: 182; Hohler 1999: V1 110-1; Hohler 1999: V2 90-1
Høre Stave Church	1179	Inscription and Dendrochronology	Inscription on corner stave	Christie, Stornes, Storsletten, and Thun 2000: 274
Undredal Stave Church	1147	Inscription	Inscription on collar beam	Anker and Havran 2005: 142

**Table 3 Stave churches with confirmable documentary dating evidence.**

This list represents my interpretation of stave churches whose inscriptions can be supported by other dating evidence.

**Stylistic analysis.** This methodology assumes that decorations, building styles, or inventory can be compared to similar evidence for cross dating purposes. Alongside dendrochronological dating, stylistic analysis is the most common dating method employed. A well-known example of stylistic church chronology based on the dating of a decorative ‘style’ can be demonstrated in Hauglid (1976: 419-23). He employs animal and dragon shapes to create a stylistic dating system for interior art, portals, and by extension, the churches themselves. In brief, he suggests the Urnes ‘Viking’ animal style gave way to dragon and tendril motifs (about 1200), this is replaced by the removal of any decoration as evident in Early Gothic. This was then ultimately replaced by a recurrence of the dragon motifs on portals. At this point, however the dragons are two legged versions, with a Europeanized head.

There are several problems with this kind of typological approach. The first and most basic is its subjectivity (Hohler 1999a: 9-11). Two legged dragons, winged dragons, and four legged dragons exist in Romanesque Europe and insular art throughout the period. Second, as detailed above, the inherent assumption that the decorative elements in a church are original is questionable. There is no a priori reason to assume a portal originated with the church it currently adorns. Uvdal, Lom, and Urnes Stave Churches are all suspected of having transplanted portals because the portals are stylistically different than the churches themselves (Anker and Havran 2005: 24-5). Additionally, the idea that the Early Gothic style lacks decoration is in itself controversial and not supported by other researchers (Hohler 1999a: 10-1).

Not all stylistic dating attempts have been unsuccessful. Churches such as Eidsborg, Høyjord, and Kvernes have been stylistically dated based on the bulbous base on the external supporting staves. Bases of this style are known in stone churches with firm dates. This is especially well documented in England where this feature can be found in 11th-century contexts (Hohler 1999a: 35). The bulbous base in Fig. 40 is from the original Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim and as such can be firmly dated 1090x1120. Using this evidence stave churches with bulbous bases are dated to the 12th century. This has proven accurate when compared with dates obtained using dendrochronology. The wooden base illustrated is from Haltdalen Stave Church. Previous to the use of dendrochronological dating, this church was placed in the 12th century.

Dendrochronology confirmed its date of construction as c. 1159 (Storsletten 2000: 63).

There have been several attempts to document minor stylistic variations in church form and use these changes to construct a typology for dating and research purposes (Budge 1981 and 1983; Hauglid 1976; Christie 1981: 139-251, among others). In addition to the previously noted difficulty of small sample size, this approach has similar issues to that of decorative typologies. Stylistic changes over time are inexact and interpretation is prone to subjectivity (examples and discussion in Hohler 1999a: 10-13, 20-2, 54-6, 72). With the procurement of accurate dendrochronological dates these chronologies have often proven inaccurate. The Mast-type stave churches illustrate the difficulties inherent with this approach. These churches share many similarities and were all assumed to be contemporary (Fig. 41). Their architectural form was interpreted as a simplification of the basilica (with the raised central room) pattern but requiring less supporting staves. This implied a Gothic influence (Christie 1981: 222-24; Dietrichson 1892: 384-5). Based on this assumption, these churches were dated to the 14th century, thus towards the end of the stave church era (Dietrichson 1892: 384). This assumption proved incorrect when the dendrochronological dates of these structures demonstrated they were contemporaneous with the earliest stave churches.

Consequently, stylistic approaches to dating have proven problematic. The small sample size negates any specificity regarding architectural differences. Stylistic data suffers from issues relating to: variability and unknowns in the speed of the transference of styles, the sometimes slow changes of style, but principally the subjectivity in how the style is interpreted.

Stave Church	Date	Dating Methodology	Dating Reference
Eidsborg Stave Church	Late 1200's?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 164-167
Grip Stave Church	1400?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 326
Heddal Stave Church	1200?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 170-2, 176-7
Kvernes Stave Church	1400?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 318
Øye Stave Church	1200?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 290
Rødven Stave Church	1300?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 330
Røldal Stave Church	1200?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 158
Rollag Stave Church	1200?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 186
Fantoft (burned down 1992)	1200?	Stylistic	Generally accepted date: <a href="http://www.norgeskirker.no/wiki/Fortun_kyrkje">http://www.norgeskirker.no/wiki/Fortun_kyrkje</a>
Vang Stave Church	1200?	Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 282-4

**Table 4 Stave churches with stylistic dating evidence.**

Anker and Havran (2005) contains the most recent analysis of stylistic dating.

**Dendrochronology.** This provides the most accurate standard for dating wooden objects. Tree ring dating provides three different kinds of data relevant to archaeology: chronological data; data on human behaviour regarding the tree in general (when it was harvested, cut patterns determining the type of tools used, etc.); and environmental information (Dean 1997: 44). Unfortunately, stave churches have historical issues that limit the extensive use of dendrochronology.

To achieve a precise dendrochronological date, two items are ideally needed. A sample with enough yearly rings to prevent chronometric noise (ideally 50 or more EH 1998: 15) and with an intact terminal ring. The terminal ring is the specific ring that provides the felling date of the tree (EH 1998: 13). Finding both ideals is rare. Great care must be taken to ensure the oldest wood is being sampled. This is the root cause of the inaccuracies regarding the dendrochronological dating of these structures. Most of the stave churches have been ‘restored’ several times. While it is true that original elements are always contained in a rebuild, they are rarely identified. The standard sites suggested for accurate dendrochronological sample cores in standing buildings are: Structural timbers (roof beams are preferred, because it is felt they are infrequently replaced); wall panelling, and floor boards (EH 1998: 15). All of these sites are problematic in stave churches. In many stave churches the entire roof has been rebuilt, examples include Vang and Øye Stave Churches (Fig. 42). The sampling location that would then be preferred is the supporting staves, but these may also not be original. The next suggested options are wall panelling and floor board, but these are routinely replaced. The painting in Fig. 43 is of Kvernes Stave Church in 1633. The image demonstrates the extent of this reconstruction. This makes dendrochronological dating of the structure difficult. Even at this early date, comprehensive church rebuilds were the norm.

There are other conditions that create problematic dating schemes. As mentioned above, it is known that during reconstructions, parts of other churches that were in better condition, or nicer, were used. For example, Øye Stave Church was made with leftovers from the restoration of Heddal Stave Church (Anker and Havran 2005: 288-91); Haltdalen church’s entire west wall comes from a stave church pulled down in Ålen (Dietrichson 1892: 390). Also, caution must be applied regarding the perceived precision of these dates. The dendrochronological date is that of the felling of the tree, not the construction of the structure. A runic inscription found on a corner

post in Høre church details the date the trees were felled, this implies that the date a church was built was different (Hohler 1999: 59).



<b>Stave Church</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Dating Methodology</b>	<b>Dating Reference</b>
Borgund Stave Church	1180	Dendrochronology	Thun and Stornes 2003: 194
Gol Stave Church	1200?	Dendrochronology	Storsletten 2013: 41-2
Haltdalen Stave Church	1159	Dendrochronology	Anker and Havran 2005: 314; additional details in: Storsletten 2000: 63-78
Hedalen Stave Church	1161-1163	Dendrochronology	Thun, Stornes, Bartholin, and Storsletten 2004: 204
Hegge Stave Church	1216	Dendrochronology	Christie, Stornes, Storsletten and Thun 2000: 273
Høre Stave Church	1179	Dendrochronology	Christie, Stornes, Storsletten, and Thun 2000: 274
Høyjord Stave Church	1160	Dendrochronology	Storsletten 2008: 3
Kaupanger Stave Church	1137	Dendrochronology	Anker, Leif and Havran, Jiri, 2005: 124-5
Lom Stave Church	1157	Dendrochronology	Thun, Stornes, Bartholin, and Storsletten 2004: 203-204
Lomen Stave Church	1179	Dendrochronology	Riksantikvaren 2005
Nore Stave Church	1166	Dendrochronology	Christie, Storsletten and Thun 1999: 146-148
Reinli Stave Church	1324?	Dendrochronology	Thun, Stornes, Bartholin, and Storsletten 2004: 204
Ringebu Stave Church	1192-1220?	Dendrochronology and Stylistic	Anker and Havran 2005: 298
Torpo Stave Church	1163?	Dendrochronology	Storsletten, 2002: 54-5
Urnes Stave Church	1129	Dendrochronology	Christie, Storsletten and Thun 1999: 148
Uvdal Stave Church	1167	Dendrochronology	Christie, Storsletten and Thun 1999: 147-148

**Table 5 Stave churches with dendrochronological evidence.**

The dates provided above are the dates most reasonably assigned to each stave church. A compilation of all of the dating evidence, as well as some of the conflicting issues related to individual churches, can be seen in Appendix A. There is an extensive and ongoing process to provide firm dating (via dendrochronology) on all standing medieval timber structures. These tests include dating of superstructures as well as decorative features such as portals. Urnes Stave Church has produced the earliest dendrochronological date so far, of c.1129 (Christie, Storsletten and Thun 1999: 148). This date is used as the terminus post quem of the Norwegian stave church era. This post-dates the conversion of Norway by St Olaf (Haraldsson) by over a century. No evidence at this point suggests any pre-conversion structural remains are incorporated in any of the standing stave churches. Reinli church is the latest in the data set, ascribed to c. 1325 (Thun, Stornes, Bartolin, and Storsletten 2004: 204).

### ***3.3. Stave Church Design and Construction.***

In the process of surveying Lomen Stave Church in 1984 and 1986, architect Jørgen H Jensenius realised the church could be described using a simple series of ratios and proportions (Jensenius 1988: 9). He noted ‘basic geometric figures, numbers that were easy to work with, one or just a few length units and simple ratios and perhaps proportions as well were among the theoretical aids all builders inherited’ (Jensenius 1988: 5). The simplicity of the structure allowed Lomen church to be designed using a series of squares and about 20 varying sized circles (Jensenius 1988: 63; Figs. 44, 45). The nave and chancel were drawn on the ground. This would then be used to form the proportions for the rest of the structure (Jensenius 2001: 110-13). The required geometric forms were either cut to shape on this drawn form, or measured from it. The walls were put together on the ground and assembled prone. These walls were then pressed upwards into place and beams used to stabilize them (Fig. 46). The roof was constructed last. The key discovery in Lomen church was that this simple design methodology, including the proportions and ratios used, were identical to that of contemporaneous churches elsewhere in Europe (Jensenius 1988: 63). These methodologies share similarities to that described in Books 3, 4 and 5 in Vitruvius’ *De Architectura libri decem* (Ten Books on Architecture). Jensenius suggests the possibility that the base unit of measurement was the Roman foot (Jensenius 1988: 61). In a later work he expanded this research to include the design principles in both existing stave churches, as well as the earlier excavated remains of post-style churches (Jensenius 2001). Allowing for

design differences in different churches and variant application of these methodologies, the ratios were often similar. He suggests that the minor differences imply that stave churches were built using an undocumented process transmitted orally, likely within the context of apprenticeships (Jensenius 2010: 157-72). He concludes that although design and construction methodologies demonstrate minor variation, these structures clearly follow methodologies in use in other parts of Europe at the time.

Although the structures are following European designs, they are constructed using indigenous construction techniques. As detailed above, and demonstrated in Fig 22 and 24, although the church form is different than that seen in domestic structures, it is built using the same construction techniques.

### ***3.4. Stave Church Styles***

Stylistic variations visible in stave church architecture suggest a division into ‘types’.

Historically this has proven difficult, and the number of types described by researchers has varied depending on what features are used for classification. The typology employed below loosely follows the methodology employed in recent Norwegian studies (Anker and Havran 2005: 27). This has the advantage of being very general, and given the limitations imposed by a small sample size, is likely to be more accurate than a more granular approach. Five styles can be perceived in the standing stave churches:

1. Simple Style
2. Basilica-Styled or Raised Central Room churches.
3. Mid-Mast Style
4. Møre Style.
5. Long Church Style

Each style is described below with a type site providing a clear example of the style. The history and origins of these styles are described in the Chapter 4. It should be noted that although there is a general agreement with the categories of this typology, which church fits into each style is not definitive and often a matter of controversy. Contrary to the standard Norwegian presentation, I

have followed this typology with a view to presenting the earliest style that we can determine, while fully admitting this is a matter of opinion and controversy.

### ***Simple Style***

This style consists of a two-cell structure, with a rectangular nave and a square chancel. In its most basic form, this is a simple rectangular building, with a square chancel. There is no raised central room nor bays, and a simple roof structure.

Haltdalen Stave Church, located in Sverresborg Trøndelag Folk Museum is the type-site for this style (Fig. 47). It is an uncomplicated construction consisting of: a small rectangular nave, 4.8 by 5.8 m long; and an even smaller square chancel, 2.9 by 3.4 m (Anker and Havran 2005: 312). It has sill beams sitting on a rock foundation with six corner staves, with a bulbous base, supporting the roof structure. The walls are composed of vertical planks. A dendrochronological date from the northern transept provided a felling date of 1159 (Storsletten 2000: 63).

<b>Stave Church</b>	<b>Earliest Church Style</b>
Eidsborg Stave Church	Simple?
Garmo Stave Church	Simple?
Haltdalen Stave Church	Simple
Hedalen Stave Church	Simple
Høyjord Stave Church	Simple
Røldal Stave Church	Simple?
Rollag Stave Church	Simple
Undredal Stave Church	Simple

**Table 6 Stave churches dated stylistically.**

### ***Basilica-Styled (or Raised Central Room) Churches***

This is stated to be the most technologically advanced form of stave church (Anker and Havran 2005: 29). It is the style most commonly conceptualized when stave churches are discussed. The defining characteristic of this style is the raised central room. A number of tall free-standing posts in the centre support the weight of the upper structure. The majority of the extant stave churches have raised central rooms. Another characteristic seen on these structures is the external ambulatory (the *svalgang*, detailed in section 4.3). This style is typified by the churches in Borgund, Lom, and Urnes (Anker and Havran 2005: 29).

Borgund Stave Church is the best preserved of the basilica-styled structures (Fig. 48). Dendrochronological dating demonstrates the church was built with wood felled between 1180 - 1181 (Thun and Stornes 2003: 194). The entire structure is original, although several parts, including some of the dragon gables have been replaced over time. The church is well known for the number of intact medieval carvings inside it. Three carved portals exist in situ, and various animals and heads adorn the inside. Carved masks are located on top of the central staves. The external ambulatory encircles the structure. In that this structure has been the type-site and model for stave church ‘restorations’ its influence from an architectural and historical point of view has been immense.

<b>Stave Church</b>	<b>Earliest Church Style</b>
Borgund Stave Church	Basilica
Flesberg Stave Church	Basilica
Gol Stave Church	Basilica
Heddal Stave Church	Basilica
Hegge Stave Church	Basilica
Hopperstad Stave Church	Basilica
Høre Stave Church	Basilica
Kaupanger Stave Church	Basilica
Lom Stave Church	Basilica
Lomen Stave Church	Basilica
Øye Stave Church	Basilica
Ringebu Stave Church	Basilica
Torpo Stave Church	Basilica
Urnes Stave Church	Basilica
Fantoft (burned down 1992)	Basilica
Vang Stave Church (Świątynia Wang)	Basilica

**Table 7 Basilica-style churches.**

### ***Mid-Mast Style***

The defining characteristic of this style is the large weight-bearing stave in the centre of the floor. The ‘mast’ is attached to the roof with a supporting structure via tie beams, supporting the weight of the roof.

Uvdal Stave Church is located in the Numedal Valley near Rødberg. This structure is today a cruciform church. It has been expanded many times, although always preserving its internal

medieval structures (Fig. 49). There was originally only one mid–mast. A mirror addition was attached to the structure requiring the addition of a second mast. Dendrochronological evidence places the felling of the trees in the oldest parts of this structure in the winter of 1167-1168 (Christie, Storsletten and Thun 1999: 147-8).

Stave Church	Earliest Church Style
Nore Stave Church	Mid-mast
Uvdal Stave Church	Mid-Mast

**Table 8 Mid-mast churches.**

It should be noted that I am excluding Reinli and Høyjord Stave church (traditionally on other listings). Although these churches have a mid-mast today, they did not have them historically (detailed in section 4.4).

### ***Møre Style***

There are three examples of this type: Rødven, Grip, and Kvernes (Fig. 50). Their stylistic similarity and geographical closeness have long suggested a regional tradition in stave church design (Dietrichson 1892: 5,32; Christie 1981: 198-201; Anker and Havran 2005: 29-30). A visible characteristic of these structures is the *skorder* that brace the sides of the building. The dating of these structures has proven controversial. Each of these churches has been radically altered since its creation. However, the extensive use of intermediary staves in the walls, while unique in these churches, is characteristic of buildings beginning in the first half of the 1400s (dating provided in Appendix B).

Kvernes Stave Church, located on Kvernesfjord in Kvernes, provides an example of a Møre-type stave church. The *skorder* are clearly visible. Direct dating of the structure has been difficult due to its many reconstructions. Documentary evidence mentions the church in 1432, and the intermediary staves are characteristic of 15th-century structures (Anker and Havran 2005: 318-20).

These buildings are different than other stave churches in several ways. First, they originate from the 15th century, and as far as can be determined are created after the stave church era. Second, they contain significant structural differences from other churches. The use of *skorder* is

unknown in other stave church types, which employ quadrant, or ‘knee’, braces. These source from the root of the lowest half of a tree to support the roof. That part of the tree holds up the entire weight of the tree and has to do so in extreme weather conditions. It is, therefore, the strongest wood in the tree and is naturally angled. Møre churches also have no interlocking roof structure, the ‘lace collar’ or *kniplingskrave* and semi-circular supporting brackets so important to the stability and structure of stave churches does not appear on this style. The roof itself is a simple structure supported by cross beams and diagonal struts. It is this weaker superstructure that necessitates the *skorder* bracing on the outside. The weight of the roof pushes the walls outward and the struts absorb this energy. Buttresses are used for the same reason in Anglo-Saxon (Yeavering) and Romanesque structures (Durham), although this methodology sees its full flowering in the later Gothic flying buttresses. If one bases the definition of a stave church on its complex roof structure, (as done by Norberg-Schultz 1996: 83), these churches would not be considered stave churches.

These buildings have the appearance and use the same construction techniques, of a type of Norwegian utilitarian building called a *grindbygg* (Fig. 51). This is both a type of building and a construction methodology (**Nor** *grindbygg byggeteknikk*). Employed throughout Scandinavia this fabrication technique can be seen in Norway since ancient times. It is the standard way that a barn and various out-buildings; such as sheds, boat-houses, and stables; are created and is seen extensively throughout western Norway. In general, the *grindbygg* is a weaker structure than a stave church. Rather than the interlocking parts characteristic of a stave church, it is built using a simple frame reflective of its long use for utility structures.

Norwegian researchers group all medieval timber churches together as a category and call them ‘stave churches’. My interpretation of these structures is different. The structural techniques; dissimilarities of the roof supporting structures; *skorder* and the very late dating (post c. 1350) on these churches; make these dissimilar to other earlier stave churches. Their obvious construction using *grindbygg* techniques takes them out of the scope of this study. These churches were built three hundred or more years later than pre-Christian architecture. The architectural influence most obvious on these structures is an agricultural outbuilding, made to look like a church on the inside.

Timber Church	Earliest Church Style
Grip Stave Church	Møre
Kvernes Stave Church	Møre
Rødven Stave Church	Møre

**Table 9 Møre style churches.**

### *Long Church Style*

The Long Church style is demarcated by a nave and chancel of the same width (Fig. 52). Reinli Stave Church serves as its only extant medieval timber example. There is reason to believe the style was more common. The no longer extant Rinde Stave Church in Sogn was of this style, and several stone churches still standing employ it (Christie 1981: 144-7). This style is a continental import (St. Chappelle in Paris is a well-known example) and its provenance is well established. This style was brought to Norway with the Franciscans and Dominicans for their monasteries in the late 13th century. (Anker 1970: 267-9; Anker and Havran 2005: 242-4). This style is still occasionally used. The timber Veøy kyrkje (in Molde Municipality, Møre og Romsdal) built in 1907 is a modern version of one.

Reinli Stave Church is near Begnadalen and overlooks the Valdres Valley (Fig. 53). The dating of the church has been both confused and controversial (the below is a summary from Anker and Havran 2005: 246-7). Carvings in the church are clearly Gothic in origin (late 1200s). Iron door fittings can be stylistically dated, and the oldest door fittings here are dated from c.1150-c.1200. Below the current church is a burnt layer. Below this layer is the remains of an earlier church. Above the burnt layer were coins from Håkon Håkonson's reign (1218-1263). Dendrochronological dating of the current church, including a bark edge, indicate a felling date of 1323 - 1324. A second date of 1325-1326 supports this (Thun, Stornes, Bartolin, and Storsletten 2004: 204). The confused dating has prompted a suggestion of an earlier church on the site that burned down with both wood and the door fittings being reused.

### *Church Survival*

Accepting that Norway's timber churches have similar stone contemporaneous structures, the question becomes why do these churches survive only in Norway? To cite just one contemporary example, Sweden had many timber churches and has well documented evidence for them (the



Sveriges Kyrkors projekt Medeltida träkyrkor database, the relevant data for this paper is documented in Lagerlöf, Erland. 1985). Yet, these medieval timber churches only survive in Norway. Although the point is debatable and more research is needed, I can suggest several factors that likely contributed to the survival of these structures:

The late arrival of Christianity via 11th-century missionary kings, versus 9th-century missionary bishops may play a role. The Norwegian churches are simply younger than the other Nordic churches and this must impact their survival. The extant churches are also remote (see map in Fig. 1). The majority of these churches are in south central Norway, many around Sogn. These areas are even today hard to access. This spared these buildings from various legal, political, and cultural forces that destroyed their brethren churches. As financial investment moved away from rural areas to the cities the lack of wealthy patrons to rebuild structures must have also played a role (as happened at Hopperstad, detailed in section 3.1). Poor parishes and relative isolation played a similar role in preserving British churches (such as Escomb) as well as the churches on Gotland.

An examination of the structures themselves and their construction suggests other traits aiding their durability. The roof and supporting structure, the rafters, braces and staves, interlock with each other. This upper level is supported by semi-circular arches and linked to staves that connect directly to the floor. Extensive use of tongue and groove construction allows the building to both shrink and move in different weather conditions, and continuous shifting winds. This interlocking provides a very solid structure and prevents the damage that would otherwise be caused by the weather. The use of pliant wooden nails, in contrast to rigid metal ones, also provides a certain amount of ‘give’ in the frame. Quadrant brackets are used as supporting structures. This entire structure was then elevated off the ground using a combination of sills and a supporting wooden chassis, onto a stone foundation. This ‘enrockment’ foundation prevented water from rotting the supporting staves. The outside of these churches were covered in black tar to preserve the wood from the elements. These factors combined allowed their survival to modern times. Of these factors, the evidence suggests the most important was the lifting of the body of the church onto a stone foundation. No timber church in northern Europe from this era built directly on the ground exists unaltered today. This includes the Swedish structures (which

were post-churches) and even Greensted had to be lifted off the ground and the bottoms of its supporting staves cut and replaced with a sill-like brick foundation (Fig. 17).

One of the attributes that differentiates Norway from other regions of northern Europe regards the ‘Great Rebuilding’ of the 11th and 12th century. This is widely documented in England, with the wooden churches being replaced by stone (Blair 2005: 420-2). This did not occur in Norway. Ankar attributes this to the wooden churches themselves. Pointing out that ‘they were cheaper and easier to raise, did not require a number of skilled people, and could be made by a local company of carpenters directed by a professional master-builder and perhaps one or two assistants’ (Ankar 1970: 394). He also makes the interesting point that they could be built quickly, to fulfil the administrative needs of the church. (Ankar 1970: 394).

Norway did rebuilt its important cult centres, and rebuilt some churches (especially as they expanded) in stone. Examples include Nidaros (originally a wooden church) and St. Mary, a palace church in Oslo (Ankar 1970: 385). Norway’s extensive pine forests assured that wood remained the most available and cost effective material of choice.

Denmark and Sweden experienced a hybrid of the ‘Great Rebuilding’. When this occurred, it was not in stone, but in brick. Bricks, and the technology to create them, were first imported into Denmark from Lombardy during the reign of King Valdemar (1157-1182, Donnelly 1992: 46). Nordic church architecture would not be the same from that point forward. Brick built Romanesque style buildings, such as at Kalundborg, Denmark, would bring about their own style called Brick Romanesque. Gothic works in brick followed shortly thereafter (Andersson 1970: 232-9). Sweden followed Denmark’s example. Norway did occasionally build medieval churches in brick. The original version of Gamlebyen church in Oslo was an abbey church built of brick in 1291 (Fischer 1939: 131-49). But, stone and wood dominated Norwegian church construction.

### ***3.5. Standing Churches in their Earliest Form***

The stave churches as they exist today are the product of many centuries of changes. Both archaeological evidence of earlier structures and the phasing of standing structures strongly suggest the original churches were based on the two-cell nave and chancel model. Although often little of this superstructure is visible externally, it is found during renovations. When these later structures are phased and their earliest floor plan recovered, the original churches are in the

two-cell style. Size considerations allow only two examples (although phasing where it exists, can be seen for all churches in the gazetteer). The examples below present both an intact church, and one that is heavily altered. Both structures provide clear details of their early form.

### ***Borgund's Earliest Form***

Borgund Stave Church is located in the Sogn region of Norway. It illustrates the complexity involved with phasing these structures, even in a relatively intact building (Fig. 54). The architectural development of this structure is well documented through period documentation and dendrochronology. The building was built in stages, and although it has never been in doubt that the building was medieval, the precise dating of its individual parts has been controversial and confused. One of the staves in the raised central room yielded a dendrochronological date demonstrating the wood was felled between 1180 and 1181 (Thun and Stornes 2003: 194). The current external ambulatory is generally believed to have been built last (c. 1250). In that it goes around the apse, suggests that the apse was built before it (Hauglid 1973: 284-6). An even earlier apse is suggested by finds of what is generally believed to have been parts of the original external ambulatory (documented in an unpublished excavation report from 1969 by H.E. Lidén stored in the Riksantikvaren). Hohler suggests this may source from an earlier church (Hohler 1999: 121). Bjerknes on stylistic grounds argues that the nave and chancel were built first, then the apse and external décor such as the dragon heads, ridge turrets and ridge capping was added later (Bjerknes 1947: 30). It is however argued that these all stylistically match similar contemporary churches (such as Høre) and that there is no inherent reason for presuming they were constructed later (Hohler 1999: 120-1; Anker and Havran 2005: 152). No matter the precise date of the structural components, a generally accepted *terminus ante quem* of 1250 is acceptable for the structure in its current form (Anker and Havran 2005: 154). As Fig. 54 demonstrates, even though this structure was altered and expanded over time, the original two-cell pattern is preserved in the floor plan of the structure.

### ***Høyjord's Earliest Form***

Høyjord Stave Church is the only stave church in Vestfold. Although Vestfold is the smallest county in the country, it preserves the largest number of medieval stone churches (24, Anker and Havran 2005: 210). The discovery in 1904 of the remains of a stave church under the non-

descript white wall panels of an otherwise plain white church was unexpected. The building was then extensively reconstructed, with little reference to any research on its original appearance. A mid-mast, where one likely did not exist previously, was added. The building was jacked up and placed on a concrete foundation. An exterior supporting structure was added and a new exterior put in place (Anker and Havran 2005: 212). Although extensively altered, the majority of the supporting stave structure still exists. The rectangular nave and square chancel can be seen in Fig. 55. This clearly suggests a design structure based on the simple two-cell construction.

These examples demonstrate the complex changes that have occurred in the stave church plans over time. Several of the standing structures source from the 12th century. Even with the sometimes extensive alterations, the original two cell design can be seen preserved in the ground plan. This demonstrates that the earliest version of the standing stave churches is the two-cell nave and chancel plan.

### ***3.6. Archaeological Evidence of the Earliest Churches***

The archaeological evidence recovered from church excavations addresses two important issues. First, it is important to examine the earliest phase of these structures to determine the earliest version of the church form. This evidence has implications relating to the origin and ‘uniqueness’ of this style. Second, the standing stave churches date to the mid-12th century and they are thus separated from paganism by a century or more. In order to compare pre-Christian temples to contemporaneous church architecture it is necessary to identify the earliest version of these monuments. In that this is a core research goal, this necessitates examining this data in detail.

#### ***Høre Stave Church***

Høre Stave Church is located at Ryfoss, Vang municipality, Valdres. This region has an extensive and early presence in saga literature. This stave church has considerable and varied dating evidence. A runic inscription on one of the staves states that the timbers for the church were cut down by two brothers (Erlingr and Auðunlling) ‘in the summer [that] Erling J... (the inscription cuts off here) in Nidaros’. This is widely interpreted to mean the summer that Erling ‘Jarl’ died at the Battle of Kalvskinnet (**Nor Slaget på Kalvskinnet**) near Nidaros in 1179. The

Erlingr mentioned is likely 'Erling of Kvie', mentioned in the *Sverris Saga*. This date is supported by dendrochronological dates of 1179-1180 (Christie et al 2000:274).

This was not the first church on this site. During excavations in 1979-1980 (unpublished, manuscript stored at the Riksantikvaren, pertinent results summarised in Jensenius 2001:147-154; coin analysis in Berg 1981: 69-84) several early postholes were discovered (Fig. 56). One of them ('B') had a Danish penny from Magnus the Good (c. 1042, Berg 1981: 69-84) inside it. This complicated series of postholes have been interpreted to be an early two-cell post structure from the second half of the 1000s (Jensenius 2001: 147-54). The nave of this church was about 13 metres long.

The dotted line in Fig. 56) represents this earliest structure (the post church from the 1000s) the faint outlines show the original standing church (before reconstructions done in the early 1800s) and the dark outline is the current church. It can be seen that the earliest structure on site was a small two-cell church. This early post church disturbed a number of Christian graves (based on finds and alignment) in its construction. This suggests that the church was built on a pre-existing Christian burial site. There is also evidence that hints at an earlier structure on site. One of the postholes had charcoal in the bottom of it. This carbon dated to 850-1020 Cal AD (T-3775, Jensenius 2001:153). This may suggest an earlier structure that burned down. Other circumstantial evidence supports this conclusion. The earliest graves in the current church floor are at an off-angle to the church. Although not diagnostic of another older church (off-angle Christian graves, although not common, are known) it suggests that possibility.

### ***Kaupanger Stave Church***

Kaupanger Stave Church overlooks Amla (Amble) Bay, in Sogn. The name (ON *kaupangr* a market place, Zöega 2004: 237) implies the location of an ancient market place. The current church has been rebuilt several times. This has complicated the dating of the structure, and the current church bears little resemblance to its appearance of only fifty years ago (Fig. 57). The structure has similarities to other churches in the Luster area (such as Hopperstad Stave Church). That suggests a cross-dating to the second quarter of the 1100s.

The existing structure was not the first church at this site. Excavations in 1964, documented in Bjerknes and Lidén (1975), discovered a number of postholes in the floor. This initially

confusing plot, turned out to be the remains of two post churches (Fig. 58). Building 1 was approximately 5.5 by 4.2 metres (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 21-3). There was no wood found in the postholes allowing an easy demarcation of Building 1 and 2, and suggested the structure was removed. Precise dating has been problematic, but stratigraphic evidence (from graves disturbed during the construction of the building) suggest it dates from the 10th to the 11th century (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 41, 43). The excavators were unable to determine if Building 1 had a chancel. A deep 17th-century tomb lies where the chancel would have been located (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 22). The disturbance of early graves by postholes implies that this was built on a pre-existing burial ground (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 20-1). Building 2 was built on the same site, and with the same axis as Building 1. This 12th-century building had a two-cell construction with a nave 8.3 by 5.2 metres and chancel approximately 3.5 by 2.5 metres (Bjerknes and Lidén 1975: 23-7).

### ***Lom Stave Church***

The municipality of Lom, known in the medieval era as Lóar, lies near Vågå above the river Otta in Norway. Tradition maintains, and *St Olaf's saga* (chapter 112) records, that its first priests were ordained by St Olaf. Its importance archaeologically lies in the extensive remains found inside the floor of the church. Excavations in 1973 (documented in Christie 1978 and 1978a) demonstrated that the church was not the first on this site. A post church, and hints of an earlier structure, were uncovered. In addition to the architectural evidence, extensive material remains suggestive of folkloric and early Christian beliefs were uncovered under the flooring (Christie 1978a: 197-200, further information is provided in Appendix A)

The excavation diagram (Fig 59) shows the traces of the wall posts of the earlier church. The north line of posts is still extant, although the southern line of posts has been destroyed. An inner row of posts suggests a 'raised room' as is seen in similar standing structures. The wall trenches were lined with wood and well drained. The nave was clear from the remains, but where the chancel should have been, a large burial vault now resides. The nave though was open on the east end suggesting the chancel's existence (Christie 1978a: 200) and this conclusion was supported by two intermediary staves (Christie 1978a: 200). Coins found in a stratigraphic context provided evidence that this early structure dated to c.1030-c.1060 (Christie 1978a: 199). This two-cell construction would have been within a generation of the conversion.

Several graves were damaged during the construction of the early 11th-century structure. This suggested that this church was built on an existing Christian grave site (Christie 1978a: 199). The disturbance of the graves, along with the literary evidence of St Olaf, suggests a long Christian lineage in this area, and the possible existence of an even older church.

### ***Urnes Stave Church***

Urnes is located on the eastern side of Lustrafjord, Orneset. Although today a small and relatively remote village, it was a major crossroads in the medieval and later periods. This World Heritage Site is one of the best studied and most documented stave churches extant (Fig. 60). The structure visible today is dendrochronologically dated to between 1129 and 1131 (Christie, Storsletten and Thun, 1999: 148). Excavations done between 1956-57 (documented and interpreted in Christie 1959: 49-74, and Bjerknes 1959: 75-96) demonstrated evidence of at least two additional churches on the site. This has allowed the creation of a fairly comprehensive site history. The most extensive evidence is for the church just previous to the existing one. The current church was constructed using materials from the previous church on the site. The northern portal (Fig. 61) is the type-site for the Urnes style. Most of the northern wall, parts of the east and west gables, and two rafters source from this earlier church. Precise dating of this structure has been difficult. Dendrochronology has been complicated by a lack of bark edges, and the potential that these were reworked (summarised by Anker and Havran 2005: 116). However, recent dendrochronological analysis with several samples suggests a date from 1069-1080 (Krogh 2011: 211-5). This dating is supported by the oldest coin finds from 1950s excavations dating to the reign of Harald Hardråde (1046-1066). The walls, trenches and postholes clearly demonstrate this church was a two-cell structure. Enough remained of this early structure that its appearance could be determined.

Fig 62 compiles the floor plans of the excavations of both the earliest stave churches, as well as several excavations of timber structures buried in the floors of stone churches. This evidence strongly suggests that the earliest stave church form, near contemporaneous to the pagan era, was a two-cell construction.

### ***3.7. Conclusion***

Stave churches share enough form and stylistic characteristics to create a definition that differentiates them from other Norwegian stone churches, as well as domestic structures. This provides the vocabulary that allows a determination of the validity of the unique status of these structures by comparing these structures to contemporary church building traditions throughout Europe (detailed in section 4.1). Although true that no one church fulfils all of the defining field characteristics of a stave church, the enrockment foundation appear to be shared by all, and most important for church survival. The evidence also suggests that the standing stave churches share enough architectural similarities to be placed into specific types. A small sample size limits the conclusions that can be deduced regarding this evidence and many questions will remain unanswerable. However, as long as the stylistic demarcators are kept very general, it can be said that the standing structures appear to fit into one of five categories. Although dating stave churches has proven problematic due to extensive reconstructions, the oldest dates generally found are from the 12th century. Thus, the standing structures are two centuries or more after the conversion. Phasing and archaeological evidence suggest the oldest timber church style seen in Norway is the two-cell nave and chancel variety. This suggests that when comparing stave churches to pre-Christian structures, it is the two-cell church plan that will have to be employed.



## Chapter 4: Stave Church Origins and Influences

This chapter details the architectural, decorative and stylistic attributes of the stave churches. I provide a comparative analysis of these churches with non-Norwegian architectural and decorative traditions. The overarching motif is examining the question, are stave churches related to cult-houses? If not, from where did they originate? This chapter interrogates two important suppositions. First, the question of the ‘uniqueness’ of the stave church tradition. This is initially addressed by an analysis of the decorative influences in the Norwegian church building tradition. If these decorative elements were seen only in Norway, it would be natural to assume they were an indigenous pre-Christian tradition. Second, I analyse the architectural form and layout of the stave churches. It has already been determined that the timber churches can be classified into separate ‘styles’. I posit the question, do any of these styles originate from pre-Christian traditions, and if not, where did they come from?

Two other related topics are presented at the end of this chapter. Stone church examples from Norway are provided as an important comparison point. The extensive timber church tradition seen in Russia and eastern Europe is also examined. These cultures also have wooden churches, and Norse influence in these cultures was extensive.

### *4.1. Stave Churches and Their Influences*

Two important underlying assumptions about stave churches are challenged herein: the belief that the architectural design of Norwegian stave churches was a local tradition and outgrowth of native traditions (Holan 1990: 51, 115; Norberg-Schultz 1996: 81; Anker 1970: 380) and the related argument that this tradition represents a unique building methodology in Christendom (Dietrichson 1892: 176; Hauglid 1977: 11; Holan 1990: 115; Norberg-Schultz 1996: 81). If the stave church tradition, in plans, form, or decoration, can be demonstrated to be ‘uniquely’ Norwegian, the argument that they are based on pre-Christian Norse structures may be supportable (Bjerknes 1948; Bugge 1983: 9; Conant 1993: 83). If they are similar to other architectural traditions, then this point is moot.

