CHAPTER 4

The kingdom of Norway

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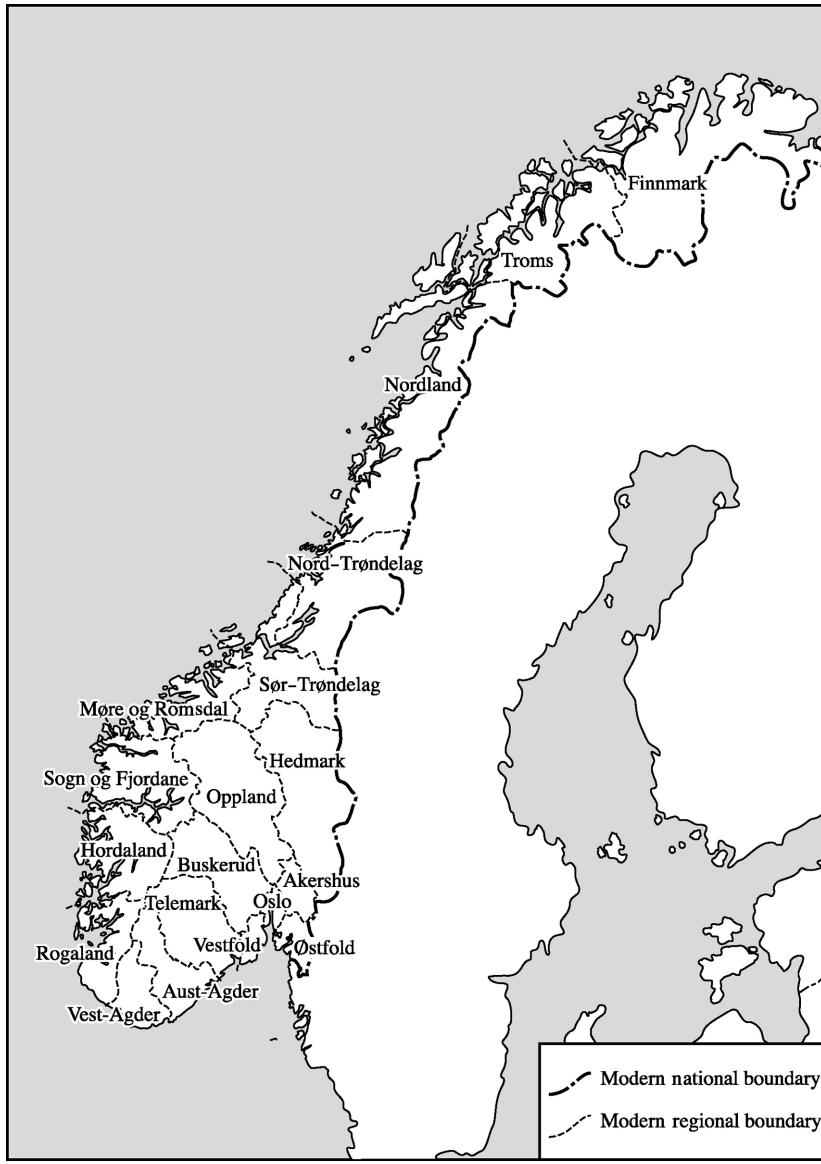
1. BEFORE CHRISTIANITY: RELIGION AND POWER

The sources for the early history of Norway, including its Christianization, are relatively abundant, although most of them are late. It is therefore very often difficult to distinguish between reliable information and later inventions. This also applies to the information about pagan religion. Best known is the mythology, for which the most important source is the *Elder Edda*, a collection of twenty-nine pieces of pagan poems, ten of which deal with the gods, collected in written form around 1230 and preserved in an Icelandic manuscript from around 1270.[1] The best known of these poems is *Vǫluspá*, 'the Volve's prophecies', which deals with the creation of the world and its end.[2] Other well-known writings in the collection include *Hávamál*, 'the words of the High', i.e. Odin, on how to live, and *Skírnismál*, which some scholars believe refers to a fertility cult. Further, the skaldic poetry, poems composed in praise of kings and chieftains, contains frequent allusions to the mythology.

There has been a long discussion on the date of the Eddic poems, but the majority of scholars believe that they have been preserved orally since the pagan period, or at least that the mythology contained in them goes back to this period. There is also some evidence to support this view, such as a quotation from the poem *Hávamál* in a skaldic stanza from the tenth century and from a Viking Age runic inscription in the Eddic metre. Further, poetry is more likely to be preserved orally than prose; in particular, the very complicated metre of the skaldic poems gives some protection against change in oral transmission. However, examples of different versions in the medieval manuscripts show that some changes did take place, and we cannot exclude the possibility that some skaldic or Eddic poems were composed or were subject to considerable changes in the Christian period.

[1] Vries 1956–7; Lindow 1985; Harris 1985; Fidjestøl 1999; Clunies Ross 1987; 1994.
[2] A volve, ON *vǫlva*, is a woman with divinatory powers.



5. Norway: modern regions (*fylker*)

Skaldic poems were still being composed in the thirteenth century, which might give rise to suspicion about the authenticity of the oral transmission. On the other hand, this fact also serves to explain the continued familiarity during the Christian period with the ancient mythology. This use of pagan mythology was hardly more opposed to Christianity than the contemporary European use of the Greek and Roman mythology and literature.

The second main source for the ancient mythology is Snorri Sturluson's (1179–1241) *Edda*, usually referred to as the *Younger Edda*, composed between *c.* 1220 and Snorri's death. This work is allegedly intended as a book of instruction for skalds, who need to be familiar with the ancient mythology, above all in order to master the metaphorical language (*kenningar*) of skaldic poetry. The work contains myths about the gods and their genealogies, about the activities of the gods and about the history of the world from the time it was created until it ends. Snorri's sources for this were ancient skaldic poems, preserved orally, and poems from the *Elder Edda*, but Snorri must also to a considerable extent have used his own imagination, based on thirteenth-century Christian ideas.

The Eddic and skaldic poems contain allusions to and stories about a number of male and female gods and the relationship between them, but give no systematic account of the mythology. Snorri's *Edda* is more organized, but this may be the result of Snorri's familiarity with the far more systematic Christian theology. The mythological sources depict the gods as married, having families and living on individual farms, in a similar way to their human worshippers. Odin seems to have been regarded as the leader of the gods, or at least the most prominent of them, but he was no absolute monarch. He was a warrior god and in addition known for his wisdom and magical powers. His son Thor (Tor) was known for his strength but also appears as a somewhat comical figure in some of the poems. He seems to have been more connected to fertility, as were also the god Frøy and the goddess Frøya. The names of the gods occur in a number of place names, e.g. Onsøy or Onarheim (derived from Odin) and Tysnes (from the war god Tyr), which may be used to draw conclusions about their cult and popularity in various parts of the country. These do not necessarily correspond to their status in the poetry. Thus, a large number of the place names, e.g. Ullensaker, Ullevål, suggest that Ull, usually referred to as a sky god, must have been very important, although he does not occur in the extant mythological sources. In addition to the gods, there was another category of supernatural figures, the giants (*jotnar*), who were their enemies and inferior to them in rank, though resourceful and often dangerous. The

relationship between these two 'tribes' does not correspond to that between good and evil in Christianity, nor were they always enemies.

In contrast to the mythology, very little is known about the cult, which was probably the most important part of the religion. The sagas contain some descriptions of it, the most famous of which is Snorri's account of the sacrifice (*blót*) at Mære, in which Håkon den gode is forced to take part. The reliability of this account has been subject to much discussion, but it is difficult to imagine that Snorri knew very much about religious practices that had been banned for more than 200 years. Most of his details seem to be derived from contemporary Christian practice or from accounts of sacrifices in the Old Testament.[3] It seems likely, however, that cult had the form of sacrificial meals – the introduction of common drinking-parties three times a year in the earliest Christian laws is clearly intended to replace such meals – and further that the eating of horsemeat formed an important part of these meals, as this was strictly forbidden in Christian times.

Cult and religion must have been an integrated part of life in pagan society, and there was a close connection between the cult and political, social and economic activities. There is no evidence of a professional priestly class; most probably chieftains and prominent men or women acted as cultic leaders. However, some places are believed to have been specialized for cult more than others. Pagan cult buildings are referred to as *hof* in the sagas. Farm names such as Hov, -hov, Hove etc., which are numerous in Norway, indicate the sites of pagan cult places. For instance at Hove in Trøndelag an irregular row of ten cylindrical, 0.4–0.6 metres wide, stone-packed holes are interpreted as bases for deity figures, associated with many pits containing the remains of charcoal and animal bones. The pits are interpreted as traces of cult, maybe offerings or sacred meals. Burial mounds are found as well, but no traces of houses. The activity is dated *c.* 100 BC–AD 1000.[4] Farms with names indicating cult are often centrally located and thus well suited for gatherings. Against the background of Danish and Swedish evidence, scholars today are of the opinion that the *hof*, the same word as German *Hof*, was a hall or large building on farms.[5] The excavations in the church at Mære in Trøndelag for instance indicate that the church was built on the site of a pagan cult building. This building was identified by small pictures made of goldleaf, 'gullgubber', engraved with pagan motifs which were found in postholes belonging to a building older than the medieval church. 'Gullgubber' depicted one or two persons in relief interpreted as deities, on

[3] Düwel 1985. For alternative points of view, Steinsland 2000, 111–12; Meulengracht Sørensen 2001.
[4] Farbregd 1986b. Also Narmo 1996. [5] Olsen 1995.

a small golden sheet. Since these excavations in the 1960s, gullgubber have been found near posts in (often large) buildings where pagan cult activities are believed to have taken place, for instance in a chieftain's hall at Borg in Lofoten, at Klepp in Rogaland and at Hov at Hedmark. Farm names such as Horg or ending in -horg refer to outdoor cult sites. One skaldic poem refers to Olav Tryggvason as a 'horg breaker', that is, as the destroyer of these sites. The oldest Christian legislation prohibited the location of cults near hills and 'horgs'. A stone construction, found near Egersund, may be a pagan altar. Other place names like 'vang', 've', 'leik' and 'lund' may indicate cult as well, but we do not know the character of the cult. Although, due to the lack of systematic archaeological research, it is impossible to prove a strong correspondence between archaeological evidence of pagan cult and farm names, nevertheless burials have often been observed in places with names indicating cult.

Burials provide the most common archaeological evidence of the pagan religion. Both cremation and inhumation were practised. The two types appear side by side in some areas from the same period, and even sometimes in the same burial mound, while only one type dominates in others. There is no difference between the indications of wealth in the two kinds of burials. We do not know what determined the choice between them, whether it was the life of the buried person, the cause of death, practical reasons or simply a coincidence. The orientation of the body varies as well, between south–north, east–west and in between. In the cremation burials the burial gifts and the body are often neatly arranged and burnt at the same time, and the grave is sometimes covered by a mound. The amount of burial gifts increases during the Viking period, with many particularly rich cremation burials from the tenth century.[6] Visible monuments above the grave vary considerably, many graves having none. The burial mounds are generally quite visible; they are usually in groups from a few to about twenty, and located near farmyards or along farm paths. It is generally believed that only the members of the social elite were buried in monumental graves, and that the size of the burial monument as well as the amount of grave gifts depended on wealth and social status. The graves of the poor have no visible signs.