### *Foreign Stylistic Influences in Portals*

Portals have been long studied in the Norwegian stave church research. There are 126 portals from eighty churches extant (Hohler 1999: 9). About a third of these are on the surviving stave churches, the rest are in museums. It is generally agreed that a stylistic analysis focused on stave church decoration should provide information on chronologies and geographic ranges. This has proven difficult in practise and remains an active area of research. Several attempts at a typology have been created (Dietrichson 1892: 62-78; Blindheim 1966: 40-53; Hauglid 1973; Hohler 1981: 253-329; Anker 2001: 376-447; among others). Although many specific decorative styles are generally recognized, no comprehensive scholarly consensus exists regarding the styles or their chronologies (Anker and Havran 2005: 38-65 provides a current summary). All of these typologies recognize foreign influences. As early as 1892 Dietrichson recognized Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman influences (Dietrichson 1892: 239). Hohler speaks of this era as ‘one of overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon influence’ (Hohler 1999a: 63). Southern decorative influences (described below) coming from Lombardy are seen as well. These influences parallel those seen in stone structures. Employing a century’s worth of scholarship, Hohler presents the generally accepted view in her encyclopaedic two-volume examination (Hohler 1999 and 1999a). She recognizes three phases of influences sourcing from outside of Norway. The first phase is seen in the 11th century at Urnes (Hohler 1999a: 234-7; Fig. 120). The carvings are seen as different to those seen in later Romanesque structures. There is controversy regarding the role of the Urnes style in relation to early Romanesque (Anker 1970: 394-407; Blindheim 1966: 33-9; Hohler 1999: 37-8, 42, 236), but, it is generally accepted that the Urnes style is used widely in contemporary and earlier rune stones (documented most recently in Gräslund 2006). Perhaps the best known example is the Jelling Rune Stone erected by King Harold in the late 10th century. A single plank from a church in Sweden demonstrates that this style was also done in wood (Fig. 63). It is argued that this represents a ‘native’ Norse tradition and it is often referred to as the last of the ‘Viking’ art styles (Fuglesang 1981: 97-118; Hauglid 1977: 10). The second phase was the influence of the late Anglo-Saxon tradition (examples below). This is a Romanesque tradition, and corresponds to that seen in the early stone churches. This is the tradition that Blindheim (1966: 7-21), Bogdanski (2013) and Thurlby (1997) identify as the North Sea Tradition. Before the end of the stave church era, a third and final foreign influence is present that represents a

later Anglo-Norman tradition, with suggestions of a Lombardic design element that arrives at this time as well (Hohler 1999a 78-82; Blindheim 1966: 22-7).

### *The North Sea Tradition*

As early as 1890, Norwegian scholars recognized foreign influences, specifically Anglo-Saxon ones, in the Norwegian church architectural tradition (Taranger 1890). Over time it has become apparent that specific themes from the Romanesque style could be detected throughout the North Sea region (Blindheim 1966: 7-21). These shared decorative and architectural traditions reflect the major sea routes and communication links between these regions. This North Sea Tradition includes Scandinavia, the British Isles, and, via the Irish sea Ireland and parts of France (Blindheim 1966: 5). Art historian Martin Blindheim traced the decorative patterns seen in Norway, mainly in Trondheim, and notes the various influences coming from the North Sea region (Blindheim 1966). Bogdanski highlighted the importance of Nidaros Cathedral on this style. She suggests it was used as a base/centre for importing craftsman from England during the 12th century. This resulted in a mingling of English and Norwegian stonemasons that facilitated the transition of decorative ideas throughout Scandinavia, northern England, and Scotland (Bogdanski 2013: 79-80). This may explain why only some elements of the Romanesque styles are seen (versus the entire range of Romanesque styles seen in Europe). Thurlby in a similar vein traces this style in Kirkwall Cathedral in Orkney (Thurlby 1997).

This approach must be utilized cautiously. The North Sea countries had long connections with Norse traditions, as demonstrated by the extensive use of northern mythology in sculpture (Bailey 1980: 101-42) and the similarity of ship burials finds at Sutton Hoo to those in Vendel and Valgärd, Sweden (Carver 1998: 56, 128-9). Sharing of cultural ideas in the North Sea long predates the Christian era (Blindheim 1966: 32). It is not entirely clear where this subset of Romanesque tradition begins and ends. Nor are the limitations of the North Sea Tradition clear in comparison to Romanesque and English Early Gothic styles. One can easily argue for example that there was a North Sea architectural tradition for the building of halls and long-houses. Ultimately the term North Sea Tradition serves as a shorthand for a series of shared Romanesque decorative elements in a specific region. O’Keeffe, calling the Romanesque styles and its regionalisms a “Black box” (O’Keeffe 2007: 45) argues that there are still many unanswered

questions and this needs more research before conclusions can be drawn (O’Keeffe 2007: 100-14).

Space considerations allow only a few examples of specific foreign decorative influences in Norway to be presented. The best documented Anglo-Saxon thematic tradition is called the Trondheim Milieu. This is represented in works in wood, ivory, and stone (Hohler 1999a: 61-2). Among the earliest examples of these architectural carvings is that seen in the stave church in Vågå. These carvings utilize a theme known as the ‘beast chain’. This reflects a particular design element seen in a number of Anglo-Saxon crosses and grave slabs best known from Viking York (Lang 2014). The characteristic of this theme is a chain of alternating animals with arched necks and extended legs (Fig. 64). Perhaps the most commonly cited example of foreign influence and most recognizable to an English audience, is that of the cushion capitals seen on the interior columns at Urnes (Fig. 65). This form is identical to that seen on stone Romanesque architecture (Blindheim 1966: 33; Hauglid 1973: 328-33; Hohler 1999: 240).

The most popular motif used in stave church portals is the Sogn-Valdres motif. It is characterized by interlinking circular vines with small dragons in the vines. This is capped by three large dragons (Fig. 66). The portals that exist today have been heavily influenced by this design (Hohler 1999a: 95). Of the remaining 76 large door jamb portals, 46 are of this style (Hohler 1999a: 74). This motif has well known European Romanesque predecessors (Hohler 1999a: 73). Fig. 67 presents a comparison of the mid-12th century Prior’s Doorway in Ely Cathedral and several stave church carvings. This English stone doorway has long been noted for its similarities to stave church decoration (Hohler 1999a: 78-9).

Lombardic influences are also seen in Norwegian stave church and church decoration (Hohler 1999a: 84-8). Perhaps the most recognizable Lombardic feature seen in Norway is the lion topped capital (examples in Fig. 68). Seen in stone versions throughout Europe and Scandinavia (Hohler 1999a: 85-86) the timber version is common in Norway. Although Lombardic influences are widely seen in Scandinavia (Blindheim 1966: 22-27) their source is contested. Some scholars have seen this tradition sourcing from Lund Cathedral, then a bishopric over all of Scandinavia (summarised in Hohler 1999a: 86-8, 106). German masons familiar with the Lombardic traditions were employed from Lund in the 1130s to finish the cathedral there (Liden 1966: 78;

Norberg-Schulz 1996: 86). It may also have reached Norway via stone work done in Bergen at Mariakirken. Others have supported a more direct route, and even sources in England have been suggested (Anker 1970: 402-4).

The extensive evidence of foreign influences seen in the Norwegian architecture of the time contradicts the idea that stave churches were a local architectural and artistic development by Norwegian craftsman (Conant 1993: 431-8). Architectural and decorative influences from Britain, Germany, Denmark, as well as Cluniac influences from France can be seen throughout the medieval era (Conant 1993: 437-8). Norway is not alone in this, other Nordic churches display extensive foreign influences. Norway employed English and French influences via the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman world, Denmark employed German influences, seen most clearly at Our Lady Maria Cathedral in Ribe (*Vor Frue Maria Domkirke*, Donnelly 1992: 41-2). Sweden's Lund Cathedral was German built, and well known for its Rheno-Lombardic architectural vocabulary (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 86; Donnelly 1992: 41-6).

### ***Biblical and European Literary influence in Church Architecture***

There is a long history of church commentators interpreting the church as a literal and metaphorical recreation of heaven on earth. The building was seen to embody the scriptural references regarding the Temple and Tabernacle of New Jerusalem (Bandmann 2005: 61-4). This idea originally sourced from Hebraic tradition regarding the Temple in Jerusalem (*Exodus* 25-31; *1 Kings* 6-7; *2 Chronicles* 3-4; *Ezekiel* 40-48). To the Jewish people the temple represents identity, it is mystically associated with the individual and carried within (*Hebrews* 8:5). This approach passed into Christianity (*Ephesians* 2:19-21) and the rebuilding of the temple, as described in *Revelations*, was second only to the crucifixion in the medieval mind (Coldstream 2002:151). Architecturally, this means each part of a church can be idealized to stand for a Christian concept (the altar signified love, foundation timbers represent apostles, the door symbolizes wisdom, etc.). This is an early idea, and can be seen in the 3rd century in the early Christian church fathers. The earliest mention of this appears to be in Origen (*In Exodum Homiliae* 9 and *De Tabernaculo* 13). North European examples of this perspective can be seen in Bede's (AD 673x735) *De Templo* and *De Tabernaculo*. In Ireland, sacred topography was based on this analogy (Jenkins 2010) iconographic representations of the temple on earth in the Book of Kells (the Lucan temptation page being the best known) and the early 9th-century *Liber*

*Ardmachanus* includes both textual analogies and imagery of the Temple on earth (Jenkins 2010: 128-46).

This allegorical marriage of heaven, church architecture, and the individual, becomes an important theme in medieval art and architecture (Bandmann and Wallace 2005: 63). It can be confirmed that the Norwegians shared this approach because of a 12th-century **ON** church dedication homily called *In Dedicatione Tempeli* (*Kirkjudagsmál*, Turville-Petre (1972:79-101).

This work, sometimes called the *Stave Church Homily* (a translation is provided in Appendix C) is important for several reasons. It exists in four manuscripts (Conti 2013: 224-5; Turville-Petre 1972: 78-80; Knudsen 1967: 53-72; Knudsen 1949: 28-39; stemma can be found at Turville-Petre, 1972:88-93; Facsimile edition is: Knudsen 1952). Most importantly, it can be found in the oldest Old Norse manuscript written in the Latin alphabet (folio AM 237 in the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection, Copenhagen). This dates to c.1150 (Conti 2013: 225). This homily examines each part of a church and gives each part of the church a symbolic meaning (Turville-Petre 1972: 80). This early work is clearly based on European precursors (Conti 2013: 226, Turville-Petre 1972: 80-7 provides an exhaustive comparison of European precursors). Turville-Petre suggests that ‘nearly every thought expressed in the homily is derived from a foreign source, although the homilist has adapted symbols originally designed for a church of stone to his church of wood’ (Turville-Petre 1972: 87).

These European sources, although even inconsistent in regards to symbolic association themselves, demonstrate the depth of knowledge seen in Iceland in the mid-12th century. Additionally, it suggests the Norwegians were staying symbolically within the existing European Christian tradition. Although the homily clearly describes a two-cell wooden structure, unlike the stone structures described in the European works (Turville-Petre 1972: 95)

### ***Stave Church Styles and Their Origins***

It has been demonstrated (section 3.4) that the standing stave churches can be divided into styles. By comparing the Norwegian stave church styles to Christian architecture in other regions, insights can be gained to the origins of these various styles. Contradicting common belief, it will be demonstrated that these source from contemporaneous church styles seen in European Christianity, and also reflect liturgical changes seen in this time period. While indigenous

construction methodologies were often employed, church appearance and plan are clearly Christian in origin. Every stave church style can be shown to have clear Christian predecessors as well as contemporaneous examples in nearby countries. Unlike Britain and Germany, whose long Christian history allows the demonstration of how church styles evolved from one another (detailed below), the separate styles came wholesale into Norway.

### ***Origins and Controversies***

The small sample size of standing churches has made the origins of stave church styles controversial. Historically, researchers have had different opinions regarding stave church typologies and origins. Dietrichson was the first researcher to suggest that the stone basilica was the forerunner of the Norwegian stave churches (Dietrichson 1892: 193). He saw strong similarities to it in the floor plans of basilicas and stave churches, particularly in the three-aisle construction and the use of tall columns to divide the nave and side aisles. This connection to both stone architecture, and also early Iron Age domestic structures, was expanded by Hauglid (1976). In contrast, Christie's investigations suggest the 'raised central room' is unrelated to basilicas (Christie 1981). He saw the origin of this structure in a no-longer extant structural tradition. Echoing Horn (1958: 2-23), Christie looked at archaeological evidence in the Nordic countries and other Germanic areas and saw stylistic origins in the barn (*grindbygg*) or hall structure. He upheld the genius of the Norwegian craftsman in the moving of the entire structure off of the ground via ground sills and eventually the enrockment foundations. Ahrens (2001) examines these issues in a pan-European perspective. His investigations of timber churches throughout Europe and Scandinavia, suggests the 'raised central room' originates with churches and halls in Anglo-Saxon England. Many architectural historians ignore these timber churches in their studies (such as Coldstream 2002; Stalley 1999 and McClendon 2005). Of those who do not, Conant sees the raised central room as a pagan structure originally, that was influenced by the nave and chancel constructions of Ireland and England or the three bay halls such as found in Brenz, Germany or Lojsta, Gotland (Conant 1990: 77-9). Contemporary stone cathedrals he sees as strictly Anglo-Norman affairs (Conant 1990: 436-8). Calkins (1998: 63-4) follows Horn (1958) in seeing the stave church as a barn or hall type structure influenced by English sources and suggests that similar (no longer extant) structures may have impacted early Carolingian structures (Calkins 1998: 63).

#### ***4.2. The Two-Cell Church Style***

The two-cell nave and chancel church exists in stone (section 4.6) as well as wood (section 3.4). The most important attribute in the Norwegian churches, whether of wood or stone, relates to the chancel. Chancels in some form have existed on church structures since the conversion of Rome (Doig 2008: 89-91). Their purpose and shape were not standardized. There was a slow change over the course of centuries that helped create the chancel as it would be seen in the Norwegian churches. All of the stave churches (as well as the later stone churches) demonstrate an important design element in their chancel. The chancel is square, and smaller than the nave. This architectural detail is not seen throughout all church architectural history, and provides an important detail relating to church chronology.

In that the missionary kings were so influenced by England, the concentration below is on English churches (with the understanding that these influences and designs can be seen throughout the North Sea region, Taylor VIII 2011: 1042-3). The Anglo-Saxon world has a long history of Christian architecture, and allows evolutionary patterns to be gleaned from its archaeology. This must be done cautiously, it is recognized that the Anglo-Saxon evidence is complex, and does not wield to easy summary. Also, several themes seen in the UK, such as church 'groups', and large minsters, are not reflected in the early medieval Norwegian evidence.

The earliest churches built in England during the conversion period (*c.* 600-670) consisted of a one, or two-cell structures (Gittos 2013: 149; Barnwell 2003: 46). There is some variety in the appearance of these structures (for example St Mary's Church in Reculver, Kent has a porticus), but all were simple in their construction and their plans share similarities with European and Irish examples. Several of these early structures are known through excavation and standing remains, although precise dating is often unavailable (Gittos 2013: 153). Foreign influence is suspected in some of these structures, Reculver for example is suggested to have been built by masons from Ravenna (Cambridge 1999).

Two important changes occurring over a period of a century and a half dramatically impacted the liturgy and left traces in the contemporaneous church architecture. Under reforms by Gregory VII (1073-1085) the relationship between priests and laity began to change. Priests, over time, became a separate class. Celibacy rules and exemption for secular law enhanced this separation



(Barnwell 2004: 15-6, 19-20). The second change involved the ritual itself. It became more complicated and 'theatrical' (Barnwell 2004: 19). Confession and the ritual of the Eucharist became primary. Pope Innocent III (1160-1216), following the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (Canon 1), ended a point of controversy that had long plagued the Christian church. In brief, he formulated the idea of transubstantiation. The Eucharist had initially been a meal shared by the congregation together. This did not necessarily have to be performed by a member of the clergy, did not require special implements nor did it need a special place for the ritual. The new doctrine assigned a special sacredness to this ritual and suggested that the bread and wine became the actual flesh and blood of Christ. This had some important architectural implications that can be clearly seen in the evolution of church structure in Britain (Barnwell 2003: 41-59). A priest was now required to perform the ritual. The implements used in this ritual were considered to have touched the body of Christ and in and of themselves became holy (Barnwell 2003: 55-6). These ritual implements had to be separated from daily activities of the mundane sort. With the ritualizing of the Eucharist, and the moving of the altar from in front of the chancel arch in the nave into the chancel, this room becomes a sacred area containing the tools of the Eucharist (British examples are presented by Barnwell 2003: 46-7). New churches were built with the larger chancel, or existing churches had their east walls removed and extended or new chancels built (Rodwell 2012: 72-3; Barnwell 2004: 17-9).

The evolution of these structures through time can be seen in Fig. 69. This example is Raunds Furnells, Northamptonshire (information below from Barnwell 2004: 14). It shows the pattern of a one room structure being enlarged, and ultimately becoming a two-cell church. In the first phase (A) of the building (early 10th century) this is a simple one room structure. It has evidence of a screen that divides the church in two. And, continuing the methodology of handling space that originates with late antique basilicas, it likely had a non-structural seat (that would become a stone bench in later developments) behind the altar (Barnwell 2003: 46, 48, 53). In the second phase (mid-10th century) a second cell is added, and dedicated space is provided for the clergy (reflecting the separation of the clergy). The altar was located in the front of the chancel arch. By the third phase (late 11th century), the second cell has been significantly enlarged. Although this specific excavation does not provide direct evidence of this, other examples suggest that the eastern movement of the altar has terminated into this space. A fourth image (D) has been provided (this is St Mary's Church, Winchester). This similarly dated church provides an

example of an apsidal church, and also provided evidence of the altar in the chancel, thereby separating the ritual implements from the laity.

This ritual and architectural change is also witnessed in examples of the small churches in Ireland. There, as in England, is great variability in early church structures. Chancels in Ireland begin to be added to existing one room churches in ‘the decade or two either side of 1100’ (Ó Carragáin 2010:5). The liturgical changes regarding the Eucharist are the driving force for these changes (Ó Carragáin 2010:192-5). Fig. 70 shows a series of churches, constructed during a building boom in Glendalough, Co. Wicklow in 1096-1111 (Ó Carragáin 2010:193). Previous to this, these churches did not have chancels. Those earlier churches had chancels added to them. Any church built or rebuilt during this time (in Fig 131 this is demarcated as phase two), was designed with a chancel attached. Interestingly, these churches were located in areas that were Hiberno-Norse ports and maintained close links to Canterbury (Ó Carragáin 2010:193).

Britain and Ireland with their long history of Christianity can demonstrate this architectural evolution in church structure. Norway however converted to Christianity late and the religion was gaining acceptance just at the point where the chancels were being created consistently (early 12th century). Thus, the Norwegian churches were originally built with the chancels in place. It is possible that English priests brought over by the missionary kings for the top down conversion influenced or oversaw the creation of these churches. The Anglo-Saxon chancel arch can be seen in the stone versions of these structures in Norway. That would also explain the general similarity of Norwegian churches to their contemporaneous British version. Fig. 71 demonstrate the strong resemblance between the Norwegian timber and stone churches and the early British churches). However, as Fig. 72 demonstrates, churches of this style also exist in Germany, France, Ireland, and other parts of Scandinavia (Taylor VIII 2011: 1042-3; Ó Carragáin 2010:193). The lack of documentary information on the early Norwegian church prevents making definitive conclusions regarding this. But, as Fig. 73 demonstrates, these are very similar structures.

### *Conclusion:*

The two-cell church seen in Norway, in either timber or stone, is common in the region. It also has a long history and its evolution can be traced in other countries in the North Sea region. This

is the earliest style associated with stave churches both in their existing form, as well as the form of the archaeological remains. The two-cell layout is clearly an import into Norway and therefore does not provide evidence for a uniquely Norwegian architectural style, nor of a mirroring of a pre-Christian structure.

#### **4.3. *Basilica-Styled Churches***

...therefore was the temple broader in the higher parts: as so from the lower parts they went to the higher by the midst. *Ezekiel* 41:7

By the late 8th and 9th century, Carolingian influences were being felt in Anglo-Saxon architecture. The major import was the basilican form (Gittos 2013: 160-1; Barnwell 2003:53). This floorplan was a copy of a structure from late antiquity, applied to Christian ritual. Similar to that seen with the two-cell structures detailed above, one of the key themes is the division of space separating the congregation in the west, altar in the east, and the clergy beyond that (Barnwell: 2003: 53). An example of these influences in a large structure with side aisles is All Saints' Church in Brixworth, Northamptonshire. In a development that would ultimately be important for Norwegian church architecture, Canterbury Cathedral was rebuilt at this time, and in a style similar to Brixworth, (Gittos 2013: 164-5). Throughout the 9th century, large churches built by wealthy communities were employing either the basilican plan, or the cruciform plan.

It has been axiomatic that that early Mediterranean Christianity favoured basilica based structures, and northern Europe inclined toward simple one and two-cell structures. This is somewhat simplistic and it is more accurate to state that in areas without greater churches and their financial support (in Norway, Nidaros Cathedral and its predecessor was the first) the two-cell style was preferred. Norway, as in the rest of the North Sea area, the two-cell plan was common and used for small parish and local churches. With the advent of the archbishopric and Nidaros, the two-cell styled structures would often be replaced by basilica-styled aisled structures (Holan 1990: 107-11). This basilica-styled construction can be seen in the majority of remaining stave churches. In Fig. 74 I present the similarities between a stave church, Borgund, and a traditional basilica, St. Peter's in Rome. Both structures share:

- A rectangular shape

- Each has side aisles supported by columns.
- The interior columnar structure is similar.
- Both structures contain apses
- A high central area is common to both structures.

This style of stave church is clearly designed to be a timber version of a basilica. The form, however, is somewhat simplified. There are no transepts and of course the structural modifications initiated by later liturgical changes (related to the altar location, and chancel) are only visible in the latter structure. The 'raised central room' is also a feature of both structures.

Norwegian authorities have long questioned the origins of the raised central room (various theories are summarised in Fischer 1962: 87-8). It has even been suggested that this is an early Anglian innovation imported into Norway (Fisher 1962: 88). And indeed, the earliest versions of the high roofs similar to that seen in Norwegian timber churches appears in stone examples in England such as Escomb (Fig. 75). Borgund Stave Church is the earliest surviving church of this style and it contains suggestions as to the purpose of the central room. When entering the church, one walks forward and then walks into the higher central area. It drives the gaze upward. This has been attributed to a uniquely Norwegian design due to a lack of a predecessor in timber structures. This methodology though exists in stone Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals all over Europe, as well as the contemporaneous stone cathedral of Nidaros in Trondheim.

### ***Long-houses and Basilicas, a Building Tradition***

It has been suggested that the raised central room in stave churches, effectively a timber clerestory, is based on the basilica design. Norwegian researchers have puzzled over the question -- where did the carpenters learn how to build these structures? They note a lack of development and that there are no precursors to these structures in Norway (Ahrens 2001: 24-7; Norberg-Shultz 1996: 81; Bugge 1983: 5; Anker 1970: 380). This apparent lack of skills to build these high churches is only accurate if you ignore vernacular structures. The aisled basilicas share many construction methodologies similar to a common structure seen in earlier domestic and aristocratic settings. Before the medieval period, extending back to the Bronze Age, there was a building called a long-house (Fig. 76). This aisled structure would later evolve into both the timber and stone aristocratic hall and it relates to the later barns seen in rural Scandinavia to this day. Fig. 77 presents three buildings, spanning 1000 years that all possess similar

superstructures. Fig. 78 presents two well-known halls (Lejre and Borg) in comparison to Lund Cathedral. Similar to the basilica-style stave and stone churches, long-houses and halls employ regularly spaced columns to hold up a roof, and all have three bays. It has is known that a medieval tradition existed of building aisled vernacular structures in northern Europe (Horn 1958: 16). Norway is not alone in this, and there are numerous examples of three-aisled structures that can be seen throughout Europe ranging from medieval halls, guildhalls, and granges (Horn 1958). This type of structure can enclose a large open space below it, hence its widespread usage for public areas. In Norway, this tradition was easily adapted to the construction of three-aisled timber churches.

### ***External Ambulatories (svalgang)***

A unique feature associated with this style of stave church in Norway is an external ambulatory (Fig. 79). This is a feature not seen in any other contemporaneous churches in Scandinavia nor in medieval churches in any other region in Europe. In Norwegian this feature is termed a *svalgang*. This is usually translated and interpreted as a covered balcony or vestibule (as Haugen 1965: 411 does). I would though point out some important shades of meaning in Norwegian relevant to these studies. *Sval* means hall, but the term *gang* implies movement (the English word gait is cognate). This suggests a place for walking. *Gangdag* for example is the ecclesiastical term for a day of procession.

The external ambulatory in the Norwegian timber churches is a covered space that goes around the outside of the church. Often a window or door opens onto the walkway presumably allowing the viewing of the altar and the relics if the church had any (Fig. 80). The creation of these external ambulatories coincides perfectly with both the founding of the archbishopric in Norway and the spread of the Cult of the Saints in the region. Timber basilican churches built originally without ambulatories, such as Borgund and Urnes, were retrofitted with them in the early 1200s (details are provided in Appendix A).

The Norwegian cathedrals and basilica-styled stone churches are large structures and have processional ways similar to those seen in other parts of Europe. This poses two questions, obvious when looking at these structures. Why do basilica-styled stave churches have external ambulatories and the stone basilicas do not? I suggest part of the answer may lie in the simple

observation that stone churches are larger, and can house their congregations and have the room to allow internal processions. The timber churches are small structures (originally with no benches) and would need to accommodate processions without interfering with church services. This may also be the reason they were placed around the outside of the church. Rather than building a new, larger, church, it is easier to build an ambulatory as an external addition (Borgund provides an example of this).

Another visible difference between the stone and timber structures relates to crypts. Stave churches are above ground buildings with no structures beneath them. The floor of a stave church is above the ground (details on the floor plans can be seen in the Gazetteer). These structures do not have crypts, although they do occasionally have burials beneath the floors. Burials were performed by pulling up the floor boards. Although no study has been done on this, I can suggest a possible reason why this was done in this manner. As detailed above, these churches are often built on a chassis, and always placed on a stone foundation elevating the structure off the ground. This is done so that during inclement weather, the rain will run under the structure. Hence, unlike stone churches, which often have stone crypts and an underground super-structure to keep out water, the timber structures are lacking in this regard. Any crypt built out of wood underneath would be impractical because the moisture in the soil would cause the wood to rot.

### ***Timber Basilicas Outside of Norway***

Although Norway has the only standing versions of basilica-styled timber churches, there is strong evidence these existed in other parts of Scandinavia. Timber basilica structures, predating Norwegian ones, are known through archaeological and iconographic evidence. Fig. 81 presents an architectural reconstruction of the archaeological remains of St. Drotten in Lund, Sweden (at that time part of Denmark). This church had the tiered basilican shape complete with side aisles. This structure dates to c. 1060 and predates the earliest basilican Norwegian stave churches by about a century (Hauglid 1976: 166). I suggest that a graphic example of basilican style proving that this was also known in Sweden can be demonstrated in a 12th-century reliquary. The *Eriksbergsskrinet* originates from the Eriksberg church in Västergötland Sweden (Fig. 82). This reliquary is built in the form of a church. It demonstrates that the basilican style, with aisles and raised central room, was known in Sweden and contemporaneous with the early stave churches.

The reliquary also has dragon gables, a roof comb, and further dragon imagery in the feet of the shrine. Dragon imagery has historically been associated with Norwegian stave churches. There are no definitive iconographic images of timber basilican-styled churches outside of the Norse examples. There is though an iconographic image that implies their existence. Fig. 83 is a 13th-century stained-glass panel located in Chartres Cathedral, France (Miller 1996: 5). According to the dedication it was created by the master woodworker's guild. This panel (first noted by Hauglid 1977: 13, 111-2) illustrates a group of carpenters creating a timber church. I would point out several similarities to Norwegian stave churches visible in the imagery. An aisled structure and a raised central room is visible on a supporting stave superstructure. St Andrew's cross brackets (the 'X' at the second floor) long associated with Norwegian stave churches as well as carved capitals, reminiscent of what is seen in the church at Urnes, are also visible.

#### ***4.4. Equal-Arm Churches and the Norwegian Mid-Mast Church***

I have a differing opinion on the Equal-arm and Mid-mast churches and their origins than has been presented by previous researchers, but to elucidate this I need to present some background. In Norwegian technical literature, there is a stave church architectural style called the Mid-mast style. The field characteristic has been a central stave that supports a complex roof structure (Fig. 84). This has proven to be one of the most controversial stave church styles. There is about a century's worth of research on this topic (documented by Håkon Christie 1981: 139-251 with an extensive bibliography). If one accepts that architectural styles evolve from simple to elaborate, then it is a logical assumption that these are later structures. An equal-armed, four-cell structure, with a central mast supporting a network of roof braces, appears more advanced than a simple two-cell structure. For this reason, it was traditionally assumed to be a later construct. This was complicated by a perceived lack of precursors for this style. This issue became more complex when dendrochronological dating determined that this style was in fact one of the earliest (detailed below).

The origin of the mid-mast structure has historically been variously explained. The influence of the Roman basilica, necessitating the raised roof and its bracing has been suggested (Christie 1981; Bugge 1953). The mid-mast structure has been seen as necessary to support the weight of bells in a bell tower (Hauglid 1976: 416; Anker and Havran 2005: 29). Although some mid-mast churches do not have belfries and most churches that have bells do not have mid-masts. An

otherwise unknown ‘pagan temple’ style copied by the Christians has also been posited (Bjerknes 1948; Conant 1993: 83). The perceived design complexity of creating an equal-arm church with a mid-mast has been seen as a possible eastern influence into Norway (Bugge 1983: 85). Equal-arm churches of this time frame (12th century and earlier) were common in Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions and I detail below, a familiarity and acceptance of Orthodox traditions. Although a Byzantine influence on church architecture is possible, the explanation is not an ideal one. In the Greek Orthodox equal-arm church tradition, the other feature that identifies a church as Byzantine is the central dome, these are called ‘Cross Domed Churches’ (Krautheimer 1986: 285-300). Since the time of Justinian (6th century), the dome has been a characteristic feature of these churches, with the dome being symbolic of heaven (Krautheimer 1986: 201-3, 300). In timber structures, the apogee of this tradition can be seen in the later Russian domed churches (Brumfield 2004: 2). In Norway, domes are not used as an architectural tradition.

I have a different approach to this form. The mid-mast is not unique to Norway and although rare, there are parallels in other building traditions (Fig. 85). The supporting post has design and structural similarities to a common timber roof form called (using English terminology) a crown post. This is one of the most common roof braces seen in the medieval period in England (Barnwell and Adams 1994: 51-3). If the crown post is extended to the floor as a column, this is identical to the traditional mid-mast seen in Norway (Fig. 86). By deemphasizing the mid-mast as a field characteristic of this type of church, and instead interpreting it as a construction device for roof support, a number of important points present themselves.

There are currently four stave churches containing mid-masts. They are Reinli, Høyjord, Nore and Uvdal Stave Churches. Two of these churches have qualities that disallow them from this study. Reinli is occasionally called a mid-mast church based on a strict definition of mid-mast. In its current form it resembles similar contemporary stone structures that are of a style called the ‘Long-church’. These are churches where the nave and chancel are of similar style and size. The perception when going inside is akin to looking down a long, wide hallway. There is evidence of a ‘suspended’ mast, meaning a non-weight bearing mid-mast attached to the roof brackets. It does not come down to the floor (Hauglid 1976: 360-2). Similar to a crown post, this appears to have been a way to provide extra roof support. Høyjord has a true mast in its centre. This was



added during one of its earlier restorations (Anker and Havran 2005: 212). There is no evidence of the roof beams required to anchor a mast. As such, this mast appears a later, likely aesthetic, addition.

The two remaining churches are Nore and the Uvdal Stave Churches (Fig. 87). Both are medieval, and their geographical and chronological proximity suggests a regionalism. These structures are unique, not only because they have a mid-mast structure, but both were originally designed on equal-arm, Greek-Cross plan. The Norwegian equal-arm medieval tradition is exclusive to these two stave churches. Only two medieval stone churches, Nidaros and Ringsake church, have transepts and they follow the more traditional Latin-Cross design (see Appendix B for stone church plans). Although Uvdal was originally built as an equal-arm church, Nore was not. The wall plates and manner in which the mid-mast was constructed though demonstrate that the Nore church was initially designed as an equal-arm church (Anker and Havran 2005: 196). The church has a secure dating based on dendrochronology from a felling date of winter 1166-1167 (Christie, Storsletten, and Thun 1999: 147). Paradoxically, the arms were built as late as the 1400s (this is based on the use of intermediate staves, and dendrochronological dating, Anker and Havran 2005: 196).

The cross-shaped design of Equal-arm churches is ancient and appears to be based on an interpretation of biblical quotes as well as the obvious cross symbolism. The Book of Revelations stresses that the future City of God (called New Jerusalem) is geographically laid out ‘in a four square: and the length thereof is as great as the breadth’ (*Revelations* 21:16), the four sides representing the four cardinal directions. *Ezekiel*: 40-48 also describes four sides laid out geometrically. The *Book of Enoch*: 33-35 speaks of the gates of heaven reaching out in the cardinal directions. Equal-arm churches have been a feature common in Christianity since the 5th century (Conant 1993: 39). The pattern of using equal-arms is ancient and geographically diverse. This tradition appears cyclically in church buildings even today.

While an indirect architectural influence from Orthodox tradition remains a possibility, there are several more likely direct sources. Equal-arm churches predating the Norwegian examples can be seen in Austria (Fig. 89) and at Potterne, England, (Fig. 89). These examples demonstrate that this style was known regionally, and in the correct time frame. However, in researching stone

churches in Denmark, I discovered an almost identical match for these Norwegian churches in a well-known structure in Denmark. Church of Our Lady in Kalundborg, Denmark was begun in c. 1170 (Donnelly 1992: 51). It is one of the last Romanesque structures built in Scandinavia. After its completion, everything would be constructed using a Gothic style. Church of Our Lady is contemporaneous with many of the earliest stave churches and considered by Danish historians one of the most important contributions to architecture by Denmark (Donnelly 1992: 51-3). As Fig. 90 demonstrates, when the floor plan of Kalundborg and Nore are compared it will be noted that with the exception of scale, and the central supporting mast, they are almost identical. Hence, this style is at the least sourcing from known and recognized Christian architectural tradition, or more directly, these structures appear to be copying Kalundborg.

#### ***4.5. Conclusion***

One of the core theorems in the idea of Norwegian stave churches regards their uniqueness. The evidence presented above suggests that the purported ‘uniqueness’ of the Norwegian stave churches cannot be maintained. These churches display decorative influences from all over the North Sea region, but especially from Britain. Architecturally, it has been demonstrated that no matter which style of Norwegian stave church is examined, their form and layout follow a pattern dictated by Christian norms. These norms source from Roman predecessors, up through Europe and Britain then into Norway. It is the survival of these structures, not a novel style, form, or decoration that creates this impression of uniqueness.

#### ***4.6. Stone Churches***

The construction of timber churches precedes the creation of stone churches. In that this thesis is concerned with comparing contemporaneous churches (all of them are timber structures) to pre-Christian structures (which are similarly all timber buildings) I do not present a detailed study of Norwegian stone churches here, except where details are relevant to stave churches. In the middle of the stave church era, Norway was building churches in timber, as well as stone. Borgund Stave Church (c. 1180) was built at the same time as Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim (c. 1153-1183, Nidaros 1997: 14-5). The survival rate of stone churches from this era is far greater than timber ones. Twenty-five medieval timber structures (excluding the three Møre churches) survive compared with about 300 medieval stone ones (Ekroll, Stige and Havran, 2000:17).

There are several complications that are brought up when examining the stone churches. Timber and stone churches are often examined as different topics in the scholarly literature (for example Anker and Havran 2005, and Ekroll, Stige and Havran 2000). This reinforces a biased view that stresses the differences of stone and wood structures, over their similarities. Although made of different materials, they share many structural and stylistic features. Visually the stone churches resemble churches seen in other parts of northern and western Europe (detailed below). Although some of the Norwegian timber churches appear to be different, this is likely due to the lack of surviving timber churches outside of Norway for comparative purposes.

Another problematic issue regards chronology, many stone churches have only approximate dates. Some structures have early documentation (in the documentation, such as seen in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, these are often labelled 'church diplomas'). Several churches possess dendrochronological dates. The usual schemes for dating structures via dendrochronological dates (often via rafters) has proven problematic, in that roofs are often replaced on these structures; often several times over the centuries.

Another issue involves Norway specifically. Denmark has long examined their churches archaeologically. By 1966, Olson had examined the excavations of over 1000 churches to reach his conclusions (Olsen 1966: 236-75, 277-88). Sweden comes in a close second. An ongoing research program has analysed this topic and created a database of church analysis (the *Sveriges Kyrkors projekt Medeltida träkyrkor* database). Norway has not examined these stone churches with the depth that the other countries have. The Norwegian results have either been geared toward the well-known structures (such as the Fischer 1965 analysis of Nidaros cathedral) or been regional studies involving a handful of churches. There is no countrywide examination of these medieval structures, in the same way as that seen in Denmark or Sweden. In Norway, the stave churches, with their nationalistic import, have been better documented and researched. The most comprehensive modern Norwegian overview covers only 40 churches (Ekroll, Stige and Havran 2000, examined below).

Olson in his examination of stone churches in Scandinavia noted a pattern in their construction. He noticed that two timber churches, usually in the two-cell design, were constructed before being replaced with a Romanesque stone structure (Olsen 1966: 286). This is clear in Denmark

and mainly in Sweden during the early medieval era, but Norway is not as clear on this point. Several stone church excavations (such as at Nidaros and St Marie's church, Oslo) suggest this approach is accurate but this is an area needing confirmation. The sample size of excavated stone churches is too small to make definitive conclusions.

What can be clearly seen in the Norwegian evidence is that wooden churches appear about a century or so before stone structures. The 11th century has wooden churches, and stone dates to the 12th century. This makes logical sense (detailed below) in that stone working was not a native tradition in Norway. Norway had a long history with working with wood, given their extensive forests. But, it did not have a stone working tradition. Stone was expensive, and local sources for it would have to be found. It would take time to train craftsman to work in stone (Blindheim 1966: 2-3). Stone carvings bear similarities to earlier timber ones, suggesting the wood carvers were doing the stone work as well (Blindheim 1966: 11). The most important ecclesiastical buildings, all early 12th century and coinciding with the founding of the archbishoprics, in Norway were built (or rebuilt) of stone (detailed below). However, none were built using native master builders.

Anglo-Norman building and decorative influences dominate in this period in wood and stone (Blindheim 1966: 5, 9, 12-13). With the well-attested religious and socio-political connections between Norway and the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Church, it is no surprise that architecture in Norway has clear parallels with that in Britain. It is not only the early kings with links to England, two of the earliest saints in the Norse world, 10th-century St Sunniva (patron saint of Bergen, buried in the Mariakirken) and Henrik, came from Britain (Dubois 2008a: 66). Norse historians have long studied the influence of the Anglo-Saxon Church on the conversion process. The classic work on this subject is *Den Angelsaksiske Kirkes Indflydelse paa den Norske* [The Anglo-Saxon Church's influence on the Norse], from Taranger (1890). In 2000 an analysis was done on the oldest stone churches in Norway. The ground plans of 40 medieval churches were presented (Ekroll, Stige and Havran 2000: 265-70; see Appendix B).

These churches share extensive architectural similarities to Anglo-Saxon structures (like them, most are two-cell constructions). These are so similar that I have taken the standard Anglo-Saxon

church typology (from Taylor and Taylor 2011: V3 971-3) and overlaid this onto the Norwegian stone churches.

Stone Church	Taylor Classification
Alstadhaug kirke	2CLa
Bø gamle kirke	2CLa
Hedrum kirke	2CLa
Kviteseid gamle kirke	2CLa
Rygge kirke	2CLa
Alstahaug kirke	2CLs
Aurland kirke	2CLs
Avaldsnes kirke	2CLs
Byneset kirke	2CLs
Dale kirke	2CLs
Kinsarvik kirke	2CLs
Moster gamle kirke	2CLs
Nes kirke	2CLs
Skaun kirke	2CLs
Stiklestad kirke	2CLs

Stone Church	Taylor Classification
Tanum kirke	2CLs
Tingelstad gamle kirke	2CLs
Tingvoll kirke	2CLs
Vestre Slidre kirke	2CLs
Fjære kirke	2ILa
Giske kirke	2ILs
Mære kirke	2ILs
Talgje kirke	p2CLa
Kvinnherad kirke	p2CLs
Sørbø kirke	p2CLs
Hove kirke	t2CLa
Enebakk kirke	t2CLs
Hustad Kirke	t2CLs
Værnes kirke	t2CLs

Legend:

2CL: Two cell linear (nave and chancel, with chancel arch)

2IL: Two cell integrated linear (two connected rooms, no chancel arch)

p: porch

t: tower

a: apse

s: square (referring to the chancel)

**Table 10. Norwegian Medieval Stone Churches typed using the Taylor classification system for Anglo-Saxon churches (typology source: Taylor and Taylor 2011: V3 971-3).**

As the table and decorative evidence suggest, post-conquest influences are well represented. Confirming earlier Anglo-Saxon missionary activity in Norway has proven difficult in that

historical documentation is lacking. The best evidence for a long standing Anglo-Saxon influence is in the churches themselves (Fig. 103).

For the sake of simplicity in the analysis, Norwegian stone constructions can be divided into two different types. The smaller two-cell churches and the larger cult centres and cathedrals.

*Parish or 'Rustic' Churches:*

Small two-cell stone churches can be found all over Norway. These are similar to the 'parish' churches found in the UK. However, since the organizational structure of the earliest Norwegian church is unclear, architectural historians avoid the term 'parish' and employ 'rustic' instead (as Conant does, 1993:438). They are stone two-cell constructions, usually with a wooden roof. The chancel contains a chancel arch, identical to what is often seen in Anglo-Saxon churches (Conant 1993:438). Conant contrasts the stave church design, which strives for height (via the raised central room) with stone churches which demonstrate a 'strong horizontal movement' (Conant 1993: 438).

The archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates during the period of the Norwegian conversion the two-cell structures were common-place in France, Germany, and England (Taylor VIII 2011: 1042-3; Fig. 72 provides regional examples). It is the style commonly employed for small churches, private chapels and areas where a larger structure is neither needed nor financially supported. The Anglo-Saxon world of the 10th and 11th century was dominated by simple two-cell structured local churches, often built out of wood initially and rebuilt with stone (Gittos 2013: 179-81). This tradition continues into the 12th century, when the local parish churches are in the main the two-cell nave and chancel design (Barnwell 2004: 15-6, detailed below). The two-cell version of this structure seen in England has important implications for Norwegian churches. Fig. 73 demonstrates the strong resemblance between the Norwegian timber and stone churches and the early British churches (in this case the 8th century Church of St. John at Escomb, County Durham). Unlike the early Anglo-Saxon world which had several simple one-cell style structures through its history, the two-cell structure in the nave and chancel form is the common layout for small medieval churches in Norway. This reflects two important points. The Norwegian conversion is occurring after the ecclesiastical reforms ultimately codified in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (detailed in section 4.2) and the small village sizes seen in

Norway did not necessitate larger basilica-styled structures. The earliest wooden two-cell constructions in Norway predate the stone constructions (detailed in section 3.6).

### *Cult Centres and Cathedrals*

Although the smaller two-cell churches are a dominant architectural type throughout Norway, the large Romanesque basilica-styled structures exist in areas with an important cult centre (such as Nidaros which houses the relics of St Olaf) or in areas with large urban area where local wealth supported these large structures (the several stone churches in Bergen, eventually an important member of the Hanseatic League, being a prime example; Ekroll, Stige and Havran 2000: 116-8, 162-4, 166-8).

### *Norway's Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Connection in Stone*

The most important medieval stone structure was Nidaros Cathedral. It is one of the best documented and most studied Norwegian stone churches (Fig. 91). As the location of the burial site of St. Olaf, it acted as an important conduit for stylistic influences throughout the North Sea region (Blindheim 1966: 7-21; Bogdanski 2013: 79-80). It shows clear Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman architectural influences. Construction of Nidaros Cathedral, then known as Christ Church, is believed to have begun in the early 1030s. Although the chronology is poorly documented, saga evidence suggests the first timber two-cell church was built over the burial place of St. Olav (killed in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030). After his canonization, a stone church replaced the timber one c.1070-c.1090 (Nidaros 1997: 14-5). It was built in an Anglo-Saxon style, probably by English stonemasons (Fischer 1965: 23-42). It was the largest church in Norway. When Nidaros became a bishopric in 1152, a new wave of construction was initiated. This was mainly directed by Archbishop Øystein (Erlendsson). Øystein, like many ecclesiastics of his day had strong ties to England, and was educated in Paris (summarised from Nidaros 1997: 14-7). These connections to England were reinforced when he was forced into exile at Canterbury and Lincoln in 1180. Before his return to Norway, he also spent time in the Monastery of St Victor in Paris (Blindheim 1966: 55). Influences from all of these regions can be seen in Nidaros Cathedral. After his return to Norway in 1183 he began construction on the new cathedral.

The cathedral he built was an Anglo-Norman/Romanesque hybrid, built by stonemasons from Lincoln Cathedral (Nidaros 1997: 15). Although stating this somewhat simplistically, in that there is a mixture of styles, the Anglo-Norman cathedral is based on Lincoln Cathedral (Fischer 1965: 163-81), with the later Early Gothic Octagon and its decoration based on Canterbury (Fischer 1965: 129-34, Fig. 92). The octagon is widely believed to have been built by Anglo-Norman craftsmen from western France (Nidaros 1997: 26-7). Its dimensions are believed to have been copied from Southwell Minster (Fischer 1965: 96-7). The similarity of the interior of Nidaros and Lincoln Cathedral are documented in the architectural study of the cathedral in Fischer (1965). Fig. 93 demonstrates a side by side overview of the two cathedrals. The similarities extend to some unique decorative features seen in both cathedrals. Nidaros has an unusual pillar that has curved decorations that project from its sides. This is called the 'Lincoln Column'. The mate of that column is located in Lincoln, where it is called the 'Trondheim Column' (Fig. 94). Upon examination, I noticed that the Lincoln dragon head hood mould has a copy in an early 12th-century unfinished architectural remnant from Nidaros Cathedral (Fig. 95). A *sheela na gig*, the only example known in Norway, is also present on the church (Fig. 96). This carving appears to me to be in the Hereford style (Fig. 97). The Herefordshire School of stonemasonry is the name given to a theoretical group of English masons that carved in a unique Romanesque style (Thurlby 2004: 33-6). The connection of Hereford Cathedral, Kilpeck Church, and Lincoln Cathedral (and, therefore, possibly Nidaros) is well documented (Thurlby 2004: 6-8).

Trondheim's Nidaros Cathedral was not alone in this mixture of styles and stonemasons from England and France. This was common, notable examples are the 12th-century Bergen Cathedral (*Bergen domkirke*) and Stavanger Cathedral (Ekroll, Stige and Havran 2000: 116-9, 163-4). Stavanger Cathedral was built by Bishop Reinald (from Winchester) and consecrated to St Swithun, a Bishop of Winchester (Fischer 1964: 9). Stavanger Cathedral is effectively a Norwegian version of a large-aisled Anglo-Norman church and has a convoluted architectural past similar to Nidaros (Conant 1993: 437). Its earliest sections have Anglo-Norman capitals and influence (Fischer 1964: 20-7) and a double splayed window suggests a possible Anglo-Saxon or German influence (Fischer 1964: 28). Lombard influences can also be seen in some of its reliefs (Fischer 1964: 27).



## *Conclusion*

Several facts are clear from the evidence presented. Stone and wood structures both exist in Norway. Although the timber churches arrived first, structures in areas with more wealth available, such as important ports, were either initially built out of wood and replaced with stone, or built out of stone. In either case the most important point with these larger structures is that they were built by foreign workers, using building methodologies unknown in Norway at the time. The largest and most obvious foreign influence sourced from England.

### ***4.7. Russian Orthodox Churches and Eastern Traditions***

Although focusing extensively on Norwegian stave churches, it can be argued this ignores comparable and extensive timber churches in eastern Europe and Russia. The timber church tradition still exists in these countries. And, in traveling around in these areas, it is quite normal to come across older buildings in a decrepit state.

There is evidence that supports a possible eastern orthodox influence during both the Viking era, as well as the Early Medieval time frame. ‘Resurrection eggs’ (associated with the Eastern Church, see Fig. 98), and orthodox styled crosses have been found in eastern Sweden (Sanmark 2004: 76-8). Coin evidence (Arabic dirhams contain the year of minting on them) demonstrates that in the years *c.*890-*c.*950 there is extensive trade with the East (Skaare 1976: 49). Hoards of silver coins demonstrate significant trade routes and contacts between Byzantium, the Caliphate, the Baltic rim and the Carolingian Empire. From the middle of the 9th century, to the beginning of the creation of national currencies, the currency of the Viking world was an Arabic currency (Skaare 1976: 40, 49). This would change due to political considerations, from Arabic to German and Anglo-Saxon coinage in the 970s as the influence of Europe began to take hold (Skaare 1976: 111). These dates parallel the conversion of Christianity and the inclusion of Scandinavia into European influence.

There is also literary evidence, in the form of church laws that suggest a familiarity and acceptance of Orthodox Christian traditions. The *Grágás* [Ancient laws], *Konungsbók* (Section 6, Priests) lists a *c.* 12th-century Icelandic law that says ‘If bishops or priests come to this country...whether they are “Armenian” or Russian, it is lawful for people to hear their services if they wish’ (Dennis et al 1980: 38). The possibility of an eastern influence in church design

cannot be discounted. Eastern Orthodox influences, especially in Sweden, are often underestimated (Beskow 2003: 559-63). Even a modern glance at the oldest churches in Stockholm today demonstrate that this was not an entirely uni-directional movement of ideas. Onion domes are common on both modern and medieval Swedish churches. This is not though characteristic of Norwegian churches of any time period.

Similarities between Nordic architecture and eastern European/Russian architecture have long been recognized by scholars. This is not surprising, it is well known that Viking peoples colonised to the east as well as west; the Vikings founded a number of Russian cities (documented in the Russian Primary Chronicle, years 869x879, Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1973: 59-60; Hazzard Cross and Conant 1949: 3-5; Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1973: 111-5; Brumfield 2004: 9, 26-7). The Norwegian stave church researcher Lorentz Dietrichson compared Norwegian stave churches and Russian ones in his classic work (Dietrichson 1892: 102-19). The Russian scholar Vladimir Suslov similarly examined Norwegian stave churches in his classic work (Suslov 1888: 5-25). Both countries employed their structures as nationalistic symbols during the romantic era and do so to this day (detailed for Norway in section 2.5, detailed for Russia in Khodakovsky 2016: 27-40 ). As Fig. 99 demonstrates, there are superficial similarities in some of these structures throughout the region. There is no question the same Christian vocabulary is being employed. Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian sources have long spoken of a Slavic 'Trans-Carpathian' church style forming the basis for the various regional church styles. This consists of a traditional orthodox interior (the standard three sectional internal format consisting of a porch, the church, and the altar with the tiered iconostasis). The exterior of the structure was different depending on the style, and regional variations (Goberman 1970: 20-4). Nevertheless, caution must be applied with this definition. The variety of structures across a broad geographical region is dramatic, and this definition simplifies a complex history (a summary of architectural influences in Russia can be found in Brumfield 2004: 1-5).

Timber churches are often different in appearance and structure than their contemporaneous masonry structures and are usually categorized separately (the most recent attempt at a typology for Russian timber churches is Orfinskii and Grishina 2004). Although churches after the 14th century become typologically complicated, in the pre-Mongolian invasion era, they are stylistically much simpler (detailed below). Given those caveats however, the similarities are

clear. Fig 2 demonstrates a sampling of these structures in the region. The Polish example in Fig 3 has a similar profile to Norwegian stave churches, has the enrockment foundation associated with stave churches, as well as contains an external ambulatory (Russian *papert*) which is otherwise considered unique to Norwegian stave churches (Fig. 100). There are though also distinctive differences. The defining features of stave churches, such as the lace collar bracing, vertical stave construction in contrast to ‘log cabin’ or *blockbau* horizontal construction, are not evident in these eastern timber church traditions. Chronologically, these eastern European and Russian examples post-date Norwegian churches by several centuries. However, the source of these styles in the region does have churches from our target time frames. The medieval power player in the region which dominated church politics of the time, and thereby creates a geographical limit to our studies, was Kievan Russia.

The Norwegian stave churches provide an important chronological limit to this summary. Stave churches were only built between c.1130-1350 (the year of the Black Death in Norway). The ensuing population decimation dramatically altered wooden church construction and stave churches were no longer built (section 1.3). Eastern Europe and Russia has its own similar catastrophic chronology. Starting in 1220, and lasting through the rest of the 13th century, Genghis Khan and his descendants decimated the entire region. Although post conquest, the Khans treated the Orthodox religion well, the architectural result was a virtual cessation of church construction in Russia for more than a century (Craft Brumfield 2004: 62-3; Buxton 1981: 148-9). When construction recommenced, it concentrated on building monasteries (Khodakovsky 2016: 4-5).

Kievan Rus is the historical areas ruled by Kiev and Novgorod. This region today encompasses Ukraine, Belarus, as well as parts of Russia. The focus on Moscow as the political and cultural capital of Russia postdates our target time period. This region, with its well documented Viking influences provides the focal point for this period. The question to be addressed is, what is the relationship of the Norwegian stave churches to the Russian churches? Data can be interrogated from several sources for this area. There is archaeological evidence (detailed below), literary evidence (in the form of extensive chronicles, such as the 43 volume *PSRL*) and although just past our target date, graphic evidence in the form of churches, usually as painted background in icons (Khodakovsky 2016: 11-7, Fig. 101).

Similar to the issue seen in Norwegian churches, although the focus is on Russian wooden churches, this approach is somewhat artificial. Masonry churches in Russia form an ‘overwhelming majority’ of the medieval churches in Russia. The wooden churches examined below represent a minority of these structures. (Brumfield 2004: 10). Wooden secular structures are well documented with archaeological evidence for wooden structures in Novgorod and Kiev. These ruins, especially in Novgorod, are extensive, having been studied for decades and on public display (an extensive English summary of Novgorod is provided by Brisbane and Hather 2007, the results of extensive excavations by the Archaeological Research Centre of the Novgorod State Museum are available in Russian online<sup>3</sup> and an English listing of all extant standing pre-conquest structures is also available online.<sup>4</sup> The pre-Mongolian church evidence has two important issues that complicate these studies. The first is that Russian construction methodologies used horizontal logs. This technique (unlike their Norwegian counterparts, which used vertical staves that left postholes) leaves little in the way of residual evidence for walls. The second issue is that these early churches were built using the same construction techniques and floorplans of secular structures, meaning identifying a church is more complicated, relying predominantly on indirect evidence, such church related artefacts or burials (Khodakovsky 2016: 9-10).

Kievan Rus was the focus of missionaries from Byzantium beginning in the mid-9th century. This initial missionary attempt resulted in the creation of a Slavonic alphabet, as well as a translation of parts of the Bible (Ivanov 2009: 316, 320-8). Although this certainly provides a foundation for conversion, it was a political manoeuvre that created it (Brumfield 2004: 10). In 988 Vladimir the Great (958-1015) the ruler of the Kievan Rus, married Anna, the sister of the Byzantine emperor Basil II, and was baptized in the Orthodox tradition (Brumfield 2004: 10; detailed in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, year 988, Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1973: 111-15). This created an enduring religious and cultural bond with the eastern empire over the Latin one. One of the precepts mentioned in Vladimir’s baptism ritual was ‘Do not accept the

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<sup>3</sup> A database by the Archaeological Research Centre of the Novgorod State Museum is at: <http://arc.novgorod.ru/second.php3?content=server&menu=main> [Accessed 08 August 2014]

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_buildings\\_of\\_pre-Mongol\\_Rus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_buildings_of_pre-Mongol_Rus) [Accessed 01 August 2017]

teachings of the Latins, whose instruction is vicious.’ (Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1973: 115). The first major church construction was the masonry Church of the Tithe, also known as the Desyatinnaya, in Kiev (989x996). As Fig. 102 demonstrates, this church was clearly constructed using Orthodox plans and construction techniques (Cross and Conant 1949: 6-7). It is believed to have served as the prototype of the Russian masonry ‘cross-domed’ church (details from Brumfield 2004: 11). The first timber church recorded in the chronicles was St. Sophia’s Cathedral of Novgorod in the year 989. Confirming its architectural basis in Orthodox tradition, this structure is recorded in the chronicles to have 13 domes on it (PSRL 1879: 2; Khodakovsky 2016: 3-4). A second wooden church is detailed in the *Chronicle of Novgorod* under the year 1017 and 1037 (Michell and Forbes 1970: 2,3; although that dating is controversial, Brumfield 2004: 528). This was the first church of St Sophia in Kiev that would ultimately be torn down and rebuilt as a masonry structure by Vladimir’s son and successor Iaroslav the Wise (var. Yaroslav). In that a wooden mausoleum was built nearby with five cupolas, that church too was most likely built in Orthodox style (Brumfield 2004: 11, 27). These structures demonstrate the expansion of Byzantium’s influence in the north (Khodakovsky 2016: 4). The architectural vocabulary employed ‘reflected an attempt to assimilate the culture and spiritual ideals of Byzantine Orthodoxy’ (Brumfield 2004: 3), and not the Roman Catholic influence seen in stave and stone churches seen in Norway.

Timber churches in Russia have long been categorized into five types (Khodakovsky 2016: 51-2 provides a history of the typology, definitions below are from Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 251-4). Samples of plans are provided in Fig. 103.

*Klet*: an east-west oriented rectangular structure, with logs fitted into each other at the corner joints, the term means ‘cage’. This has its origins in secular structures (Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 16; Khodakovsky 2016: 52-9; Brumfield 2004: 501).

*Shater*: a square structure, usually with an octahedron tower and a pyramidal style roof. The term means tent and these are often translated into English as tent-roof. This has its origins in fortifications, mainly watch towers (Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 16; Khodakovsky 2016: 59-69). This style has many subgroups, several of which do not initially appear related (such as cruciform churches).

*Kub*: a tetrahedral roof on a rectangular base. It can be visualized as a large onion dome, on a pyramidal base (Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 252; Khodakovsky 2016: 76).

*Tiered*: A series of levels, each of a smaller design, to achieve height (Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 16; Khodakovsky 2016: 78-9).

*Many-domed*: although the use of domes are a feature from the earliest times, this most often refers to 17th century and later structures where the multiplicity of domes is a major feature of the structure (Khodakovsky 2016: 79-81).

The last three styles (*Kub*, *Tiered*, and *Many-domed*) appear far later than our target date, they date from the mid-17th century and later (Khodakovsky 2016: 76-8). It is also worth noting that as the styles evolved, these three simple general descriptions become mixed. Churches from this era are better served by the more complex typologies, such as presented by Дрґан (Dragan 2014) or Orfinskii and Grishina (2004).

The earliest of these structures is the *klet* and the *shater* church. Russia, following a pattern seen in Norway, Sweden and England, generally preserves its earliest churches in remote areas (Brumfield 1993: 2). As detailed above, the *klet* is based on secular structures, the *shater* on watch towers. These forms are ancient, and both can be seen in the earliest excavations in Novgorod (although not necessarily as sacred structures). Chronologically, it is these older structures that would be contemporaneous with Norwegian stave churches.

An example of these early structures can be seen in Russia's oldest standing church. The Church of the Resurrection of Lazarus is currently located at the skansen at Kizhi Island, in Lake Onega in the Republic of Karelia, Russia (Fig. 104). This small church was originally at Muromsky Monastery and moved to this location in 1960. It is believed to have been built in the late 14th century. Local legend suggests it was built by Lazar Muromskii in 1352 and the architectural style supports this dating (Khodakovsky 2016: 52-3; Opolovnikov and Opolovnikova 1989: 162-5).

#### *Conclusion:*

Although the earliest Kievan Rus churches are in the appropriate time frame for this study, there are several reasons to exclude them. While a Christian architectural language and background is

utilized, there are distinctive differences in these structures. An Eastern Orthodox blueprint is being followed. There are onion domes and horizontal *blockbau* construction. Several defining characteristics of Norwegian stave churches (vertical stave construction, *kniplingskrave*, quadrant brackets) are not extant in their Russian counterparts. These earliest timber structures (the *klet* and *shater*) do not resemble the Norwegian stave churches. Even the later structures bare only a superficial resemblance to the stave churches (comparison on Fig. 105).

Whereas examples of orthodox architectural influence are absent from Norway, the same cannot be said in Sweden. There, onion domes betray an eastern influence not generally seen in Norway. Although not relevant for studies on Norwegian stave churches, stylistic borrowing in either direction is certainly an important line of enquiry for future study. The Russian and eastern European churches resembling stave churches are long past the era that stave churches were being built. But, a later stylistic influence (perhaps from Sweden) can certainly not be excluded. These eastern European and Russian churches were built in the era of heightened political and cultural contact between Scandinavia, eastern Europe, and Russia that is seen in the mid-16th century.

## **Chapter 5: Pagan Cult Structures: The Written and Archaeological Evidence**

This chapter provides a short overview of the pre-Christian Nordic world and the written, linguistic and archaeological evidence for cultic structures. Until the work of Olsen (1966, detailed below), it was generally assumed that stave churches evolved in form from pre-Christian structures. In order to critically evaluate these assumptions, it is necessary to review the varied evidence for pre-Christian cultic structures. Literary evidence is scattered in the surviving texts of later centuries. These texts range from near contemporaneous historical documents from the time of Charlemagne, to saga and eddic material from the first two centuries post-conversion. These documents are widely acknowledged as difficult and complex source materials. The majority originate during a cultural transition from a pre-Christian oral tradition to a literary tradition recorded by Christian intellectuals. These works exhibit viewpoints and prejudices reflective of that Christian intellectual perspective. Identifying the veracity of pre-Christian details is, therefore, both important and challenging.

### ***5.1. Pre-Christian Cult-houses and Their Influences***

Most early researchers, and a number of modern ones, assumed that stave churches were either built from pre-Christian structures, or strongly influenced by them (Dietrichson 1888; Schirmer 1910: 97-140 with bibliography; Strzygowski 1920, 1928 the latter provides an English synopsis; Bjerknes 1948; Bugge 1983: 9; Conant 1993: 83). Two things occurred simultaneously in the mid-20th century that brought this viewpoint into doubt. Despite extensive excavations there was a lack of confirmable pre-Christian cultic sites found in Scandinavia, and the questionable historical nature of Saga literature was being recognized (detailed below). The belief in the veracity of pre-Christian literary references received its death knell from the influential work of Olsen (1966). Olsen argued that the ‘temples’ mentioned in Old Norse/Icelandic sources were motifs introduced in these later accounts and were strongly influenced by Christian ideas (Olsen 1966: 82). He then examined the archaeological remains of about 1000 churches largely in Denmark (with several in Norway and Sweden) and concluded there was no evidence for any preceding structural remains that could be interpreted as dedicated Norse pagan ‘temples’ (Olsen 1966: 280-2). This served to reinforce the prevalent scholarly view that the pre-Christian Norse



practised their cultic rituals outdoors. This simplistic, and one could argue colonial, view was ultimately based on various interpretations of ancient authors, mainly the writings of Tacitus (Tac. Ger. 9.2) on Germanic populations living beyond the Roman frontier (Slupecki 2009: 24; Petts 2011: 74-7).

Archaeological remonstrance arrived almost immediately. One year later in 1967, definitive remains of a pre-Christian cultic structure were discovered under a church in Mære, Norway (Lidén 1969). Since that time more evidence of pre-Christian cult-houses and practises have been coming to light (Gräslund 2008: 250; Sundqvist 2015: 97-8). This evidence, in addition to a modern more nuanced view of saga sources, corroborates the literary and linguistic evidence suggesting the reality of pre-Christian cult-houses, albeit not necessarily functioning as a dedicated temple site, as seen in Christian or classical ideals.

The early medieval period in Scandinavia, pre-11th century, is poorly documented (Brink 2012a: 622; Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 1-5). Literary evidence is confined to information gleaned from numismatic evidence and runic inscriptions. The runic evidence is mainly found on Christian rune stones and presents problems of its own including the varied reasons why such stones were erected, and questions of interpretation (Gräslund and Lager 2012: 634-7; Sawyer 2000: 16-23; Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 3, 10-6). This contrasts with other parts of Europe, where literary documentation is by comparison, extensive and survives from earlier centuries. The earliest original Norse document is a Danish grant of AD 1085 which exists only in a copy (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 1). The ravages of repeated military interventions have played the largest role in the destruction of written documentation (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 2-3). Fires at important libraries have been a constant in the Norse world; what fires and war could not destroy, the Reformation did. Parchment reuse has also been a factor, although paradoxically, these palimpsests preserved parts of texts hinting at what has been lost (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 1-3).

The earliest sources regarding Norse pre-Christian cultic traditions derive from outside Scandinavia. The 9th-century conquest of the Saxons by the Carolingians made the Danes their neighbours. Various chronicles provide some information on this early period. The *Vita Anskarii* and the **OE** insertions into Alfred's insertions into *Orosius* (all detailed below) provide the only

direct information that exists on Scandinavia in the late 9th century (Sawyer and Sawyer, 1993: 3-5). A century later, Widukind's (var. Widukund) *Deeds of the Saxons* (Book 3, section 65) provides some information regarding the Danes, mainly about Harald Bluetooth (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 4). This is followed by Adam of Bremen (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 4, information is detailed below).

It is only at the end of the 12th century that more documentation becomes available. This is often in the form of ecclesiastical documents. This literature reflects the creation of an educated clerical aristocracy in Scandinavia in the 12th century (Bagge 2008: 737). The clergy considered itself a part of the 'international educated elite' (Bagge 2008: 738). The church was the source for education, and the promulgation of numerous early translations from Latin into the vernacular demonstrates this (Clunies Ross 2005:142-5)

The mid-13th century by contrast produced a wealth of literature that mainly derives from and survives in Iceland (Clunies Ross 2005: 206-7). This takes the form of sagas, legal, and ecclesiastical literature, comprising a history recorded by the Christian elite who could afford and had a motivation, to write these works (Clunies Ross 2005: 207-19). This resulted in a bias discernible even in modern research. There is a tendency to consider Latin Christian works as more accurate and 'historical' than their vernacular counterparts. Slupecki notes that Olsen's (1966) seminal work on pre-Christian cultic structures demonstrates this slant. His chapter heading on Icelandic 'literature' is titled *Om benyttelsen af de norrøne kilder* or 'Norse sources'; and his chapter on Latin sources is called *Kultbygningen I de historiske kilder*, or 'Historic sources' (Slupecki 2009: 25-6).

### ***From Oral to Literary Traditions***

The surviving literature from the pre-Christian north sourced from ancient and long held oral traditions of remembering and verbally transmitting information over generations (Clunies Ross 2005: 69-70, also further detailed below). This narrative tradition consisted of culturally important data such as the deeds of heroes, mythological and quasi-historical information. This is in contrast to the Latin European tradition. Here the written form had a significant and long history reaching back to classical times.

Oral epic song is defined as ‘narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations by singers of tales...it consists of the building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes’ (Mitchell, Nagy and Lord 2000: 4). It has been argued that Old Norse/Icelandic literature was initially transmitted in this fashion (an overview of current research is provided by Mitchell 2001: 168-202). Two important points from the research of oral traditions relate to the accuracy of the Old Norse and Icelandic tradition: First, the singer changes the poem slightly and it is never sung the same way twice. The singer must contend with audiences coming and going, the intent of the audience, the mood of the singer, etc. (Mitchell, Nagy and Lord 2000: 14). It is the audience that usually determines the added details and the length of the narrative. Second, there is no concept of a ‘fixed’ song. The major plotlines and well known factual information remain the same. These are used mnemonically as a pattern (Mitchell, Nagy and Lord 2000: 4-5). An example of these processes can be identified in the Norse literature in relation to dynastic history of the Skjöldung dynasty at Lejre, Denmark. There is evidence that parts of this may record historical events. Hygelac is recorded historically and, according to Gregory of Tours, dies in c. AD 525 (Shippey 2007: 471-2). This dynastic plotline, or parts of it, is referenced in works as diverse as: the controversially dated 8 to 10th-century Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* (dating issues summarized in Liuzza 2000: 281-302), the late 12th-century *The Lejre Chronicle* (Newland, 2007A: 311), Snorri Sturluson’s (c. 1179-1241) *Grottasöngur* (*Skáldskaparmál* 43; Faulkes, 1998: 51-58), the 12th-century *Skjöldunga Saga* (Newlands and Osborn 2007: 333) and Saxo’s 1190x1208 *Gesta Danorum* (Friis-Jensen and Karsten 2005: 58). Niles analyses these documents and determines that in basic outline these stories agree with each other (Niles 2007A: 255-65). Certainly, specific details in these works are different and occasionally contradict each other. If these are sourced from each other, or from a single written source, more similarity would be expected. Differences in detail, but similarity in plot is precisely what is expected of an oral narrative ultimately transmitted to a written medium. The setting down of this narrative tradition occurs in the 12th century (Clunies Ross 2005: 69).

Written literature is amenable to research that oral literature is not. A pertinent issue for textual research is the concept of a ‘source’ text. This is the earliest version, often traced through various recensions. Unlike the mutability of oral traditions, source comparison can be utilized to determine the reliability of historical documents as witness to the events they describe. Saxo

provides an example of an unquestionable source document. A fragment of the *Gesta Danorum* is in his own hand (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: V1 lii-liii). The norm though is that texts are copied and recopied with errors and scribal changes. The mutability of these texts (especially in regard to the earlier *vitae*) was even noted by those who wrote them.<sup>5</sup>

The theme of a strict dualist approach to oral versus written in Old Norse and Icelandic literature has a long history. Arguably the purpose of the *First Grammatical Treatise* (written 1125x1175, Clunies Ross 2005:152) was to create a written language to record oral information (*First Grammatical Treatise*, Section 84<sup>6</sup>). Historically Icelandic literary analysis split into two groups, Freeprose (mainly folklorists) and Bookprose (mainly literary historians, Sigurðsson 2004: xiii). The former saw the sagas strictly as oral works that were written down, and the later saw the sagas as works of historical fiction. Although these views still have adherents on each side, the argument is now rather threadbare. Sigurðsson, in his examination of the results of centuries of analysis states ‘the debate about oral tradition and the Icelandic sagas under the opposing labels of ‘freeprose’ and ‘bookprose’ came to a dead-end since the methods and ideas available proved unable to shed new light on the problem.’ (Sigurðsson 2004: 115). Examining this literature with a binary approach of Oral or Written literature does not fully explain the facts, and a more nuanced approach is necessary. There is evidence of Oral works being recorded, but as detailed below, there is evidence of literature influencing these works. These Old Norse/Icelandic and Latin sources provide several avenues for extrapolating data regarding cult-houses, as well as cult information in general. In addition to employing this directly, but cautiously, as descriptive documentary evidence, there is a variety of additional evidence that can be culled for cult data. This includes information from linguistic evidence in the form of terminology used to describe these sites as well as toponymical evidence.

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<sup>5</sup> I beseech any who wish to copy these books, nay rather I call on them in the name of Christ, the judge of the ages, that when the copying has been done with care, they should then diligently compare what they have written with the exemplar and correct it, and they should add this injunction here at the end of what they have written. Adomnán of Iona, *Vita of St Columba* 3.23, 136a (Sharpe 1995: 233-4)

<sup>6</sup> ... to write and read....both laws and genealogies, or exegetical writings, as well as ... erudite lore... (Benediktsson 1972: 208). The ON text is available online at: < <http://etext.old.no/gramm/>> [Accessed 15 August 2017]

## 5.2. A Critical Review of the Source Documents

In advance of the direct examination of literary evidence for cult-houses, the major source documents are detailed below, and an overview of their problematic nature is provided. The all-important question that must be resolved is, how trustworthy is this literature for factual information. In the culture war between the Christian and pre-Christian world views, it was the victors that recorded the histories and authored almost all of its documentation. Although this resulted in a biased and sometimes hostile set of documentary accounts, methodologies exist to mitigate this bias (Howell and Prevenier 2001: 43-87). Determining the writer's motivation and agenda are a necessary part of source analysis. There are many sources for cultic references (many are detailed in the section: Source Quotes). However, the principal sources generally consulted and used in this thesis are:

[1] *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, by Adam Bremensis ([*History of the Archbishops of Hamburg by Adam of Bremen*). Little is known of the life Adam of Bremen (1050?-1081 Tschan 2002: xvi) other than the statements in his own works. The *Gesta* suggests he came from Saxony (Tschan 2002: xxv), and his title 'Magister' implies he finished higher education. He joined the Church of Bremen at the invitation of Adalbert of Hamburg, and became the director of the cathedral school (Tschan 2002: xxv-xxvi).

Adam's work *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (hereafter GHEP) was written 1072x1085 (Tschan, 2002: xvii-xxviii) and he continually added notes to it as he gained more information. This work is first and foremost the work of a medieval church historian writing a *Gesta Episcoporum* (Deeds of the Bishops, Tschan 2002: page xi) — it was not intended to be an ethnography. However, he provides a contemporaneous account of pre-Christian structures and ritual activity from Gamla Uppsala (Uppsala, Sweden).

In order to understand Adam's motivation in writing this work, it is necessary to understand the history that surrounds it. The bishopric of Hamburg, unlike other early bishoprics, was not an ancient one. It was founded during Charlemagne's reign with the cathedral being consecrated in c. AD 789, becoming a bishopric under Louis the Pious (Charlemagne's son). The earliest attempts by missionaries to convert the Nordic peoples had been unsuccessful. This failure would cause political issues and result in Hamburg and Bremen being united, this being

confirmed by Pope Nicholas 1 in AD 864 (summary above from Tschan 2002: xiii). By Adam's time the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen claimed exclusive rights for converting those in Scandinavia (VA XXIII, Robinson 1921: 77-88). This created conflict with the Norse rulers who perceived this as a threat to their royal power. Adam witnessed and chronicled the height of power of the Hamburg-Bremen bishopric and would ultimately witness its decline (Tschan 2002: xiii–xv). The political spin presenting the bishopric in the best possible light is obvious in the work. The pro-Christian, anti-pagan polemic was employed to demonstrate the moral superiority of the church over the pagans. It should be noted that the purported superiority of Hamburg-Bremen was done at the expense of the influence of the Anglo-Saxon church. Evidence for early incursions into Scandinavia are extensive (in the form of architecture, traditions, and inscribed rune stones). There is however a lack of written documentation of these early incursions (Sanmark 2004: 75-6). Ultimately, the responsibilities for converting the north would be passed to a new archbishopric in Lund (detailed in section 1.1.3).

GHEP, Book Four, section 26-31 (Schmeidler 1917: 257-63; Tschan 2002: 207-10) details the only contemporaneous description of a pre-Christian 'temple' (employing the Latin '*Templum*' , OE glosses in this time frame were similarly using the term 'temple', this is detailed below). His account is lively and appears factual. He states one of his sources is the Danish King, Svein Estridsson, who ruled c. 1047-1074 (Sveinn Ástriðarson, GHEP, Book 2, section xxxviii, Tschan 2002: 80). His work was taken as factual for almost 900 years (an overview of historicity controversy is Sundqvist 2015: 113-5). It remains one of the few detailed sources on cult structures, but executed from a Christian perspective by an author who never visited Sweden, and at best was working from second or third-hand information. There are factual errata with this account.

In brief (this is detailed more extensively below in the section on Gamla Uppsala), he describes the 'temple', as 'decked out in gold' (GHEP, Book 4, section 26, Tschan 2002: 207) with 'a gold chain...hangs over the gables' (GHEP, Scholia 139, Tschan 2002: 207). Everyone from Sweden was required to visit this temple (GHEP Book four, section xxvii). There are points of contention with several elements in this description. Temples covered with gold are unknown in the Norse tradition. They do feature, however, in a tradition Adam would have known well, the Hebraic tradition. Solomon's Temple is similarly described in *Chronicles* as extensive, large and covered

in gold (1 *Chronicles* 29:4 DRB, Q:6; 2 *Chronicles* 3:4-5, 7-9 DRB, Q:7, Q:8). Additionally, in regard to the sacrifices performed at Uppsala, I suggest Adam is plagiarizing a similar account (it agrees in both details, as well as the detail order), written 64 years earlier, by Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg about Lejre in Denmark.