The characteristics above concern the Norse people in all parts of Norway. However, the belief system and cult of the Saami, who lived as nomads in the north of Norway as well as further south, were different. The sources on Saami religion are from the Christian era. Adam of Bremen around 1073–5

[6] Solberg 2000.

appears to be writing of the Saami religion, when he relates that those who live along the sea farthest to the north are not yet Christian. 'These people are still so skilled in sorcery and prayer that they claim to know what everyone in the world is doing.'[7] The *Historia Norvegiae* contains a section on the special characteristics of the Saami's religion: shamanism, cultic dance, trances and clairvoyance. The clerical author gives the impression that there was much contact and trade between the Christians and the Saami in the second half of the 1100s. *Heimskringla* links the Saami for the most part to 'wizardry'. The *Law of Eidsivating*, legislation concerning the east of Norway and brought to bear in early Christian times, implies that the Saami were known for their healing abilities and methods. The most important Saami good gods were female (for instance Sáráhkká, Juksáhkká), while the most important evil power was male (Stallo). The goddess Jábmeáhkká dominated the place for the dead. The sun, Beaivi, was also an important god. Throughout the period *c.* 800–post-1800 the dead were buried in rocky areas where loose stones stood in piles, often with a Saami sledge and birch bark. The importance of the naked stone is reflected in this burial custom; the Saami believed in Sieiddit, a god inhabiting rocks and stone. Animals and dress accessories are a common grave gift in both Norse and Saami cultures, but the standard weapons and rich household equipment and boats which we find in many of the Norse graves seem to be missing in the Saami graves. The lack of weapons is explained by the belief about conflict between the goddess of death and the god of hunting.[8]

There seem to be some similarities between Saami and Norse religions, such as the stratified cosmos and the idea of a free soul which can travel between the different levels. The bear is present in rituals in both cultures, and both Norwegian and Saami religion have a god of thunder with a hammer, Thor and Horagalles.

Principalities are likely to have existed before the unification of the kingdom, but little is known about them. Ottar of Hålogaland, who visited King Alfred's court around 870 and whose narrative is preserved in the preface to the Anglo-Saxon translation of Orosius, uses the term Norway (Norðveg) saying that he lives in the land of the Norwegians, but makes no mention of political units. He must have been a powerful chieftain, who drew income from taxation of the Saami in northern Norway, and from trade of traditional Saami merchandise in southern Norway and northern Europe. Ottar's power was to a much lesser extent based on ownership of land. This, however, must have been a main source of political power further

[7] Adam of Bremen IV.32. [8] Schanche 2000.

south, particularly in south-eastern Norway, Trøndelag and some parts of western Norway. Various smaller principalities are mentioned in the later sources as existing here before the unification. Their existence seems likely but we do not know whether they were fairly permanent entities with some kind of administrative structure, or mainly based on personal lordship and thus short-lived and changing. In any case, grave finds indicate the presence of powerful chieftains during pagan times. The best known and best preserved are the Oseberg (*c.* 834) and Gokstad ship graves (*c.* 900–5) in Vestfold, but such burials have also been found in other parts of the country, for instance at the outlet of Glomma in Østfold and on Karmøy in Rogaland (tenth century). Some very well-furnished women's graves in Sogn indicate the existence of powerful chieftains in this region, as do also house and dock foundations, discovered in north Jæren in south-western Norway. Further, scholars believe that income from Viking activities and the military power possessed by the Vikings provided the basis for power at home. The Eddic and early skaldic poems particularly honour chieftains who distinguished themselves in battle.

There is some evidence that kings and magnates had a religious function in the pagan period as cultic leaders, and formed the link between people and the gods, whose 'luck' ensured 'good years and peace' as well as victory in war.[9] There are even examples of some of them claiming descent from the gods. The poem *Ynglingatal*, quoted in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, traces a dynasty in south-eastern Norway (Vestfold) back to the god Odin. This dynasty was later identified with that of Harald Hårfagre. The age of the poem has been the subject of much discussion, but the majority of scholars believe that it dates from the Viking Age.[10] The divine descent of the Ynglingar is further developed in the later prose sources *Historia Norvegiae* and *Heimskringla*, the latter probably dependent on Ari's lost work. Further, the skaldic poem *Håløygjatal*, composed by Øyvind Skaldespille in the tenth century and preserved in a fragmented form in four sagas, including *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, lists the ancestors of Håkon jarl back to Odin.

Harald Hårfagre (Fairhair) allegedly unified the whole country, but most of the evidence for this is very late. The oldest narrative source, Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók*, from the first half of the twelfth century, relates that he ruled for seventy years and died at the age of eighty, in 931–2. Details about his

[9] Bagge 1991, 218–24; Steinsland 2000, 53–9; 2001; Krag 2001.

[10] An exception is Claus Krag who claims that it was actually composed in the twelfth century in order to serve as legitimation for the Norwegian kings in their struggle with Denmark over the south-eastern part of the country (Krag 1991): this hypothesis has been rejected by most scholars; e.g. the reviews by Fidjestøl 1994 and Sandnes 1994.

conquest of Norway are only given in the sagas from the thirteenth century (they are most elaborate in *Heimskringla*), and are most probably later constructions. The only event for which there is contemporary evidence is the battle of Hafrsfjord, just south of present-day Stavanger, which is celebrated in a skaldic poem, quoted in the sagas. As far as can be gathered from this poem, Harald defeated a number of chieftains mentioned by name, most probably arriving at Hafrsfjord from the south. The battle has been dated to between around 870 and 900. Several chieftains contemporary with Harald are mentioned in the sources: Atle earl of Fjordane, Ragnvald earl of Møre and Håkon earl who belonged to the powerful chieftain families in northern Norway and Trøndelag. The current opinion is that Harald's kingdom was mainly confined to western Norway, as all early evidence links Harald to this part of the country.[11]

Sources described Norwegian rulers as king (Old Norse *konungr*, Latin *rex*), earl (Old Norse *jarl*, Latin *comes*) and chieftain (Old Norse *hǫfðingi*, Latin *princeps*). The titles have fairly exact meanings in the prose sources that probably reflect twelfth- and thirteenth-century conditions. According to *Heimskringla*, Harald Hårfagre even established a fixed hierarchy, with one *jarl* in each *fylki* (territorial division),[12] each with four *hersir* under him. *Hǫfðingi* is a more general term, in the kings' sagas mainly used to denote independent rulers. The title 'earl' in the sagas normally refers to men ranking just below the king, who ruled more or less independently over large areas, such as the Lade earls of Trøndelag. This resembles the use of the title in the thirteenth century, when there was normally only one earl at a time in the country, who was a kind of co-ruler, ranking next to the king. The title *hersir* – 'ruler' – has been the subject of much discussion. According to *Heimskringla*, St Olav replaced this title with that of *lendr maðr*, i.e. 'landed man', a man who held land from the king. Most probably, however, this neatly arranged hierarchy is a later construction, whereas in reality before the twelfth century the differences between the various titles were vague and depended on time and place. This is reflected in the early Eddic and skaldic poetry where for instance the title 'earl' refers to powerful men in general, as in the poem *Rígsþula*, where mankind is divided into three categories: slave, commoner (*bóndi*) and *jarl*.[13]

[11] Krag 2003, 185–9.

[12] Trøndelag was divided into eight *fylki* and western Norway into six. The units probably date from well before the Viking Age, in Trøndelag possibly from 300–600. *Fylki* apparently did not exist in eastern Norway, until they were introduced after the western Norwegian model in the late thirteenth century.

[13] The date of *Rígsþula* has been the subject of much discussion, the opinions varying from the ninth until the mid-thirteenth century: See 1981, 84–95, 96–8, 514–16; Bagge 2000, 20–38.

If the tradition about Harald Hårfagre's unification is correct, then unification came before Christianization. However, even if Harald did rule the whole country, which is doubtful, none of his successors did so until St Olav Haraldsson (1015–30), who was responsible for the final Christianization. The sagas depict the struggles in the intervening period as a conflict between two dynasties, the descendants of Harald Hårfagre and the earls of Lade. Modern historians have modified this on two points. They pay greater attention to the intervention of the Danish kings who apparently controlled the south-eastern part of the country and sometimes even more during most of the period, and they have questioned the existence of the Hårfagre dynasty. Most probably, Harald's grandsons, the Eirikssons, were the last of his descendants to rule the country, whereas the two missionary kings, Olav Tryggvason (995–1000) and St Olav Haraldsson, did not belong to the dynasty.[14] The competition over Norway thus seems to have been more open during the first century after Harald's death than the sagas admit. The later Norwegian dynasty cannot trace its line further back than to Harald Hardråde (1046–66), St Olav's half-brother.

2. CONTACTS

In contrast to Denmark and Sweden, which were the targets of Ansgar's mission in the ninth century, there is no evidence of individual missionaries in Norway, nor do we know of any *Lives* of missionaries. All the missionaries mentioned in the sources were apparently brought in by the missionary kings in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. By contrast, the Viking Age was a period of close connections between Scandinavia and Christian Europe, through travel, trade, plundering or conquering expeditions and Scandinavians serving as mercenaries abroad. Contemporary European sources mention that pagan Scandinavians were marked with the sign of the cross, although not baptized, before entering Christian countries, so that they could move freely among the Christian members of the population. There are also references to Scandinavians being baptized abroad, in the sagas as well as in non-Scandinavian sources. Thus, of the two missionary kings, Olav Tryggvason was baptized in England in connection with a peace settlement, whereas St Olav was baptized in Normandy, probably in connection with an alliance with the exiled English king. In both cases, a number of warriors must have been baptized together with their leader.

[14] Krag 1989; 2003, 185–96.

Moreover, as the sources are meagre, there must have been many other, similar examples that are not mentioned.

The evidence of Christian influence in Norway itself is mainly archaeological. An important category of sources in this context is the ninety-three stone crosses, mostly found along the western coast between Rogaland and Sogn og Fjordane. The crosses are interpreted by Birkeli as a sign of a gradual process of Christianization prior to the establishment of any organized church in Norway.[15] He points out that the location of the crosses corresponds to the core area of Håkon den gode's sphere of influence. Birkeli also shows that these crosses resemble the stone crosses found in England and Ireland, thus forming evidence of close contacts with the British Isles. Both the existence of the crosses themselves and their style seem to link southern Norway, especially its western parts, to the British Isles, although the style in Norway is very rough compared to the British crosses. Stone crosses in Britain with runic inscriptions form further evidence of contact across the North Sea. Recent research has dated most of the crosses to the period *c*. 950–*c*. 1030, but some of them may be younger. The dating is based on comparative studies of style, inscriptions, whether they are situated on an older grave and whether they are associated with a church.[16] However, the dating is very rough, as the crosses are not dated by their context. Birkeli's theories about the influence from the British Isles have received general support, but both his theory about the gradual process of conversion and whether or not the geographic and chronological framework of the stone crosses corresponds to Håkon den gode's reign are debated.

Trade was an important means of cultural and religious exchange and may in many cases have contributed to conversion. Archaeology reveals objects in Norway from the rest of north-western Europe from Roman times onwards. Numerous imported objects from the British Isles are found in pagan graves in Norway in the Viking period. Although not all of these are Christian cult objects, they indicate contact with Christian areas. How they arrived in Norway, by trade, plundering or gift exchange, may vary from case to case and often cannot be decided. Nevertheless, the exchange of objects with foreign countries facilitated a long period of religious influence in Norway prior to its 'official' Christianization. Ottar of Hålogaland recounts that extensive trade existed between commercial centres in Norway (Kaupang/Skiringssal), Rus' and Saami areas of the north, the continent (Hedeby) and England.

[15] Birkeli 1973. [16] Gabrielsen 2002, 57–60.