[Adam of Bremen] It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all of the provinces of Sweden. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted. Kings and people all and singly send their gifts to Uppsala... The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male, they offer nine heads, with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort. Feasts and sacrifices of this kind are solemnized for nine days. On each day they offer a man along with other living beings in such a number that in the course of nine days they will have made offerings of seventy-two creatures. This sacrifice takes place about the time of the vernal equinox. GHEP Book 4 xxvii (Tschan 2002: 207-8).

[Thietmar of Merseburg] In those parts, the centre of the kingdom is a place called Lejre [Ledurun]....Every nine years, in the month of January... they all convene here and offer their gods a burnt offering of ninety-nine human beings and as many horses, along with dogs and cocks –the latter being used in place of hawk. Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg. Chronicon Book 1, Chapter 17 (Osborn 2007:299).

This makes it clear that Adam's account, seemingly trustworthy at face value, is not as dependable as it initially appears

*Manuscript Tradition:* The GHEP manuscripts have a complicated history (there are about 141 manuscripts believed to preserve some of Adam's work, Tschan 2002 xviii). Originally there were three versions of the manuscript created by Adam. These consisted of: a preliminary text, a second text submitted to the Bishop, and a third with the addition of scholia (stemma and variants available at Schmeidler 1917: VII- LXVII). The manuscript that contained the complete edition of the *gesta* (the Copenhagen 'Codex Z' or Sorö manuscript from 1161 or 1162) was destroyed in the fire in Copenhagen in 1728 (Tschan 2002: xxix). Luckily, it had been copied and serves as the base for the critical edition by Schmeidler (1917).

The most complete manuscript, containing the preliminary text only and not the added scholia, currently extant is the National Library of Vienna codex 521. It is available online.<sup>7</sup> It dates to the first half of the 13th century. The most complete manuscript version with the scholia, although the last part is missing, is the Copenhagen Royal Library, Old Royal Collection, No. 2296 quarto (dating to c. 1200x1225)<sup>8</sup>. Several fragments of other manuscripts, important for variant scholia can be viewed on the Royal Danish Library site.<sup>9</sup> The critical edition (including stemma) is: Schmeidler, Bernhard (ed.) 1917. *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi 2: Adam von Bremen, Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*. Hannover und Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung. The standard English translation is: Tschan, Francis J. 1959 (with numerous reprints). *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen: Adam of Bremen*. New York: Colombia University, the edition of 2002 is the most recent version with a new introduction and different pagination.

[2] **The Prose Edda** and the *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson. Snorri (c. 1178-1241) is the most prolific single source regarding both Norse mythology and pre-Christian cultic structure references. Snorri was a powerful Icelandic chieftain, influential law speaker, and notorious for being ruthless to his enemies (Faulkes 2002: xii). He would travel to Norway twice to curry favour from the king (Faulkes 2002: xii). His political motivations are clearly evident throughout his works. His most important quotes relating to the early mythological cycle (concerning Odin and Frey) occur in the *Saga of the Ynglings* (Source Quotes: Quotes from Snorri). The Norwegian Royal family claimed descent from the Ynglings (Q:47). Snorri's *Edda* similarly links the Norse gods, as well as Norse peoples and the Norwegian/Danish royal families and traces them through biblical creation, to Troy, and ultimately into Scandinavia.

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<sup>7</sup>Available online at

<[http://archiv.onb.ac.at:1801/view/action/nmets.do?DOCCHOICE=3306952.xml&dvs=1485968047793~486&locale=en\\_US&search\\_terms=&adjacency=&VIEWER\\_URL=/view/action/nmets.do?&DELIVERY\\_RULE\\_ID=1&divType=&usePid1=true&usePid2=true](http://archiv.onb.ac.at:1801/view/action/nmets.do?DOCCHOICE=3306952.xml&dvs=1485968047793~486&locale=en_US&search_terms=&adjacency=&VIEWER_URL=/view/action/nmets.do?&DELIVERY_RULE_ID=1&divType=&usePid1=true&usePid2=true)> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

<sup>8</sup> Available online at <<http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/378/>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

<sup>9</sup> Available online at <<http://www.kb.dk/da/soeg/>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]



Snorri had access to the libraries in Oddi and Reykholt, Iceland as well as the Royal library in Trondheim, Norway (Faulkes 2012: 311-2). Unique among medieval chroniclers, he does not quote the bible, and with one possible exception (Sæmund the Wise's lost Latin history of the Kings of Norway), does not quote Latin writers (Sigurðsson 2004: 8-9; Faulkes 1993: 59-76; Simek 1990: 189-92). Although writing two centuries after the conversion, he strives for objectivity in his works, evident in his omission of fabulous tales in his sources, and undertakes a critical analysis of his sources:

... we gathered most of our information from what we are told in those poems which were recited before the chieftains themselves, or their sons.... no one would have dared to tell them to their faces about deeds which all who listened, as well as the prince himself, knew were only falsehoods and fabrications. *Heimskringla*, Prologue to the *Saga of the Ynglinga* (Hollander, 1964: 4).

A similar justification regarding authenticity is occasionally asserted in modern times for Snorri's works (such as Whaley 2000: 167), although most researchers apply a more critical approach (summarised in Sundqvist 2015: 23-5). Source comparison is the gold standard used by historians to determine the accuracy of any historical narrative (Howell and Prevenier 2001: 69-79), and it can be demonstrated that Snorri's works do not always meet this standard. A case argued by Clunies Ross has important implications for the accuracy of Snorri's documentation (Clunies Ross 2005: 73). This involves the historically important story of St Olaf's death recorded in Snorri's *Heimskringla* (*Saint Olaf's Saga*, Hollander 1964: 245-537). According to the saga, three of Olaf's court poets accompany the king to record his deeds (Chapter 206, Hollander 1964: 496-7). As noted by Meulengracht Sørensen, all three were killed in battle (2001: 185). Snorri states that he uses Sighvatgr's [Sigvat] *Erfidrápa* as his authenticating source. Sigvat was Olaf's best known court poet, he was however in Rome at the time. This calls into question the accuracy of this traditional account (Clunies Ross 2005: 73).

*Manuscript Tradition:* The early manuscripts of the *Heimskringla* are untitled although usually they are presented as the *History of the Kings of Norway*. The title actually means 'world disk', the name given to it in 1697 by the Swedish antiquarian and translator Johan Peringskiöld (ÍF *Heimskringla* 2002 I: V). It records the history of Norway from mythological origins to 1177. It is

generally believed to have been written by Snorri Sturluson, although his authorship is recorded first in the 16th-century Danish translation (Finlay and Faulkes 2011: VII). The earliest complete version known, called the *Kringla* or the Copenhagen Manuscript, was stored in Copenhagen at the University library. A second early manuscript called the *Jöfraskinna* was also stored there. Both were destroyed by a fire in 1728. Fortunately, they had been copied before their destruction. There are also two incomplete 14th-century manuscripts. They are the ÁM 39 fol. and *Codex Frisianus* (also known as the *Fríssbók*). In the main, these all corroborate each other. Variants and stemma are detailed in the three volume *Íslensk fornrit* set (ÍF *Heimskingla* 2002). The majority of these manuscripts have been digitalized and can be viewed online.<sup>10</sup> There have been many translations, in several languages, spanning centuries. The most commonly used English translation is Finlay and Faulkes' three volume set (2011; 2014; 2015, this is a translation of ÍF *Heimskingla* 2002), although the one volume Hollander version (1964 and its many reprints) is also commonly employed.

The *Prose Edda* (also known as *Snorri's Edda*, or the *Younger Edda*) is represented by six medieval versions, each with many variant readings. The surviving texts are:

The *Codex Regius* (GKS 2367 4to) is believed to have been written in the middle of the first half of the 14th century (Clunies Ross 2005: 151). This is the most complete text, and the basis of most translations. The manuscript is located at Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi in Reykjavik and available online.<sup>11</sup>

*Codex Upsaliensis* (DG 11 8vo), currently located at Uppsala University. This work is the oldest remaining text. It is believed to originate in the early 14th century (Clunies Ross 2005: 151). The manuscript is available online.<sup>12</sup> The scholarly edition with stemma and variants is Pálsson 2013.

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<sup>10</sup> Available online at <<https://handrit.is/>> [Accessed 05 March 2015]

<sup>11</sup> Available online at <<http://www.am.hi.is:8087/>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

<sup>12</sup> Available online at: <<http://www.alvin-portal.org/alvin/view.jsf?pid=alvin-record:54179>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

*Codex Wormianus* (AM 242 fol) was written in the mid-14th century and is currently located at the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection in Copenhagen (dating: Clunies Ross 2005: 151). It is available online.<sup>13</sup>

*Codex Trajectinus* (MSS 1374). This is a c.1600 copy of a 14th-century destroyed original (Clunies Ross 2005: 151). It is located at the Utrecht University in the Netherlands. Although the manuscript is not available online, the diplomatic edition and stemma is (Van Eeden 1913<sup>14</sup>).

[3] **The *Gesta Danorum*** (*Deeds of the Danes*) by Saxo Grammaticus. Saxo (c. 1150-1220) was a canon of the cathedral in Lund, and the personal secretary to Bishop Absalon, who himself was a close friend and advisor to King Valdemar of Denmark (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: xxix-xxxi, xxxix). This work details primarily Danish history from mythological times, to the early 13th century. It is, in the main, a description of kings and military conquests. It contains several recordings of pre-Christian cultic structures and ritual details. The precise dating of its creation ranges from 1190x1208 (Friis-Jensen and Kartsten 2005: 58) or alternatively 1208x1218 (Davidson and Fisher 1999: 5). Absalon's motive for writing this work is stated in the preface. He desired to 'glorify the fatherland' and record, Aeneid-like, the great deeds of their ancestors (Friis-Jensen and Karsten 2005: 72).

Saxo, unlike other chroniclers, does not use history as demonstrative of the Christian struggle between good and evil. He instead takes a more pragmatic approach stressing classical concepts of princely virtues, such as prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: xl-xli). An interesting point is that he employs Adam of Bremen, Danish oral and written traditions as well as Icelandic sources. He must, therefore, have been aware of their descriptions of the Uppsala temple, yet he tends to avoid mentioning this even when it is directly implied in his work (Davidson and Fisher, 1999:5; Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: xlviii-l).

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<sup>13</sup> Available online at: <<http://www.e-pages.dk/ku/621/>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

<sup>14</sup> Available online at: <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030060118;view=1up;seq=159>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

Manuscript Tradition: The *Gesta Danorum* usually translated as *The History of the Danes* has both direct, and indirect manuscript sources. There is only one complete direct source. In 1514 Christiern Pedersen published the earliest Latin text (Petri 1514). This was a transcription from a no longer extant version borrowed from Archbishop Birger Gunnerson of Lund. All work on Saxo originates from this source. There are four incomplete fragments, all located in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Three copies from the late 12th century, called the Lassen's Codex (Ny kgl. S. 570 2°) Fragment, the Kall-Rasmussen Fragment (Ny kgl. S. 570 2°) and the Plesner Fragment (Ny kgl. S. 570 2°). A fourth fragment, called the Angers Fragment (Ny kgl. S. 869 g 4°) is paleographically dated to Saxo's time and believed to be in Saxo's own hand (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: V1 lii-liii). The fragments, and complete Pedersen text is available online at the Royal Library website.<sup>15</sup> In addition to fragments there are many indirect sources for Saxo. His works were widely quoted in medieval literature. These can be used to correlate and amend the existing text as we have it. These are detailed in Friis-Jensen and Fisher (2015: V1 lvii-lxii).

The standard scholarly Latin text used today is the two volume Oxford Manuscript Text (OMT) *Saxo Grammaticus* (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: V1 li-lxii) or the similar Latin text in (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005). The OMT text provides the standard English translation, and a comparison of the variant texts and a stemma (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: V1 li-lxii). It is worth noting that Volume I of the OMT text is not technically a new translation, but a revision of the Davidson translation done by the same translator, Peter Fisher (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: V1 lxxxi-lxxxii; Davidson and Fisher 1999). The standard Danish work (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005) is widely used and quoted by Norse scholars as well.

[4] The *Landnámabók* (the *Book of Settlements*), is a work of compiled stories that detail the settling of Iceland by prominent families. It records the 9th-century discovery of Iceland, as well as the immigration of settlers and the location of their settlements up to the 11th century. Several of these stories are shared (albeit, here in abbreviated form) with the Family sagas. These are the most pertinent works to the study of cult-houses, in that they are among the earliest works (detailed below). It is difficult to not see these as the basis for the ancient land claims in Iceland (*Landnámabók* is literally 'the book of the taking of the land'). Certainly, long-term ownership

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<sup>15</sup> Available online at <<http://www.kb.dk/da/soeg/>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

claims would be strengthened by the existence of pre-Christian sites (Pálsson and Edwards, hereafter P & E, 1972: 5-6).

*Manuscript Tradition:* It is believed that the earliest version of this was done by Ari Thorgilsson (1068-1148), although this manuscript does not survive (P & E 1972: 3). There are five manuscripts that preserve the *Landnámabók*, most are viewable online.<sup>16</sup>

The *Sturlubók*, compiled by Sturla Thordarson (1214-1284). The original was destroyed in the Copenhagen fire in 1728. A copy though had been made (AM 107 fol.) had been made by Rev. Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt in 1275x1280 (P & E 1972: 3).

The *Hauksbók*, written by Hauk Erlendsson, parts of which survive in his own hand (AM 544 4to). It was written in 1306x1308. Only 14 leaves remain of the original, but a more complete version was copied by Rev. Jón Erlendsson in the 13th century (P & E 1972: 3-4).

The *Melabók* (AM 445 b, 4to) is believed to have been written for the Melar family, in that most genealogies end with that family. It is attributed to Snorri Markússon (died in 1313) because the genealogies terminate with his father and his wife (P & E 1972: 4). This work is not currently available online.

In addition to the above, there are two compilations, both from the 17th century, used by scholars. They are the *Thórdarbók* (by Rev Thórd Jónsson of Hitardale) and the *Skardsárbók* (by Björn Jónsson of Skardsá). These provide alternate reading of texts that are illegible today (P & E 1972: 4).

The standard scholarly text used today is the Íslenzk Fornrit *Íslendingabók Landnámabók* (ÍF 1986). It contains a comparison of the variant texts, provides a stemma, and presents a synthesized text. This work is rarely translated in English, and the standard English translation is *The Book of Settlements* by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (P & E) in 1972. It is only a translation of the *Sturlubók* and does not include variations seen in other texts. It does include an

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<sup>16</sup> Available online at <<https://handrit.is>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

English summary of the ÍF stemma (P & E 1972: 3-5). Other older English editions are Vigfusson and Powell (1905) and Ellwood (1908).

[5] *Vita Anskarii* (*The Life of Ansgar*, alt. Anskar) by Rimbert. Written c. 870, this work details the missionary attempts in Scandinavia by Anskar (c. 801-865, Krambs 2015:14). Louis the Pious, the son of Charlemagne, sends Anskar to Gotland with the deposed King Harald Klak. Upon Anskar's return in c. 829, Louis (answering a request from Swedish King Björn) sent him on a mission to convert the Swedes. Upon his return in 831, he was appointed Archbishop of Hamburg, and given the task of converting Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. He travelled extensively. Ultimately, living through a politically tumultuous time that saw his church and archbishopric destroyed, in 864 he was given the newly combined sees of Bremen and Hamburg (details from Robinson 1921: 9-15). He died shortly thereafter (a yearly overview of his missions and the manuscript sources can be found in Krambs 2015: 4-17).

*Manuscript Tradition:* The original Latin manuscript was believed to have been lost in the 14th century, the only remains of it being quotes in Adam of Bremen (Robinson 1921: 21). Several copies of the manuscript were later rediscovered. The oldest manuscript is the 10th-century Codex Stuttgardiensis G.32 (the source for the critical edition of Waitz, G 1884). This is the version most often used in translations. Three other 12th-century versions also exist: The Codex Parisiensis, 1372; the Codex Ambianensis, 461, and the Codex archivipublici Monasteriensis, 1228. None of these manuscripts are currently available online. The most complete English translation with critical commentary is Robinson 1921, although other partial translations exist. Textual re-examination of Anskar is experiencing something of a renaissance. A new critical edition is being prepared by Paul Gazzoli at the University of Cambridge. His investigations have led to the discovery of two further manuscripts, these and the critical edition and translation are in press.<sup>17</sup>

[6] *The Poetic Edda* (also known as: *Sæmundar Edda* or the *Elder Edda*). A collection of mythological and heroic poems believed to have been written in c. 1275 (Clunies Ross 2005: 6).

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<sup>17</sup> <<http://anglosaxonnorseandceltic.blogspot.com/2014/11/a-hitherto-unknown-manuscript-of.html>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

*Manuscript Tradition:* This anonymous work survives in only one manuscript, the Codex Regius of the *Elder Edda* (GKS 2365 4to, although the codex is currently located in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi in Reykjavik and available online<sup>18</sup>). The text of this section of the manuscript can be found in Kuhn 1983. It is worth noting that Kuhn altered the text somewhat (detailed in section: Note on Translations), but photostats and a text with the original orthography, are widely available in Wimmer and Jónsson 1891. Several scholarly translations into English exist with Larrington 1996 being the most common, although the incomplete works by Dronke (1969; 1997; 2011) are also used.

[7] *Íslendingasögur* (*Saga of the Icelanders*). This work is a collection of individual, mainly anonymous, sagas. There are about 40 separate sagas, purported to detail events from c.870-c.1070 (Nordal 2012: 315-36).

Although several of the individual sagas are preserved in parts of other codices, the first known compilation of these sagas is the codex Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol). This codex is currently located in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi in Reykjavik and is available online.<sup>19</sup> Precise dating of this manuscript is controversial, but it is generally accepted to be from 1330x1370 (Clunies Ross 2010: 144). The standard scholarly collection of the entire *Saga of the Icelanders* (*Íslendingasögur*, with the orthography standardized to modern Icelandic) is the *Svart á hvítu* series, printed as 2 volumes in 1985, a three volume set in 1987 and its most recent iteration as the three volume Mál og menning 1998 set. Pagination is the same for all of these versions. In addition to these collections, many of the individual sagas have scholarly editions (including stemma, standardized ON transcription, variants and scholarly notes) in the *Íslensk Fornrit* (hereafter ÍF) series. Translations of individual sagas have been produced for hundreds of years. A popular five-volume set, in several languages, which organizes the sagas by topic, is produced by the Leifur Eiríksson Publishing in Reykjavik. This edition in English (Hreinsson 1997) is the current scholarly standard. There is one caveat to this English translation. The writing style of the translation has been standardized, so regional and stylistic variations in the

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<sup>18</sup> Available online at: <<http://www.am.hi.is:8087/>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

<sup>19</sup> Available online at: <<https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0132>> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

Old Norse originals are not visible in these versions (these alterations are detailed in Hreinsson 1997: V1 xv-xvi). A popular one volume compilation of the English Hreinsson translations (excluding the genealogical listings) can be found at Smiley and Kellog 2000.

[8] **‘Message’ of Ibn Fadlān** (subtitled in Arabic: *the Account of the lands of the Turks, the Khazars, the Rus, and the Saqaliba in the year 309/921*) by Ibn Fadlān. In English, this work is often known by various titles not reflective of the actual title from the Arabic original. Ahmad Ibn Fadlān (877-960) was a 10th-century emissary for the Abbasid caliph Muqtadir. His mission was to provide religious instruction to the recently converted Bulghār khan. He travelled from Baghdad to the camp of the Bulghārs on the Volga River. In 922 he encountered a group of Viking traders (Montgomery 2012: 553-54; Montgomery 2000: 5-22; Lunde and Stone 2012: xiii-xv). His account details an ‘astonishingly objective description of Viking customs, dress, table manners, religion and sexual practices’ (Lunde and Stone 2012: xiii). His work is known for the only eyewitness account of a Viking ship cremation. He also details other cultic practices, such as the setting up of a carved pole, the offerings presented to it (Lunde and Stone 2012: 47-8), as well as various funerary customs (including the boat cremation, Lunde and Stone 2012: 49-55; Montgomery 2000: 14-21).

I studied Arabic at the University of Utah in the early 1990s and travelled throughout the Middle East. One of my goals in that trip was to see the Ibn Fadlān manuscript (Razawi Library, MS 5229) and acquire the diplomatic editions of Ibn Fadlān’s works. At that time, his works were not well known, and unlike the situation today, translations were not very good. When reading this work a few important points must be recognized. Fadlān’s principal duty was to instruct the King of the Bulghārs in Islamic rites and law (Lunde and Stone 2012: xviii-xix; Montgomery 2012: 553). The actual title of the work (here translated as ‘message’) is *Risala*, this term has religious implications. It is not known how much of his text can be interpreted as a polemic comparing the civilized Muslim lifestyle to the barbarian lifestyle of the outsiders. However, in my own reading of the original, this religious aspect comes across as stronger than the English translations convey. Additionally, there is century and a half of debate on who the Rūs were, and if they even were of Viking stock (Montgomery 2000: 2; a summary of the debate can be seen in Montgomery 2000: 1-5, 22-5). Current scholarly belief inclines to the Rūs being a Viking peoples; although perhaps in the process of assimilation into the Slavic culture (Montgomery



2000: 2, 23-5). In either case, unless one believes in the veracity of battling spectral soldiers hiding in clouds (Lunde and Stone 2012: 31-2), some allowance must be made for fictionalizing forces in his writings.

*Manuscript Tradition:* Although the Arabic text was quoted in various early Arab geographies, the earliest and most complete manuscript is the 13th-century Razawi Library MS 5229, located in Astane Quds Museum in Mashhad, Iran. The standard text is: al-Dahhān, Sāmī, (1959) which contains this manuscript with additions from partial sources. Another important manuscript work is: al-Faqih, et al (1987), this contains both Ibn Fadlāns text and the earliest geographical works that quoted him. Neither work is available online.

Ibn Fadlān has been translated into several languages. The most commonly used scholarly English translation is Montgomery 2000, although this translation only covers the section of the work on the Rūs (available online<sup>20</sup>). Complete translations can be found in: Lunde and Stone 2012 and Frye 2005.

[9] *Íslendingabók* (*Book of the Icelanders*). This work details the early settlement of Iceland and its earliest history. It ranges from the discovery of Iceland, to its adoption of Christianity. It was written in the early 12th century by the priest Ari Þorgilsson, and his ancestors appear in important roles (Grønlie 2006: xiv-xvi; ÍF 1986: v-viii).

*Manuscript Tradition:* Although the original is lost, it exists in two 17th-century copies (both copies of the same original text). They are located in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi (AM 113 a fol and AM 113 b fol), digital copies are not currently available. The standard version is the Íslenzk Fornrit *Íslendingabók Landnámabók* (ÍF 1986). The standard English translation is Grønlie 2006.

[10] *Diplomarium Norvegicum*. This is a comprehensive compilation of early documents and texts from Norway from about 1050 (the earliest document) to 1590. There are 23 volumes, transcribed from 1840 to 1991, containing 20,000 records. It should be noted that these are transcriptions in the original languages and as such contain works in the Old Norse, Danish,

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<sup>20</sup> Available online at: <<https://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/montgo1.pdf>>[Accessed 05 March 2017]

Latin and the various versions of the Norwegian language. Most of these volumes are available digitally.<sup>21</sup> None of these volumes exist in English translation.

### *Conclusion:*

There are many written sources providing information detailing Norse history and cultural traditions. These documents, the majority originating from Iceland in the 12th to 13th century (two centuries after conversion), often purport to contain details on pre-Christian cult. These traditions, with only a few exceptions, were written down by ecclesiastical authorities, or at the very least people who identify as Christians. So, although sources do exist, they must be dealt with critically.

### *Historical Veracity and its Complications*

Some brief examples of the problematic nature of these sources is provided below. It is worth reiterating that these documents and their biases are multifaceted and widely argued.

One of the earliest pre-Christian cultic source references serves as an example of these multiple issues and exemplifies these difficulties, revealing how these sources might contain traces of indigenous meaning as well as clerical distortions. The 8th-century destruction of the pre-Christian site of the *Irmingsûl* (a sacred pole, believed to have been located near Obermarsberg, Germany), played an important symbolic role in the conversion of the pagan north, and was still referenced centuries after the event. What little is known about the site and its meaning to the Saxons can be deduced from the etymology of the name: *Irmingsûl*: **OHG** *Sûl*, pillar and **OS** *Eormen*, great, mighty, large, placing the meaning at ‘gigantic pillar’ (Köbler 2006). No contemporary pagan source records what this pole looked like or its purpose. The term though is cognate with **ON** *Himinsjóla* (possibly heaven-pillar), the pole that holds up heaven (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957: 262, 535). This suggests a reference to world tree iconography. This is the meaning of the word as it appears in Snorri’s *Edda*, (*Skáldskaparmál*, Section 81, line 29; Faulkes 1998: 27). It may have parallels in the Finnish *sampo* (Vote: *sampan* pillar, post;

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<sup>21</sup> Available online at <[http://www.dokpro.uio.no/dipl\\_norv/diplom\\_felt.html](http://www.dokpro.uio.no/dipl_norv/diplom_felt.html)> [Accessed 05 March 2017]

Estonian: *samba* prop, mainstay, support) mentioned in the Kalevala (Peabody Magoun 1978: 400-1).

According to various sources, Charlemagne cut down this sacred pole at some time during his first attack on the Saxons in c. 772. Numerous later ecclesiastical sources mention the event, and it was viewed as something of a watershed moment in the domination of the Christian church in Europe. The earliest record of this event occurs in the *Royal Frankish Annals* (Scholtz and Rogers 1972: 48-9). These record the deeds of the Carolingian monarchs from 741-829. In year 772 it records:

Capturing the castle of Eresburg, he proceeded as far as the Irminsul, destroyed this idol and carried away the gold and silver which he found. A great drought occurred so that there was no water in the place where the Irminsul stood. The glorious king wished to remain there two or three days in order to destroy the temple completely, but they had no water. Suddenly at noon, through the grace of God...so much water poured forth in a stream that the whole army had enough. *Annales Regni Frencorum* Year 772 (Scholtz and Rogers 1972: 48-9).

This describes the *Irminsûl* as a standing idol, with gold and silver around it. Only one structure (the 'temple') is mentioned, versus a series of structures, and this took two or three days to destroy. Although the point is a debatable one, this may imply that the site was fabricated from stone and had to be dismantled (versus the quicker act of burning). As a point of reference, Fantoft Stave Church, likely a larger structure, burned to the ground in just a few hours.

Although these annals were commissioned at the behest of the royal family for the avowed purpose to glorify their ancestors, there is good reason to accept that this work has some historical veracity (Scholz and Rogers 1972: 3-5). The *Royal Frankish Annals* were written by three separate anonymous authors. The first author (who covers the years quoted) appears to either have had access to, or been part of, the royal court (Scholz and Rogers 1970: 4-5). It is known that he compiled the earliest parts of the annals AD 787x793. He then backfilled the rest with historical references and finished with contemporaneous events. Charlemagne became the archetype of the early Christian ruler — he was seen as a Christ-like figure taking on many of the virtues of various biblical heroes (Brault 1978: 93-6). Subsequent references to the *Irminsûl*

provide more details. These provide insight to how paganism was interpreted and presented. Rudolf of Fulda, almost a century later (c. 865) describes the *Irmīnsūl* in *De Miraculis Sancti Alexandri* (Chapter 3) as a large pillar of wood (**Lat** *truncum* or tree trunk)<sup>22</sup> worshipped under an open sky. Widukund in his 10th-century recording of Saxon history (*Res Gestae Saxonicae*, Chapter 12) provides the most detailed description:

When morning came, the Saxons placed an eagle before the eastern gate, and constructed an altar of victory following the error of their fathers. They worshipped their divinities in their own manner. In worshipping one of them, called Mars, they imitate Hercules with an image of columns. They worship this deity in the place of the sun... *Res Gestae Saxonicae* Book 1, Chapter 12 (Bachrach and Bachrach 2014: 22).

This example illustrates some of the difficulties seen with these references. The placing of the ‘eagle’ in the east gate is unusual. This sounds suspiciously like a Roman allusion, reinforced by the mention of an ‘altar of victory’. This *Interpretatio Romana/Christiana* is not uncommon. It is widely seen in *vitae* and in sources as late as Saxo. However, eagles and birds of prey are also associated in late sources with Odin.

The reference to an area of wooden columns and the sun implies an open-air site rather than an enclosed cult-house. Open-air sites are mentioned in classical sources (such as Tac. Ger. IX.2<sup>23</sup>) as well as later saga references (detailed in section 5.4). This does appear to be a contradiction from the original account which suggests an enclosure. Although it cannot be stated with

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<sup>22</sup> *Truncum quoque ligni non parvae magnitudinis in altum erectum sub divo colebant patria eum lingua Irmīnsul appellant quod latine dicitur universalis columna quasi sustinens omnia.* “The tree trunk was not very large, and was erected under an open sky. Its purpose was as a supporting pillar [to hold up the sky] and was called the Irmīnsul. In Latin it was said the pillar sustained all.” (Latin source Wetzel 1881: 101, translation my own).

<sup>23</sup> *Ceterum nec cohibere parietibus deos, neque in ullam humani oris speciem assimilare, ex magnitudine coelestium arbitrantur: lucos ac nemora consecrant, deorumque nominibus appellant secretum illud, quod sola reverentia vident.* ‘In other matters, they judge it not in accord with the greatness of the gods to confine them with walls or to liken them in appearance to any human countenance. They consecrate woods and groves, and the mystery that they see only in their awe they call by the name of gods’ (Rives 2002: 80-1).

certainty, it is possible that the sun reference may be a misunderstanding of Old Saxon *Sūl* (pillar) as Latin *Sol* (sun). The Latin text says ‘*effigie columpnarum imitantes Herculem*’, this states that the ‘columns’ were copies of columns ‘imitating’ Hercules. The identification of Hercules, and who he would represent in a Saxon pantheon, is not recorded in these texts. As a powerful hero battling monsters this may be related to the Thor of later Old Norse sources. The ‘*effigie*’ suggests a faint echo of the later carved pillars that both Icelandic written sources and Ibn Fadlān (Lunde and Stone 2012: 47-8; detailed below) mention, and archaeology occasionally uncovers (Fig. 9). Nevertheless, a lack of contemporaneous pagan sources makes all of this empty conjecture. There is no inherent reason to believe that the writer of this story had any real knowledge of Saxon theology (Palmer 2007: 402-25). Destroying pole sites is common fare in *vitae*, and descriptions of them are fairly common (examples are provided in Source Quotes:Q:24-Q:35). If these accounts can be accepted at face value, then there were many such sites.

The *Irmingsûl* entry continues, detailing that Charlemagne ran out of water while destroying the site. Then, ‘Suddenly at noon, through the grace of God...so much water poured forth in a stream that the whole army had enough’ (Scholz and Rogers 1972: 48-9, Q:4). The magical appearance of water while doing the Lord’s work is a common motif in biblical stories and in the later *vitae*. This example clearly reflects biblical precedents such as from Exodus: ‘Behold I will stand there before thee, upon the rock Horeb, and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink.’ (Exodus 17: 5-6; Q:3).

Ultimately, history provides an admittedly biased, though near-contemporaneous, source that is repeated and embellished over the course of several centuries. *Interpretatio Christiana* has strongly tainted the historical account, and magnified its Christian triumphalist narrative. The only useable data regarding pre-Christian practices are determined by examining the linguistic basis of the name *Irmingsûl*, as well as comparative analysis to later **ON** and **Lat** information purportedly describing pre-Christian practices.

#### *Conclusion:*

There are only a small handful of cultic references written contemporaneously by Norse pagans (examples can be seen Source Quotes: Pre-Christian Contemporaneous References). These are in

the main short inscriptions providing few details. Excepting Ibn Fadlān and Adam of Bremen as rare, contemporaneous accounts, the remaining sources are written centuries after the decline of pre-Christian religions in the north. Iceland converted to Christianity in AD 1000 (*Kristni saga*, chapter 13, Grønlie 2006). Snorri Sturluson is the most prolific single source regarding both Norse mythology and pagan cultic structure references, he wrote the *Heimskringla* in 1220x1230 (Finlay and Faulkes 2011: vii-viii, ix). Saxo Grammaticus wrote the *Gesta Danorum* between 1190x1208 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg I 2005: 58). The Icelandic source closest to the time frame of living paganism is the earliest version of the Icelandic *Landnámabók*, likely written between 1097x1125 (P&E 1972: 3-5). Often these works, even the **ON** survivals like the *Saga of St Olaf*, imitate the classic narrative rhythms of the *Vitae* or *Saints Lives*. As detailed above, these framed the destruction of temples and idols as a prerequisite for sainthood. This is a fulfilment of the biblical edict: ‘But destroy their altars, break their statues and cut down their groves’ (*Exodus* 34: 13 DRB) and ‘He that sacrifices to gods, shall be put to death’ (*Exodus* 22: 20, DRB). The lack of native pre-Christian references and these kinds of endemic distortions by clerics makes the interpretation of this evidence difficult.

### ***The Use of Folk Tale Motifs***

Another line of investigation occasionally employed for pursuing data related to pre-Christian religious evidence is the use of folk tales. Old Norse/Icelandic folk tales are similar to other European literatures in this regard. They capture motifs or similar plotlines which recur in folktales, stories, and literature across Europe from different temporal and geographic ranges. These motifs have a long history of study, first recorded by Aarne (1910), revised by Thompson (1928; 1961) and most recently revised again by Uther (2011). The example below provides two similar stories, one about a Christian saint (St. Germain), the other a Norse deity (Thor). In academic literature this plotline is classified as ‘Hospitality Rewarded’ and is catalogued as ATU 750B (Uther 2011 2: 398).

[Thor and Loki] arrived at a peasant’s house and were given a night’s lodging there. During the evening Thor took his goats and slaughtered them both..... Then Thor placed the goatskins on the other side of the fire and instructed the peasant and his household to throw the bones on to the goatskins... Thor stayed the night there, and in the small hours before dawn he got up and dressed, took the hammer Miöllnir

and raised it and blessed the goatskins. Then the goats got up... Sturluson, *Edda* (*Gylfaginning* 44.3 -44.15, Fawkes 2002:37-8)

One of the king's swineherds...was on the way home and saw [Saint] Germain and his fellows in sorry straights due to hunger and the cold. He kindly took them to his cottage and had his one and only calf killed for their supper. When the meal was finished, the bishop had all the calf's bones laid upon the hide, and as he prayed over them, the calf stood up whole and entire. *Vita St Germain, Bishop* [Granger Ryan, 1993:29]. Although various versions of this *vita* exist, this story is early as 'Nennius' (*Historia Brittonum* III: 32, Morris 1980:27).

These stories are rooted in the well-spring of shared memes that have their origin in the Indo-European imagination and the folk cultures that subsequently evolved from this stem across Europe. Although these stories contain references to deities, as well as cultic practices, their value in terms of providing factual information is minimal (Uther 2011: V1 9-11).

### ***Saga Literature***

The majority of records with references to both pre-Christian practices and cult structures are preserved in Icelandic manuscripts. Iceland, perhaps because of its remoteness, the late date of its conversion, and what can be best described as an inherent cultural connection to the past, preserves the majority of the literary evidence. There are many reasons to question the historical accuracy of these accounts. Among them are European influences in the form of romances, the earliest beginnings of the modern novel in the form of narrative fiction (Clover 2005: 239, 251-3; Kalinke 2005: 317, 343-5), and a general lack of independent confirming sources.

The majority of cult-house references occur in the oldest layer of saga material -- the *Family Sagas* and the related *Landnámabók*. Both works share many stories and are suggested to have been written within two generations of the events described (P&E 1972: 60). Before examining the historical veracity of the saga material, it is important to recognize some pertinent issues. Like Quranic or biblical exegesis, the critical apparatus is hundreds of years old with the *First Grammatical Treatise* written 1125x1175 (Clunies Ross 2005:152). The modern critical literature spans the Norse languages, German, and English, and is defined around 'schools'. To ascertain a simple fact, such as when a particular saga was written, is to enter a minefield of

conflicting opinion, often centuries old. With a topic of such chronological breadth there is often a cyclical nature to any argument. The idea of the influence of romance in family saga material appears very current (Kalinke: 2011, 1999). This is actually a continuation of an influential commentary in the 1920s (Rubow 1928). General statements, in an area of research where conversations have been on-going for so long, make a short overview of this research difficult. The importance of this literature to cultic structures cannot be understated. As such, critical review is important with the most pressing question being how true are the sagas when it comes to cultic references?

The argument for the veracity of the sagas hinges on an important philosophical point that impacts any historical approach to, or use of, these sources. The question becomes what would the saga writer, or their audience, consider as 'truth'. Would the sagas have been regarded as historical works in conception, or works of fiction? Both of these ideas are modern concepts and this is a question difficult to answer. There are no words in Old Norse for historical truth, novel, or fiction, in the sense that they are used today (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1973: 25-8). Steblyn-Kamenskij suggests the modern reader approaches truth dualistically. Works defined as 'historical truth' present an exact reporting of events that transpired. These are amenable to source criticism and source comparisons to determine their objectivity and accuracy. There is a second type of truth called 'artistic truth', this is a fictional interpretation of what might have been. Although these often strive for a realistic reproduction of the past, they are entertainment, and at no point does the writer believe this represents actual events. Steblyn-Kamenskij suggests that this dualistic view was foreign to the writers and original readers of the saga. The concept of history or of fiction did not exist at this point in time. Their view of truth was something he called 'syncretic truth'. He suggests that the saga creator '...strove simultaneously for accuracy and for reproduction of reality in all its living fullness' (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1973: 24). It is a third-person narrative structure that describes the background and motivations of its protagonists. It may or may not be based on an historical event, but its purpose is not quite fictional either. It is simply a complete and attempted realistic interpretation of what a person would be experiencing. The work is judged as good if it describes in full the various aspects of the lives, both internal and external, of the protagonists (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1973: 21-48). This is relevant to cult-house references, because it suggests that although events occurring in these temples may not have



happened, the temples (as realistic background scenery) would have had to have held a basis in reality.

There are other issues as well. The recording of the sagas occurs at an important stage in the evolution of the first novels, and: ‘As fusions of history and legend in a vernacular prose form, the sagas constitute – depending on one’s point of reference -- either Europe’s first novels or her only prose epics’ (Clover, 2005: 239). The early Icelandic sagas appear to present factual events. The third-person narrative avoids, in the main, supernatural events, and often sympathetically presents both sides of an argument, giving the appearance of objectivity. This provides an immediacy and legitimacy to what is being recorded and seemingly implies historical accuracy. However, I note that events in the sagas — describing the thoughts of a character, simple formulaic plotlines leading to a conclusion (Hreinsson 1997: V1 xliv-xlvi), foreshadowing to build suspense, and the insertion of humour —all suggest the tools of a fiction writer.

There are reasons to believe Romance literature influenced these works. These were literary works of imagination written to entertain. Like the sagas, they employ history and mythology as scaffolding for their characters’ actions. The influence of these romantic ballads on saga literature has long been argued. The idea has been cyclical through time, and a number of rather precise borrowings have been suggested, as well as plotlines, ideas (Clover 2005: 250-3; Kalinke 1999: 25), and even metres (Clunies Ross 2005: 6). The influence of Romantic literature on the sagas is plausible. The Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (c. 1217-1263) was obsessed by French romances, particularly Arthurian material. Snorri acted as his official biographer, and the king’s early interest in this material made it fashionable in Iceland (Clunies Ross 2005: 162, 185). The king was largely responsible for the earliest importation and translation of these texts. By the early to mid-13th century the majority of French, and especially Arthurian, romances and some *lais* had been translated into Icelandic (summarised by Sigurðsson 2004: 22-32 and Kalinke 2005: 310-35; Kalinke 2011: 11). It is quite possible that the King’s Sagas were directly influenced by an English tradition. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s fictional *Historia Regum Britanniae* was written between 1129x1152 (Reeve and Wright 2007: vii). The Norse translation dates to c. 1200 (Kalinke 2011: 1; Clunies Ross 2005: 210). The version that Iceland knew had both Merlin’s Prophecies (*Prophetiae Merlini* translated as *Merlinússpá*) and the *Historia* proper (translated as *Breta sögur*). The early dating of this translation is important, because there are

similarities to these pseudo-histories in both Snorri and Saxo (Davidson and Fisher 1999:1). Both men may have known of Geoffrey's work in the Latin original. That this work existed in the Scandinavian royal libraries can be confirmed by the anonymous 12th-century author of the *Historia Norwegie* (a Latin history of the kings of Norway). This Norwegian or Danish author preceded both men, and quotes from Geoffrey's *Historia* (Book VI, 19).

The earliest detectable evidence of these sources coming out of Europe and the Anglo-Saxon literary world is the *Íslendingabók* of Ari the Learned (1067-1148). According to Snorri this was the first history of Iceland (*Heimskringla*, Introduction; Hollander 1964: 4-5). This work is significant for several reasons. Uniquely for its time, it was written in the vernacular. Although it records the beginnings of Christianity and documents the lineage of Iceland's first bishops, it does so in a secular fashion. There is no religious rhetoric, no miracles, and, arguably, few apparent stylistic influences reminiscent of hagiography (Grønlie 2006: viii). Ari also mentions his sources, and it is obvious that he is using oral sources (Grønlie 2006: xvi). Because of this method of presentation, the *Íslendingabók* has often been seen as a historical source preserving a record of a strong, secular, oral tradition (Clunies Ross 2005: 75; Grønlie 2006: xvi-xvii, xxiii, xxix-xxx). It presents a history of the leading families in Iceland, including his own, combined with an ecclesiastical history of the bishops of Skálholt (Iceland's first bishops). It clearly demonstrates the influence of medieval traditions, specifically Anglo-Saxon ones (Clunies Ross 2005: 75). This work is based on Latin sources, and occasionally uses Latin words (Grønlie 2006: xix). Ari quotes from an otherwise unknown hagiography of Saint Edmund. He links the founding of Iceland chronologically to Saint Edmund's death in England (Grønlie 2006: 3). There are also similarities to Bede that strongly suggest an intimate knowledge of this work. Ari's origination myth is similar to Bede's styling of the Anglo-Saxons on the Israelites (Grønlie 2006: viii). His methodology of referencing oral sources is in a similar style to that seen in Bede. He employs Bede's death-date for Pope Gregory (Grønlie 2006: xix-xx). Most importantly, in that other early Icelandic sources did not use this, he uses Dionysius's dating scheme (Grønlie 2006: xx). All of these points strongly suggest Ari's knowledge of Bede's works, and therefore, a very early Anglo-Saxon literary influence (Clunies Ross 2005: 75; Grønlie 2006: xix-xxi).

*Conclusion:*

Icelandic literature was highly influenced by medieval literature, at a time when romantic literature presented fictional stories blending history and mythology. Although Iceland may intuitively seem to be remote, when transportation routes were by boat, Iceland was well served. Hence, this literature is not as unique, nor as isolated, as is often assumed.

### 5.3. *Linguistic Evidence*

Several terms in Old Norse documentation relate to sacred space and enclosures. These terms are hard to define, probably had long usage, and may well have changed in meaning over time and had differing meanings from region to region.

*Vé* and *Vi*: The term *Vé* is Old Norse (Cleasby, Vigfusson, and Craigie 1957: 687; Heggstad, Hørdnebo, and Simensen 2015: 708-9; the term is occasionally seen without the accent). Modern Norwegian uses *ve* (Henriksen and Haslerud 2012: 1161), although I have seen the term spelled *vi* occasionally. Modern Swedish and Danish use *vi*, as does most archaeological research (including this paper). The term is an ancient one and derives from the Proto-Germanic in the form of *\*wīha* (m, n) sanctuary. This term is related to *\*wīha* (q.v) meaning holy (Kroonen 2013: 585). Words using the root *vé* are present in Old Icelandic and Old Norse dialects. It is commonly accepted to mean a ‘temple’ or sanctuary, a holy mansion or house, and could be used to denote the homes or mansions of the gods (Zoëga 2004: 476; Cleasby, Vigfusson, and Craigie 1957: 687). Such usage and meaning suggests a sense of enclosed space, a ‘house’. It has been noted that this toponymical element (and related terms) attached to a theophoric element are often associated with royal residences and suggest ritual spaces (Brink 2012: 63-4; Sundqvist 2015: 38-9; Vikstrand 2000: 43-54). The term could also become attached to individuals performing religious functions, for example Geir, from Sogn [Norway], named as ‘Vegeir, because he was a great sacrificer’ Chapter 149 (P&E, 1972: 70). Toponymical evidence suggests *vé* is anachronistic in Icelandic (where it is replaced by *hov*), although common in local place names in Scandinavia (Cleasby et al 1957: 687). Although the term disappears in common usage, it remains in the specialized (and conservative) vocabulary of the legal sphere. *Vé* is associated with a demarcated area in court. Obscure legal references hint at this: *Um vés úti*, and *um vés útan* can be translated as ‘outside the court’ and ‘absent from court’, respectively (Cleasby et al 1957: 687). *Vé-bönd*, n. pl. are the ropes that surround the court (Zoëga 2004: 476; Brink 2012:

26 provides literary examples and details). This association with law and religion is well evidenced in the surviving literary sources (Brink 2001: 87).

A contemporary example of the use of the word is provided by the 9th-century Forsa Ring. This survival, composed of a 43cm diameter ring with about 250 runes on it, was affixed to the door of a parish church in Forsa (Hälsingland, Sweden, Fig. 107). Visual evidence, in the form an image of a cult-house with a door ring on the Sparlösa rune stone (Västergötland, Sweden) and evidence from Uppåkra cult-house, in which door rings were recovered, suggest this ring may have been on a cult-house door (Sundqvist 2015: 422-4) . It carries a runic inscription widely considered the earliest Viking legal tract (Ruthström 1990: 41-56; Brink 2012: 28-9). This provides detailed information on how a *vi* was perceived.

One ox and two aura [a coin] ...in fine...for the restoration of a cult site...for the first time; two oxen and four aura for the second time; but for the third time, four oxen and eight aura; and all property in suspension, if he doesn't make right. That, the people are entitled to demand, according to the law of the people that was decreed and ratified before [after Brink, 2008: 28-9].

The inscription mentions a fine for the upkeep of a *vi*, suggesting a dedicated site. Laws were enacted for its protection, and these laws were occasionally broken. The same individuals or groups did this multiple times. The ring that recorded this was important enough to be later placed upon a church. Runes are widely recorded in early Christian churches and in Christian inscriptions. The pagan nature of this inscription would be readily apparent; suggesting the preservation of this object was deliberate.

*Hof* and *Hov*: The term *Hof* is Old Norse (it exists in similar form in **AS** and **OHG**). Modern Norwegian, Swedish and Danish (as well as in archaeological research), usually translate this as *hov*. This term is well attested in Icelandic and often translated as 'temple'. Activities that occur inside were related to worship, feasting, and housing deity images. This is the term most commonly used in saga evidence. Archaeological and literary evidence suggests that many, perhaps most, large farmsteads (or central places) had this type of dedicated space. The Icelandic sources use this term to refer to either the smaller sized 'cult-house' (a seemingly dedicated cult structure) or the larger 'hall' with both secular and sacred attributes (Sundqvist 2015: 104-10;

Sundqvist 2009: 275-94). The term originates from Proto-Germanic *\*hufa* (n) meaning a hillock (Kroonen 2013: 252). This is associated with agriculture, and in a culture with a mythologized landscape it is not surprising that such features accrue ritual significance. The term *hof* is first evident in Old Germanic and can be traced through the early Germanic languages related to a farm structure (Sundqvist 2015: 165; linguistic details with examples are in Sundqvist 2009). Historically in southern Germany the term simply meant a large (secular) building associated with a farm and in modern German *hof* still means farmyard. By about the year 1000 the term starts appearing in Anglo-Saxon glossaries as ‘temple’ (Olsen 1966: 279).

*Hörgr* (**ON**, plural *hörgrar*, **OHG** *Harug*, **OE** *Hærg*, **ON** *hörgr*, **Nor** *horg*, **Dan** *hørg*, **Sw** *harg*): initially appears as a rare instance where a precise understanding of the term is suggested in the literature (detailed in Source Quotes: Hörgr Quotes).

An altar [hörgr] he’s made for me, piled with stones  
Now it shines like a wall of glass  
The fresh steaming blood has coloured its sides  
The Lay of Hyndla Stanza 10, lines 1-3 of the Hyndluljóð.

The term evolved from Proto-Germanic *\*hargu* (m), and most likely meant sacrificial mound (Kroonen 2013: 211). The literary evidence suggests piles of rocks were used as a focus for sacrificial activities, often involving pouring blood on them. Several excavations throughout Scandinavia have heaps of rocks used in precisely this way, and it has become common to refer to piles of rocks with this term (detailed below). At Lejre, a sacrificial rock pile was large and developed enough to have its own stratigraphy (Niles 2007: 55). There are however linguistic issues with a simplistic definition (Sanmark 2004: 167). Historically *hörgr* has been translated as temple, as well as altar (Folk and Torp 1903: 298-9). Old Norse/Icelandic sources are inconsistent in this regard, employing this term as altar, hall, and occasionally as a feature inside a hall (Sundqvist 2015:104-5). An example of the varied Icelandic usage of the term can be found in the Prose Edda, *Gylfaginning*: Line 25-26:

Another hall [*salr* **ON** royal hall] they [the gods] built. And this was the cult building [*hqrgr* **ON** altar, or in this case cult building] for the goddesses, it was very beautiful. The house [*hus* **ON** house] was called Vingólf (Faulkes 2000: 15).<sup>24</sup>

Olsen (1966: 103-12) has argued that the meaning of **ON** *hqrgr* evolved from a pile of stones, to an outside stone altar, to a cultic structure (occasionally cognate with *hov*, Brink 2012: 63).

Literary, legal, toponymical and archaeological evidence strongly suggest that cult foci existed in various forms and cultic structures were but one form of sacred space in a larger sacred landscape. The general consensus of scholars is that religious rituals were performed in open-air sites, as well as in multi-use structures and dedicated cult-houses (Sundqvist 2015: 103). The archaeological evidence suggests that during late Antiquity, outdoor cultic practices were the norm. With the advent of the early medieval period, central places became the preferred organizing structure. Although outdoor cult continues, the use of halls in central locations began to augment the previous cult systems reliance on exclusively outdoor centred ritual activity (Fabech, 2006: 28-30). As detailed below, excavations of central places suggests it is more accurate to refer to a cult-house complex or sacred landscape than a sole place of worship, demarcated by a cult-house structure or ‘temple’. In this context, it is worth summarizing the details provided by the cultic references in this literature.

### *The Sacred Landscape*

The importance of landscape in the written sources cannot be understated. A glimpse into the rationale of outdoor ritual is provided by anthropology. The concept being employed is that of a mythologized (or numinous) landscape. Research on this topic was explored and detailed by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), who, in his studies in New Guinea from 1914x1918, encountered the idea.

Here we must try to reconstruct the influence of myth upon this vast landscape, as it colours it, gives it meaning, and transforms it into something live and familiar.

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<sup>24</sup> Annan sal gerðu þeir, þat var hqrgr er gyðjurnar áttu ok yar hann allfagr. Þat hús kalla menn Vingólf. Prose Edda, Gylfaginning: Line 25-26 (Faulkes 2000: 15).

What was a mere rock, now becomes a personality ....hallowed by romantic associations with heroes; a meaningless configuration of landscape acquires a significance, obscure no doubt, but full of intense emotion.... all this makes the landscape represent a continuous story, or else the culminating dramatic incident of a familiar legend (Strenski and Malinowski 1992: 10). ... the mythically changed features of the landscape bear testimony in the natives mind to the truth of the myth (Strenski and Malinowski 1992: 36).

There is widespread evidence for the primacy of this idea in the Old Norse/Icelandic written accounts. Heroic stories and mythology are woven together to create a living, sacred landscape (Brink 2001: 80). Unique natural features, ancient monuments and, in the case of Norse sources, place name evidence were used as mnemonic devices or triggers linking them with mythological events. Over time historic events might be linked to these landmarks as well. The Christian view of a dichotomy of sacred and profane space was not part of this worldview (Brink 2001: 82).

There are many references to outdoor cult and cult sites in the written record. The early Norwegian *Gulathing Law* (the Church Law, section 29<sup>25</sup>), contains a prohibition against the worship of any hill or sacred site. It is worth highlighting that the ‘hills’ (or sometimes, as Adam calls them, ‘mountains’ GHEP Book 4, Scholia 139<sup>26</sup>), may in fact be grave mounds. Hills are also known to have been used as assembly sites throughout the region and this may also be what is referred to here (Skinner and Semple 2016: 115-33; Sanmark and Semple 2008: 245-59). *Law of the Gotlanders*, from c. 1220 (*Guta Lag*, Section 4<sup>27</sup>) prohibits worship in groves, around grave mounds or at ancient sites (‘anti-pagan’ law texts and their vocabulary are further developed in Sanmark 2004: 163-8). Similarly, the early 13th-century *History of Gotland* (*Guta*

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<sup>25</sup> Heathen sacrifices are also banned for we are not permitted to worship any heathen god or on any hill, or in any heathen fane.... The Church Law, Section 29, Concerning Heathen Sacrifices, *Gulathing Law* (Larson 1935: 57)

<sup>26</sup> ... the shrine [Uppsala ‘temple’] stands on level ground with mountains all about it like a theater (Tschan 2002: 207).

<sup>27</sup> Sacrifice is strictly forbidden to all men, together with all those old customs that belong to paganism. No one may pray to either groves or howes or heathen gods, nor to holy places or ancient sites. *Guta Lag* [*Law of the Gotlanders*] Section 4, Concerning Sacrifice (Peel 2009: 9)

*saga*, Chapter 1<sup>28</sup>) notes that for a long time people believed in sacred groves and ancient sites. The Icelandic *Landnámabók* and related sagas are also well known for the inclusion of references to sacred natural features and places (see Brink 2001: 80; a larger sampling of these is in the Source Quotes: Sacred Landscapes; Anglo-Saxon approaches are detailed in Semple 2010: 21-48). This includes varied landscape features such as headlands and mountains (an example is *The Saga of the People of Eyri* <sup>29</sup>), boulders (such as *Landnámabók* Chapter 241<sup>30</sup>), groves (an example is *Landnámabók* Chapter 237<sup>31</sup>) were especially sacred in this context.

This idea of a sacred landscape is widely embodied in the written texts. The cult-house must be seen as only part of the sacred landscape, not the sole focus of cultic activity. This is counter to the modern church as focal point in the Christian tradition. This landscape acts as a cultural anchor for mythological themes and stories.

### ***Individual Cult-foci or Poles***

There is one particular type of ‘constructed’ outdoor cult foci that has a contemporaneous account — the worship of poles. Ibn Fadlān records in 921:

When their boats come to this anchorage, each one of them goes ashore... and betakes himself to a tall wooden pole set upright, that has a face like a man. Around it are small images and behind these are long, tall poles driven into the earth...  
 ([Frye 2005: 65-6, Full quote in Q:11])

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<sup>28</sup> Prior to that time, and for a long time afterwards, people believed in groves and grave howes, holy places and ancient sites, and in heathen idols *Guta saga*, Chapter 1: 17-24 [*The History of Gotland*, c 1220 – 1330] (Peel 1999: 5).

<sup>29</sup> The headland is in the form of a mountain, and Thorolf invested so much reverence in it that no one was allowed to look towards it without having washed and nothing was allowed to be killed on the mountain. *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, (Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4). Full quote is in the Appendix at Q:16.

<sup>30</sup> His son Eyvind took possession of Flateyjardale up to Gunnsteinar, and held the boulders there sacred. *Landnámabók* Chapter 241 (P&E, 1972: 104)

<sup>31</sup> Afterwards, Thorir took possession of the whole of Fnjoskdale as far as Odeila. He made his home at Lund [ON Lunde, grove], and held the grove sacred. *Landnámabók* Chapter 237 (P&E, 1972: 103)



Such ‘idols’ are also verified through archaeology, a good number can be found scattered throughout museums in Scandinavia (Fig. 108). The sites of Hovshaugen (Farbregd 1986: 42-51) and Mære Church (Olsen 1969:26; Nordeide 2011: 107-13), both in Norway, are examples of sites where poles had been erected in pre-Christian times (Fig. 109).

There is a broad repertoire of evidence for single poles employed in similar manners throughout northern Europe. World tree symbology, such as seen with the *Irmingsûl* is extensive (summary of details and Germanic examples can be found in Tolley 2013: 178-83). The evidence, in the form of written sources and etymological data, can be controversial. The term translated in the *Guta Lag* (text: Pipping 1907: 7<sup>32</sup>; a sample translation is Peel 2009: 9; Q:14) for ‘ancient sites’ is actually *stafgarpr*. The term has proven contentious (Peel 1999: 27-9; an analysis of the entire quote is in Sanmark 2004: 158). The Gnutish words though for ‘pole’ and ‘enclosed area’ are clear, and this may suggest a grouping of poles. Related toponymical evidence from Gotland concludes the most likely explanation is a generality cognate with the more generic translation ‘ancient site’ (Olsson 1992: 91-7). In the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon world it has been hypothesized that the **OE** term *stapol* (as a carved ritual pole) maybe have served a similar purpose both as potential world tree iconography, and a cultural point of ritual foci (Blair 2013: 188-91). It is suggested that these wooden poles may have ultimately been assimilated and replaced by Christian crosses (Blair 2005: 186-7, 226-7, 475-80; Blair 2013: 190-1). Evidence from a version of the Norwegian Law of Gulathing suggest a possible phallic association with some of these (Sanmark 2004: 164-5). Although the derivation is unclear, toponymical evidence from Sweden may relate to the deity Nerthus mentioned by Tacitus (Tac. Ger. 40.2). Examples are Niærdhastaf and Nälsta, which appear to be related to either (**ON**) Njörðr or potentially (**OSw**) Niærdh (Brink 2007: 118-9).

The conclusion that can be drawn from this evidence is that a one size fits all approach to identifying poles as world trees is simplistic. It is not known what deity or deities these poles

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<sup>32</sup> The Pipping transcription of the text of the *Guta lag* and *Guta Saga* (Pipping 1907) is available online at: <https://ia600507.us.archive.org/27/items/urn-nbn-se-kb-digark-4771075/urn-nbn-se-kb-digark-4771075.pdf> [Accessed 07 May 2017]

represent and, given their geographical range and long chronological span, they may represent different gods.

### *A Summary of Literary Cult Structure details*

The literary evidence provides many details regarding cultic structures. These varied descriptions share many similarities, and they can be summarised as follows.

All of the cultic structures mentioned in the written accounts are timber constructions. The most common building element mentioned is the stave superstructure (often translated as ‘columns’, ‘pillars’, or ‘timbers’).<sup>33</sup> These structures are varied in form, but can be typologically described in two different patterns. One a small structure, the second a much larger hall-like structure.

The small structure comprises a one room building that often houses idols (detailed below). These are most often detailed as dedicated cult-houses, mentioned in the context of making individual sacrifices, and being built and controlled by one family (Sundqvist 2015:155-7 ).<sup>34</sup> These structures are often dedicated to one deity. So, for example, in *Tale of Ogmund Bash*

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<sup>33</sup> Hallstein, son of Thorolf Mostur-Beard, took possession of Thorskafjord, and lived at Hallsteiness. He held sacrifices so that Thor would send him high-seat pillars. Then a tree was washed ashore on his land, sixty three ells long and two fathoms thick, and this was his used for making high seat pillars for almost every farm there in the fjord. *Landnámabók* Chapter 123 (P&E 1972: 61-2)

Thorhadd the Old was a temple priest at Moere [Mære] in Trondheim. He had a great desire to go to Iceland, but before he set off, he dismantled the temple and took the pillars and some earth from under the temple with him. *Landnámabók* Chapter 297 (P&E 1972: 117)

As soon as Ingolf caught his first glimpse of Iceland he threw his [family temple] high seat pillars overboard, hoping for a good omen, and declared he’d settle wherever the pillars happened to wash ashore. *Landnámabók* Chapter 8 (P&E, 1972: 20).

<sup>34</sup> There was a famous man in Sogn [Norway] called Geir, and he became known as Vegeir, because he was a great sacrificer. He had a large number of children. Vebjorn the Sogn-Champion was his eldest son, and after him came Vestein, Vethorm, Vemund, Vegest, and Vethorn; his daughter was called Vedis. *Landnámabók* Chapter 149 (P&E, 1972: 70).

(Hreinsson 1997: V2 320-1) this cult-house (in this case, for Frey) is small enough to be cared for by one person, the deity taken by wagon to other feasts.

The second is a large, multi-use hall like structure, capable of holding a large group of people. This large structure (this is often termed a ceremonial building, banqueting or feasting hall Sundqvist 2015: 100-2, 105. 147-9) is frequently mentioned in relation to communal feasts (Slupecki 2009: 28). These structures are occasionally demarcated as owned communally.<sup>35</sup> The temple in Trondheim is described in the *Saga of Hákon the Good*, (Chapter 14) as so large that all of the farmers would come and bring all the food (including livestock and horses) they needed for the feast and ate this indoors.<sup>36</sup> The ‘temple’ in Uppsala so large that all of Sweden presents gifts and sacrifices there has already been mentioned above. The *Saga of the People of Kjalarnes* provides a measurement of an Icelandic cult structure 100 feet long and sixty feet wide.<sup>37</sup> Halls are detailed in both Latin and Old Norse sources. *St Olav’s saga* (Chapter 112) even utilizes a feasting hall as a plot device.<sup>38</sup> The feasts mentioned are often done in a yearly cycle, with the

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<sup>35</sup> Thorhall sacrificed to idols, like his kinsmen. Not far from his farm was a rich temple which the people of Fljot owned in common and held sacrificial feasts there every year. *The Tale of Thorhall Knapp*. (Hreisson 1997 Vol II: 462)

<sup>36</sup> Earl Sigurth maintained all sacrificial feasts there in Trondheim on the king’s behalf. It was ancient custom that ... all farmers were to come to the heathen temple and bring along with them the food they needed while the feast lasted. At this feast all were to take part in the drinking of ale. Also, all kinds of livestock were killed in connection with it, horses also... But the meat of the animals was to be boiled and to serve as food for the banquet. Fires were to be lighted in the middle of the temple floor, and kettles hung over them. The sacrificial beaker was to be borne around the fire... (Hollander 1964: 107).

<sup>37</sup> Thorgrim built a farm at Hof that spring...He had a large temple built in his hayfield, a hundred feet long and sixty wide (Hreinsson 1997: V3 307-8).

<sup>38</sup> In fall, at the beginning of winter there was a sacrificial feast at Hlathir, and the king attended it... Then he went to another farm. There the woman of the house stood in the doorway and told them they could not come in there, saying that they had to sacrifice to the elves there.... *St Olav’s Saga* Chapter 112 (Hollander 1964: 369-374), an abridgement of this episode is in Q:49.

local farmers in attendance.<sup>39</sup> There is occasional mention of the use of feasts for demarcating special events, such as in the *Saga of the People of Eyri* where the advice of Thor is solicited.<sup>40</sup>

There are two relatively extensive descriptions of cult interiors in Old Norse/Icelandic sources. Before examining the specific details of the interior of these cult structures, it is worth reviewing these longer descriptions in full.

*The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes* states:

[Thorgrim] ... had a large temple built in his hayfield, a hundred feet long and sixty wide. Everybody had to pay a temple fee. Thor was the god most honoured there. It was rounded on the inside, like a vault, and there were windows and wall-hangings everywhere. The image of Thor stood in the centre, with other gods on both sides. In front of them was an altar made with great skill and covered with iron on the top. On this there was to be a fire which would never go out – they called it sacred fire. On the altar was to lie a great armband, made of silver. The temple godi [chieftain-priest] was to wear it on his arm at all gatherings, and everyone was to swear oaths on it whenever a suit was brought. A great copper bowl was to stand on the altar, and into it was to go all the blood which came from animals or men given to Thor. They called this sacrificial blood and the sacrificial blood bowl. This blood was to be sprinkled over men and animals, and the animals that were given

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<sup>39</sup> It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all of the provinces of Sweden. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted....Feasts and sacrifices of this kind are solemnized for nine days. *GHEP* Book 4 xxvii (Tschan 2002: 207-8)

Earl Sigurth maintained all sacrificial feasts there in Trondheim on the king's behalf. It was ancient custom that when the sacrifice was to be made, all farmers were to come to the heathen temple and bring along with them the food they needed while the feast lasted. *Heimskringla, Saga of Hákon the Good*, Chapter 14 (Hollander 1964: 10)

..... and the animals that were given in sacrifice were to be used for feasting when sacrificial banquets were held. *The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes* (Hreinsson 1997: V3 307-8)

<sup>40</sup>Thorolf Moster-beard held a great sacrificial feast during which he consulted his dear friend [the god] Thor about whether he should reconcile himself with the king or leave the country [Norway] and seek another fate. *The Saga of the People of Eyri* (Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4)

in sacrifice were to be used for feasting when sacrificial banquets were held. Men whom they sacrificed were to be cast into a pool which was outside by the door; they called it Blotkelda (Hreinsson, 1997: V3 307-8).

Several points in this description are questionable. Windows in timber structures make walls unstable. They are quite rare and unknown in this time frame, for this type of structures. Even the chronologically later stave churches did not have them. The windows call into question other items related to the description. A length of 100x60 foot structure with 'windows everywhere' describes a suspiciously church-like structure. In a similar vein, wall hangings are not detailed in other descriptions, although certainly the recovered Oseberg tapestries suggest they existed (textiles documented in Christensen, Arne Emil and Nockert, Margareta, 2006).

*The Saga of the People of Eyri* states:

[Thorolf] ...had a temple built, and it was a sizable building, with a door on the side-wall near the gable. The high-set pillars were placed inside the door, and nails, that were called holy nails, were driven into them. Beyond that point, the temple was a sanctuary. At the inner end there was a structure similar to the choir in churches nowadays and there was a raised platform in the middle of the floor like an altar, where a ring weighing twenty ounces and fashioned without a join was placed, and all oaths had to be sworn on this ring. It also had to be worn by the temple priest at all public gatherings. A sacrificial bowl was placed on the platform and in it a sacrificial twig –like a priest's aspergillum- which was used to sprinkle blood from this bowl. This blood, which was called sacrificial blood, was the blood of live animals offered to the gods. The gods were placed around the platform in the choir-like structure within the temple. All farmers had to pay a toll to the temple and they were obliged to support the temple godi [chieftain-priest] in all his campaigns, just as thingman [citizens] are now obliged to support their chieftain. The temple godi was responsible for the upkeep of the temple and ensuring it was maintained properly, as well as holding sacrificial feasts in it. (Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4).

Although both of these descriptions appear factual, they employ vocabulary reflective of ecclesiastical structures, as well as details reminiscent of church structures. Both structures are

suggested to be large and used for feasts. This implies they are the hall-like structure, rather than the dedicated smaller cult-house structure.

Idols are mentioned in both types of structures. The implication from the literary sources is that the small structure is most often associated with a specific deity (detailed below, Q:71, Q:65, Q:61) and the larger type of structure is frequently mentioned in relation to communal feasts (Slupecki 2009: 28 Q:75, Q:48). On occasion the internal detail of these structures is recorded, for example *The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes* (Hreinsson 1997: V3 307-8, detailed above) provides a detailed account of the presence of images of deities within: ‘The image of Thor stood in the centre, with other gods on both sides’. Many sources mention deity images in various detail. Adam of Bremen (GHEP, Book Four: xxvi) provides one of the more detailed accounts:

... the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko [Frey] have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather and crops. The other Wotan- that is the Furious- carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Frikko, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals. His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus. But Wotan they chisel armed, as our people are wont to represent Mars. Thor with his scepter apparently resembles Jove. (Tschan 2002: 207).

Several sources speaking of the destruction of these statues and provide further detail related to their construction. An example can be seen in *St Olav's Saga* (Chapter 112):

....In the evening the king asked the son of Guthbrand how their god was made up. He answered that he was made in the image of Thór, “and he has a hammer in his hand and is of great size and hollow inside, and he stands on a kind of pedestal when he is outside. There is a profusion of gold and silver upon him.”

.. Kolbien struck at their god so he fell to pieces, and out jumped mice as big as cats, and adders, and snakes. (Hollander 1964: 369-74).

From these descriptions, it appears these wooden idols were realistically carved, approximately life-size and hollow. Additional relevant excerpts are provided in the Source Quotes at the end of this paper.

The second most common interior attribute described in written accounts is oath rings. Oath rings are used for swearing oaths, and used extensively in legal manners. *The Tale of Thorstein Bull's-Leg* (Section 1) details 'A ring weighing two ounces or more had to be kept on the altar of each chief temple',<sup>41</sup> as well as an example of the oath sworn on it.<sup>42</sup>

The *Landnámabók* and related sagas provide a formulaic narrative for cult-house construction, which appears several times in varying forms. This excerpt is from *The Saga of the People of Eyri* [*Eyrbyggja saga*] (Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4).

Thorolf [Moster-beard] then sailed out to sea with a fair wind and came within sight of land..... Thorolf cast overboard the high-seat pillars which had been in his temple...he would settle in Iceland in whatever place Thor directed the pillars to land.

...He put in to land halfway along the southern shore of the fjord.... They explored the area and found that Thor and the pillars were already ashore at the tip of the headland north of the cove....

Then Thorolf carried fire around his land-claim... He established settlements for the crew and set up a large farm by the cove, Hofsvog, which he called Hofstadir.

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<sup>41</sup> [Pagan law code requires...] A ring weighing two ounces or more had to be kept on the altar of each chief temple. Every godi was obligated to have this ring on his arm at all of the public meetings he was to preside over and to redder the ring in the blood of a sacrificial bull he had sacrificed himself. Every person who needed to acquit himself of a legal duty at court had first to swear an oath on that ring and to call two or more witnesses to his oath (Hreinsson 1997: V4 341).

<sup>42</sup> 'I call on you to witness,' he was to say, 'that I swear an oath, a legal oath, on the ring. May now Frey and Njord and the all-powerful god so help me that I will now prosecute or defend the case or bear witness or render a decision or verdicts according to what I know is most just and true and most according to the law, and will acquit myself of all legal duties which fall upon me while I am present at this Thing (Hreinsson 1997: V4 341).

There he had a temple built...(Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4, the complete entry can be viewed at Q:74).

In summary, this involves the arrival of a first wave settler to Iceland from Norway, who throws the temple or cult-house pillars overboard on the approach to the new land. He and his family settle where the pillars come ashore. An area is then dedicated by walking around its perimeter carrying fire (usually via torch,<sup>43</sup> although the *Landnámabók* does record one instance of land claim via flaming arrow<sup>44</sup>) and a cult-house is built on the site (further examples are in the Source Quotes section). Occasionally a structure, often with dirt removed from underneath it, from the homeland is dismantled and moved to the new farm location.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the emphasis on the building of individual cult structures or houses by families, the sagas occasionally mention the financial methodology behind supporting the cult-houses via community fee, or personal donation. For example, *Landnámabók* Chapter 41 details: ‘The men of Geitland were supposed to pay for half the upkeep of the [pagan] temple there, and Tongue-Odd the other half’ (P&E 1972: 31-2). *Íslendingabók* Chapter 2 provides an example of donation ‘[Grímr geistkor] explored the whole of Iceland...And everyone in this country gave him a penny for that, and he later gave the money to the temples’ (Grønlie 2006: 5).

The construction of a cult-house thus serves several functions. It can be interpreted as a political act, in that the reigning family builds it. In this sense, it provides legitimacy for the new landowner/settler and their subsequent dynasty. In that these structures provide the focus for communal feasts, they help build community. Since many of these structures are built with previous existing structures or parts from the homeland, it maintains a connection to their origins as well as signalling continuity. Allowing the pillars to dictate where the family settle also makes the act divinely inspired, the choice of location is legitimized by supernatural intervention.

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<sup>43</sup> Jorund carried fire around it [unclaimed land] and dedicated it to the temple. (P&E 1972: 131)

<sup>44</sup> [Onund the Sage]..shot a tinder-arrow across the river to claim the land west of it...’ (P&E 1972: 91)

<sup>45</sup> [Thorolf Moster-beard] dismantled the temple and transported most of its timbers, together with the earth from the underneath the pedestal on which Thor had been placed. *The Saga of the People of Eyri* (Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4).



### *Conclusion:*

This plentiful evidence reveals the breadth and depth of references to pre-Christian cult structures in the medieval sagas. Despite the late date of the sources, details are employed with the aim of making the narratives realistic. Distilling this data, it is apparent that the medieval population believed that pre-Christian cult structures did exist. Some were multipurpose halls, capable of holding large groups of people for feasting. Others appear to be smaller, dedicated cult-houses, often containing deity imagery. Sacrifices took place in both of these types of these structures, as did the taking of alms and oaths.

### *Concluding Thoughts. What Can We believe?*

This section began by addressing a simple question, can we trust the sources we have as historical information? The answer is a qualified yes. Accepting the bias and general unreliability of this material, there are some important points to be noted. As will be examined shortly, references to cultic structures in the medieval literary sources are numerous. This occurs as a common theme throughout medieval Norse literature, and is suggested to exist throughout the entirety of the Viking era up to the period of conversion. These references, with the exception of only a small handful of examples, are simply descriptive background detail. They play no role in the plot, and are not often important for the storyline. This is the same whether these references are in quasi-historical sources, or the Family Sagas themselves. Even alone, arguably, this frequency of mentions implies their existence. The evidence above demonstrates the generally negative view of pagans by the first authors of written accounts in the early medieval Christian world. These ‘pagan’ details could have been left out, but instead they offered up a useful triumphalist narrative for the Christian conversion. Nevertheless, the banality of the many mentions, and the sheer number of references, implies their presence in written account was more than just a useful trope.

These sources gain greater credibility when their evidence can be triangulated with excavated findings and artefacts, aiding interpretations. An example of this is in the story of Thorhadd the Old in the *Landnámabók* (Chapter 297). He was a priest in Mære, Trondheim, Norway. He

dismantled his cult-house, and reassembled it in Stodvarfjord, Iceland.<sup>46</sup> A cult-house, recovered in an excavation at Gudehovet, (Ranheim, north of Trondheim) was shown through the work of archaeologists to have been dismantled in this very manner (see section 5.6 on Gudehovet).

Thus, if the presence of temples on the basis of the literary texts is accepted, the next stage is to interrogate this evidence to determine if any detailed information can be accessed on what form these took and how they functioned.

#### ***5.4. Cult foci: the Archaeological Evidence***

Similar to the manner in which the written accounts present significant problems, the evidence for pre-Christian ritual sites/structures that survive in the archaeological record is also occasionally ephemeral and opaque. This section discusses selected evidence and is not comprehensive. A range of excavations are drawn upon to demonstrate the primary material elements connected to these ritual sites. The sites chosen for discussion are well documented, and often preserve extensive evidence of ritual activities. For example, Gamla Uppsala (Uppsala, Sweden) is discussed because of the extensive archaeological investigations there, the written accounts, and also the site highlights issues of interpretation that are evidenced at other locations. Lille Ullevi (Bro, Stockholm, Sweden) is also included here. This site exemplifies a locale with seemingly obvious cultic associations, although remaining enigmatic in terms of function and purpose. Another seeming contradiction worth highlighting regards the unusual geographical position of these structures. Most of the archaeological remains of cult-sites, ritual structures or cult-houses are in Sweden and Denmark. Only one cult-house (Gudehovet, near Trondheim, detailed below) is in Norway. Yet, the majority of literary evidence suggests a large number of sites would be in Norway. The large majority of evidence comes from Sweden and that is where this selective tour of sites and discussions begins.

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<sup>46</sup> Thorhadd the Old was a temple priest at Moere in Trondheim. He had a great desire to go to Iceland, but before he set off, he dismantled the temple and took the pillars and some earth from under the temple with him. He put in at Stodvarfjord, and declared the whole fjord sacred, just as his place in Moere has been, forbidding people to take any life there except for domestic cattle. *Landnámabók* Chapter 297 (P&E 1972: 117).

### 5.5. *Cultic Sites and Complexes*

#### *Gamla Uppsala (Uppsala, Sweden)*

Gamla Uppsala är helt enkelt den mest komplexa kungsgårdsmiljö från yngre järnålder med äldre historiska rötter som går att hitta i Norden idag, komplex i avseendet att den avtecknar sig i så många olika typer av källmaterial. (Zachrisson 2013: 11)

Gamla Uppsala is simply the most complex royal archaeological site from the early Iron Age, with older historical roots than any found in Scandinavia today. Its complexity lies in the many different types of sources that provide details.