Kaupang in Vestfold was a trade centre from *c.* 800 to *c.* 960, and a possible arena for various cultures to meet. Arabic, French and English coins, ceramics from the Rhine, the North Sea area of northern Holland and the Baltic have all been found in Kaupang, and there are traces of at least the Norse and Christian religions. Three Thor's hammers were found in the settlement area, one in the form of a pendant and two incised on Arabic dirhams.[17] The latter indicate that the Norse people recognized the dirhams as foreign, and maybe threatening, since they have found it necessary to add a familiar god's symbol. Lead brooches with a simple cross decoration may be produced by Christians, but not necessarily.[18] However, the burial customs seem not to have changed markedly even when grave gifts include Christian objects. Even a woman with a cross pendant, thought to be a Christian of non-Scandinavian origin, is buried in a non-Christian way. The only possible evidence of Christian influence on burial customs is the fact that Christian objects occur more often in inhumation than in cremation burials.[19] Inhumation and cremation burials appear side by side during the 900s, and boat graves as well as coffin graves have been discovered, some totally without burial goods, one with a reliquary. Although the burial traditions vary in Viking Age Norway in general, the different burial practices within the same burial place at Kaupang could be explained by the fact that Kaupang attracted a variety of travellers. The situation in Kaupang is very much a parallel to Birka in Sweden, where Christian objects are found as well.

Although there is a considerable amount of archaeological evidence of contacts with Christian Europe, it is more difficult to decide to what extent this evidence expresses adherence to Christianity. Graves with little or no burial gifts are not unequivocally Christian; neither is an east–west grave orientation or inhumation burial. Many people were already buried in a simple manner in Norway in the Viking period. As only landowners got a rich burial, a process of concentration of property owners would also lead to a reduction in rich burials.[20] Many Christian objects may have been plundered from churches or monasteries; they were used purely for decoration or were destroyed, as for instance book mountings torn off a book, in order to use the precious metal, which clearly shows that contact with Christians did not lead to Christian influence. Other instances are more ambiguous. Ann-Sofie Gräslund interprets Christian objects in the

[17] Skre and Stylegar 2004, personal communication from Christoph Kilger.
[18] Skre, Pilø and Pedersen 2001, 24; Lager 2002, 140.
[19] Blindheim, Heyerdahl-Larsen and Tollnes 1981, 119. [20] Solberg 2000.

graves as an indication of the Christianity of the dead (often a woman).[21] However, the women were often buried with dress accessories and jewellery, and the Christian objects may be interpreted as such, particularly if they are found in an obviously pagan cultic context. An increase in richly furnished cremation burials appears in many districts during the 900s, e.g. in Innvik, Nordfjord and in Grytten, Romsdal. In the last, the dead woman was buried in a boat with rich gifts, like jewellery and a reliquary, most likely plundered from the British Isles.[22] The grave is dated to the first half of the tenth century, and the site is not far from the contemporary Christian graves at Veøy. The grave goods including Christian objects in a pagan context suggest opposition rather than adherence to Christianity.

It is unclear when Norwegians began to use Christian cult objects for cultic purposes. A possible example is a complex of Christian objects found at a chieftain's farm at Borg: a glass with gold decoration including a cross, a 'Tating' pitcher,[23] also decorated with a cross, and an insular bronze bowl, all possibly for liturgical hand washing. In addition, a gold pointer possibly for reading holy manuscripts was found, with insular parallels. The date range for the objects is *c.* 770–900.[24] The top of a bishop's crosier in bronze, dated by style to the eleventh–twelfth century has been found at Hunstad, by Bodø.[25] A mould for a cross found at Kaupang is probably the oldest evidence for local production of Christian objects. As pagan cult was still practised in Kaupang at the time, the mould is not necessarily evidence of a strong local Christian community, but may also have been used for production intended for foreigners or indicate syncretism or the peaceful coexistence of pagans and Christians.

Very early Christian burials are traced at Veøy in Romsdal: two tenth-century Christian churchyards surrounded by stone fences, and the remains of what is interpreted as a church in the centre of the churchyard. The first of these burial places is dated to about 950 or a bit earlier, and the other to the second half of the 900s. The dates and the area fit Håkon den gode's church-building activities as described in the sagas.[26] An early Christian churchyard is also found under the stone church of St Clement in Oslo, where some of the bodies are buried wrapped up in birch bark and in coffins made of tree trunks. The graves are probably from the early eleventh century. Of a similar date or slightly later are seven graves interpreted as Christian from Hernes in Frosta, Trøndelag. The farm was mentioned as a royal estate in 1135, but no church has been found at Hernes. Graves and

[21] Gräslund 2002. [22] Farbregd 1986a.
[23] A type of pitcher from Westphalia, often used for liturgical purposes.
[24] Munch, Johansen and Roesdahl 2003. [25] Cruickshank 2002. [26] Solli 1996.

house remains excavated at Hadsel in Nordland are interpreted as Christian, but the remains are very fragmentary and the interpretation is not without problems. The oldest grave is dated *c.* 1030–1150 by Carbon 14 dating.[27]

Regional differences regarding Christian influence are considerable: no evidence of Christian burial practice is found before the eleventh century in the interior of eastern Norway and in Agder, Trøndelag and northern Norway, while Østfold, Rogaland and some parts of Møre appear to have been significantly influenced by Christianity after 950. Most pagan burials disappear between 950 and 1050 at different times in different areas, with the general exception of the Saami. By contrast, we find pagan burials in Agder in the second half of the eleventh century. In Hordaland there seems to be a rapid shift to Christianity around 1000–50, and pagan graves disappear almost completely some time in the eleventh century.[28] Such change is typical of most areas. However, the earlier, Migration Age inhumation burials were not the result of Christian influence; inhumation was part of pagan burial customs. Archaeological evidence from Østfold and Vestfold, on either side of the Oslofjord, is very different throughout the Iron Age. There is no evidence of Christian influence in Vestfold; on the contrary, Vestfold is characterized by an increase in rich burials (for example at Borre and Gokstad) during the tenth century, whereas the burials became simpler in Østfold, which was subject to influences from Sweden and from the Christian Danes.[29] The Danes may also have influenced Oslo.

Because Christian burials are less visible and more difficult to date, we have very few examples of Christian burials before 1100, but the pagan burial customs stop very suddenly in many places during the eleventh century. However, more research is needed to gain a more complete picture. It is difficult to know whether or not the two religions coexisted in the same locality. No examples are known of pagan and Christian burials in the same burial ground simultaneously, although Christian churches were often built on the ground of earlier pagan gravefields. But the fact that we never find Christian graves while excavating non-Christian graves indicates that churches and pagan cemeteries did not exist simultaneously. Within larger areas, however, such as Romsdal, pagan burials can be found from a later date than the first Christian churchyard. From the archaeological material it looks as if Christian and non-Christian communities mostly lived separately, although they overlapped chronologically.

Thus, although the archaeological evidence indicates a fairly complex picture, it clearly suggests the existence of Christian impulses in Norway

[27] Eide 1974; Farbregd 1986c; Sandmo 1990. [28] Gellein 1997. [29] Forseth 2003.

6. Medieval towns and central places in Norway and places mentioned in the chapter

well before the official conversion of the whole country in the early eleventh century. There must have been a number of conversions by individuals and family groups in the tenth century, and pagans and Christians must have coexisted within some larger areas.

3. CHRISTIANIZATION

Håkon den gode (ruled *c.* 934–61) was brought up by the English king Athelstan, and returned to Norway as a Christian. Why he was sent to England is not known – the explanation in the sagas is late and hardly trustworthy – but it was probably the result of some alliance between his father, Harald Hårfagre, and King Athelstan. Håkon's successors, the Eirikssons, were also baptized in England. As for Olav Tryggvason's baptism (ruled 995–1000), Adam of Bremen gives two alternative versions, one that he was baptized in England, another that he was baptized by Danish missionaries, most probably in Norway. The Norwegian–Icelandic sources all agree that he was baptized in England, although they give different accounts of the circumstances. Olav's baptism in England is confirmed by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, according to which the Viking chieftain Anlaf, usually identified with Olav Tryggvason, was baptized in Andover, at King Æthelred's court, in 991. This statement is likely to be correct and indicates that Olav's baptism should be understood as part of the peace settlement between the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxon king. As for Olav Haraldsson, the Norman chronicle of William of Jumièges from the end of the eleventh century relates that he was baptized at Rouen in 1013 or 1014, which is probably true. This piece of information is also referred to by Theodoricus Monachus, who has some doubts about the matter, referring to an alternative, Norwegian–Icelandic tradition that also occurs in the later sagas, that he was baptized as a child in Norway by Olav Tryggvason. This, however, is clearly an invention, possibly an expression of the analogy between the two Olavs and John the Baptist and Christ, the first Olav preparing the way for the second. The sagas agree for the most part that the missionary kings were baptized along with their followers.

According to the sagas, Håkon den gode was the first to bring missionaries to Norway. *Ágrip* (*c.* 1190) as well as the later sagas mention that Håkon built churches and installed priests, but the people of Møre in the north-western part of southern Norway burnt down the churches and killed the priests, and the people of Trøndelag further north forced the king to give up the mission and take part in the pagan cult. Håkon was succeeded by his nephews the Eirikssons, the sons of his brother Eirik, who were also

Christian, but according to the sagas did not act as missionaries. They were in turn succeeded by Håkon of the Lade dynasty, the last pagan ruler of Norway, who fought to restore the pagan religion. This is attested by the skaldic poem *Vellekla* which praises Håkon for protecting the pagan sanctuaries. Whereas the core area of the Hårfagre dynasty was western Norway, Håkon's stronghold was Trøndelag and northern Norway. His famous victory over a Danish force at Hjørungavåg in Sunnmøre may indicate that his power extended to western Norway or parts of it as well, but there is no evidence that he had any control over eastern Norway which was probably part of the Danish sphere of influence.

Håkon's death in a local rebellion paved the way for Olav Tryggvason (ruled 995–1000), who according to Adam was 'the first to bring Christianity to Norway'. Adam has otherwise little information about him and even hints that he may later have lapsed from the faith. By contrast, three Norwegian works from the late twelfth century depict him as a great missionary, but give very few details about how he carried out his missionary work. The *Saga of Olav Tryggvason*, written by the monk Odd Snorrason in Iceland around 1190, credits Olav with having Christianized five countries, and narrates in great detail Olav's missionary expeditions in the various parts of Norway. Olav Tryggvason was later the subject of several longer sagas, including *Heimskringla*. No attempt was apparently made to canonize him, but the accounts about him have strongly hagiographic features, notably Odd Monk's work, which contains a detailed story of Olav's conversion through divine intervention, as well as an account of his reign as a decisive phase in the spiritual battle between God and the devil over the souls of the Norwegians.[30]

After Olav's death in a battle against the neighbouring kings, Norway was ruled by the two earls of Lade, Eirik and Svein, under the suzerainty of the Danish and Swedish kings. The earls were both Christian, but according to the narrative sources did little to promote Christianity. They were succeeded by the second great missionary king, Olav Haraldsson, who also brought many bishops and priests from England, the most important of whom according to the sagas was Bishop Grimkjell. According to Adam of Bremen, Olav Haraldsson established contact with the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen and asked for missionaries to be sent to Norway. In addition to Grimkjell, Adam names Siegfried, Rudolf and Bernhard, whose names suggest German origin.

[30] Lönnroth 1963; Andersson 2003; Bagge 2006.

Olav had to leave the country in 1028–9 as the result of an alliance against him of Norwegian chieftains and Knud the Great. He went to Rus', returned in the summer of 1030 to regain his kingdom, but was defeated and killed in the battle of Stiklestad. Adam of Bremen claims that the internal opposition against Olav was caused by Olav's decision to have the wives of some chieftains executed for having practised magical arts, which would mean that the rebellion was a pagan reaction. However, there is no other evidence for such an interpretation, either in the contemporary skaldic poems, or in the later written sources. If Adam's information were true, it would probably be corroborated, given the strong hagiographic tradition. Most of Olav's leading enemies were also Christians, including of course Knud the Great, and nothing suggests that his death led to a return to paganism. Quite the contrary, Olav was almost immediately regarded as a saint.