Gamla Uppsala is one of the largest cultic sites known in Scandinavia (Fig. 110-112). Along with extensive literary evidence (detailed below), there is evidence of the importance of this multi-focus site as a royal centre during the entirety of the late Iron Age to the early Middle Ages, becoming an archbishopric in 1164 (Sundqvist 2015: 41-3). In a situation that will be echoed in the stave churches, this nationally important site has been the subject of many different interpretations. This site has over four centuries of being interpreted as a political symbol (Alkarp 2009 provides a 457 page examination of these differing interpretations through four centuries).

Adam's contemporaneous account of the Uppsala temple is the most important witness to a pre-Christian cultic structure, as well as outdoor ritual. Adam's descriptions suggest two important avenues for this research. First is his detailed account of the temple. Second, is the information he provides which supports and allows an interpretation of outdoor ritual. Due to the differing nature of the archaeological evidence these subjects are treated separately, although they are obviously linked.

Some elements of Adam's descriptions can be dismissed outright as exaggeration. For example, no 'gold' temples are known in the Norse building tradition, and the 'mountains' he describes are grave mounds (Fig. 111). Other elements appear to be based on *Interpretatio Romana/Christiana*, and as previously detailed, are likely a plagiarization of other accounts. Some scholars suggest Adam's description is a fiction (Janson 1997 and Janson 1998; the argument interprets the term 'pagan' for apostate Christian). Snorri though, provides evidence

confirming of some of the particulars that Adam mentions. For example, the *Heimskringla*, (*Óláfs Saga Helga*, Chapter 77) states ‘Freyr built a great temple at Uppsálir and made it his capital’ (Finlay and Faulkes 2011: 13-4). In the *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga Saga*, Chapter 10, detailed below), he confirms elements of the feasts that Adam speaks of. These details are particularly important because Snorri is believed to have been unaware of Adam. Thus, Snorri’s writing provides independent corroboration for the existence of the temple and some of its activities (Sundqvist 2015: 124).

Prior to examining the archaeological evidence for a temple, it is worth reviewing Adam’s contemporaneous account (located in GHEP Book 4, xxvi, these quotes are long and in their entirety in Source Quotes: Adam of Bremen). He described the temple structure as ‘decked out in gold’ (GHEP, Book 4, section 26, Tschan 2002: 207) with ‘a gold chain...hangs over the gables’ (GHEP, Scholia 139, Tschan 2002: 207). Inside ‘...people worship the statues of three gods’ (GHEP, Book 4, section 26, Tschan 2002: 207). Adams graphic description, purportedly based on second-hand contemporaneous information, of the ‘temple’ in Uppsala has spurred research going as far back as 1555 by Olaus Magnus (Magnus 1555: 104). There have been many attempts to find remains related to Adam’s temple and it is fair to say that this location was the first, and remains one of the best known cultic sites.

It was generally believed the most likely location for the temple was under, or nearby, the church in Gamla Uppsala. Sune Lindqvist excavated the site in the 1926 and reported posthole remains as the possible remains of the temple (Fig. 114-115). He then attempted to reconstruct the cult-house using the newly discovered cult-house at Arkona as a model. Arkona though proved a problematic example in that it is a Wendish cult-house. The Wends were a Slavic people, unconnected chronologically and culturally with the Norse world (Olsen 1966: 141-52). There have been various attempts to reconstruct what the cult-house may have looked like based on the posthole evidence. Olsen, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, presented these images side by side (Fig. 116) and argued that the remains could be an early church or even a horse stall (Olsen 1966:140-2, 283, 164-5).

The results of Lindqvist’s 1926 excavation, and the identification of a cult structure under the church, was re-examined and subsequently thrown out by Nordahl. She concluded that the

postholes recovered in previous work and identified as related to the temple were not all contemporaneous (Nordahl 1996: 71-2). Nordahl also flagged documentary evidence (the 13th-century *Annotationes scriptis ex Karoli episcopi Arosiensis excerptæ* although the veracity of this document has been called into question, Janson 2001: 41-60), suggesting the preceding timber church was joined to the pre-Christian structure, and the church was therefore not built on top of a pre-Christian structure. Nordahl did find evidence for a hall (possibly two) on clay platform mounds north of the church. This was likely a 9th-century royal hall that burned down (Nordahl 1996: 73). Further research tentatively identifies this as a banqueting hall, 50 metres in length (Sundqvist 2015: 98). This hall has reignited a debate as to whether Adam's '*Templum*' was in fact a multi-use structure, rather than an exclusive religious building (Sundqvist 2015: 125). Several promising potential sites in and near the church were documented via GPR (Alkarp and Price 2005), although subsequent excavations were unable to confirm this data (Göthberg 2008). Although this is an area under extensive focus (updates are documented at Gamla Uppsala 2015, final publication of the current and 2012 sites is in press), nothing at this point supports Adam's temple details.

#### *Conclusion:*

The recovery of Adam's 'temple' has so far remained elusive. Work however continues in this regard. Although much of the evidence for this structure remains questionable and exaggerated, the literary evidence, as well as the extensive evidence for Uppsala as a cult centre, supports its existence.

#### ***Outdoor Cult***

Although the 'temple' evidence is unconfirmed, this location as a cultic centre is incontrovertible. Again, we start with a summary of Adam's observations (located in GHEP Book 4, xxvi and xxvii, Source Quotes: Adam of Bremen). He says, 'at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all of the provinces of Sweden. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted' (GHEP Book 4 xxvii, Tschan 2002: 208). The site is described as 'standing on level ground with mountains all about it like a theatre' (GHEP, Scholia 139, Tschan 2002: 207). Natural foci are also described such as a 'sacred grove that adjoins the temple [where sacrificial victims are hung]' (GHEP Book 4 xxvii, Tschan 2002: 208), a sacred tree 'with wide-spreading branches, always green winter and summer' (GHEP, Book 4, xxvii, Tschan 2002: 208) and a

‘spring at which the pagans are accustomed to make their sacrifices [including human sacrifices]’ (GHEP, Scholia 138, Tschan 2002: 207). Snorri corroborates some of these details, in the *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga Saga*, Chapter 10), confirming the feasting and its rotating yearly requirement, ‘it was an ancient custom...for the chief sacrificial feast to be held at Uppsälir... people had to attend it from all over Svíþjóð (Finlay and Faulkes 2014: 69).

Potential evidence of procession, can be found at the site. A long row of postholes north and south of the site, recovered from 1996 to 2013 may demarcate a consecrated area, or a processional way. Several of the burial mounds (dating from the Merovingian period and the early Viking Age) are enclosed within this boundary (details summarised by Sundqvist 2015: 126-7).

Four large burial mounds (called by Adam **Lat** *montes* or mountains, GHEP, Scholia 139 Schmeidler 1917: 258) lie near the church in a row. The three large burial mounds at Gamla Uppsala (**Sw** *Kungshögarna*, Royal Mounds) are demarcated as Western, Middle, and Eastern. A smaller mound, called the Thing Mound, lies at the eastern end of the row (see Fig. 110-111). These have long been a focus of attention. They were excavated in 1874 by Bror Emil Hildebrand, the Director-General of the National Archives and were confirmed to artefacts associated with royal interments. The Thing Mound was found to be of geological origin with the surface levelled, and a gravel and clay layer added. This was interpreted as the mound being prepared for use as a grave, but not actually used as one (Persson and Olofsson 2004: 556-7; a summary of the archaeological and survey evidence can be found in Ljungkvist 2013: 33-67). There are literary suggestions that these mounds were used for cultic purposes. The *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga Saga*, Chapter 10) states ‘...when Freyr was dead they carried him secretly into the tomb [for three years] they poured all the tribute into the mound...The peace and prosperity continued’ (Finlay and Faulkes 2011: 13-4). Saxo (Book V, 16.3, Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: 355) is also suggested to have a similar story (Sundqvist 2015: 467-8). Besides containing the likely remains of royalty, there is another important point to relate here. Mounds are well known as assembly sites. This is reflected in the name of the Thing Mound. According

to Snorri (*Heimskringla*, *Óláfs Saga Helga*, Chapter 77<sup>47</sup>), '[At Gamla Uppsala] ...there had also to be an assembly of all the Svíar [the Thing of All Swedes]. There was also at the same time a market and meeting of traders and it lasted a week (Finlay and Faulkes 2014: 69-70).

#### *Conclusion:*

While the evidence for the Uppsala 'temple' is sparse, the evidence for the area as a cult centre is extensive. Archaeological and literary evidence demonstrates a long standing royal and cultic centre with extensive outdoor rituals, large royal burial mounds, a processional way, and country-wide ritual festivals.

#### *Lunda (Strängnäs, Södermanland, Sweden)*

Before detailing Lunda (ON for grove, Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957: 399), it is worth examining the information known about sacred groves. Sacred groves are extensively mentioned in the Old/Norse and Latin sources (see Source Quotes: Sacred Groves and Sacred Trees:). However, these are obviously difficult to recognize in the archaeological record (Andersson 2006: 195). There is one definitive excavation of a sacrificial tree, with animal remains. This sources from Frösön medieval church (Lake Storsjö, Jämtland, Sweden). Excavations done in 1984 (published in Iregren 1989; and an osteological re-examination in Magnell and Iregren 2010) provide the best evidence for a sacrificial tree. An excavation under the church choir recovered 5kgs of disarticulated and scattered bones around a birch tree stump (Fig. 117). Carbon dating of the stump and bones placed it in the range of  $745 \pm 85$  Cal AD to as late as  $1060 \pm 75$  Cal AD (Iregren 1989: 119-20, 130-1; Magnell and Iregren 2010: 224). There is also graphic evidence of a tree with sacrificed humans hanging from it on the Oseberg tapestry fragments (Fig. 118, Krafft 1956: 35). It is worth highlighting that the term *lund* may not imply a grove of trees dedicated to a specific deity. In a study of theophoric elements around Lake Mälaren (Sweden) it was noted that the term *lund* is used as a theophoric element in association with a number of

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<sup>47</sup> In Svíþjóð it was an ancient custom, as long as heathendom lasted there, for the chief sacrificial feast to be held at Uppsalarir in Goí [mid-February to mid-March]. Sacrifices had to be offered at it for peace and victory for their king, and people had to attend it from all over Svíþjóð. Then there had also to be an assembly of all the Svíar. There was also at the same time a market and meeting of traders and it lasted a week *Heimskringla*, *Óláfs Saga Helga*, Chapter 77 (Finlay and Faulkes 2014: 69-70).

deities. This implies that the term has a more general meaning, (i.e. holy grove) than a specific meaning related to a deity (Vikstrand 2001: 291).

Lunda was excavated in 2001 and 2002 by the National Heritage Board. It demonstrated some of the clearest evidence in Scandinavia of a sacred landscape most active from the 7-9th century (Anderson 2006: 198, Fig. 119). The site contained what was interpreted as a sacred grove, hall, as well as what appears to be a small cult-house. This site illustrates the variety of cult foci suggestive of sacred landscape (Fig. 120). It also highlights some of the necessary cautions one must take when interpreting these sites. If large parts of this site had not been excavated (often a rarity in today's economic climate) the totality of the sacred landscape would not have been realised.

A number of important finds related to cultic usage were discovered. The remains of a three-aisled hall, 50 metres long and 10 metres wide, were recovered. The remains of a smaller cultic building (as defined by the three phallic figurines buried in it, Andersson et al 2003: 124-6; Fig. 121) were found nearby. The walls were on the same alignment as the hall (Andersson et al 2003: 125-6). This combination of small cult room and aligned hall will be seen in other high-status sites below.

A cemetery was located behind the hall, and a nearby hilltop contained evidence of a possible sacrificial site, as judged by the burnt bones and burnt clay at the site. Crushed bone, coloured beads, arrowheads, and knives were all scattered around the site (Andersson 2006: 197). The worn bone found at the site was interpreted as being surface deposits (Andersson 2006: 197). There appears to have been stone sites where rocks were ritually broken and crushed with millstones (Andersson 2006: 196-8). The use of millstones, potentially for cultic purposes, has a mention in Norse literature. In the *Poetic Edda's Grottasöngur* and Snorri's *Edda* (*Skaldskaparmál*, Section 43), two millstones are described. These magic millstones were said to have the ability to grind out whatever the grinder desired.<sup>48</sup> Two slaves employed this to grind out salt, gold, peace and prosperity and ultimately an army (Snorri 2002: 107). The work song used by the slave girls is recorded in the *Grottasöngur* (Larrington 1996: 260-3; Snorri 2002:

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<sup>48</sup> But the millstones had this quality, that the mill ground out whatever the grinder prescribed (Snorri 2002: 107).



107). A similar tradition can be seen in the Finnish *Kalevala*'s *Sampo* (the *Sampo* is central to the Finnish epic, its creation is detailed in poem 10). This mill also grinds out salt and money, as well as grain (Kalevala Section 10, Lines 423-4, Peabody Magoun 1978: 60<sup>49</sup>). It is worth noting that many scholars follow a different, although not necessarily thematically exclusive, interpretation of mills. They are construed as an analogy for cosmological knowledge by equating the seasonal production of grain, with stellar phenomenon and mythic themes (most deeply detailed by De Santillana and Von Dechend 2007, 86-112 covers Scandinavia; Zachrisson 2004: 154 relates a similar idea to Helgö).

To summarise, Lunda presents a large excavated site with some of the clearest evidence for a sacred grove and related sacred landscape. The site is composed of a hall, a small one room cult-house with figurines as well as a likely grove, cemetery and ritual site. It demonstrates the interconnectedness and general complexity of these cult sites. The halls, cult-houses, cemeteries, and various landscape features are occurring in a group.

### ***Lilla Ullevi (Bro, Stockholm, Sweden)***

Lilla Ullevi is located in Upplands Bro, north of Stockholm (Fig. 122). It was excavated between 2007 and 2008. The area consisted of two major excavations. A ritual site (documented in Ullevi 2008) and a Viking era burial ground (documented at Ullevi 2007). The Lilla Ullevi site is rare case of a site that has toponymal evidence (*lilla* is modern **Sw** for little, and Ullevi means Ullr's sacred site), archaeological evidence, and the artefactual evidence that appears to match that described in the literary sources.

Ullr (**Sw** *Ull*) is a poorly understood Norse deity. He has only a brief mention in the Old Norse/Icelandic literature (detailed below). The lack of commentary, and its existence in what is believed to be the oldest strata of Eddic poetry, has led to the assumption that he is one of the earlier deities. This is supported by widespread usage in place name evidence. His name is the

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<sup>49</sup> He [the magical craftsman Ilmarinen] forged the Sampo skillfully: on one side a grain mill/on the second side a salt mill, on the third a money mill (Peabody Magoun 1978: 60).

most frequent place name in Sweden connected with a *vi* (Brink 2007: 118). In imagery that is purported to be him, he is usually portrayed with a bow on skis.

The Lilla Ullevi structure consisted of a square shaped stone platform with ‘wings’. In front of this structure between the wings were four postholes (Fig. 123). Dating placed this structure between 570-770 Cal AD (Bäck et al 2008: 161). The site was interpreted by the excavators as a ‘*Sejdhjäll*’ (the term is **Sw**, from the **ON** *seiðrhjallr*, I translate and anglicise this as seid-hall) in front of a *hörgr* (Bäck et al 2008: 37-40). The point is debatable in that the ‘*hörgr*’ is shaped more as a platform. The ‘seid-hall’ evidence is also questionable, in that it is based on literary descriptions suggested by the four postholes. If this is a seid-hall, it is unique.

Sixty-five amulet-rings (armbands) were discovered at the site (Fig. 124). Importantly, rings recovered on other sites usually have charms on them. These are interpreted as being related to specific deities: Thor’s hammers, sickles for Frey, or spears associated with Odin. The Lilla Ullevi armbands did not have charms on them. These types of rings are reminiscent of rings that oaths were sworn on. That such a practice was related to Ullr is inferred in the *Poetic Edda* (*Grimnir’s Sayings* 42.1<sup>50</sup> and the *Lay of Atli* 30.1-30.4<sup>51</sup>). The implication in these quotes is that Ullr was a deity of protection that oaths are sworn to.

In summary, this site is important for several reasons. It highlights a methodological issue related to site identification. Although this site has the term ‘*vi*’ in the name, it is unlike other sites with similar designations. This demonstrates the caution necessary when approaching linguistic evidence. Often, when a *vi* is mentioned in **ON** evidence, the implication is that this is a monolithic style of structure. Because this word is often translated as temple and occasionally as altar, this implies their similarity. This is not necessarily the case. Although the term *vi* is commonly used, it may reflect a class of structure and not be descriptive in an architectural sense. It also highlights the limits that lie at the intersection of literary, toponymical, and

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<sup>50</sup> May he have Ullr’s protection, and that of all the gods (Larrington 1996: 58)

<sup>51</sup> May it so befall you, Atli, as you gave in oath to Gunnar/ oaths you have often sworn and pledged early/ by the sun curving to the south and the mountain of the War-god/ By the marital bed and by Ullr’s ring (Larrington 1996: 214)

archaeological information. The site appears, with its elongated asymmetry, more as a stage than the *hörgr* the excavators saw in it. And although the use of armbands for swearing oaths is at least briefly mentioned in the literature, the burial of oath rings ritualistically is not. Even with the archaeological, literary, and toponymical evidence, the site remains enigmatic. Attempts to categorize it with similar sites have not been successful (Bäck et al 2008: 28-9). It serves as a reminder that little is known of these sites.

***Lejre (Gamla Lejre, Lejre Kommune, Sjælland, Denmark)***

Gamla Lejre is a tiny agricultural village lying on the south end of Roskilde Fjord (Fig. 125). It lies at the crossroads of several inland waterways. The site, like Uppsala and Yeavering, is attested as a royal site both archaeologically as well as through literary sources. Norse, Anglo-Saxon, Danish and Latin sources identify this as the site of the first Danish royal dynasty, the Scyldingas (the corpus can be viewed at Niles 2007: 295-400). This is perhaps best known as the location where the unknown poet set the *Beowulf* poem.

This site serves as an ideal example of the concept of halls in regard to central places. Lejre is well attested archaeologically with dramatic finds discovered as early as 1850. Ongoing modern excavations by the National Museum in Copenhagen started in 1944 (documented in Niles 2007). The site is complicated, with domestic structures, halls, and inhumation and cremation burials (Christiansen 2010: 240-1). Excavations have identified two pertinent sites, both containing large halls. The older site was excavated in 2002 and 2005 and is called the Fredshøj site (Fig. 126). It dates to the fifth and sixth centuries (the Danish Late Iron Age). The second site was excavated mainly in the 1980s and 1990s and called the Mysselhøjgård site (Fig. 127). It is somewhat later (7th to 10th century) and falls directly in the Viking Era. The Fredshøj Site consisted of buildings, an anomalous stone pile, and a cultural layer. There were two related large buildings. The smaller structure (14.5 metres x 6 metres with curved walls) was built in a manner similar to the nearby hall. It was located almost directly in the centre of the hill and shared its alignment with the hall. The hall (45 metres x 7 metres) was 30 metres away placed in a prominent position that overlooked the landscape. The hall in common with the smaller building had the same size postholes (1 metres wide and 1.5 metres deep). These structures were demolished in the mid-seventh century, and identical structures were rebuilt in a similar location (buildings XVI-XX at the Mysselhøjgård site, Christiansen 2010: 249-50). A stone pile

recovered was 16m by .75 metre high and comprised of fire cracked stones. Around this were a series of pits with fire damage containing animal bones. It would be difficult to not see this as a *hörgr*.

The cultural layer around the site contained the normal evidence of domestic usage; fish bones, faunal remains, and other similar examples of domestic rubbish. A number of high-status items were recovered as well. This included shards from drinking glasses, glass beads, and the remains of gilded mounts. Suggestions of manufacturing in the form of pieces of red glass, gold thread and gold foil were also found. Perhaps the most significant finds however were a series of clay pots that had a unique ornamentation on them. This ornamentation has no known parallel. (Christiansen 2010: 250-1).

The Mysselhøjgård site is a large and complicated one. Traces of more than twenty structures have been located, but it is believed that only seven or eight would have been standing at one time (Christiansen 2010: 247). These buildings have some peculiarities associated with them. These structures were continually rebuilt between the eighth and tenth centuries. They were rebuilt with the same dimensions and similar construction. One of the items noted by the chief excavator is the apparent lack of change in these structures. No sign of the dramatic changes seen in the Viking world at this time are reflected in these structures (Christiansen 2010: 247). Some unusual finds were discovered here, including hard-fired glazed ceramics using an English technology, but made with local clay (Christiansen 2010: 247-8). House IV was the largest hall on the site, at 48.5 metres long. The excavation showed that this was not just one building, but a series of structures in the same form that had been built on the same spot. The site was dismantled about AD 1000. It is suggested that religious changes with the advent of Christianity precipitated these changes (Christiansen 2010: 247).

Both sites contain evidence of ritual activity around the halls. In the Fredshøj hall (Fig. 128), besides the deposits of animal bones in the postholes, some unique artefacts were recovered. There were a series of clay pots decorated with incised designs not seen anywhere else (Christiansen 2010: 251). The site contains a potential *hörgr* 30 metres from the hall, that was 16 metres in diameter and .75 metres at its height in the centre (in fact this is similar to Gudehovet in Norway). The stones were not blackened by soot. Also, a number of contemporaneous pits

filled with animal bones were found around the stones (Christiansen 2010: 250). In the Mysselhøjgård hall (Fig. 129-130) the ritual items included a votive iron sickle in one of the postholes (Niles 2007: 58). One of the more unusual finds was in the oven of the hall. Some burned kernels of rye were discovered, contained the charred remains of the fungus ergot. Ergot is the natural hallucinogen that was the original source of LSD. Whether this was consumed intentionally as a hallucinogen cannot be determined. The site had an anomalous grouping of stones that was 20 metres wide, and 1.5 metres in height. This was dug in the 1986-1988 excavations. The excavators were baffled by this fire burnt stone pile (and theorized it was perhaps a 'colossal pile of used hearths' Christiansen 1991, in English in Niles 2007: 55). This 'stone pile' is most likely the remains of a *hörgr*.

Similar to other hall and cult-house sites, a number of unique finds have been discovered in and around the Lejre site. Perhaps the most interesting can be seen in Fig. 131. The small statue, found in the field next to the Mysselhøjgård site, appears to represent Odin on his throne.

#### *Conclusion:*

The Lejre site provides an ideal example of the use of halls for ritual and secular purposes. There is large scale evidence of feasting at both sites, as well as examples of rare goods. Ritual items were placed in the postholes. The large hall served as a central location on both sites. Unlike the smaller dedicated structures, the halls had hearths as well as an oven.

### ***5.6. Cult-Houses: the Archaeological Evidence***

#### ***Gudehovet (Ranheim, Norway)***

The site is located on a farmer's field about 10 kilometres north of Trondheim. The site was excavated in the summer of 2010 by Preben Rønne of the Vitenskapsmuseet, University of Trondheim (details below are from the unpublished excavation report Rønne 2010, used with permission). This rescue excavation was done in preparation for the construction of a housing complex. This site is generally recognized as the only pre-Christian cult-house discovered in Norway. It consisted of a processional way demarcated by two parallel rows of stones. This way ended at a timber structure. A circular collection of burned rocks existed at the site (Fig. 132). Dating evidence, both radio-carbon dating, as well as material evidence in the cultural layer,

suggest the site was used from c. AD 400-c.1000. The cultural layer in the stratigraphy implied it was used continuously.

The central mound of burned rocks was identified by the excavator as a *hörgr*. This ritual indicator consists of a circular stone setting, approximately 15 metres in diameter and about a metre high. The pile was made up of heated stones with animal blood upon them. Under the *hörgr* was a burial from AD 400. Other items discovered included a piece of a skull, and several human teeth placed in the centre of the *hörgr*. Glass beads and two ritually bent axes were discovered as well.

A partial stone wall on both sides of a path ending at the cult-house was interpreted as a processional way. This timber structure was 5.3 x 4.5 metres (Fig. 133). There were 12 staves, each placed in a stone filled hole. Inside the building was found four postholes in a square. This is assumed to have been evidence of a 'high-seat' or plinth. It is suggested that this was a place where idols, possibly in the form of carved poles, were placed. The ritual nature of the building was assumed because the building has no evidence of domestic usage in the form rubbish in the floor, nor did it contain a hearth. A reconstruction can be seen in Fig. 134.

The site remained in use until about the year 1000. Historical evidence shows that the Trondheim area was forced into Christianity by King Olaf Tryggvason. As evidenced by the saga details, many people emigrated at this point, and the site itself suggests this. Each of the posts of the timber cult-house were pulled up and removed. This methodology is supported by saga evidence (such as that done by Thorolf Moster-Beard in the *Saga of the Eyri*, section 4, Q:66). The *hörgr* was carefully covered with sand and clay, suggesting to the excavator a 'ritual' burial.

To summarise, Gudehovet presents the rare case of an excavated cult-house in Norway. It lies at the end of a processional way, near both a *hörgr* and the remains of a hall. The cult-house is a rectangular post-built structure, with the remains of a possible plinth or table for deity imagery inside it.

### ***Borg (Östergötland, Sweden)***

The site is located in Borg, west of the medieval town of Norrköping, in Östergötland, Sweden. The 7th-century site is located on a ridge overlooking the area, and is next to a medieval royal

manor (Nielsen 1997: 375). Borg demonstrates a number of the characteristics expected of a central place. It is a large site consisting of several buildings close to a central area (Fig. 135). The buildings have specialized functions with nearby farmsteads. The site contains a cultic building that presents an example of a structure associated with a royal chieftain's manor (Nielsen, 1997: 374-5). The association of royalty and religion in central places is well attested both archaeologically and via Icelandic sources, this plays a role in central places as they are seen in Scandinavia. Hus 5 is the cult-house (Fig. 136). The buildings around the cult-house appear to have been related to metal working; slag, whetstones, and blast nozzles suggest this (Nielsen 1997: 379). Likely, there were workshops dedicated to the production of votive offerings (in this case, fire-strikers).

There were many items found that suggest cultic usage of the site. In a paved area outside the grouping of houses was discovered about 75 kg of unburned bones (Nielsen 1997: 384). This was composed of sheep, pigs, and cattle. An examination of this showed a large proportion of skulls and jawbones versus the meatier section of an animal. This suggested that this was not ordinary food refuse but was related to meals connected to sacrifices. Horse and dog skulls were discovered in another area. At least ten dog skulls were discovered. This is considered important because dog burials are often associated with royalty (Nielsen 1997: 385). 98 'Amulet Rings' in the shape of fire-striker shaped rings were discovered wedged in the pavement just west of the cult building. These often had charms attached to them. These charms were in the shape of Thor's hammers, sickles (believed to be a fertility symbol related to Frey, Gräslund 2008: 255), spears (believe related to Odin, Gräslund 2008: 254) rings and others. This was one of the largest discoveries of these artefacts in Sweden (details from Nielsen 1997: 381-4).

The pig bones recovered presented an anomaly. Adult pigs' teeth can be sexed. The adult male mandible has "tusk-like" canines, the sow does not (Davis 1987: 44). It was discovered that, with only one exception, all of the pigs teeth discovered near the amulet rings were from sows. Nielsen (1997: 385) interprets this as suggesting that this area was dedicated to Freya, who was associated with a sow (Nielsen 1997: 385). Frey has been associated with fire-strikers in other contexts (Gräslund 2008: 254). Boars are associated most clearly with Freya (one of whose names is recorded as *Sýr*- sow). However, both deities are associated in Icelandic sources with

boars (Frey has a boar Gullinborsti and Freya has Hildisvíni). This suggested to the archaeologists a cult-house dedicated to both Freya and Frey.

The cult-house building was located on a large (1000 metres square) paved yard. It was about 6 x 7.5 metres. It was orientated north-south, with an entrance on the west side (Fig. 137). The house was built on stone sills, the imprint of the walls is suggested to reflect notched corner joints. The building had two rooms separated down the middle with some small sill stones demonstrating where an interior wall-plate divided the building. The rooms were nearly equal size (the north room was slightly smaller). The floor of the cult-house was paved with rounded stones. The excavators found some flat stones along the eastern wall which they suggest may have been a plinth for a collection of idols (details above summarised from Nielsen 1997: 381). Although it must be noted that this is conjectural. Several literary sources suggest this usage, but no surviving plinth with or without idols has been recovered in any Norse excavation at this point in time. Their conclusion was likely based on the 98 iron amulets that were recovered next to it (Nielsen 1997: 381).

In summary, the cult-house structure was built on a paved courtyard. It was a rectangular structure, built on a stone base. It had potential evidence in it for what was interpreted by the excavators as a plinth for deity figures. The building was divided down the centre by a wall. There was evidence both inside and outside the building of sacrificial remains. Most of these (amulets with fire-striker and extensive pig bones) appear to be related to Frey and Freya as presented in the Old Norse/Icelandic source

#### *Uppåkra (Staffanstorp, Skane, Sweden),*

Uppåkra is located about 5 kilometres south of Lund. It is situated on a rise that overlooks the plain of Lund. There have been a number of excavations at this site (Fig. 138). As early as 1934 the importance of the site was realised and excavations were started (excavations detailed in Vifot 1936). The excavations revealing the 'enigmatic house' (the term is from Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 3) were done from 2001-2004 (Fig. 139). This excavation represents the most extensive and well documented cult-house found to date (Larsson 2006: 248-53).

The yard surrounding the cult building was 'littered' with an abundance of fire cracked stones (Larsson 2004: 6). It would not be out of place to suggest a *hörgr* in these scattered remains. A



collection of 136 bent lances and spearheads (interpreted as sacrificially ‘broken’) were recovered just north of the cult-house building (Helgesson 2004: 224, 237). These weapons are from different ages suggesting a long occupation (Helgesson 2004: 229 provides a chart detailing dating and typology). A smaller collection was found south of the building. Mixed in with the weapons deposits were human and animal remains. Radio-carbon dating suggested these individuals were sacrificed in the 6-7th centuries (Larsson 2007: 19). One hundred and twenty-two *guldgubber* were recovered at the site (Watt 2004: 170). This was the second largest discovery of these figures in Scandinavia (Watt 2004: 169). Interestingly, several *guldgubber* are similar to examples from Ravlunda (eastern Skåne, Sweden) and one is die-identical to an example from Sorte Muld, Bornholm in Denmark (Watt 2004: 184). A number of high-status items were also discovered on site. This includes a decorative 6th-century beaker (analysed in Hårdh 2004: 49-92), a unique carved 6th-century glass bowl (documented in Stjernquist 2004: 103-49) as well as other evidence of high-status glass beakers. A rare figurine of Odin was recovered as well (Fig. 140).

The cult-house was a high-timbered stave built structure that had been built and rebuilt in seven major stages (Fig. 141-142). Each construction closely maintained the original building plan and similar palisade stave construction (Larsson 2006: 249; Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 9). Artefact and pot sherd evidence found in the fill, date the site from the Pre-Roman Iron period up to the Viking Age (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 12-8). The first structure was likely built, based on artefactual evidence, in the 3rd century (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 16-7). It was 13.5 metres and 6 metres wide with slightly convex walls and straight gables. There were three entrances, one on the north, and two on the south. The south-west entrance has what appeared to be an entrance structure associated with it (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 6, 17). Four large and deep interior postholes held staves that supported the roof. These postholes were 4x2 metres and at least 1.7 metres in depth (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 9). This type of structure, deep postholes supporting a high roof and concave walls, with the exception of its smaller size, is generally similar to what is seen in halls. It was completely rebuilt, on a similar floorplan, at least three times (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 14). The postholes also contained apparent ritually deposited items. The north-west posthole contained a cow cranium, and an iron door ring (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 14). All of the central postholes contained *guldgubber* as did the wall trench. In the centre of the building were the remains of a hearth (Larsson 2007: 13).

The final phase of the stave structure is similar to that seen in Gudehovet. To all appearances the building was ritually closed. The poles were pulled out of the ground, the clay floor dug up, and the entire building filled in (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 14-5). Dating of this event is via an Arabic dirham (coined by Caliph al Mansur between 771-755) and a two Viking Age combs found in the fill, placing this at the beginning of the Viking Age (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 15). It has been conjectured that this structure went out of use with the construction of the nearby church (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004: 42).

In summary, the cult-house was rebuilt several times, over five centuries, each time maintaining in the original building plan. This is a one-room structure, however it is built on a hall plan with deep and large interior postholes, implying a two-story structure. The walls were bowed, and the general plan recalls a small hall-like structure. The central postholes contained *guldgubber* and other apparent ritual depositional items. Broken spears were found nearby, all from different ages, implying long term usage over centuries. The building went out of use in the Viking Age, and was pulled out of the ground and the entire area filled in.

### ***Tissø (Sjælland, Kalundborg, Denmark).***

The site is located on the western bank of Lake Tissø in West Zealand, Denmark (Fig. 143). The name likely contains the theophoric element for Tyr and means Tyr's Lake (Jørgensen 2012: 77). This may account for the numerous Viking era weapons and tools found during periods of drought since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Tissø site is an example of a central place site. This is considered one of the most important (both in size, duration and occupation as well as variety of finds) sites to date in Scandinavia. This large site (about 50 hectares) is ideally placed, being both on the shore of Lake Tissø, but also near the river Halleby, which provided access to the inland waterways. It is a large area (about 50 hectares) with a 400-year occupation history beginning in the early 7th century (Jørgensen 2012: 77).

The site was extensively excavated between 1995 and 2003 by Lars Jørgensen under the auspices of the Danish National Museum and the Kalundborg Museum (documented mainly in Jørgensen 2003 and 2012). Eighty-five thousand square metres of the settlement was exposed with more than 11,000 artefacts discovered. Dating demonstrates that the site was continuously occupied from the middle of the 6th century to the first half of the 11th century (Fig. 144). Of specific

interest to this study, are the hall, manor, and associated cult building. In brief, the excavations showed a 6th-century complex with two halls (this is the site at Bulbrogård). The initial halls were burned to the ground in the first half of the 7th century. A second complex (Fugledegård) was created south of the original site in c. AD 700. A manor, and cult building with an enclosed perimeter were all built together at this time (Fig. 145). There was nothing found in the manor, or around it to suggest agricultural activity. This is highly unusual for what is expected in an agricultural compound. This suggested to the archaeologists that this was temporary residence employed by a mobile monarchy. This site was abandoned in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (details above from Jørgensen 2012: 77-82).

The identification of the site as a cultic area is based on a number of finds. The manor had an unusually large quantity of amulets and jewellery. These artefacts were decorated with motifs that appear to have been taken from Norse mythology. Extensive finds of weapons, gold, and silver offerings (including a 1.8 kg gold neck ring) found in the nearby lake also insinuate the manor's involvement in cultic activities (Jørgensen 2012: 79). Besides these ritual depositions in the lake and the manor, the hall and cult-house complex contained a number of other material remains interpreted as being associated with ritual activities. A pile of heated stones (*hörgr*) was located just northwest of the hall, and depositional burials of animal bones, fire strikers, and sickles deposited nearby. It is worth reiterating that fire strikers and sickles are often associated with Frey. The cult-house shares many similarities to Uppåkra. The floor plan is similar (convex walls surrounding four deep postholes), it is placed near a hall, and has weapons depositions associated with it (Fig. 146).

### ***Conclusion:***

Archaeological and literary evidence both suggest sacred landscapes were common in the Viking cultic world. Both lines of evidence also suggest ritual buildings were used. The literary evidence strongly supports the existence of pre-Christian cult-houses and provides data suggesting what was done in those houses, as well as information related to outdoor cultic activities. This appears to be confirmed by the archaeological evidence of pre-Christian cult-houses although there are digressions and differences. The excavation and literary evidence concur that there was a class of dedicated structures used for ritual activities. It is clear from these selected excavated sites that cult-houses served ritual functions in the late Iron Age and Viking societies. These are often part

of larger complexes, such as seen at Lunda and Uppåkra. Notably, votive deposits, are in evidence at these sites and usually directly associated with these cult-houses. The items deposited can often, using Old Norse/Icelandic source data cautiously, be identified with specific deities. Although the sample size is small, what can be said is that cult-houses are usually one room affairs, based on either common rectangular domestic structures, or similarly sized hall like structures, and often placed next to a hall.

### ***5.7. Pre-Christian Structures, Origins, and Typology***

As detailed previously, although the literary evidence suffers from numerous issues regarding its veracity, it suggests two kinds of cult structures, a dedicated cult-house, and the larger multiple purpose hall. This is broadly supported by the archaeological evidence. The few cult-houses recovered archaeologically appear to be broadly of two types. Both of these structures have their origins in domestic buildings.

The first type is a rectangular one room structure, usually about five by six metres. The straight walls generally support the roof. There are no central supporting beams or timber-frame superstructure. This structure is clearly based on the domestic one-room workshop sites seen in central places all over Scandinavia (Hamerow 2004: 35-6). Entrance locations are not standardized on either the domestic structures or cult-houses. Domestic structures are often orientated north and south (Hamerow 2004: 35). This is unlike the churches which face west to east, although often not precisely. Fig. 147 presents a side-by-side comparison of these cult-houses with domestic structures. Unlike that seen in other Germanic regions, a clear typology for domestic structures does not exist in Norway. Surrounding regions though suggest that these small structures have a long history that extends into the Bronze Age (Tesch 1992; Hauglid 23-106; Schmidt 1994). An example of this can be seen at Gudehovet.

The second type of cult-houses consist of small structures about six by thirteen metres. They are characterised by convex walls, and very deep and wide central postholes (to date, all known examples have four postholes). This would have supported a tall structure. This construction appears to be a miniature version of a hall (although possibly, based on the width of their postholes, two stories). Examples of this can be seen at Uppåkra and Tissø. Fig. 148 presents a side-by-side presentation of the plans of these structures with a hall for comparison purposes.

### ***Cult-house Conclusion:***

Cult-house structures appear to be built on the same ground plans employing the same construction methodologies as secular structures. The pattern followed was of a rectangular house-type structure, or a hall/long-house format. In either case, these are based on local buildings with a tradition that extends back into the Bronze Age (Fig. 149, 153). They are quite literally a ‘house’ for the gods. Another behaviour appears as well, although the sample size is admittedly small. The cult-houses at Tissø and Uppåkra suggest that as a community’s wealth increases, the religious duties may be separated out from political ones. Both cult-houses are placed near the main hall structure of their sites.