The earliest primary sources on Olav's sainthood are the skaldic poems *Glælognskviða*, from approximately 1032, and the *Erfidrápa*, from about 1040.[31] According to *Glælognskviða*, Olav, after his death, began to mediate between humans and God: 'through God he procures prosperity and peace for all people'. Scholars have had different explanations of Olav's canonization. Some point to political reasons: his sainthood could be used as a weapon against the ruling Danish king. Another explanation points to influence from the cult of royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England. Attempts have also been made to link the canonization to pagan ideas about sacred kingship, a much debated concept: the king had a special relationship with the gods, and possessed supernatural abilities.[32] As the holy king is not a specifically Norwegian phenomenon, however, but occurs in most of the newly converted countries, the problem should be discussed against a more general religious, cultural, and political background.

The chronological distance between the lives of the two missionary kings and the narrative sources, as well as the strongly hagiographic character of the latter, makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the actual lives and characters of the two kings. As for Olav Tryggvason, Adam of Bremen's negative comments are hardly trustworthy, as Adam was strongly biased in favour of his own church, Hamburg-Bremen, whereas Olav brought his missionaries from England. Further, Adam derived most of his historical information from the Danish king Sven Estridson, a descendant of Olav's

[31] Mortensen and Mundal 2003, 354–7.
[32] Thus Steinsland 2000; 2001; cf. the criticism by Krag 2001.

enemy Sven Forkbeard (Tveskæg). Olav is therefore likely to have worked for the introduction of Christianity in Norway, but there is little evidence about the details of his work, and the narrative sources may well have exaggerated its importance. As for Olav Haraldsson, there can be no doubt about his Christianity, mentioned in contemporary skaldic poetry. There is also relatively good evidence of his work for the organization of the Norwegian church,[33] and laws refer to his introducing Christian regulation, notably at a meeting at Moster.

The existence of local saints is likely to have been an important factor in strengthening the position of Christianity in the population. Apart from St Olav, St Hallvard and St Sunniva also appear from early on; both are mentioned by Adam of Bremen. Hallvard was a young man, related to the royal house, from the region near Oslo, who was killed around 1050 in order to save a woman falsely accused of theft. The woman's pursuers threw him into the water with a millstone around his neck, but the body floated. Hallvard became the patron saint of the diocese of Oslo. Sunniva was supposedly an Irish princess who left her country by ship in order to escape a pagan suitor and was stranded on the coast of Norway. Being discovered by pagans, she and her followers prayed to God to be saved from them and were buried in the caves where they had been hiding. After their death, light began to pour out from the caves, and the bones found there gave a wonderful fragrance. King Olav Tryggvason ordered the holy relics to be venerated. The earliest legend only refers to the holy people of Selja; Sunniva is a later addition. Sunniva became the patron saint of the diocese of Bergen. Neither St Hallvard nor St Sunniva became as popular as St Olav.

All the missionary kings had met Christianity in England, and both the sagas and most modern historians have emphasized the English influence on the Christianization of Norway. There is also some firm evidence for this view. Both the Old Norse Christian terminology and the Norwegian Christian laws show Anglo-Saxon influence. Further, Adam of Bremen, who generally emphasizes the importance of his own diocese, Hamburg-Bremen, at the cost of other missionary centres, including England, has little to say about Norway. However, the connection with England has been studied more thoroughly than that with Germany, and future research may find more evidence of German influence.[34] An inscription on the Jelling stone in Denmark, erected by Harald Bluetooth in the middle of the

[33] Krag 2003, 194.

[34] Myking 2001. The standard work on the English influence is still Taranger 1890.

900s, declaring that Harald 'made the Danes Christian', may form indirect evidence of German influence, via Denmark. As the area around the Oslo fjord was at this time under Danish rule, Christianization probably took place here as well. There is some archaeological evidence for this: sixty-two Christian graves were found under the church of St Clement in Oslo, which was built *c.* 1100. The graves are traditionally dated by Carbon 14 dating to the period *c.* 980–1030, although this is now under review. According to some of the sagas, King Harald sent two earls to the Oslofjord area to convert the people there. This may possibly be the mission referred to by Adam of Bremen, who writes that many were converted when German missionaries came to Norway at the time of Archbishop Adaldag (d. 988). According to written sources Trondheim was also conquered by the Danish king Knud the Great (1017–35). The archaeological finds confirm that there was an urban settlement in Trondheim from the end of the tenth century, and there are no traces of pagan cult from this time. Nevertheless, there is little to suggest that political pressure from abroad played any part in the Christianization of Norway, in contrast to the situation in Germany's neighbours.

The Christian kings' background as Vikings and mercenaries abroad may also have formed a reason for them to act as missionaries, as this would strengthen their own position at the cost of the old kings and magnates who at least partly based their local power on religious leadership. However, the division between centralization and local power does not correspond completely to that between Christianity and paganism. Most of St Olav's opponents were also Christians, and some local chieftains may have played a similar part in the introduction of Christianity as the Christianizing kings.

The focus on the missionary kings in the sagas also means that the conversion is understood in political and cultural rather than strictly religious terms. People convert out of loyalty to the king or to win his friendship or because the king forces them to do so, and faith and dogma play a subordinate part. In light of what we know about Old Norse society in general, there are reasons to believe that this picture contains some truth. Dynastic alliances through marriage or the fostering of children were an important channel of cultural contacts. The sources give several examples of marriage alliances being used to promote Christianity, as both Olav Tryggvason and St Olav are said to have married off female relatives to important chieftains in return for their conversion to Christianity. Although the trustworthiness of each particular example may be open to doubt, marriage was clearly an important instrument in forming alliances and is likely to have been so in

the religious as well as in the secular sphere. By contrast, there are no examples of Christian princesses converting their royal husbands. Furthermore, the kings' generosity and personalities may have been important factors in conversions. This applies to the two Olavs as well as to their predecessor Håkon den gode who according to *Ágrip* made 'many people' convert because of his personal popularity. The sagas give some drastic examples of the missionary kings' use of force to obtain conversion, some of which may well be true, but force can hardly have been a main factor in the conversion. Given the frequent rebellions against unpopular kings, it is difficult to imagine that it would have been possible to force the majority of the population to accept a religion they did not want.

The archaeological material presented above gives no definite answer to the question of gradual or sudden Christianization or of the relative importance of the kings in the process. There are some very early examples of Christian influence, but it is difficult to know how representative they are. As for regional differences, the archaeological material gives the same impression as the written sources, that the coast was Christianized before the inland, which is also what we would expect. However, only a limited part of the archaeological material has been studied so far, and more will probably be uncovered, so more exact conclusions might be drawn in the future. There is already reason to believe that Christianization was a more complex and gradual process than the one represented in the saga tradition, but that the kings probably did play an important part, particularly in organizing the Church and banning pagan cult. The most serious objection to the account in the sagas is that they focus too exclusively on the two Olavs, underestimating the importance of the rulers who were Christian but allegedly failed to promote Christianity. As for Håkon den gode, the early churches and churchyards at Veøy, together with a possible reference to an English missionary bishop during his reign,[35] may indicate that his efforts to introduce Christianity were more successful than the sagas admit. The fact that the sagas only refer to the outskirts of Håkon's field of influence, Trøndelag and north-western Norway, as opposing Christianity, may point in the same direction. As for his successors, the Eirikssons, a skaldic poem mentions that they destroyed pagan cult places, whereas another praises their successor Håkon Ladejarl for restoring them. Curiously enough, the later sagas give the Eirikssons no credit for this attack on the pagan cult,

[35] Birkeli 1960; Jørgensen 1996. The reference is to a list in William of Malmesbury of monks of Glastonbury who became bishops, one of whom was Sigfrid who became bishop in Norway. No date is mentioned but his position in the list is compatible with Håkon's reign.

regarding it as evidence of greed rather than Christianity. As the Eirikssons were actually Christian, the latter interpretation would seem equally plausible, or rather, it is hardly possible to distinguish between 'purely' religious and more secular motives for fighting paganism; the most important is that both motives contributed to the victory of Christianity.

The Saami people converted to Christianity in different ways and later than the rest of the people in the area. In Finmark people from Rus', Karelia and further south in Norway encountered the Saami. As a result, some Saami groups in north-eastern Finmark converted to Orthodox Christianity, while Catholicism and later Lutheranism dominated in other areas. The Saami in the coastal regions were under the influence of Norwegians from the thirteenth century on, and a church was consecrated in Vardø in 1307. But the most intensive missionary work was performed from the seventeenth century on.

4. ROYAL POWER

St Olav Haraldsson (1015–30) is considered by modern historians to have been the first king who ruled the whole country.[36] His stronghold seems to have been in the south-east. There is evidence of his interference in Trøndelag which appears as an occupied region and where he met with the greatest resistance. His conflicts and alliances with magnates in northern Norway form evidence of his attempts to control this region, as does also his conflict with the powerful magnate Erling Skjalgsson in western Norway. To judge from the extant sources, however, this was the region where he was weakest, apart from the inner part of eastern Norway. His successors seem to have been able to control most of the country, his half-brother Harald (1046–66) even conquering the area around the lake Mjøsa in the east. Throughout the Middle Ages, however, royal control was considerably stronger along the coast than in the inner regions. The main military power in early medieval Scandinavia was sea power, which largely explains how the area was divided between the three kingdoms of Norway, Denmark and Sweden.[37] The sheltered coastline was also ideal for trade and transport, and the export of commodities from northern Norway, furs and later fish, was of great economic importance, from Ottar's age to the period of the Hansa in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period.

The early royal administration was probably rudimentary: the king had to rule through personal friendship with the leading men and by travelling

[36] Bagge 2002b; Krag 2003, 193–6. [37] Bagge 2002a.

around the country in order to make his presence felt. Landed estates as well as gold and silver were important means to achieve this aim. The king's generosity towards friends and allies is an important and often mentioned theme in sagas and the skaldic poems. Land in particular served to attach powerful men to the king's service on a more long-term basis. The Old Norse term for such men is *lendir menn* (singular *lendr maðr*), i.e. 'men with land'. The term has been understood as either a man holding land from the king or simply a man owning much land. These men were powerful local chieftains whom the king attached to himself as allies or clients. They pledged allegiance to the king, who in return gave them income in the form of crown land. However, the most important basis for their status was apparently their own land. By the early twelfth century, there were apparently between 80 and 100 *lendir menn* in the country. According to the laws, the *lendir menn* were supposed to take part in the local administration. In addition the laws as well as the sagas mention a royal representative of lower status, the *ármaðr* who acted as the king's local representative and resided on one of his estates.

The kings' generosity to the Church, which was considerable, served similar purposes as his alliances with lay magnates. The bishops belonged to the kings' supporters and travelled around with them until permanent bishoprics were established. Through his leadership of the Church, the king accumulated power and attached to his service competent counsellors who were familiar with affairs of state abroad. For its part, the Church was well served by supporting the monarchy, which gave it economic security and created stable conditions for the development of Christianity.

The king's economic basis was landed estates. The sagas mention various royal estates from the reign of Harald Hårfagre onwards. On some, such as Alrekstad near Bergen, significant remains of buildings have been excavated. Many of these estates were probably acquired through confiscations during the numerous struggles for the throne in the tenth and early eleventh centuries and in the period 1130–1240. Thus, sixteen farms located in Trøndelag are mentioned in the sagas whose owners were in opposition to the kings during the period from Håkon den gode to St Olav. Fifteen of these were owned by the king or by the Church during the high Middle Ages, which indicates that they had been confiscated. Olav's son, Magnus the Good, tried to confiscate the land of his father's opponents when he became king. One of the court poets gives his reaction to this in *Bersǫglisvísur* ('outspoken verses', i.e. the skald presents the king with unpleasant truths instead of flattering him). Further, the many kings returning from careers abroad

as Viking chieftains or mercenaries often brought with them considerable wealth in the form of precious metals.

Although traces of seasonal marketplaces have been found from the pagan period, at least one of which, Kaupang in Vestfold, may be considered a town, it seems that urbanization was to a considerable extent linked to Christianization: most of the towns were founded by Christian kings. Trondheim (Nidaros in the Middle Ages) was founded by King Olav Tryggvason at the end of the tenth century. The royal residence here appears, according to the sagas, to have been built in stages by several kings from the late tenth century and during the eleventh century. Oslo and Tønsberg are approximately contemporary or somewhat later. According to the sagas, Harald Hardråde founded Oslo. This is compatible with the archaeological evidence, or the town may be somewhat older. The largest town later in the Middle Ages, Bergen, was probably founded around 1070 by King Olav Kyrre. The original royal residence was located just outside Bergen during Olav Kyrre's reign, and was moved to the town at the beginning of the twelfth century by King Øystein Magnusson, who also built a palace of wood. Olav Haraldsson built a residence and a church in Borg (Sarpsborg) in the early eleventh century. No traces of pagan symbols or graves contemporary with the urban settlement have been found in these towns. A Christian king as founder would probably monopolize the religion, as part of his ideological basis of power. A separate town law (*Bjarkøyretten*), issued for Trondheim, must have existed from the twelfth century.

Royal castles were mainly located in or near the towns. According to written sources royal residences already existed in the Viking period. However, very few, and only medieval, castles have survived. Due to poor preservation, later alterations and the lack of excavations, very little is known about these strongholds which were probably built in wood, earth and stone. King Olav Haraldsson's castle in Borg and Sigurd Jorsalfar's castle in Konghelle are among the oldest in Norway. The most important royal castle in Bergen, Bergenhus, was built of wood starting in the early twelfth century, and by its location it controlled the access to the harbour. The next royal castles we know of are hilltop strongholds built by King Sverre in the late twelfth century, in Trondheim, Bergen and Tønsberg.

Marriage was also important in forming alliances within as well as outside the country. Olav Tryggvason was married to Tyra, the sister of the Danish king Sven Tveskæg. Olav married off his sister to one of the most powerful chieftains of western Norway. Two of the king's half-sisters were married to chieftains in eastern Norway. Olav Haraldsson built up a network of familial

connections with chieftains in the interior of eastern Norway. One of the chieftains was married to the king's half-sister, another to his aunt. Olav was himself married to Astrid, daughter of the Swedish king Olof Skötkonung. The next generation of Norwegian kings was linked to the Swedish, Danish and Rus' royal houses through marriage. Marriage could occur as part of peacemaking or as part of cooperative agreements between countries. The kings moreover often had mistresses from prominent Norwegian families.

Generosity and personal ties formed the positive side to the king's government. The negative is well expressed by the advice the able and cynical Erling Skakke (d. 1179), the real ruler during most of his son Magnus's reign, allegedly gave to his son: 'You will not rule in peace for long, if you make only mild decisions.'[38] As in other countries at the time, fear was an important element in ruling. Normal practice during internal conflicts seems to have been to kill the chief opponents and pardon the rest, on the condition that they joined the victor.

There has been considerable discussion about the consequences of Christianization for the aristocracy. Early scholarship, represented above all by Ernst Sars (1835–1917), regarded the introduction of Christianity as an important step in undermining the authority of the aristocracy, whereas the Marxist historians of the early twentieth century, notably Halvdan Koht (1873–1965), maintained that the local aristocracy used Christianity as a basis of their power in a similar way to the old religion. More recent scholarship tends to take an intermediate position.[39] The introduction of Christianity probably led to some purges within the local aristocracy, pagan magnates being replaced by Christian ones. According to the sagas, the kings donated ground for the building of churches. However, the new religion certainly provided good opportunities for local magnates to continue in their position as leaders, by building churches and controlling the priests. While Christianity certainly led to political centralization, this did not necessarily run against the interests of the aristocracy but also provided new opportunities for this group.

The hundred years following the death of St Olav in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030 were a period of internal peace, which, however, was followed by another hundred years of frequent struggles over the succession to the throne (1134–1240). Some scholars have seen these struggles as the expression of regional or social conflicts, but the sources seem rather to indicate that the parties were based on personal connections between individual members of the elite. Social change, i.e. the change from an economy

[38] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, The Saga of Magnus Erlingsson*, chap. 35. [39] Skre 1998.

of plunder to an economy of agrarian exploitation, or ideological factors, notably the rise of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the struggle for *libertas ecclesiae*, may, however, have contributed to the length and bitterness of the struggles. The effect of the struggles was to strengthen the centralizing powers, the monarchy and the Church.[40]

Compared to modern conditions, government continued to be largely personal throughout the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, more impersonal structures developed from the twelfth and above all the thirteenth century in the royal as well as the ecclesiastical administration, a clearer idea of the distinction between person and office, more regular administrative districts and clearly defined functions for the officials, and a transition from oral to written administration which made control over longer distances easier. The Church served as an important model for the monarchy in this respect, although there were probably also parallel developments and influence in the other direction. A new royal official, the *syslumaðr* came into being, replacing the two older ones and combining the high status of the *lendr maðr* with the *ármaðr*'s close connection to the king. From the late twelfth or early thirteenth century the whole country was divided into permanent administrative districts, *syslur*, around fifty altogether. Probably from the second half of the twelfth century, a regular tax was introduced, originating in the defence organization in the coastal regions, the *leiðangr*. A part of the provisions prescribed to be delivered in connection with an expedition had to be rendered annually whether an expedition was to take place or not. The growth of towns can also be regarded as an expression of the development of royal as well as ecclesiastical administration. From the late twelfth century onwards, the king normally spent the winter in a town. The country had no permanent capital, but Adam of Bremen refers to Trondheim as Norway's most important city around 1070. Later, in the twelfth and above all the thirteenth century, Bergen became the city most often visited by the king, and the cathedral there the main burial church for members of the dynasty.

Olav Haraldsson's shrine in Trondheim became the most important symbol of Norway's Christian kingdom. The Olav cult was religiously and politically significant. The skaldic poem *Glælognskviða* from the first half of the 1030s indicates that even Olav's political opponents recognized him as a saint. The poem directs the following advice to the reigning king: 'Ask Olav to bestow upon you his country – he is a friend of God; he gets prosperity and peace for all people from God himself.' The most likely addressee for

[40] Bagge 1986; 1999; Helle 2003b.

this advice is Olav's political opponent, the Danish king Sven, son of Knud the Great. The shrine of the dead king was, according to the sagas, first kept in St Clement's church, the town's main church, but as soon as the cathedral had been built, it was kept on the high altar there. Olav became *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*, Norway's eternal king. His presence as a saint was recognized in Trondheim, and the religious cult dedicated to him gained importance, both in Norway and abroad. Olav also became a political ideal for later kings.

Many sculptures and paintings of Olav Haraldsson have been preserved. The earliest paintings are from the 1200s. Olav appears with the royal crown. His attribute is the axe, which was later used in the royal seal and on the banner and coat of arms. Olav also often carries a globe marked with a cross, a symbol of royal power. All these symbols are clearly developed after Olav's lifetime; there is no contemporary evidence of them, except that a bust of a king holding a sceptre, based on English design, is depicted on some of the earliest coins, Olav Haraldsson's penning.

The king's power in the early Christian period was primarily expressed as military power. The skaldic poems praise the kings for military feats. As is usual in the Middle Ages, the main emphasis in the narrative sources is also on war and conflicts. Thus, Snorri's saga about Harald Hardråde (ruled 1046–66), who participated in many military actions, comprises seventy pages while the longer but entirely peaceful reign of his son Olav Kyrre (1066–93), is dealt with in just a few pages, despite its importance for urbanization, the development of ecclesiastical organization and possibly royal government and legislation.

The earliest Christian sources continue to celebrate warlike qualities, but also point to the king's military strength as a means of upholding justice. Thus, Olav Haraldsson is praised in *Erfidrápa* for executing thieves and Vikings. Olav was also known as a legislator, thus corresponding to the Christian ideal of the just king (*rex iustus*). Olav's successors could use their relationship to the Holy King as a supplement to military power. Apart from some skaldic poems, there is little evidence of royal ideology and ideas about politics and government before the mid-twelfth century. After that, but above all during the thirteenth century, the sources become fairly numerous and varied.

The coronation of King Magnus Erlingsson in 1163 or 1164, the first royal coronation in Scandinavia, marks a new epoch. The event took place in a situation where there were many pretenders to the throne and was intended to give Magnus a unique advantage in the competition, but the coronation

was also an occasion for the Church to emphasize the Christian doctrine of the *rex iustus* and insist on the king's duties towards the Church and the people. The documents issued on this occasion or shortly afterwards – Magnus's coronation oath, the *Law of Succession*, and the privilege to the Church – present these ideas in a succinct form.

The *Law of Succession* expresses the Church's perception of the monarchy as an office established by God. It decrees that there should only be one king at a time, and that he should be elected by a central assembly in Trondheim. By contrast, before this law, all male descendants of kings had the same right to claim the kingdom. They were accepted as kings by different assemblies all around the country. The heirs to the throne opposed each other with varying support, or they might agree to share power between them, thus ruling simultaneously with the same royal titles and status. The law has been subject to much scholarly discussion, especially concerning the relationship between elective and hereditary monarchy. The law states that the eldest legitimate son of the late king should succeed to the throne, unless he is disqualified by *illzca æða uvizca*, because he is evil or unwise. The interpretation of these words determines the importance of election in this case. It has been shown fairly convincingly that these terms refer to ecclesiastical ideas of the *rex iustus* and his antithesis, the *tyrannus*, and that consequently, there is at least in principle a relatively strong element of election in the law.[41] The following paragraphs regulate the right to succession in accordance with the degree of kinship with the previous king but in such a way that there is free election between candidates within the same degree. Finally, a special committee, consisting of elected representatives, the archbishop and the bishops, is entrusted with the election. The law here conforms to the canonical rule about episcopal elections, in giving the 'better part' of the assembly, the bishops, a decisive voice. Although the exact relationship between inheritance and election may be subject to discussion, there is no doubt that both the elective element and the position of the Church are stronger in this law than in the later ones of 1260 and 1273. The substantial discussion about the law would seem to be in inverse proportion to its importance, as it was never actually practised and was later replaced by the law of 1260. However, its importance does not lie in its effects but in what it can tell us about the relationship between monarchy and Church in the mid-twelfth century and the introduction of ecclesiastical ideas about monarchy and government to Norway.