Every building has its own unique history. Local religious and architectural traditions change over time, as does the society that creates and maintains them. All would be impacted by the new religion. Pre-Christian cult buildings were overwhelmingly destroyed. I can though present some evidence that cultural conservatism adopted the *idea* of cult buildings and their place in society (Fig. 150). The left-hand image shows the cult-house located at Tissø, Denmark. The structure is placed just outside the hall, directly next to the end. The figure on the right is the 11th-century church, Kirkjuhóll on Hrísbú farm, Mosfell Valley, Iceland (Byock et al. 2005: 206). The church is situated in the same location as the pagan temple. To all appearances, and with an admittedly small sample size, the church has replaced the cult-house.

### ***5.8. Conclusion***

Pre-Christian cult-houses were based on vernacular structures in the form of houses, or aristocratic halls. They were similar to the surrounding architecture. This contrasts with a church, with its non-local design based on ecclesiastic authorities and biblical interpretations. Churches were designed to look different from the surrounding secular structures from the first post put in the ground. Using an architectural interpretation, the church stressed outside authority in its form, the pagan temples stressed local authority in their forms.

## Chapter 6: Comparing Stave Churches and Pre-Christian Structures

### *6.1. Direct Comparison of Stave Churches and Cult-houses*

I present the first direct comparison of the pre-Christian cult structures and the earliest stave churches in Fig. 151. The last of the pre-Christian cult-houses (10th century) are not contemporaneous with the stave churches as they currently exist (12th to 14th century). To accurately create a comparison, it is necessary to examine the earlier remains of the churches buried beneath the stave church floors (section 3.6). These early churches are in the main 11th-century creations and generally comprised of a simple two-cell nave and chancel construction. Although this style is not similar to pre-Christian temples, as detailed above, this structure is widely seen in the North Sea region as part of the ‘Wooden Building Tradition’ (documented by Ahrens 2001). As detailed in section 4.6, this style is commonly seen in stone as well.

As can be seen on Fig. 151, the two-cell church is different from both cult-house forms in a number of features. The church has two separate rooms, versus the single room of the cult-house. The nave and chancel structures have straight walls and 90° angles. This is in marked contrast to the convex walls seen in many cult-houses. As far as can be deduced, the existing cult-houses do not rigidly follow any particular compass orientation. They tend, like domestic structures, to be aligned north and south, but not strictly so. This evidence has to be considered speculative because the cult-house sample size is so small, and the early churches in this time period may not themselves have a strict east/west alignment. However, as a generalization, churches are aligned east/west, while it appears no special compass alignment was used for the cult-houses (Fig. 147, 148 and 151 represent accurate compass alignment, with the exception of Lejre House IV in Fig. 148).

A final point relates to the philosophical idea of how a culture treats architectural space. There is a current debate in church archaeology regarding the structure and form of early churches and halls, and their relation to Roman structures. A related debate in Norwegian sources questions the possible influences of Vitruvian architectural ideas into Norway (section 3.3). Stave church evidence highlights the differences between a Roman approach to space, and the Germanic approach. Fig.152 presents an idealized view of one type of Roman domestic structure called a

*Domus Italica* as detailed by Vitruvius (plan sourcing from Kleiner 2014: Location 670, figure 5.1). This particular plan is from Pompeii. It is compared to the ground plans of Nore Stave Church (sourcing from Holan 1990: 119). Although these plans initially appear quite different, they share many similarities. In Nore Stave Church you enter through a front entranceway (in Nore, via a vestibule, in the sample Roman plan a *fauces* #1). You are presented an axial view across the nave (or Atrium). Going around the interior room clockwise you pass a side altar/portico (in the Roman version *alae*, both versions often have altars #6). The back of the room is the chancel (the Roman version, also for housing ancestral shrines is called a *tabulum*, #7). If you look up to the centre of most stave churches, you will see a raised central room with a high rectangular canopy (or *kniplingskrave*). In the Roman version this is similar to the *compluvium* (a rectangular opening that collected rainwater). This plan becomes even more stave church like when the pool is surrounded by columns in the later Hellenized domestic structures. Obviously, it cannot be stated that the stave church harks directly back 1300 years to a Vitruvian *Domus Italica*. However, the essential idea of how to treat space is ideologically similar. The axiology and symmetry seen in Roman structures is quite evident in both structures. This differs from that seen in pre-conversion vernacular structures such as long-houses (Fig. 153). Here the building is quite long with curved corners. The entrances are on the side, necessitating a left or right turn upon entering the structure. There are long hall-like columns that make up this building. Domestic living space is split up across the structure and not necessarily symmetrical. This design breaks up the axial views so important to the Romans. The entire structure has a different plan and treats space in an entirely different manner. This suggests the stave church represents a Mediterranean ideology in its method of delineating space, not a Germanic one.

As the plans demonstrate, the churches and cult-houses have little in common. They are different in size, orientation, number of rooms (two versus one) and the way they present space. These are different constructions and building methodologies using vastly different architectural vocabularies.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

This thesis addresses the contested issues of the origins and form of the Norwegian stave church tradition and the relationships of these churches to pre-Christian structures. It does this by exploring and challenging two separate models. First by interrogating the contemporary Christian context of these buildings with reference to late antiquity in the Roman and Orthodox Christian worlds. Second, by contesting the long argued for connections with pre-Christian cult structures and sites by examining these sites directly.

### *7.1. Stave Churches*

The Christianity brought by the missionary kings to Norway sourced from England (Bagge and Nordeide 2007: 138-9; Nordeide 2011:75-9). These early kings not only had church support, but were aligned to the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman world. The earliest churches in Norway date to this period, with the remains of several of these timber churches lie under the current stave churches (section 3.6).

The 25 remaining stave churches (excluding the Møre stave churches) share enough form and stylistic characteristics to differentiate them from other Norwegian (usually stone) churches as well as other timber constructions. This definition (section 2.2) includes several architectural characteristics, including a post and beam construction with sills notched into the corner posts, on an enrockment foundation. All of these structures are built between c.1130 and 1350, often called the ‘stave church era’. The beginning of this period is conjectural, but its ending (with the Black Death) is well defined. Although a precise dating of any individual church can be problematic, the fact that they are occurring within this time period is not questioned. After that date, stave churches in this style are no longer built.

Although dating stave churches has proven problematic for various reasons (see section 3.2), the oldest structures are generally agreed to be from the 12th century. Thus, the standing structures are two centuries or more after the conversion. Phasing and archaeological evidence suggest the oldest timber church style seen in Norway is the two-cell nave and chancel variety. This suggests that when comparing stave churches to pre-Christian structures, it is this two-cell structure that will have to be employed.



One of the core theorems in the idea of Norwegian stave churches regards their uniqueness. The evidence presented suggests this idea can no longer be maintained. The idea that Norway's stave churches were unique in the history of architecture, as well as an exclusively Norwegian folk tradition, resulted from two simultaneous factors. First, the age of Romanticism, which looked back at an idealized rural past for examples of how to live in the present. Second, Norway was going through a nationalistic phase caused by its separation from Denmark and Sweden. This resulted in an examination of folk traditions as a pattern for what was unique in Norwegian life (section 2.5).

Of the estimated 1000 original churches, only 30 or so were left by the time preservationists became aware of them. These remaining 30 were often in a decrepit state, or so altered over time as to have their original medieval parts long removed. Under the guise of restoration, they rebuilt these structures often employing a preservation methodology based on the same architectural model (Borgund Stave Church). This is the origin of the modern appearance that implies a stylistic homogeneity that often did not exist in the original structures. Current church appearance is not necessarily an accurate representation of how it appeared originally.

These churches display strong decorative and architectural features from all over the North Sea region, but especially from Britain (Chapter 4). I have demonstrated that no matter which style of stave church is examined, their form and layout follow a pattern dictated by Christian norms. It is the unique survival of the structures themselves, not a novel style, form, or decorative element, that creates this impression of uniqueness. Similarly styled structures are seen in the North Sea region in stone, such as seen in Ireland and British traditions, but also in rare timber examples such as Greensted Church in Essex. The decorative stylistic precursors to stave churches are clearly in the Christian tradition. Their predecessors follow European and Anglo-Saxon precursors.

The remaining churches, out of a possible 1000 or more represents too small of a sample size to make definitive conclusions, but if we keep our stylistic demarcators very general, we can see the remaining structures fall into five general types (3.4). The most important observation related to this is that all of these types have their origins in Christian tradition (section 4.1).

The basilica-style stave church is clearly based on the basilica stone structures seen in the Mediterranean Christian tradition. This style ultimately derives from the classical world. The earliest basilica-style Norwegian stave churches (c. 1130) postdate the pre-Christian cult structures by about two centuries. These structures are too late to be considered related to the pre-Christian Norse tradition. This is important because the basilica-styled structures (such as Borgund Stave Church) are often considered the most ‘pagan’ in appearance. These apparent pre-Christian decorative themes have been demonstrated to originate with well-known Romanesque and Gothic Christian thematic material with biblical origins. In the case of Norway, this is most often sourcing from Anglo-Saxon origins.

The earliest stave churches in Norway are in the two-cell, nave and chancel design. This has been demonstrated via excavation of both timber and stone constructions. Only this style is contemporaneous with pre-Christian cult-houses. Current knowledge suggests that the earliest churches in Norway share the most structural and decorative similarities with Anglo-Saxon precursors. Although the precise origin of this building style has not been as extensively researched as the basilica, it is clear from earlier examples in the North Sea tradition that this is not exclusively a Norse style.

Although there is no evidence for a unique Norwegian stave church tradition, churches in this category were assembled using the same construction methodology as vernacular structures as well as pre-Christian structures. Palisade and post construction was employed for both churches and cult structures. Corner joins, ground sills, and wall plates are similar in pre-Christian and Christian architectural remains. Whichever form these structures would take, dictated by the church on the one hand, and secular tradition in the pagan case, both were built using the same construction techniques. This explains their occasional superficial resemblance. As demonstrated, the three-aisled multi-purpose building seen archaeologically, has similar construction techniques as a wooden basilica structure. The same techniques and perhaps craftsmen, built both structures although utilizing different plans.

Until the work of Olsen (1966), it was generally assumed that stave churches evolved in form from pre-Christian structures. To critically evaluate these assumptions, it is necessary to review the varied evidence for pre-Christian cultic structures.

## 7.2. *Cult-Houses*

Literary sources provide several avenues for extrapolating data regarding cult-houses, as well as cult information in general. This variety of information sources from linguistic evidence in the form of terminology used to describe these sites, toponymical evidence, as well as details provided in the literary information seen in various Latin and Old Norse/Icelandic sources. These texts range from near contemporaneous historical documents from the time of Charlemagne, to saga and eddic material from the first two centuries post-conversion. These documents are widely acknowledged as difficult and complex source materials. The majority were written in a Christian literary tradition and exhibit viewpoints and prejudices reflective of that perspective. Identifying the veracity of pre-Christian details is, therefore, both important and challenging. Icelandic literature, our main source for information (section 5.3), was highly influenced by European medieval literature. This occurred at a time when romantic literature presented fictional stories blending history and mythology.

Archaeological evidence demonstrates pre-Christian cult structures were based on vernacular structures in the form of houses, or aristocratic halls. The cult-house resembles smaller one room domestic structures or miniature halls.

They were similar to the surrounding architecture. This contrasts with a church, with its non-local design based on ecclesiastic authorities and biblical interpretations. Churches were designed to look different from the surrounding secular structures from the first post put in the ground. Extrapolating an architectural interpretation, the church stressed outside authority in its form, the pagan temples stressed local authority in their forms.

No standing stave church has been found to incorporate structural material dating from the pre-Christian era. Additionally, current evidence from cult-house excavations suggests these structures were disassembled (such as Gudehovet and Uppåkra) and ritually buried or burned down. At this point in time, there is no definitive evidence of a Norwegian (or Scandinavian) pre-Christian cult-house being utilized as a Christian church. Only one Norwegian church (Mære Church, documented in Lidén 1969) has been suggested to have been built on top of a pre-Christian cult-house. The latest re-examination of that evidence suggests that this may have been a sacred pole site and not a temple structure (Nordeide 2011: 109). Historically, it would be hard

to envision the Norwegian missionary kings, so violently opposed to paganism, reusing pagan structures.

### ***7.3. Closing Statements***

In the beginning of this thesis, it was suggested that this work would address three major research questions. They are:

Do stave churches provide evidence for the direct conversion of existing standing pre-Christian temple structures? Do these remains provide any structural information linking the pagan past with the conversion? The answer to both questions has been demonstrated to be no. No church has fabric dating from the pre-Christian era, nor does there appear to be any structural similarities between pre-Christian and Christian structures.

Are these churches a unique stylistic development from a preceding style of pre-Christian cult structure? Does the unusual shape, form, and decoration capture elements of structural technique, decorative repertoires, and building forms, relevant to pre-Christian religious traditions? No, these churches are clearly based on pre-existing Christian forms. The shape and form of these earliest two-cell churches in Norway is widely seen in northern Europe and predates the Norwegian examples by several centuries. Decorative elements demonstrate significant foreign influence and are based on Christian thematic influences.

Do stave churches represent a unique regional tradition bearing no link to pre-Christian religious structures? Or conversely, are we witnessing structures replicating or emulating Christian architectural styles as seen in the Mediterranean and Byzantine world as well as other Christian societies in northern Europe? The Norwegian stave churches are clearly in the Christian milieu.

This thesis examined Norwegian stave churches and Norse pre-Christian temples. This encompassed the current state of Norwegian stave churches and their origins through historical sources and archaeology. It also examined Norse pre-Christian temples via archaeology, literature and historical sources. The overarching conclusion is that pre-Christian and Christian temples each followed their own separate evolutionary path. The stave churches are fully within the style and decorative influences seen in the countries around them. These are clearly Christian churches, employing European architectural and decorative themes. This aping of

Christian traditions ultimately sourcing from Europe, and their clear dissimilarity to pre-Christian cult-houses is not accidental. These structures represent a clear break, architecturally, and ideologically with the pagan past.

## Future Work

There are currently no grounds for seeing a connection between pre-Christian cult-houses and contemporaneous Christian churches. It must be fairly said that in both the case of early timber churches and cult-house structures the sample size is quite small. As time goes on, more structural remains will certainly be discovered.

Connections between the Anglo-Saxon world and early Christianity in Norway have been noted in this paper. An examination of pre and post conversion elements of Christianity in the North - Sea region (both artistically, as well as liturgically) needs further examination. The connection of the North Atlantic Romanesque church style is in need of further study. In that Anglo-Saxon, Hiberian, and Scandinavian styles influenced each other, the hints of a distinct North Atlantic Romanesque style is in need of further clarification. It is obvious that these spheres of influence, both in pre-Christian and Christian times, impacted each other, but the individual threads of that connection are not so clear. Future work will undoubtedly clarify this connection.

In some dramatic examples (such as Frey/Freya at Borg, or Ullr at Ullevi) it remains possible that further analysis of the archaeological remains will reveal information regarding cultic practices only hinted at in the literary record.

There are still questions to be answered relating to the evolution of the long-house into the hall and basilica structure. In England, the basilica sources from Carolingian influences, and the hall follows a different evolutionary tradition. This pattern is not so clear in Norway, the long-house and hall tradition appear to provide the construction methodology for the basilica-style stave church.

A cross-comparative study of all 'Norse' cult-houses and other ritual structures would advance these studies forward. There is precedence for such a study. The 'Celtic' world has similar research difficulties to the Nordic examples (*i.e.* a lack of reliable literary sources). Yet a gazetteer comparing and analysing sites exists in French for Celtic cultic structures (Fauduet 2010). There is enough data to do something similar for Norse temples.

There are several open questions related to the evolution and survival of the timber church tradition. Sweden, like Norway has large forests, and had an extensive network of medieval

churches. Sweden's timber church ruins remain better documented than Norway's. The Swedish National Heritage Board (*Riksantikvarieämbetet*) maintains a country-wide database of its medieval timber churches and ruins called the *Sveriges Kyrkors projekt Medeltida träkyrkor* (Lagerlöf 1985). As detailed, Denmark has no wooden churches from the conversion era, and all of its surviving medieval churches are stone. It is only in Norway where Romanesque structures were both built of wood, and maintained as wooden structures. This is an area open to more research.

The linguistic resources identified and used for the section related to pre-Christian temples and ON sources are being compiled into a website to help future researchers. Something similar will also be done with the stave church photographs and research.

## Notes on Translations

The Viking historian may equally fear that before he acquires all the languages, reads all the books, flushes all the coverts of all the periodicals, he will have reached the blameless haven of senility without a word rendered (Jones 1968:11).

In any work of this nature it is necessary both to translate from, and employ translations out of, many languages. This presents great difficulty to the researcher, even the polyglot. Employing translations from multiple sources can be problematic, both implying similarities where none may exist (such as the various words translated as ‘temple’), and implying differences where there may not be any (such as stave, column, post, and even Irminsûl). As such, this requires some detail on the criteria employed for choosing particular translations.

On the assumption that the majority of the readers of this work will be reading it in English, a bias has been introduced to favour English translations. In general, when using original documentation, the original source is referenced followed by the English translation in brackets. If the translation is not referenced, it has been translated by the author. An attempt has been made to employ the best-known scholarly translations of a source document. Occasionally the clearest translation is not in fact the technical work quoted in scholarly materials. If the translation of a diplomatic edition is not in English or is in English so technically dense as to be unreadable (a common complaint), a simpler, clearer and often more complete translation is used. In this, concerns about clarity and readability have taken precedence over linguistic precision. An example of this can be seen in the case of Ibn Fadlān. Montgomery (2000) is the source used most often by scholars for his works. However, this translation is incomplete and concerns only the Rus. Lunde and Stone 2012 provide a complete translation with the benefit of being readable and in English. The classic technical works on Ibn Fadlān (in this case Zeki-Velidi Togan 1939 [German]; Kovalevskii 1939 [Russian]) have suffered from being technically dense and unattainable under normal circumstances. Related issues arise with Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. The evolution of this thesis can be tracked through the approach to Saxo. Initially, the translations from Saxo were my own. Saxo is particularly hard to translate, hence the moniker Grammaticus. When it was decided to use known translations, I gravitated to the excellent Danish edition, which included a new edited Latin text (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005). However, this work is not available outside of Denmark and rare even there. Although I



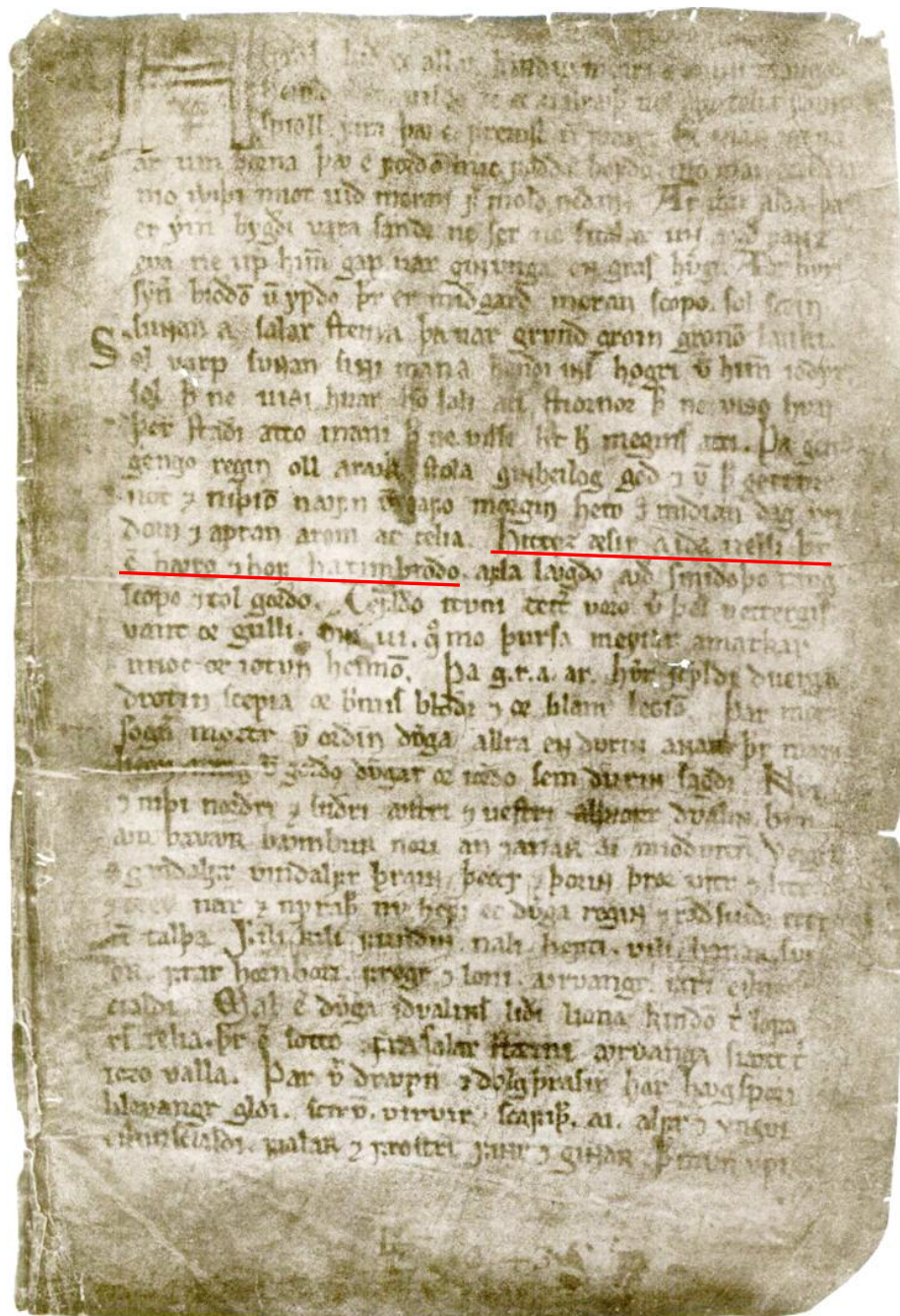
had reservations with the existing English translations, it was decided to use the partial translation of Davidson and Fisher (1999) which although dated, is familiar to English readers. I used the translation of Books X-XVI, in Christiansen's (1980; 1981) work, although I had reservations with this as well, and it too is difficult to attain. Finally, a long awaited translation in the Oxford Medieval Texts series (OMT 2015) was published, rendering the previous works obsolete. A similar issue occurred with Widukund, whose only English translation (oddly, given its importance) was a hard to access doctoral thesis from 1949 (Wood 1949). In this case as well, a new translation has recently been issued (Bachrach and Brachrach 2014). These have been employed in this work.

Translations often include terms that are not familiar, or not necessarily easily translated into English. In cases of this nature annotations are placed in [squared brackets]. A good example of this is the Norse word *Gothi* or *Godi*. This term appears on one of the oldest Proto-Scandinavian rune stones. It appears to have originally meant priest (or more technically someone who performs rituals). The earliest reference to the term is a 5th-century inscription from Huglo (near Bergen). It reads *ek gudija ungandiR ih...* (likely meaning 'I, the gothi, and immune to sorcery...' probably followed by 'raised this stone' Spurkland 2005: 49) The word *gudija* comes from the Gothic word *gudja* meaning priest. By the time this term reaches Iceland 500 years later, the term obviously has political implications as well. *Gothi* then has the dual meaning of 'chief' and 'priest'. The various Old Norse translations quoted below switch between one or the other term dependent on contextual meaning. This needs to be considered when reading these references.

Translating Old Norse works is problematic for a number of reasons. The most obvious is the well-known complexities of kennings and their poetic language and imagery. Not so well known are the seemingly endless metrical variety recorded in this literature. Often, this is very difficult to convey in English translation. As a simple example of these difficulties, there are forms that, rather like haiku, are based on syllable counts, some with rhyme (such as *runhent*) some without (*kviðuhátt*). In translating, or occasionally clarifying existing translations, the poetic element is ignored to stress clarity.

It should be noted that critical references often divide Old Norse poetry into Skaldic and Eddic types proclaiming the veracity of the former against the latter. This is something of an artificial division in that both types of poetry appear together in the source documentation. The reason for the perceived dichotomy has more to do with the way the works have been compiled rather than any inherent difference. Modern textual works (such as Kuhn, 1983) and most translations have continued this tradition (Clunies Ross, 2005: 6-16).

There are other more subtle text-based issues. In many cases scholarly editions of Old Norse texts are more than a century old. Orthography was not fixed and often changed rather randomly (some notoriously so even in modern times; Kuhn's 1983 standard edition of the Poetic Edda being an example).



The 'standard' text in Old Norse of the underlined section reads:

Hittuz æsir á Iðavelli,

þeir er hǫrg oc hof há timbroðo

*Vǫluspá* Section 7, *Poetic Edda* (Kuhn 1983:2).

The actual text is:

Hittoz æsir a iða uelli þeir er hærg oc hof hatimbroðo

Source: Wimmer and Jónsson 1891: Folio 1; with contractions expanded. Although this is the diplomatic edition, the commentary of that work is quite dated. However, the photostats and text remain accurate.

Kuhn standardized the text in the 1983 *Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, according to his own rules. In creating this unique orthography and presentation he created a document that although widely used, is not representative of the actual manuscript (see the criticisms in La Farge and Tucker 1992: viii-x).

In addition, normalized Icelandic editions of saga works (the five volume *Svart á hvítu* editions of 1985 and 1987) have also been created. Technical editions of individual works, with a standardized orthography and detailed literary and linguistic analysis, are available (the *Íslensk Fornrit* series of works). This multiplicity of ‘original’ texts (in some cases spanning three centuries) can be quite confusing. When the option exists, the non-standardized diplomatic text provided in the original orthography is used. This becomes important because there is an unspoken and inherent bias in Old Norse studies. Teachers and translators of Old Norse are virtually always trained with modern Icelandic pronunciation and word meanings. Iceland, while admirably (some would say stubbornly) preserving their language as a matter of national pride, has not done the same with pronunciation. From my experience, only about half the vowel sounds heard in Old Norse can be heard in modern Icelandic. Hence, the modern language does not always reflect Old Norse *per se*. Old Norse (**ON**) dialects, Old Swedish (**OSw**), Old High German (**OHG**) and even Anglo-Saxon (**OE**) can be more similar than modern ears might recognize and modern orthography allude to. These similarities were noted even in Old Norse:

In those days, the language of England was the same as that spoken in Norway and Denmark... *Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tounge*, Section 7 (Hreinsson 1997: V1 315).

Any work employing Old Norse documentation must address the issue of naming conventions. There are a number of idiosyncrasies specific to Icelandic and Old Norse grammar that are

normalized in this thesis. In general, forms familiar to an English speaker are employed in the commentary. The use of the nominative for proper names in the commentary has been avoided because of its general unfamiliarity. Spelling conventions around proper nouns in the genitive are similarly ignored. Nicknames in Icelandic literature are written in lower case. These names though are usually capitalized in English translations. The term ‘saga’ in Icelandic is not capitalized (for example *Íslendingasögur* is Saga of the Icelanders). In the commentary, following English rules, the term is capitalized if translated (such as *Family Saga’s*) and if quoted in the original, maintained as is standard in Icelandic usage (*Sverris saga*).

Similar simplification has been employed with deity names. Centuries of differing orthographies and geographies are distilled. Regionalisations (Thor, Tor, Þórr, Donar), different geographies (Wotan, Óðinn), and numerous variant translations from different languages (Frikko, Freyr, Frø) all are common in the source documentation. In the main, the commonly recognized deity names (Odin, Thor, etc.) have been employed, except in direct quotes.

### ***Naming Conventions of Kings.***

The Scandinavian kings had several names. Differing languages contributed to some of this variation, the common use of nicknames also complicated this. Below is a cross over list that details who is whom.

Harald Bluetooth (Harald Gormsson, **ON:** *Haraldr blátǫnn Gormsson*, **Dan:** *Harald Blåtand Gormsen*).

King Erik Segersäll (i.e. the Victorious, **ON:** *Eiríkr inn sigrsæli*)

King Olaf Eiriksson (**ON:** *Óláfr sænski*, **OSw:** *Olawær Skotkonongær*, **Sw:** *Olof Erikson Skötkonung*)

King Anund Jakob (**ON:** *Qnundr Ólafsson*, **OSw:** *Æmundær colbrænnæ*. this means Edmund the Coal Burner, purportedly for his habit of burning down the houses of his enemies)

Harold Hårfagre (Harold Fairhair, **ON:** *Haraldr hárfagri*)

King Håkon Haraldsson (Haakon the Good, **ON:** *Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri*, **Nor:** *Håkon Athelstanfostre*, **Nor:** *Håkon den gode*)

King Harald Greyhide (**ON:** *Haraldr gráfeldr*, **Nor:** *Harald Gråfell*)

St. Olav Haraldsson (also known as Olaf II)

## Source Quotes

### *Conversion Quotes*

- Q:1 He [Harold] came to his serene majesty the emperor Ludovic and asked that he might be thought worthy to receive his help so he might be able to regain his kingdom. While the emperor kept him at his court he urged him, by personal persuasion and through the instrumentality of others, to accept the Christian faith, because there would then be a more intimate friendship between them, and a Christian people would more readily come to his aid and the aid of his friends if both peoples were worshippers of the same God. At length, by the assistance of divine grace, he brought about his conversion, and when he had been sprinkled with the holy water of baptism he himself received him from the sacred font and adopted him as his son. When, then, he desired to send him back to his own land in order that he might, by his assistance, seek to recover his dominions, he bank to make diligent enquiry in order that he might find a holy and devoted man who could go and continue with him, and who might strengthen him and his people, and by teaching the doctrine of salvation might induce them to receive the faith of the Lord. *Vita Anskarii* by Rimbert Chapter VII (Robinson 1921: 38)
- Q:2 It is for us who are reputed to be, and are, the chiefs and elders to consult our own dignity and to give our consent in a worthy and pious manner to so the people who are subject to us may be taught by our example. For whatever sanctity or integrity in the sight of God or man is to be sought after, I think it is more right and comely that is should pass from the head to the members than the members to the head. In the primitive Church as we have heard, the Christian religion began with the people and with common persons and spread to the middle classes and at length affected the great chiefs of the world. Let us change the order of the primitive Church and let it begin with us who are the chiefs and, passing on from us to the middle classes by an easy progress...[speech of Duke Wortizlaus] *The Life of Otto , Apostle of Pomerania* 1060-1139 Book III, Chapter VI (Robinson 1920: 128)

## Quotes Relating to the Irminsul

- Q:3 And the Lord said to Moses: Go before the people, and take with thee of the ancients of Israel: and take in thy hand the rod wherewith thou didst strike the river, and go. Behold I will stand there before thee, upon the rock Horeb, and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink.  
*Exodus 17: 5-6*
- Q:4 Capturing the castle of Eresburg, he proceeded as far as the Irminsul, destroyed this idol and carried away the gold and silver which he found. A great drought occurred so that there was no water in the place where the Irminsul stood. The glorious king wished to remain there two or three days in order to destroy the temple completely, but they had no water. Suddenly at noon, through the grace of God...so much water poured forth in a stream that the whole army had enough.  
*Annales Regni Frencorum* Year 772 (Scholtz and Rogers 1972: 48-9).
- Q:5 When morning was come they set up an eagle at the eastern gate [of the conquered city], and erecting an altar of victory they celebrated the appropriate rites with all due solemnity, according to their ancestral superstition.: to the one whom they venerate as their god of Victory they give the name of Mars, and the bodily characteristics of Hercules, imitating his physical proportions by means of wooden columns, and in the hierarchy of their gods he is the Sun, or as the Greeks call him, Apollo. *Res Gestae Saxonicae*, Widukund Book 1, Chapter 12 (Wood 1949: 178).

## ***Adam of Bremen***

### Biblical Quotes

#### 1 *Chronicles* Chapter 29:4

- Q:6 Three thousand talents of gold of the gold of Ophir: and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the temple.

#### 2 *Chronicles* Chapter 3:4-9, 16

- Q:7 4 And the porch in the front, which was extended in length according to the measure of the breadth of the house, twenty cubits: and the height was a hundred



and twenty cubits: and he overlaid it within with pure gold.

5 And the greater house he ceiled with deal boards, and overlaid them with plates of fine gold throughout...

7 And the gold of the plates with which he overlaid the house, and the beams thereof, and the posts, and the walls....

8 He made also the house of the holy of holies: the length of it according to the breadth of the temple, twenty cubits, and the breadth of it in like manner twenty cubits: and he overlaid it with plates of gold, amounting to about six hundred talents.

9 He made also nails of gold, and the weight of every nail was fifty sicles: the upper chambers also he overlaid with gold.

Q:8 16 He made also as it were little chains in the oracle, and he put them on the heads of the pillars: and a hundred pomegranates, which he put between the little chains.

*Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*

Q:9 That folk [Sweden] has a very famous temple called Uppsala, situated not far from the city of Sigtuna and Björkö. Near this temple stands a very large tree with wide-spreading branches, always green winter and summer. What kind it is nobody knows. There is also a spring at which the pagans are accustomed to make their sacrifices, and into it plunge a live man. And if he is not found, the peoples wish will be granted [Scholia 138]. A golden chain goes round the temple. It hangs over the gable of the building and sends its glitter far off to those who approach, because the shrine stands on level ground with mountains all about it like a theatre [Scholia 139]. In this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor,

occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather and crops. The other Wotan- that is the Furious- carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Frikko, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals. His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus. But Wotan they chisel armed, as our people are wont to represent Mars. Thor with his scepter apparently resembles Jove. The people also worship heroes made gods, whom they endow with immortality because of their remarkable exploits.....Book Four: xxvi (26); (Tschan 2002: 207).

- Q:10 For all of their gods they are appointed priests to offer sacrifices for the people. If plague and famine threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor; if war, to Wotan; if marriages are to be celebrated, to Frikko. It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all of the provinces of Sweden. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted. Kings and people all and singly send their gifts to Uppsala and, what is more distressing than any kind of punishment, those who have already adopted Christianity redeem themselves through these ceremonies. The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male, they offer nine heads, with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort. Feasts and sacrifices of this kind are solemnized for nine days. On each day they offer a man along with other living beings in such a number that in the course of nine days they will have made offerings of seventy-two creatures. This sacrifice takes place about the time of the vernal equinox. The bodies they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Now this grove is so sacred in the eyes of the heathen that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims. Even dogs and horses hang there with men. A Christian seventy-two years old told me that he had seen their bodies suspended promiscuously. Furthermore, the incantations customarily chanted in the ritual of a sacrifice of this kind are manifold and unseemly: therefore it is better to keep silence about them. Book 4 xxvii (Tschan 2002: 207-8).

### ***Ibn Fadlān***

Q:11 When their boats come to this anchorage, each one of them goes ashore with bread, meat, onions, milk, and mead, and betakes himself to a tall wooden pole set upright, that has a face like a man. Around it are small images and behind these are long, tall poles driven into the earth. And he comes to the great image and prostrates himself before it. Then he says: ‘O my lord, I have come from a far country and have with me so many slave girls for such a price, and so many sable pelts,’ until he had enumerated all of the goods which he has brought for sale. Then he continues: ‘I have brought this offering to Thee’. Then he lays down what he had brought before the wooden image..... If he has difficulties in his trading, and the days of his stay are prolonged, then he makes a second and third offering (Frye 2005: 65-6).

### ***Sacred Landscapes***

Q:12 [Odin says] The land is sacred which I see lying near the Æsir and elves.  
*Grímnismál*, section 4 (Larrington 1996: 52)

Q:13 Heathen sacrifices are also banned for we are not permitted to worship any heathen god or on any hill, or in any heathen fane.... *The Church Law, Section 29, Concerning Heathen Sacrifices Gulathing Law* (Larson 1935: 57)

Q:14 Sacrifice is strictly forbidden to all men, together with all those old customs that belong to paganism. No one may pray to either groves or howes or heathen gods, nor to holy places or ancient sites. *Guta Lag [Law of the Gotlanders] Section 4, Concerning Sacrifice* (Peel 2009: 9).

Q:15 Prior to that time, and for a long time afterwards, people believed in groves and grave howes, holy places and ancient sites, and in heathen idols. They sacrificed their sons and daughters, and cattle, together with food and ale. They did that in accordance with their ignorance of the true faith. The whole island [Gotland, off the coast of mainland Sweden] held their highest sacrifice on its own account, with human victims, otherwise each third held its own. But smaller assemblies held a lesser sacrifice with cattle, food, and drink. Those involved were called ‘boiling companions’, because they all cooked their sacrificial meals together.

*Guta saga, Chapter 1: 17-24 [the History of Gotland, c. 1220 – 1330] (Peel 1999: 5).*

Often the sacred areas either stood out in the landscape, or had a particular beauty to them.

- Q:16 The headland is in the form of a mountain, and Thorolf invested so much reverence in it that no one was allowed to look towards it without having washed and nothing was allowed to be killed on the mountain... [Throlf] believed that he and all his family on the headland [Helgafell] would go there when they died. *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, (Hreinsson 1997: V5 132-4).
- Q:17 His son Eyvind took possession of Flateyjarðale up to Gunnsteinar, and held the boulders there sacred. *Landnámabók* Chapter 241 (P&E, 1972:104).
- Q:18 Take your gold and finery which is scattered over the meadow and bring it home to your women folks, and do not hereafter hang it on sticks or stones....*Heimskringla* Chapter 113 (Hollander, 1964:369-74).
- Q:19 The king called first his chieftains and began to discuss our father Ansgar's mission with them. They decided to enquire by casting lots to find out what the gods thought about this. They went out into a field, as was their custom, and cast lots. *Vita of St Ansgar*, Chapter 27 (Mellor 2008:57).
- Q:20 They accepted his council [to pray for deliverance], and as one and with free will they all went out to a field, as was their custom, where they all promised the Lord Christ to fast and give alms for their deliverance from the Danes [the invaders]. *Vita of St Ansgar*, Chapter 19 (Mellor 2008:50).
- Q:21 [Aud] made her home at Hvamm near Aurrida River Estuary, at a place now called Audartoft. She used to say prayers at Kross Hills; she had crosses erected there, for she'd been baptized and was a devout Christian. Later her kinsmen worshipped these hills, then when sacrifices began, a pagan temple was built there. They believed they would go into the hills when they died *Landnámabók* Chapter 97 (P&E 1972: 32).

*Sacred Groves and Sacred Trees:*

- Q:22 The bodies they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Now this grove is so sacred in the eyes of the heathen that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims. Even dogs and horses hang there with men. GHEP Book 4 xxvii (Tschan, 2002:207-8).
- Q:23 Afterwards, Thorir took possession of the whole of Fnjoskadale as far as Odeila. He made his home at Lund [ON Lundr, grove], and held the grove sacred. *Landnámabók* Chapter 237 (P&E, 1972:103).
- Q:24 He seized every opportunity to impress on them in his preaching that they should forsake idols and images, accept the Christian faith, destroy the temples of the gods, cut down the groves and build sacred churches in their stead. *Life of St. Sturm*. Chapter 22. (Noble and Head 1995:185).
- Q:25 Again, in a certain village he had demolished a very ancient temple and was proceeding to cut down a pine tree that was close to the shrine, when the priest of the place and all his pagan following came up to stop him. *Life of St Martin* by Sulpicius Severus Section 13 (Noble and Head 1995:16).
- Q:26 [St. Boniface] attempted...to fell a certain oak of extraordinary size, which is called, by an old name of the pagans, the Oak of Jupiter..... suddenly the oaks vast bulk, driven by a divine blast from above, crashed to the ground, shivering its crown of branches as it fell; and, as if by the gracious dispensation of the most high. *Vitae Sanctii Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini* by Willibald Chapter VI [*Life of Saint Boniface*] (Robinson 1915: 63)
- Q:27 But others, not yet strong in the spirit refused to accept the pure teachings of the church in their entirety. Moreover, some continued secretly, others openly, to offer sacrifices to trees and springs; to inspect the entrails of victims; some practised divination, legerdemain, and incantations; some turned their attention to auguries, auspices, and other sacrificial rites... *Vitae Sanctii Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini* by Willibald, Chapter VI [*Life of St. Boniface*] (Noble and Head 1995: 126).

- Q:28 [St. Boniface] destroyed pagan temples and shrines, built churches and chapels... *Vitae Sanctii Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini* by Willibald Chapter V [*Life of St. Boniface*] (Noble and Head 1995:122).
- Q:29 [St. Boniface] traversed all of Frisia [Nederland], and removed the pagan worship and overthrew the erroneous way of heathenism, and earnestly preached the word of God, and having destroyed the divinity of the heathen temple he built churches with great zeal. *Vitae Sanctii Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini* by Willibald Chapter VIII [*Life of Saint Boniface*] (Robinson 1915: 80-1).
- Q:30 He seized every opportunity to impress on them in his preaching that they should forsake idols and images, accept the Christian faith, destroy the temples of the gods, cut down the groves and build sacred churches in their stead. *Life of St. Sturm*. Chapter 22. (Noble and Head 1995:185).
- Q:31 [St Willibrord] came to a certain island [Heligoland] on the boundary between the Frisians and the Danes, which the people of those parts call Fositeland, after a god named Fosite whom they worship and whose temples stood there. This place was held by the pagans in such great awe that none of the natives would venture to meddle with any of the cattle that fed there nor with anything else, nor would they dare draw water from the spring that bubbled up there except in complete silence. *Life of St. Willibrord*, Chapter 10 (Noble and Head 1995:199).
- Q:32 [After the king found out about St Willibrord's defiling of the Holy Island, Heligoland, and its spring] The king was roused to intense fury... for three whole days he cast lots three times every day to find out who should die; but as the true god protected his own servants, the lots of death never fell upon Willibrord nor upon any of his company, except in the case of one of the party, who thus one the martyr's crown. *Life of St. Willibrord*, Chapter 11 (Noble and Head 1995:199).
- Q:33 Then it happened that certain of his disciples, moved by divine passion, began to destroy the temples that had been erected throughout the region according to pagan custom and, insofar as they were able, to raze them to the ground. *Life of St Willihad* Chapter 4 (Noble and Head 1995:284).
- Q:34 At the invitation of the matron Ansfrida, she was on her way to a noble banquet, attended by all her worldly retinue. About a mile from the blessed queen's route,

there was a fane where the Franks worshipped. Hearing that, she ordered her servants to burn the fane revered by the Franks with fire...and did not allow her horse to go forward until the fane was consumed by fire... *The Life of the Holy Radegund*, by Venantius Fortunatus (McNamara et al 1992: 87).

- Q:35 Again, in a certain village he had demolished a very ancient temple and was proceeding to cut down a pine tree that was close to the shrine, when the priest of the place and all his pagan following came up to stop him. *Life of St Martin* by Sulpice Sévère Section 13 (Noble and Head 1995:16).

### *Hörgr Quotes*

- Q:36 An altar [hörgr] he's made for me, piled with stones  
now it shines like a wall of glass  
the fresh steaming blood has coloured its sides  
*The Lay of Hyndla* Stanza 10, lines 1-3 of the *Hyndluljóð*.
- Q:37 But during the night, when Álfhild reddened the altar [*horginn*] with blood,  
Starkad Áludreng carried her off...*The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (Tolkien 1960: 67).
- Q:38 Dómalði succeeded his father Vísbur and ruled over his lands. In his days there was famine and starvation in Sweden. Then the Swedes made huge sacrifices in Uppsala. The first fall they sacrificed oxen, but the season did not improve for all that. A second fall they sacrificed humans, but the season remained the same or was even worse. In the third fall, the Swedes came in great numbers to Uppsala at the time for the sacrifices. Then the chieftains held a council, and they agreed that the famine probably was due to Dómalði, their king, and that they should sacrifice him for better seasons, and that they should attack and kill him and redden the altars with his blood; and so they did. *Saga of the Ynglings*, Chapter 15 (Hollander 1964: 19).
- Q:39 There the Æsir met at Idavell. They built altars [*horgir*] and temples [*hof*] of high timbers. *Vǫluspá* Section 7, *Poetic Edda*.
- Q:40 Hwīlum hīe gehēton æt hærgtrafum

wīgweorþunga, wordum bædon

At times they prepared sacrifice in temples [Hærgtrafu]

War-idol offerings, said old words aloud

*Beowulf*, line 175- 176 (text by Klaeber 1950: 7, translation by Chickering 2006: 59)

*Hærgtrafu* (the term would be best translated as hörgr-tent) refers to the altars at which the Danes offered sacrifice. Semple suggests the OE term may be a special case in British tradition. The term applying to a ‘topographically distinct’ active (or recently active) cult site with a long British history (Semple 2007: 383-5).

### ***Pre-Christian Contemporaneous References***

- Q:41 One ox and two aura [in fine] [to?] staf [or] aura staf [in fine] for the restoration of a cult site (vi) in a valid state for the first time; two oxen and four aura for the second time; but for the third time four oxen and eight aura; and all property in suspension, if he doesn’t make right. That, the people are entitled to demand, according to the law of the people that was decreed and ratified before. *Forsa Ring* (Brink 2008: 28-9).
- Q:42 Ragnhildr placed this stone in memory of Alla Solva, the temple priest [Gothi], honourable thane of the sanctuary-group [VĒa-liðs]. Alla’s sons made this stone in memory of their father, and his wife in memory of him. And Soti carved these runes in memory of his lord. Thor bless these runes. A curse upon anyone who damages this stone or drags it to be a memorial to someone else, may they become an outlaw. *Glavendrup Runestone* (Rundata DR230, translation after Macleod and Mees 2006: 224).

This inscription confirms several important points. First, that dedicated temples and temple priests existed. Also, that Thor was a diety seen as blessing runes. The term Alla Solva is open to multiple interpretations. It is a proper name (or at least the first part is), but could be read in various way such as Alli the Sun-Smitten [i.e. pale] or as Alli of the people called Sølver or Solver (as Macleod and Mees 2006: 224 suggest).



### *Quotes from Snorri*

- Q:43 ... we gathered most of our information from what we are told in those poems which were recited before the chieftains themselves, or their sons.... no one would have dared to tell them to their faces about deeds which all who listened, as well as the prince himself, knew were only falsehoods and fabrications. *Heimskringla, Prologue to the Saga of the Ynglinga* (Hollander, 1964: 4).
- Q:44 The land east of the Tana Fork was called the Land of Home of the Æsir, and the capital of that country was called Ásgarh. In this capital the chieftain ruled whose name was Óthin. This was a great place for sacrifices. The rule prevailed there that twelve temple priests [hofgoðar] were highest in rank. They were to have charge of sacrifices and to judge between men. *Heimskringla, Saga of the Ynglings*, Chapter 2 (Hollander 1964: 7).
- Q:45 Óthin appointed Njorth [Njord] and Frey to be priests [blótgoða] for the sacrificial offerings, and they were the díar (gods) among the Æsir. Freya was the daughter of Njorth. She was the priestess [blótgyðja] at the sacrifices. *Heimskringla, Saga of the Ynglings*, Chapter 4 (Hollander 1964: 8).
- Q:46 After Njorth, Frey succeeded to power. He was called king of the Swedes and received tribute from them. He was greatly beloved, and blessed by good seasons like his father. Frey erected a great temple [hof] at Uppsala and made his chief residence [hofuðstað] there, directing to it all tribute due to him, both lands and chattels. This was the origin of the Uppsala crown goods, which have been kept there ever since. *Heimskringla, Saga of the Ynglings*, Chapter 10 (Hollander 1964: 13).
- Q:47 [Odin] sent a son of his over the realm of which is now called Norway. He is called Sæming, and the kings of Norway trace their ancestry to him.... And Odin took with him a son of his named Yngvi, who became king in Sweden....Snorri's *Edda*, Prologue II (Faulkes 2002: 5).
- Q:48 Sigurth, early of Hlathir, was a most ardent heathen worshiper, as had been Hákon, his father. Earl Sigurth maintained all sacrificial feasts there in Trondheim on the king's behalf. It was ancient custom that when the sacrifice was to be made, all farmers were to come to the heathen temple and bring along with them the

food they needed while the feast lasted. At this feast all were to take part in the drinking of ale. Also, all kinds of livestock were killed in connection with it, horses also; and all the blood from them was called hlaut (sacrificial blood), and hlautbolli, the vessel holding that blood: and hlautteinar, the sacrificial twigs (aspergills). These were fashioned like sprinklers, and with them were to be smeared all over the blood the pedestals of the idols and also the walls of the temple within and without; and likewise the men present were to be sprinkled with blood. But the meat of the animals was to be boiled and to serve as food for the banquet. Fires were to be lighted in the middle of the temple floor, and kettles hung over them. The sacrificial beaker was to be borne around the fire, and he who made the feast and was chieftain, was to bless the beaker as well as all the sacrificial meat. Óthin's toast was to be drunk first –that was for victory and power to the king –then Njorth's and Frey's, for good harvests and for peace. Following that many used to drink a beaker to the king. Men drank toasts also in memory of departed kinsfolk –that was called minni (memorial toast)

*Heimskringla, Saga of Hákon the Good*, chapter 14 (Hollander 1964: 107).

[The farmers speak] 'But, if you mean to pursue this [the conversion of the farmers from paganism to Christianity] as to contend against us with force and compulsion, then all of us farmers have made up our minds to desert you and choose another leader, one who will help us freely to have the faith we wish to have...'

When silence was restored, Earl Sigurth made this answer: 'It is the intention of King Hákon to agree with you farmers, and to let nothing stand between him and your friendship...

[After the assembly] Earl Sigurth talked to the king and warned him that he should not refuse altogether to do as the farmers would have it-that nothing else would do. In good time we shall devise some way or other, sir king, to accomplish this (i.e. your aims).

In fall, at the beginning of winter there was a sacrificial feast at Hlathir, and the king attended it.

[the king attended the feast and sat on the high seat]... when the first beaker was served Earl Sigurth proposed a toast, dedicating the horn to Óthin, and drank to the king. The king took the horn from him and made the sign of the cross over it.

Then Kár of Grýting said ‘Why does the king do that? Doesn’t he want to drink of the sacrificial beaker?’.

Earl Sigurth made answer, ‘the king does as we all do who believe in their own might and strength, and dedicated his beaker to Thór. He made the sign of the hammer over it before drinking’ ... The next day when people had seated themselves at the tables, the farmers thronged about the king, saying that now he must eat the horse meat. That the king would not do under any condition [being an obvious pagan rite]. Then they asked him to drink the broth from it. He refused to do that. Then they asked him to eat the drippings from it. He would not do that [to the farmers this refusal demonstrated that the king would not assure fertility to their land] either, and the came near to making an attack on him. Earl Sigurth said that he would help them come to an agreement, asking them to cease their tumult; and he asked the king to gape with his mouth over the handle of the kettle on which the smoke of the broth from the horse meat had settled, so that the handle was greasy from it. Then the king went up to it and put a linen cloth over the handle and gaped with his mouth over it. Then he went back to the high-seat, and neither party was satisfied with that *Heimskringla, Saga of Hákon the Good*, chapter 15, 16 and 17 (Hollander 1964: 109-11).

Q:49 Then they journeyed through Gautland and in the evening came to a farm called Hof. There they found the door barred, so they could not enter. The people of the house declared it was ‘holy’ there, so they turned away from there.....

Then he went to another farm. There the woman of the house stood in the doorway and told them they could not come in there, saying that they had to sacrifice to the elves there....

The next evening he came to three farmers, all called Olvir, and they all drove him away....

Then they journeyed on, that same evening, and came to a fourth farmer who was reckoned to be the most considerable [meaning generous] man in the neighbourhood. He too drove them away.... *Heimskringla, St Olav's Saga* Chapter 91 (Hollander 1964: 336-7).

Q:50 When Guthbrand learned that King Óláf had come to Lóar and forced people to become Christian, he sent out war-arrows, summoning all Dalesmen to meet with him at a farm called Hundthorp..... There Guthbrand held a meeting with them and said that a man called Óláf had come to Lóar, and ‘means to bid us have a faith different from the one we have had, and to break in pieces all of our gods, and says that he has a god far greater and more powerful. It is a wonder that the earth does not burst asunder under him for daring to speak thus, or that our gods allow him to go about longer. But I think if we bear [the statue of] Thór out from our temple, where he stands here in this farm [hof, the farm is the temple], and has always helped us, and if he sees Óláf and his men, they will melt away, and he and his men become as nothing.’ ...

[The Dalesmen] came to the farm called Hof and stayed there three days, when many joined them of those who had fled Lesjar, Lóar, and Vági and would not receive baptism.

...[after the Dalesmen and others lose the battle] Then the king went to meet the farmers and negotiated with them. There fell a hard rain that day. Now when the assembly met, the king arose and said that the people at Lesjar, Lóar, and Vági has accepted Christianity and had destroyed their heathen houses of worship, ‘and they now believe in the true God who created heaven and earth and is omniscient.’ Then he sat down.

Guthbrand replied, ‘We know not of whom you speak. Do you call him God whom neither you nor anyone else can see? But we have a god whom one can see every day, but he is not outside today because it is raining, and he will look

terrifying to you and awe inspiring when you see him. I expect you will be seized with fear if he comes to the meeting. But, as you say that your god is so powerful, let him bring it about that the weather will be cloudy tomorrow but with no rain, and let us then meet here’.

....In the evening the king asked the son of Guthbrand [now a hostage] how their god was made up. He answered that he was made in the image of Thór, ‘and he has a hammer in his hand and is of great size and hollow inside, and he stands on a kind of pedestal when he is outside. There is a profusion of gold and silver upon him. He received four loaves of bread every day and also fresh meat.’

[continuing the story, the king arrives at the assembly] Then they saw a great crowd of farmers come up to the place of meeting who carried between them a big figure of a man all glistening with gold and silver. And when the farmers already at the place of meeting saw it, they all sprang up and bowed down before this idol.

[The king arranges for Kolbien the Strong to hit the statue with his club as soon as the people look away from it] Then the king arose and spoke: ‘You have said much to us, this morning. You think it strange that you cannot see our god, but we expect he will soon come to us. You terrify us with your god who is blind and deaf and cannot save either himself nor others and cannot budge unless he is carried, and I expect that ill will befall him soon. And now look ye to the east, there comes our God now with great light.’ Then the sun rose, and all the farmers looked at the sun. And at that moment Kolbien struck at their god so he fell to pieces, and out jumped mice as big as cats, and adders, and snakes.

....[the king says] But now you can see what power your god has whom you clad in gold and silver and whom you fed with meat and other provisions, and behold now what creatures were benefited by it –mice and snakes, adders and toads. .... Take your gold and finery which is scattered over the meadow and bring it home to your women folks, and do not hereafter hang it on sticks or stones....

*Heimskringla, St Olav’s Saga* Chapter 112 (Hollander 1964: 369-74).

- Q:51 After Njorth, Frey succeeded to power. He was called king of the Swedes and received tribute from them. He was greatly beloved, and blessed by good seasons like his father. Frey erected a great temple [hof] at Uppsala and made his chief residence [hofuðstað] there, directing to it all tribute due to him, both lands and chattels. This was the origin of the Uppsala crown goods, which have been kept there ever since. *Heimskringla, Saga of the Ynglings* Chapter 10 (Sturluson 2002 1:23, Hollander 1964:13).
- Q:52 Sigurth, early of Hlathir, was a most ardent heathen worshiper, as had been Hákon, his father. Earl Sigurth maintained all sacrificial feasts there in Trondheim on the king's behalf. It was ancient custom that when the sacrifice was to be made, all farmers were to come to the heathen temple and bring along with them the food they needed while the feast lasted. *Heimskringla, Saga of Hákon the Good*, Chapter 14 (Hollander 1964: 10).
- Q:53 Now when the assembly met, the king arose and said that the people at Lesjar, Lóar, and Vági has accepted Christianity and had destroyed their heathen houses of worship, 'and they now believe in the true God who created heaven and earth and is omniscient.' Then he sat down. *Heimskringla, St Óláfs saga*, Chapter 112 (Hollander 1964: 372).

### *Quotes from Saxo*

- Q:54 At the time there was a man called Odin who was believed throughout Europe, although falsely, to be a god. He had the habit of staying more frequently than anywhere at Uppsala, deigning to live rather more constantly there because of the inhabitants' torpor or the beauty of the countryside. The kings of the north, eager to honour his divinity with more enthusiastic worship, executed a representation of him in gold, the arms thickly encircled with heavy bracelets, and as an expression of their devotion sent it with utmost show of piety to Byzantium. Delighting in his celebrity, Odin avidly greeted the donor's affection. His wife, Frigg, desiring to walk around more bedizened, brought in smiths to strip the statue of gold. Odin had them hanged and then, setting the image on a plinth, by a marvellous feat of workmanship made it respond with a voice to human touch.

Book 1, section 25, (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005:113-4, Davidson and Fisher 1999: 25-6).

- Q:55 On his return Hading endured unvarying disaster, putting all peaceful places in turmoil by his arrival. When he set sail, a potent thundercloud arose and engulfed his fleet in a gigantic storm; when he sought shelter after shipwreck, the house suddenly collapsed in ruins. There was no alleviation for his calamities till he had been able to atone for his wickedness by religious offerings and return to heavenly favour; in order to mollify the divinities he did indeed make a holy sacrifice of dark coloured victims to the god Frø [Freyr]. He repeated this mode of propitiation at an annual festival and left it to be imitated by his descendants. The Swedes call it Frøblot Book 1, section 30 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005:122-4; Davidson and Fisher 1999: 30).
- Q:56 There was also a viceroy of the gods, Frø, who took up residence not far from Uppsala and altered the ancient system of sacrifice practised for centuries among many peoples to a morbid and unspeakable form of expiation. He delivered abominable offerings to the powers above by instituting the slaughter of human victims. Book 3, section 75 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005:214, translation by Davidson and Fisher 1999: 73).
- Q:57 At one time certain individuals, initiated into the magic arts, namely Thor, Odin and a number of others who were skilled at conjuring up marvellous illusions, clouded the minds of simple men and began to appropriate the exalted rank of godhead. Norway, Sweden and Denmark were ensnared in a groundless conviction, urged to a devoted worship of these frauds and infected by their gross imposture. The results of their deception spread, so that all other realms came to revere some kind of divine power in them, believing they were gods or the confederates of gods. They rendered solemn prayers to these wizards and paid the respect to an impious heresy which should have gone to true religion (Davidson and Fisher 1999: 170-1)
- Q:58 Magus, too, emulated his vigorous pursuits with similar deeds of worth; among other distinctive trophies he had his followers bring back to his native country some unusually heavy implements knowns as Thor's hammers [*quos Iouiales*

*uocabant* ‘Jupiter’] , which were venerated by men of the primitive religion on one of the islands. Ancient folk, in their desire to understand the causes of thunder, using an analogy from everyday life had wrought from a mass of bronze hammers of the sort they believed were used to instigate those crashes in the heavens, since they supposed the best way of copying the violence of such loud noises was with a kind of blacksmith’s tool. But, Magnus, in his enthusiasm for Christian teaching, hated the heathen religion, and held it an act of piety to rob the shrine of its objects of worship and Thor of his emblems. Book 13, 5.5 (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015: 923).

### ***Landnámabók Temple References***

- Q:59 The men of Geitland were supposed to pay for half the upkeep of the [pagan] temple there, and Tongue-Odd the other half. *Landnámabók* Chapter 41 (P&E 1972: 31-2).
- Q:60 Hallstein, son of Thorolf Mostur-Beard, took possession of Thorskafjord, and lived at Hallsteiness. He held sacrifices so that Thor would send him high-seat pillars. Then a tree was washed ashore on his land, sixty three ells long and two fathoms thick, and this was his used for making high seat pillars for almost every farm there in the fjord. *Landnámabók* Chapter 123 (P&E 1972: 61-2).
- Q:61 Thorhadd the Old was a temple priest at Moere in Trondheim. He had a great desire to go to Iceland, but before he set off, he dismantled the temple and took the pillars and some earth from under the temple with him. He put in at Stodvarfjord, and declared the whole fjord sacred, just as his place in Moere has been, forbidding people to take any life there except for domestic cattle. *Landnámabók* Chapter 297 (P&E 1972: 117).
- Q:62 Bodvar took possession of land west of Leiru Creek, including all the valleys here, and eastwards on the other side as far as Muli. He made his home at Hof and built a large temple there. *Landnámabók* Chapter 305 (P&E 1972: 119).
- Q:63 Jorund the Priest, son of Hrafn the foolish, settled west of Markar River, at a place now called Svertingsstead, and built a large [pagan] temple there..... Jorgund carried fire around it and dedicated it to the temple. *Landnámabók* Chapter 346 (P&E 1972: 131).



- Q:64 Jorund carried fire around it [unclaimed land] and dedicated it to the temple.  
*Landnámabók* (P&E 1972: 131)
- Q:65 There was a famous man in Sogn [Norway] called Geir, and he became known as Vegeir, because he was a great sacrificer. He had a large number of children. Vebjorn the Sogn-Champion was his eldest son, and after him came Vestein, Vethorm, Vemund, Vegest, and Vethorn; his daughter was called Vedis.  
*Landnámabók* Chapter 149 (P&E, 1972: 70).
- Q:66 As soon as Ingolf caught his first glimpse of Iceland he threw his [family temple] high seat pillars overboard, hoping for a good omen, and declared he'd settle wherever the pillars happened to wash ashore. *Landnámabók* Chapter 8 (P&E, 1972: 20).
- Q:67 Chapter 41. The men of Geitland were supposed to pay for half the upkeep of the [pagan] temple there, and Tongue-Odd the other half. Finally Illugi went to live at Outer-Holm on Araness when he and Holm-Starri exchanged their property, farms, wives, livestock and all. Then Illugi married Jorunn, daughter of Thormod Thjostarsson of Alftaness, but Sigrid [his wife] hanged herself in the [pagan] temple because she couldn't bear the change of husbands [hanging, being associated with Odin likely had some ritual significance here]. *Landnámabók* Chapter 41 (P&E 1972: 31-2).

### ***Saga Temple References***

- Q:68 Thorir's men both leapt to their feet, but none of them was armed because they were in a sacred temple [a hov], and people broke up the fighting between those who were most furious *Egils Saga* Section 49 (Hreinsson 1997: V1 91).
- Q:69 Thorhall sacrificed to idols, like his kinsmen. Not far from his farm was a rich temple which the people of Fljot owned in common and held sacrificial feasts there every year. *The Tale of Thorhall* Knapp. (Hreisson 1997: II 462)
- Q:70 When Hrafnkel had taken the land at Abalbol, he held great sacrifices, and had a great temple built. Hrafnkel loved no other god more than Frey, and he dedicated half of all his best livestock to him. *The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi*. Section 2 (Hreinsson 1997: V5 262).

- Q:71 East in Fljotsdal, Hrafnkel heard about the activities of the Thjostarsoons, how they had first destroyed Freyfaxi [a sacred horse dedicated to Frey], and then burnt the temple building and the images of the gods of Hrafnkelsdal. *The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi*. Section 13 (Hreinsson 1997: V5 276).
- Q:72 Ingimund turned towards him and said, 'It is not our custom to carry weapons into the temple, and you are exposing yourself to the wrath of the gods, and this is intolerable unless some amends are made'. *The Saga of the People of Vatnsdal*, Section 17 (Hreinsson 1997: V4 23).
- Q:73 The winter after this was very hard and the people of Reykjadal held a meeting at Thvera at Ljot the Temple Priest's and people thought it advisable to offer sacrifices for better weather. But people were not at all agreed on what should be offered. Ljot wanted to dedicate to the temple and then expose children and to kill old people. But that seemed unspeakable to Askel who said nothing would get better as a result of that offering; he said it would be wiser to do the creator honour by supporting old people and contributing money for bringing up children *The Saga of the People of Reykjadal and Killer-Skuta* Section 7 (Hreinsson 1997: V4 266).
- Q:74 Hrolf was a prominent chieftain and a man of great largesse. He maintained a temple to Thor on the island [the island of Moster in Norway, off of the Hordaland coast] and was a great friend of Thor's. It was because of this that he was known as Thorolf. [Thorolf sheltered an outlaw and the king threatened to take his land].

Thorolf Moster-beard held a great sacrificial feast during which he consulted his dear friend [the god] Thor about whether he should reconcile himself with the king or leave the country [Norway] and seek another fate. The oracle directed Thorolf to Iceland. He got himself an ocean-going ship and prepared it for the journey to Iceland, taking with him his household and all his goods. Many of his friends decided to go on the journey with him. He dismantled the temple and

transported most of its timbers,<sup>52</sup> together with the earth from the underneath the pedestal on which Thor had been placed.

Thorolf then sailed out to sea with a fair wind and came within sight of land..... Thorolf cast overboard the high-seat pillars which had been in his temple, one of which had Thor carved on it. Thorolf declared that he would settle in Iceland in whatever place Thor directed the pillars to land. As soon as the pillars were thrown overboard, they were swept towards the more westerly of the fjords and seemed to travel faster than might be expected.....

...He put in to land halfway along the southern shore of the fjord.... They explored the area and found that Thor and the pillars were already ashore at the tip of the headland north of the cove....

Then Thorolf carried fire around his land-claim... He established settlements for the crew and set up a large farm by the cove, Hofsvog, which he called Hofstadir. There he had a temple built, and it was a sizable building, with a door on the side-wall near the gable. The high-set pillars were placed inside the door, and nails, that were called holy nails, were driven into them. Beyond that point, the temple was a sanctuary. At the inner end there was a structure similar to the choir in churches nowadays and there was a raised platform in the middle of the floor like an altar, where a ring weighing twenty ounces and fashioned without a join was placed, and all oaths had to be sworn on this ring. It also had to be worn by the temple priest at all public gatherings. A sacrificial bowl was placed on the platform and in it a sacrificial twig –like a priest’s aspergillum- which was used to sprinkle blood from this bowl. This blood, which was called sacrificial blood, was the blood of live animals offered to the gods. The gods were placed around the platform in the choir-like structure within the temple. All farmers had to pay a toll to the temple and they were obliged to support the temple godi [chieftain-priest]

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that the reason timbers are often taken from the home area, or temple timbers are reused, is because Iceland lacks in wood.

in all his campaigns, just as thingman [citizens] are now obliged to support their chieftain. The temple godi was responsible for the upkeep of the temple and ensuring it was maintained properly, as well as holding sacrificial feasts in it.

Thorolf called the headland between Vigrafjord and Hofsvog 'Thorsnes'. The headland is in the form of a mountain, and Thorolf invested so much reverence in it that no one was allowed to look towards it without having washed and nothing was allowed to be killed on the mountain, neither man nor animal, unless it died of natural causes. He called this mountain Helgafell and believed that he and all his family on the headland would go there when they died *The Saga of the People of Eyri* (Hreinsson 1997: V5. 132-4).

Some architectural features of note:

- The high seat pillars had faces carved on them.
- Dirt from underneath the original temple was taken and placed into the temple.
- There was a raised platform in the middle of the floor. A large copper bowl was located on it.
- There was a door on one side of the gable.
- High seat pillars were placed inside the door.
- At the inner end was a structure similar to a choir.
- Gods were placed around the raised platform in the choir like area.
- A ring for swearing oaths was located inside

Q:75 Thorgrim built a farm at Hof that spring. It soon became very celebrated, for it had many friends and kinsmen to support it. Thorgrim became powerful in the district. His authority reached all the way to Nyjahraun. It was called the godord [regional political and religious center] of the men of Brynjudal, and he was called Thorgrim the Godi. He made many pagan sacrifices.

He had a large temple built in his hayfield, a hundred feet long and sixty wide. Everybody had to pay a temple fee. Thor was the god most honoured there. It was rounded on the inside, like a vault, and there were windows and wall-hangings everywhere. The image of Thor stood in the centre, with other gods on both sides.

In front of them was an altar made with great skill and covered with iron on the top. On this there was to be a fire which would never go out – they called it sacred fire. On the altar was to lie a great armband, made of silver. The temple godi [chieftain-priest] was to wear it on his arm at all gatherings, and everyone was to swear oaths on it whenever a suit was brought. A great copper bowl was to stand on the altar, and into it was to go all the blood which came from animals or men given to Thor. They called this sacrificial blood and the sacrificial blood bowl. This blood was to be sprinkled over men and animals, and the animals that were given in sacrifice were to be used for feasting when sacrificial banquets were held. Men whom they sacrificed were to be cast into a pool which was outside by the door; they called it Blotkelda (Well of Sacrifice).

In the hall of the house at Hof were the cross-beams which were in the temple when Olaf Jonsson had it torn down. He had them all split apart, but they were still quite thick *The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes* (Hreinsson 1997: V3 307-8].

There are some architectural details to note in this description:

- The temple is built near a farm
- It was rounded on the inside.
- There were windows everywhere.
- Wall hangings covered the interior.
- Image of Thor stood in the centre, with gods on both sides (compare to Adam of Breman's description.
- Altar was covered with iron, and maintained a sacred fire.
- A great copper bowl was on the altar.
- A pool was located outside the temple for human sacrifice.

Q:76 Now time wore on toward winter. Late one evening Bui went out to Brautarhold and stayed the night there. In the morning he was up before dawn and went east to the hill from where he could see the farm of Hof clearly. The weather was cloudless and bright. He saw a man coming out early at Hof, in linen clothes. The men went down from the gate and along the path which led to the temple. Bui

thought he recognized Thorstein. He went toward the temple, and when he reached it he saw that the gate was unlocked, and so too was the temple. The Bui went into the temple. He saw Thorstein lying face down before Thor. Bui moved forward silently until he came up to Thorstein, and then grabbed him in such a way that he had one arm under his knees and the other under his shoulders. In this manner he lifted Thorstein up high and dashed his head down against the stone so hard that the brains spilled across the floor. He died at once. Bui then carried him out of the temple and threw him against the wall.

Then he went back into the temple. He took the sacred fire and made a torch, and then carried the flame around the temple and touched it to the hangings. One quickly caught fire from the other, and in a short time the inside of the temple was ablaze. Bui went out and locked both the temple and the gate, and flung the keys into the fire. After that he went on his way.

Thorgrim the Godi awoke that morning and looked out. He could see the fire at the temple. He called on his people, both women and men, to come running with buckets of water and try to save the temple. He also called for his son Thorstein, but he was not to be found. When they came to the gate in the hayfield wall they could not get in, because the gate was fastened and the keys were not to be found. They had to break down the gate, since the wall was so high that they could not climb over it. They broke the gate down, and when they came through it into the yard they saw where Thorstein lay dead. The temple too was locked, and so they were not able to save any of its contents. Grappling hooks were made, and the temple was pulled apart, and in this way some of the wood was saved. *The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes*, Section 4 (Hreinsson 1997: V3 310).

- Thorstein, in the guise of a priest is wearing linen clothes, and this identifies him as a priest.
- Note that the doors and gates have a lock and key. This shows that there is conflict.
- In a similar vein, note the existence of a high wall.
- The temple contains a sacred fire, as well as a statue of Thor.

### *Assorted Other References*

- Q:77 And it is said that his foster-brother was Grímr geistkor, who explored the whole of Iceland on Úlfljótr recommendation before the Althing was held. And everyone in this country gave him a penny for that, and he later gave the money to the temples. *Íslendingabók* Chapter 2 (Grønlie 2006: 5).
- Q:78 To those who believed in Christ he [Bishop Eginó], administered consolation and to the unbelievers he perseveringly announced the Word of God. There he also broke to pieces a very highly esteemed image of Frikkó [Freyr]. *GHEP* Book four: ix (9) (Tschan 2002: 192).
- Q:79 [Pagan law code requires...] A ring weighing two ounces or more had to be kept on the altar of each chief temple. Every godi was obligated to have this ring on his arm at all of the public meetings he was to preside over and to redden the ring in the blood of a sacrificial bull he had sacrificed himself. Every person who needed to acquit himself of a legal duty at court had first to swear an oath on that ring and to call two or more witnesses to his oath. *The Tale of Thorstein Bull's-Leg*. Section 1 (Hreinsson 1997: V4 341).
- Q:80 "I call on you to witness," he was to say, "that I swear an oath, a legal oath, on the ring. May now Frey and Njord and the all-powerful god so help me that I will now prosecute or defend the case or bear witness or render a decision or verdicts according to what I know is most just and true and most according to the law, and will acquit myself of all legal duties which fall upon me while I am present at this Thing". *The Tale of Thorstein Bull's-Leg* Section 1, (Hreinsson 1997: V4 341).
- Q:81 Iceland was first settled from Norway.... When Ivarr, son of Ragnarr Loðrók, had St Edmund, King of the Angles killed; and that was 870 years after the birth of Christ, according to what is written in his [Edmund's] saga. *Íslendingabók*, Chapter 1 (Grønlie 2006: 3).
- Q:82 There were many whose hearts told them that they should begin to tell the secret runes, the word of God, the famous feats that the powerful Christ accomplished in word and deeds among human beings. *Heliand*, Cotton Caligula A. VII, lines 1-5 (Diplomatic edition (non-normalized text), Sievers 1878: 7, translation Murphy 1992:3).

Q:83 At that time there was also a very pious matron among the Swedes. The impudence of wicked men had been unable to turn her from the true faith. When she was placed in difficult positions, it was suggested to her that she should offer sacrifices to idols, according to their customs. *Vita Anskari* Chapter 20 (Mellor 2008: 50).

Q:84 [Speaking to the hero Ingimund] The Lapp women [a prophetess] answered, 'What I am saying will come to pass and, as a sign of this, an amulet is missing from your purse –the gift which King Harald gave you at Havsfjord –and it now lies in the wood where you will settle, and on this silver amulet the figure of Frey is carved and when you establish your homestead there, then my prophecy will be fulfilled'.

The king answered, 'I cannot deny that the prophecy may have some purpose, and the Frey might wish his amulet to come to rest in the place where he wants his seat of honour established'.

Ingimund said that he was eager to know whether he could find the amulet when the digging was done for his high-seat pillars.

Ingimund chose a site for his home in a very beautiful vale and prepared to build his homestead. He built as great temple a hundred feet long, and when he dug holes for the high seat pillars, then he found the amulet as had been prophesized. *The Saga of the People of Vatnsdal*, section 10- 15 (Hreinsson 1997: V4 14-20).



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### Abbreviated Sources:

**DRB:** *The New Douai Rheims Bible* 2011. Boyd, Minnesota: Straightway Ministries. This work is a transcription of the original English texts (c. 1609/1582) with only minor changes to update spelling. Confusingly, there are several later biblical translations called ‘Douai Rheims’ bibles, but they are extensive modern revisions with little or no connection to the original version.

**GHEP:** Schmeidler, Bernhard (ed.) 1917. *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi 2: Adam von Bremen, Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*. Hannover und Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung. The standard English translation is: Tschan, Francis J. (trans). 2002. *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen: Adam of Bremen* New York: Colombia University

**P&E:** Pálsson, Hermann, and Edwards, Paul 1972. *The Book of Settlements: Landnámabók*. Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press. The standardized Old Norse version of this work is: *Íslendingabók Landnámabók* (Íslensk Fornrit Vol 1), 1986. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag.

**PSRL** *Полное Собрание Русских Летописей, Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisei* [The Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles]. This, currently 43 volume set, was started in 1841 and it not yet complete. Written in Russian, this work is often the source for various English translations of individual chronicles. The majority of this work has not been translated into English. The texts are available online in Russian at:  
<[http://psrl.csu.ru/indexs/index\\_tom.shtml](http://psrl.csu.ru/indexs/index_tom.shtml)>. It is worth noting that the volumes have been reprinted and there is variability in the publication year.

**RunData:** The RunData base is the standard listing of both Rune Stones and their translations. It is available at:<<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>>

**VA:** Waitz, G. (ed.) 1884. *Vita Anskarii auctore Rimberto. Accedit vita Rimberti: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex monumentis germaniae historici recuse*. Hannoverae: Impensis bibliopolii. The standard English translation is: Robinson, Charles H. 1921 *Anskar, the Apostle of the North*. 801-865. Macmillan Company: New York.

**VW:** Levison, W. (ed.) 1923. *Vita Willibrordi archiepiscopi Traiectensis. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, VII: 81-141, is the standard work. However the French work: Veyrard-Cosme, Christiane 2003 *L'oeuvre hagiographique en prose d'Alcuin. Vitae Willibrordi, Vedasti, Richarii. Edition, traduction, études narratologiques* Firenze [Florence]: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, includes a new critical Latin text and is widely becoming the scholarly standard. The standard English translation is: Talbot, C. H. 1954. *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany, Being the Lives of S. S. Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba and Lebuin, Together with the Hodoeporicon of St Willibald and a Selection from the Correspondence of St. Boniface* New York, Sheed and Ward, This translation, with some updates, is also found in: Noble, Thomas F.X., and Head, Thomas (eds.) 1995. *Soldiers of Christ*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. p. 189-212

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