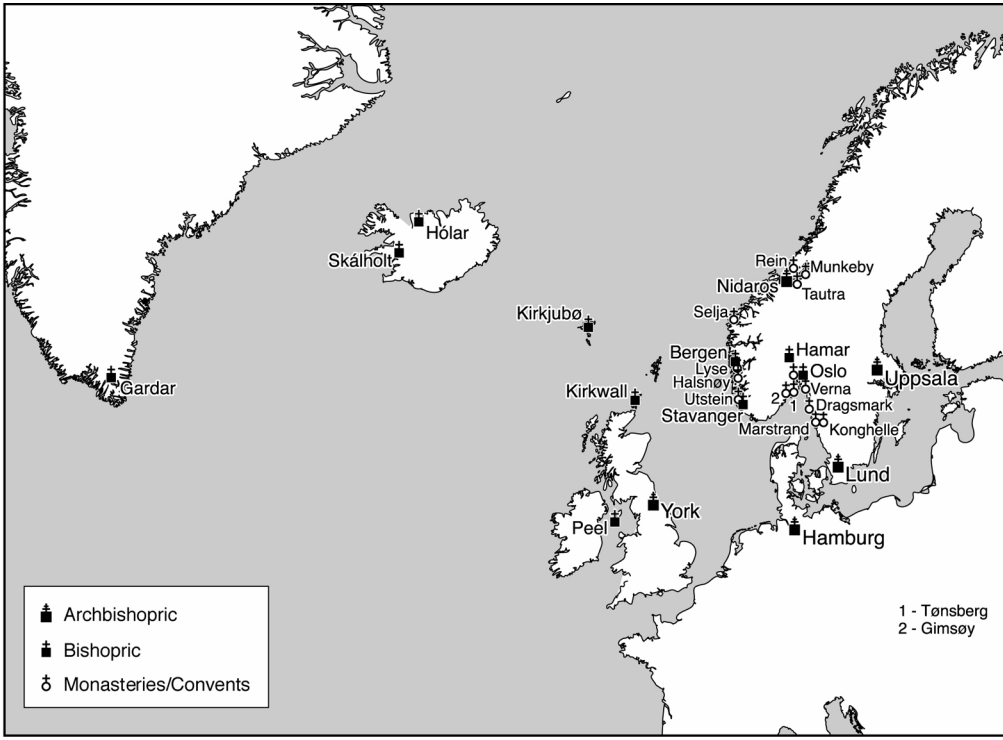
[41] Tobiassen 1964.

Magnus Erlingsson's coronation oath expresses similar ideas, containing fairly specific expressions about loyalty to Pope Alexander III and his successors – a clear reference to the schism at the time – and about respecting the privileges of the Church. The exact interpretation of the oath has been the subject of considerable scholarly discussion, as have also the passages in the *Law of Succession* and Magnus Erlingsson's charter about the king's crown being sacrificed to St Olav at the altar of the cathedral of Trondheim for the soul of the deceased king and of the king being St Olav's knight or vassal. There are two main interpretations of this latter provision. One, that the king acknowledged that he had received his office from the Church, formally at least agreeing to submit to the archbishop's control and guidance. The second, that the vassalage was a tactical move in a situation where the Danish king claimed control over the south-eastern part of the country, intended to create a legal foundation for refusing to submit to this claim. The recent tendency has been more in the direction of the second explanation. Comparative studies, e.g. of the French king's vassalage to St Denis or John Lackland's to Pope Innocent III, have supported this view. However, the consistent refusal by the new dynasty of King Sverre (1177–1202) and his successors to renew this provision, does suggest that it did contain some element of submission.[42]

A specifically royal ideology was developed in opposition to these ideas in the milieu around King Sverre and his successors who fought and eventually defeated the 'Magnus line'.[43] *A Speech against the Bishops* (*c.* 1200) is an apology for King Sverre in his struggle against the Church, but also presents a general monarchical doctrine, strongly emphasizing the king's relationship to God and the subjects' duty to obey him. These ideas are developed in great detail in *The King's Mirror* (*Konungs skuggsiá, Speculum regale*), most probably from the 1250s, as well as in the legislation from the 1270s, the National Law, the Town Law and the *Hirðskrá* (the law of the king's retainers). They are also expressed in charters and amendments to laws. The practice of royal coronation was taken over by the new dynasty founded by King Sverre who was himself crowned in 1194, as was his grandson Håkon Håkonsson in 1247. From then on, coronation became a permanent element in the accession to the throne, but considerable energy was spent in the milieu around King Håkon to reject the interpretation of the coronation as meaning that the king had received his office from the Church.

[42] As the privilege was never put into practice, we do not know what was to happen to the crown. No crown or other royal insignia have been preserved.

[43] Bagge 1987, 113–53.



7. Nidaros church organization and its neighbours

5. THE EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANIZATION

According to Adam of Bremen, permanent bishoprics did not yet exist in Norway at the time of his writing, around 1073–5, but must have come into being shortly afterwards, probably during the reign of Olav Kyrre (1066–93).[44] The three oldest are Oslo, Bergen and Nidaros (Trondheim). Olav appointed Bjarnhard bishop of Selja in western Norway, but he later moved to Bergen. Further, Olav Kyrre was responsible for the establishment of the diocese of Trøndelag, with residence in Trondheim. During his reign or shortly thereafter, the diocese of eastern Norway was established, with residence in Oslo. The boundaries of the oldest dioceses were generally the same as those of legal jurisdictions. The diocese of Bergen comprised the entire Gulating law district, from Møre to Agder, from which Sunnmøre was transferred to Trondheim some time before 1223. The diocese of Trondheim

[44] On the growth of the church organization: Bagge 2003, 51–80; Orrman 2003, 421–62.

came to consist of the eight Trøndelag *fylki*, Møre og Romsdal and northern Norway. The diocese of Oslo comprised the areas around the Oslo fjord, the interior part of eastern Norway and Båhuslen (now in Sweden), which at that time belonged to Norway. The early dioceses were thus very large and difficult for the bishops to administer. This is probably the reason for the erection of two new dioceses, Stavanger and Hamar, through subdivisions of Bergen and Oslo respectively. Stavanger, founded around 1125 at the latest, comprised the south-western part of the country and the inland valleys of Valdres and Hallingdal, whereas Hamar, founded in 1152 or 1153, covered the inner parts of eastern Norway.

Prior to its establishment as an archbishopric in 1152–3, the Norwegian church belonged to the church province of Hamburg-Bremen, and from 1104 to that of Lund. The full development of the diocesan organization thus coincided with the foundation of the church province. According to *A Speech against the Bishops* from the end of the twelfth century, the cathedral chapters were also organized on this occasion. All Norwegian chapters were secular, each canon having his separate prebend, in addition to which there was a *mensa communis*. In Bergen, the cathedral chapter came to consist of twelve canons, which appears to have been the norm. Hamar cathedral probably had less than this number, whereas the chapter of the archdiocese was twice as large.

Given the king's importance in introducing Christianity to Norway, combined with his central role in the government of the Church in other parts of early medieval Europe, it would seem a likely deduction that he in practice functioned as the head of the Norwegian church in the early period, until the foundation of the church province. This is further confirmed by a papal letter to King Harald Hardråde, quoted by Adam of Bremen, which reveals a conflict between the king and the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen between 1061 and 1066 over the appointment of bishops. According to Adam, the king replied to the archbishop's protests that he knew no other ruler of the Norwegian church than himself.[45] In his letter, the pope considered the Norwegian monarchy to be inexperienced in the ways of Christianity and the laws of the Church. A similar attitude is also reflected in the more accommodating letter of Pope Gregory VII to Olav Kyrre from 1078. After the establishment of the archbishopric, the leading prelates sought to implement the Gregorian ideas of *libertas ecclesiae*, and obtained some important privileges to this effect, concerning the appointment of priests and episcopal elections without royal interference. King

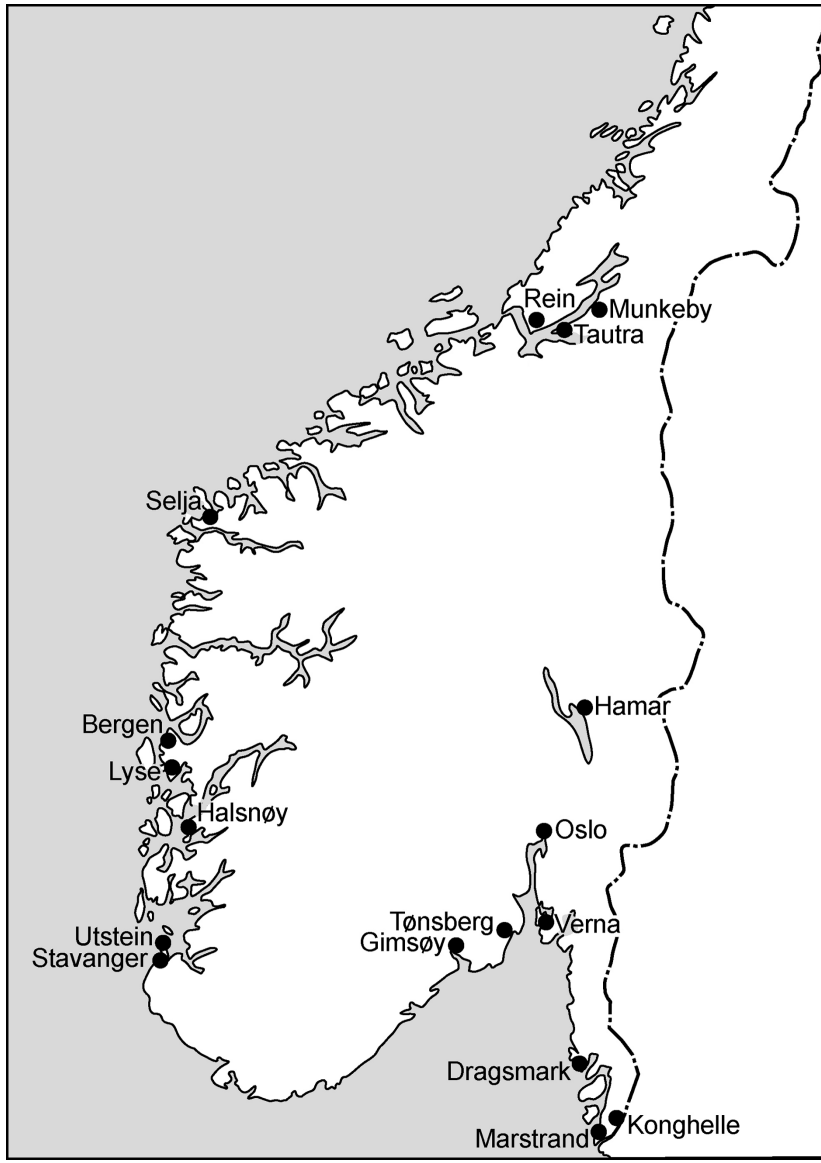
[45] Adam of Bremen III.17; the letter is also printed in Vandvik 1959, no 1.

Sverre (1177–1202) sought to revoke these privileges, which resulted in a major conflict between the Church and the monarchy. His successors recognized most of the privileges but some tension remained.

The Norwegian archbishop had jurisdiction over eleven bishoprics. In addition to the five Norwegian ones, these included Skálholt and Holar in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroes, the Orkneys and the Hebrides-Man. The Norwegian archbishop's jurisdiction over the other bishops was limited, but he seems to have retained a stronger position than was usual in the period after the Gregorian reform, when the archbishop's power was usually reduced in favour of the pope on the one hand and the suffragans on the other. The social status of the higher clergy is reflected in the secular rank accorded to its members in Norwegian law. The archbishop ranked next to the king, and had the same status as a duke. The bishops had the rank of earls, whereas the abbots and abbesses ranked above the *lendir menn*.

Church administration was centralized in the towns where the bishops resided, and these cities simultaneously became the kingdom's administrative centres from the time of Olav Kyrre onwards. As for the relationship between royal and ecclesiastical administrative districts in general, it seems that the earliest ecclesiastical divisions were to some extent based on earlier regional divisions, such as the law districts and the *fylki*, but that the monarchy as well as the Church developed new administrative units during the following period, which often did not correspond to one another.

The first monasteries in Norway were Benedictine. According to English accounts, monks with connections to Norway are mentioned from the first half of the eleventh century, including a monk named Sigurd who was bishop at the time of Olav Haraldsson. An English source also states that Knud the Great established a monastery near Trondheim in 1028, but this is rejected by most scholars. Norwegian–Icelandic sources attribute the foundation of this monastery (Munkholm) to a Norwegian magnate around 1100. Benedictine monasteries were also founded in Bergen (Munkeliv) and on the holy island of Selja at the beginning of the twelfth century, and a Benedictine nunnery was apparently founded in Trondheim at about the same time. The Nonneseter convent, located in Bergen, was probably established in the 1140s, and the nuns most likely belonged to the Cistercian order. The Gimsøy nunnery, located in eastern Norway, was founded by a Norwegian magnate in the first half of the twelfth century, whose daughter became its abbess. The Augustinian monastery of St John was built around the middle of the 1100s or a little later. Lyse monastery, located on the outskirts of Bergen, was founded by the bishop in 1146 as the first Cistercian monastery in Norway. The Cistercian monastery on Hovedøya



8. Norwegian monasteries
(Number of monasteries in Bergen: 5; Nidaros (Trondheim): 5; Oslo:4; Tønsberg: 2; Hamar: 1; Stavanger: 1)

was established in 1147, also by the bishop, and a monastery of the same order, Tautra, was established somewhat later in Trøndelag. Some of the early Norwegian monasteries, including the two oldest Cistercian ones, recruited their monks from abroad, especially from the east of England to which some of them returned. Halsnøy monastery was Augustinian, and was founded by the earl Erling Skakke, King Magnus Erlingsson's father, around 1160. Several more Norwegian monasteries, nunneries and other religious houses were established later. There were altogether thirty-one such institutions in Norway during the Middle Ages. Most of them were small, and some existed for only short periods of time. The sources mention kings, bishops and lay magnates as founders of monasteries, but in most cases there is no evidence of the identity of the founder. It is therefore not possible to point to particular patterns or changes over time in the way monasteries were founded.

A permanent division of the church parishes was not complete before well into the 1200s. Terms like 'parish', 'vicar', 'parishioners' and the like do not become common in historical sources before the second half of the thirteenth century. However, the regional laws of the twelfth century contain detailed provisions about the local ecclesiastical organization. According to the *Law of Gulating*, there was to be one church in each *fylki*, which is referred to as the main church. Moreover, the *fylki* were to be divided into fourths and eighths, each with one church of minor rank. Maintenance of these was the common responsibility of the residents. These provisions may go back as far as the time of Olav Haraldsson. The law also refers to *heraðskirkjur* for smaller local communities, and *hægendiskirkjur*, 'convenience churches', built by wealthy people for private use, to avoid travelling long distances to get to church. According to the laws, the founder was responsible for the maintenance of such churches. In the towns, 'congregation churches' and royal chapels were erected. Bishops were responsible for appointing priests in the churches. There was clearly a difference of rank between these churches, and there is some evidence that the priests of the smaller units were subordinated to those of the larger. The complicated church organization of western Norway may be modelled on the older pattern of local church organization, the *ecclesiae baptismales*, which were centres for large areas and existed, for example, in Anglo-Saxon England.[46] It is, however, unlikely to have existed in practice in complete form. The parish organization then developed gradually from the *hægendiskirkjur*. Thus, 'private' as well as 'public' churches came to function in much the

[46] Skre 1998.

same way as the old main churches, and all became parish churches. According to Adam, Norwegians had great respect for priests and churches, but had to pay for all transactions with the church. The tithe was, according to a list from Trondheim bishopric, instituted during the reign of King Sigurd Jorsalfare (ruled 1103–30), but was hardly accepted generally until the second half of the twelfth century. According to twelfth-century laws, the tithe was to be divided evenly among the bishop, the church, the priest and the poor.

Church architecture is slightly different in different parts of Norway. In the earliest period the churches in the western and middle parts of Norway were influenced by England and Normandy (Anglo-Norman style), while those of eastern Norway were influenced by Denmark and Germany. The Romanesque style dominated the twelfth century and the early 1200s. Churches in eastern Norway usually had a simple ground plan where the nave was not divided by posts, but the cathedrals in Hamar and Oslo were basilicas, as were a handful of other churches. A more local style developed as well, for example in Trondheim which was the country's most important town in the eleventh century. A community of stonemasons developed here that became important for the style and construction of churches in the district as well. A similar tendency is true for the architecture of the bishops' palaces, which resemble the architecture of the local region as well as each other within the archbishopric.

The relationship between the architecture in wooden and stone churches has been discussed, and the construction of the stave churches is thought to be influenced by the stone churches. The early stone churches are decorated in the Romanesque style, whereas representations of pagan myths sometimes occur on the porches of stave churches. This has recently been interpreted as an aspect of the general interest people took in the past during the thirteenth century, but may also be understood as a parallel to the 'chaos' creatures among the decorations on the stone churches.

Generally, recent archaeological research has proved that most of the stone churches have had one or more wooden predecessors, stave churches. The majority – perhaps three-quarters – of the churches built during the Middle Ages were made of wood. The earliest were supported by poles; after around 1000 the poles or staves were put on cross-ties and eventually on foundations so that the construction became more permanent. Several remnants recognized by archaeologists as churches are dated around the middle of the eleventh century, for example at Høre in Valdres and Lom in Gudbrandsdalen. The oldest dendrochronological dating of a stave church is from Urnes in Sogn, dated 1129–30. According to the sagas, the

earliest-known stone building in the country is a palace constructed in Trondheim by Magnus the Good, which was later turned into a church by his successor Harald Hardråde and finished around 1050. The sagas particularly attribute the building of churches to the kings Olav Tryggvason, Olav Haraldsson, Harald Hardråde, Olav Kyrre and Sigurd Jorsalfare (1103–30).

Several ecclesiastical stone buildings, and even more wooden ones, were erected during the twelfth century. A cathedral, three stone monasteries and seven or eight stone churches were built in Bergen before 1200. The building of Christ Church cathedral in Bergen was started by Olav Kyrre, but took about 100 years to complete. It had a basilica nave. The construction of St Mary's church and the Cross church in Bergen was begun sometime in the 1130s or 1140s and must have been finished in 1181, when the two churches are mentioned in *Sverris saga*. The closest parallel to St Mary's of a similar age is the cathedral in Lund. Hans-Emil Lidén finds similarities between the masonry, ornaments and style which may indicate that the masons came from the Lund region.[47] On the other hand, he points out that the monastery at Lyse was founded directly from Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, and the monks brought their own craftsmen. The two-tower west front was also normal in England and Normandy, and the architecture of St Mary's church may have been influenced from there.

The cathedral in Trondheim was the largest construction in Norway during the Middle Ages, serving as the centre of the national cult of St Olav, as the cathedral for the bishopric and later the archbishopric, and until the first half of the twelfth century also as the royal burial church. Olav Kyrre built the Christ Church, the earliest phase of what would later be the Nidaros cathedral. After the establishment of the archbishopric and the cathedral chapter in the middle of the 1100s, the church was expanded in the Romanesque style. In the 1180s, after Archbishop Øystein's exile in England, the cathedral was expanded in the Gothic style. The first stage in this was the eight-sided extension, the octagon, built over St Olav's grave and finished between 1210 and 1220. A chancel in Early English Gothic style was then added. Gerhard Fischer called the oldest parts of the cathedral in Trondheim 'Anglo-Saxon' because of the similarity between its ground plan and that of Anglo-Saxon churches, but he also found some differences.[48] Very little was left of this church to give evidence of a particular style. He called the next building phase of the cathedral 'Norman' in style, based on the chevron-decoration and on other parts of the decoration with strong

[47] Lidén 2000. [48] This and following: Fischer 1965, 23–340.

similarity to churches in Normandy, but particularly in England. There are for instance similar masks, and a capital in Nidaros cathedral which is almost identical with a capital in Lincoln cathedral. The craftsmen might even have been English. But this style does not characterize the whole church: after a short while, the chevron-decoration has been given up and replaced with water-leaf decoration, which probably represents purely English influence. Nidaros cathedral reached its present length by the mid-thirteenth century.

The archbishop's palace was built to the south of the cathedral in Trondheim, and consisted at all times of both stone and wooden constructions, from the foundation in 1153, with a strong stone curtain wall or stone buildings facing outwards. The cathedral was richly decorated, built of well-shaped stones with a smooth, grey surface; in contrast the palace was off-white, simple, with a rough surface which had to be covered in lime.

It is not clear when Norwegians began to enter the priesthood. The clerics who came over with the missionary kings were highly educated Englishmen whose status corresponded to their attachment to the royal household. The first bishops to be appointed in Norway were foreigners, but from around the middle of the twelfth century most of them seem to have been Norwegian, often belonging to prominent families. In a letter to Olav Kyrre, the pope offered to receive selected Norwegians in Rome to be educated for the service of the Church and the papacy, but the practical consequences of this initiative are unknown. The main evidence for Norwegians studying abroad comes from the mid-twelfth century and later. The laws from around the middle of the eleventh century demand that the bishop appoint priests 'who know how to perform their service', which indicates that inexperienced priests were not uncommon. Norwegian priests were educated under the tutelage of the bishop. When permanent bishoprics were established at the end of the eleventh century, the training of priests was relocated to these. This was the beginning of the cathedral schools. According to one of the earliest laws, the *Law of Borgarting*, which covered the area around the Oslofjord, the farmers had the right to appoint priests in the local churches, whereas the bishops had this right in the other laws. Priests attached to private churches were considered to be part of the church owner's household. They had low status, as did other servants. According to a passage in the *Law of the Gulating*, probably from the mid-twelfth century, this was eventually changed, and the priests became respected members of the community to whom respectable men could marry their daughters. The introduction of celibacy was late in Norway. Cardinal Nicholas Brekespear, who acted as papal representative by the

establishment of the archdiocese, tried to limit clerical marriages but did not categorically ban them. A general prohibition was not issued until a papal letter in 1237. Almost nothing is known about rectories from the high Middle Ages.

Olav Tryggvason is said to have converted five countries, i.e. Shetland, the Orkney and Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. Odd Monk's saga also states that Olav converted King Vladimir of Rus' and many of his circle to Christianity. Adam of Bremen relates that Olav Haraldsson sent bishops and priests to evangelize Sweden and the islands in the west. Olav is also credited with the Christianization of Gotland. Olav Tryggvason's contribution to the conversion of Iceland is attested by Ari fróði in the early twelfth century and must be considered trustworthy, despite the general tendency in the narrative sources to exaggerate the two Olavs' importance for Christianization.

King Sigurd Jorsalfare left on a crusade in 1108, lasting for three years. According to *Heimskringla*, he had sixty ships and many people with him and participated in eight battles against Muslims in the Mediterranean, as well as in the capture of a Muslim castle in Syria. The sagas emphasize the honour and the number of captives that this expedition brought to the king. While the crusade itself is well attested, its success and importance may well be exaggerated in the sagas. It is also difficult to say anything exact about its motives and background. The most likely interpretation seems to be a combination of religious zeal and the wish for booty, prestige and adventure, as in other parts of Europe, to which can be added the existence of a military apparatus and organization well suited to such purposes, notably a large fleet and skilled sailors. There were several large overseas expeditions in the post-Viking Age, such as Harald Sigurdsson Hardråde's expeditions against Denmark in the 1050s and 1060s and against England in 1066, and his grandson Magnus Olavsson's (1093–1103) expeditions against Ireland and other areas in the west. By contrast, there is little evidence of Norwegian participation in Baltic crusades, but it is likely that individual magnates took part in the Danish expeditions in this area. An expedition against the Kalmar area in Sweden, allegedly to fight the pagans, may also be mentioned in this context, but the religious aim is likely to be a pretext rather than the real reason, as the area in question was hardly pagan by that time (1123).

The introduction of Christianity brought about a number of important cultural, social and administrative changes, one of the most important of which is the introduction of writing. However, script was not unknown in pagan times. The old Nordic runic alphabet was in use, its earlier version

consisting of twenty-four symbols, its later of sixteen.[49] The runes were in use from the sixth or seventh century until the end of the Middle Ages. There has been disagreement as to whether the runes were mainly used for the purpose of communication, or were magical symbols. The latter has been claimed in relation to the way in which the runes are sometimes referred to in the ancient poetry, e.g. as an instrument of divination in *Hávamál* strophe 80. Most runic inscriptions from the pagan and early Christian period are found on stone memorials of the dead, but there are also examples of inscriptions on wood, bone and metal. We do not know to what extent runes were used in everyday life, or if they were used to write poetry. Only one complete stanza of skaldic verse, written in runic script, has been found in all of the northern countries. This is inscribed on a stone pillar found in Öland, erected in memory of a Danish chieftain around the year 1000. Rune-stones, inscriptions on church walls and a quantity of wooden pegs with runic inscriptions have been found from the centuries following Christianization. Throughout the Middle Ages, the runic alphabet was used to write labels on goods, short messages, poems, prayers, including names of saints, and magical inscriptions. Although most of these inscriptions are in the vernacular, there are also examples of runic inscriptions in Latin.

It is an open question whether the use of runes for practical purposes was a novelty during the Christian period or whether they were used in a similar way in the pagan period as well. The evidence from the Christian period comes from excavations in medieval towns, to which there are few parallels in the pagan period. The impression of a fairly exclusive use of runes during this period may therefore be explained by the fact that inscriptions on stone are more likely to be preserved than brief notes on perishable material. Nevertheless, there is much to suggest that runes were not used for the composition of longer texts and that consequently, from a literary point of view, pagan Norwegian culture was predominantly oral. Important knowledge about religion, law and history was preserved orally, and the skalds who composed oral poetry had high status. Thus, what was introduced by Christianity was not primarily the technology of writing, but the need for writing.

The most pressing need for texts after the introduction of Christianity was that of the Latin liturgy. The early missionaries must have brought with them liturgical books, and from fairly early on such books must also have been copied in Norway. Fragments of liturgical texts of English origin dating

[49] Liestøl 1969; Moltke 1985; Odenstedt 1990.

from the eleventh century have been found as bindings of post-Reformation account books; some, from the end of the century, were probably written in Norway.[50] Further, the introduction of specifically Norwegian saints from the 1030s onwards resulted in the composition of liturgical texts for them. Some fragments from the office of St Olav are preserved from the mid-eleventh century, and the feast of this saint is mentioned in the skaldic poem *Erfidrápa* from around 1040. The main features of the legend of Olav may also have been composed fairly early, although the extant version dates from around 1160. It was originally written in Latin and later translated into Old Norse.

The earliest extant text and, with the possible exception of the laws, the first text written in Norway in the vernacular is the *Old Norse Book of Homilies* from the first half of the twelfth century, which consists of translations and adaptations of old Latin homilies. During the following period, the late twelfth and above all the thirteenth century, a rich literature developed, mainly in the form of narratives, historiography, saints' *Lives*, heroic tales, romance, but also didactic and ideological texts. Most of this literature is in Old Norse, partly in the form of original compositions, partly translations, mostly from Latin or French. A considerable part of this literature was written by Icelanders, and most extant manuscripts are also Icelandic, although many of the texts are likely to have existed in Norway as well. It is in practice often difficult to distinguish between Norwegian and Icelandic origins of manuscripts. Although the dialects of the two countries – as well as within Norway – are sufficiently different to identify the country or region of origin of manuscripts in the original where the dialect occurs in its pure form, there are many examples of mixtures of dialects and of originals in one dialect being transcribed in another.

The Icelander Sæmundr fróði (1056–1133) is usually believed to have laid the foundation for Norwegian–Icelandic historical studies with a work about the first Norwegian kings, probably written in Latin in the first half of the 1100s. This work has been lost, as has also the other earliest history, in Old Norse, by Ari fróði (1068–1148).[51] The earliest extant works date from the second half of the twelfth century: the *Historia Norvegiae*, Theodoricus Monachus's Latin history of the Norwegian kings (*Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, *c.* 1180), and *Ágrip* (*c.* 1190) written in Old Norse. At this time, the archbishopric was established in Trondheim, and the town was the literary centre of Norway. In the following period, mainly the first half of the thirteenth century, a series of sagas of the Norwegian kings was

[50] Pettersen and Karlsen 2003. [51] Ellehøj 1965; Andersson 1985; 2003; Lange 1989; Bagge 2006.

composed in Old Norse, most of them by Icelanders. The most famous of these works is Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, probably written around 1230. The relatively late development of historical writing means that the only contemporary information about the period before the end of the twelfth century is the skaldic poetry and some references in various foreign chronicles, both of which contain fairly meagre information.

Administrative literacy developed with the expansion of the ecclesiastical and royal bureaucracy. The first royal charter preserved in the original is from 1207 and is written in Old Norse, which was the usual administrative language in the following period. Latin was only used for correspondence with the Church or with other countries. Even the Church used Old Norse to a considerable extent for administrative purposes, although less than the royal chancery. There are references to various royal communications and decisions from the early twelfth century onwards, but we cannot be quite sure if they were in writing. A royal charter sealed by King Øystein is mentioned in connection with the establishment of the archdiocese in 1152–3 but its text has been lost. Some charters from King Magnus Erlingsson are preserved in transcript or through later renewals or summaries. Few Norwegian charters have been preserved before around 1250, after which they become more frequent, particularly from the last two decades of the thirteenth century. The style and formulas of the Old Norse charters were influenced by Latin charters from abroad, with some local variations. The oldest known papal letter to a Norwegian king is from around 1050. There are a few examples of correspondence with the pope and other ecclesiastical authorities in the following period until the 1160s, when the contacts with the Holy See became fairly regular.

With the increasing use of writing and correspondence with other countries, the skill of reading and writing became more important. The clergy must to some extent have been literate, although the education of ordinary priests was hardly very thorough. It is not known to what extent the laity acquired education in reading and writing. According to a report by an English abbot, King Olav Kyrre (1066–93) was probably able to read Latin. It is, however, unlikely that lay literacy was very widespread as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Such skills probably became more common in the course of the thirteenth century. Evidence of this is that King Sverre (1177–1202) and his successors were well educated and had intellectual interests. Members of the secular aristocracy must also to some extent have been literate in the thirteenth century, some of them even having studied at universities abroad. During the relatively peaceful period after around

1240, the aristocracy seems to have developed into an administrative more than a military class.

The Norwegian system of representative assemblies was created in pagan times. The country consisted of four legal districts, each with its own law and representative assembly: the *Law of Gulating* for western Norway, the *Law of Frostating* for Trøndelag and northern Norway, the *Law of Borgarting* for the Oslofjord area and the *Law of Eidsivating* for the interior parts of eastern Norway. The two former laws are preserved in manuscripts from the mid-thirteenth century but must be considerably older. As for the two latter, only the parts concerning Christianity are extant. There is some evidence for Håkon den gode as the organizer of the *Gulating*. The district was most likely expanded during his time, and the system of representation introduced. The *Frostating* may be equally old, whereas the two eastern assemblies are probably somewhat younger. The legislation the missionary kings wanted to bring into effect had to be approved by the assembly (*þing*) of farmers and chieftains. The first Christian-era laws differed significantly in composition and content from one part of the country to another, but thorough studies are lacking. According to the narrative sources, the earliest Christian laws were issued by St Olav, and there are also references in the extant laws to provisions allegedly issued by him. To what extent these were preserved verbatim is more doubtful. The references in question may also be an expression of the widespread tendency to attribute legislation to some mythical legislator in the past.

By contrast, there is more to suggest that Olav Kyrre was the first legislator and thus that the passages in the *Law of Gulating* attributed to 'Olav' actually refer to him. Admittedly, the evidence for this is also fairly circumstantial, but his long reign might seem a likely period for putting the laws into writing.[52] The date of these laws, usually referred to as the regional laws (as opposed to the National Law, issued in the 1270s and common to the whole country), is uncertain but it is generally agreed that they are older than the mid-twelfth century. The laws deal in some detail with the Church and Christianity. Thus the *Law of Gulating* contains decisions attributed to Olav on the organization of the *þing* assembly and the number of representatives meeting there, on the liberation of a small number of slaves each year, on drinking parties in honour of Christ and the Virgin 'for prosperity and peace', on the building and maintenance of churches, on holidays, on Friday and Lenten fasting, on compulsory baptism, marriage and burials

[52] Helle 2001, 20–3.

in the churchyard, on prohibition against abandoning children and on prohibition of various kinds of magic and pagan cult. The paragraph on holidays defines all Sundays as holidays plus fourteen mass days allegedly introduced by St Olav and Bishop Grimkjell at the Moster *þing*. These include the feasts of the Virgin Mary, the apostles Peter, Paul, Bartholomew, Simon, Jude, Andrew and John the Evangelist, as well as John the Baptist, St Michael the Archangel, St Lawrence, All Saints, and finally three Norwegian saints, Olav, Hallvard and Sunniva.

The paragraph on abandoning children (severely handicapped newborns were to be baptized and brought to church to die) represents a compromise between the old rule, according to which the father decided whether a newborn child should be allowed to live, and the Church's general prohibition against child exposure. This concession was later abolished, probably during the reign of Magnus Erlingsson (1161–84). As for marriage, polygamy as well as marriage within seven degrees, according to the rules introduced in the western Church in the eleventh century, were prohibited (c. 24–5). However, divorce was still allowed in the early layers of the law. The law on drinking-parties was probably an attempt to Christianize the traditional gatherings in honour of the pagan gods. Finally, the prohibition of various kinds of magic and pagan cult specify animal sacrifice (*blót*), the eating of horsemeat and divination, magic chants (*galdr*) and witchcraft (*gerningar*) (c. 28). Late eleventh- or early twelfth-century regional laws also prohibited pagan burials.

The earliest Norwegian coins to have been found have the inscription *ONLAFREXNOR*, that is, 'Olav, king of Norway', who, corresponding to the date of the finds, is most probably Olav Tryggvason. The coins bear the symbol of the cross and a royal bust; they show the influence of English coinage. A few coins are also known from St Olav's reign, but none from those of his successors, Knud the Great and Magnus Olavsson. Norwegian coinage was taken into permanent usage in about 1047, during the reign of Harald Hardråde.

6. CONCLUSION

The fairly rich source material about the pagan period and its religion points to a certain cultural continuity between pagan and Christian times, as does also the continued existence until the thirteenth century of the skaldic poetry with its mythological allusions. This material forms an important but not unproblematic source of information about the pagan period and the transition to Christianity, which, however, has to be supplemented

by archaeological evidence. Whereas the later narrative sources regard the Christianization as a brief process, mostly the result of the missionary activity of Olav Tryggvason and St Olav during the period 995–1030, the archaeological material suggests a longer period of Christian influence and considerable regional differences. In particular, the Saami population was relatively little influenced by Christianity during the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it seems that the kings played a very important part in the conversion of the country, although most kings during the period from around 930 until 1030 were involved in this process and not only the two Olavs. By contrast, there is no evidence of individual missionaries coming from abroad, nor of political pressure from powerful Christian neighbours, with the possible exception of Danish influence in the south-east. This 'indigenous' Christianization process, combined with the impulses from Anglo-Saxon England, may possibly serve to explain the strong position of the vernacular and the continued existence of pagan traditions. However, the specificity of Norway should not be exaggerated; particularly after the mid-twelfth century the organization and position of the Church increasingly conformed to the rest of Europe, and the Church and Christianity played a crucial role in state formation and cultural development.

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