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The Saint, the Cathedral and the Town of Trondheim: The Creation of a Pilgrimage Cathedral and Pilgrimage Town in Twelfth-Century Norway

Le Saint, la cathédrale et la ville de Trondheim : la création d'une cathédrale et d'une ville vouées au pèlerinage dans la Norvège du XIIe siècle

Abstract: King Olav Haraldsson was made a saint one year after his death in 1030. His cult spread rapidly through Scandinavian-dominated areas and was the main reason why the seat of the Norse archbishopric was established in Nidaros (Trondheim) in 1152/53. The cult of St. Olav was consciously employed by the Church for bolstering both the authority of the archbishopric and the fledgling Norwegian monarchy, not least through creating St. Olav *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* and underlining his Christ-like features. After 1153, the cult of St. Olav expanded through the creation of new liturgies, literature and laws, but also through architecture. An octagon was raised over the saint's grave and shrine in the mould of an Early Christian martyrion, which was also inspired by the contemporary Crusader-centralized churches in Jerusalem. The town of Nidaros was also developed to give it the features of a pilgrimage town.

Key words: Norway, Nidaros, St. Olav, Eystein, Pilgrimage, Cathedral

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Résumé : Le roi Olav Haraldsson fut canonisé un an après sa mort en 1030. Son culte se répandit rapidement dans les zones qu'il dominait en Scandinavie et fut la raison principale pour laquelle le siège archiépiscopal fut établi à Nidaros (Trondheim) en 1152-1153. Le culte de Saint-Olaf fut sciemment utilisé par l'Église pour renforcer à la fois l'autorité de l'archevêché et celle de la jeune monarchie norvégienne, en faisant spécialement de Saint-Olaf le *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* et en soulignant ses ressemblances avec le Christ. Après 1153, ce culte connut une réelle expansion grâce à la création de nouvelles liturgies, de la littérature et de la législation, mais surtout grâce à l'architecture. Un édifice octogonal fut érigé sur la tombe ainsi qu'un sanctuaire sur le modèle des martyrions des premiers saints chrétiens, à l'instar de ce que l'on faisait alors dans les églises des croisés de Jérusalem. La cité de Nidaros prit alors tous les traits d'une ville de pèlerinage.

Mots-clés : Norvège, Nidaros, saint-Olaf, Eystein, pèlerinage, cathédrale

Nidaros Cathedral in Nidaros (modern Trondheim) owes its existence to St. Olav, the former King Olav Haraldsson who died in the battle of Stiklestad on 29 July 1030.[1] According to a tradition written down in the 1220s, the body of Olav was buried in secret on the spot where the high altar of the cathedral still stands today.[2] One year and five days after his death, on 3 August 1031 (*translatio Olavi*), his uncorrupted body was exhumed and he was declared to be a saint by Bishop Grimkjell with the acclamation of the Anglo-Danish boy-king Swein Knutsson and the general population.[3] The king's coffin was brought to St. Clement's Church where it was placed above the altar and covered with costly textiles.

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[1] Nidaros, meaning 'the mouth of the river Nid', was the medieval name of Trondheim. The name was gradually replaced during the Middle Ages by 'Trondhjem', which originally was the name of the whole province. The name Nidaros was reintroduced in 1929 as the name of the town, the cathedral and the diocese. Due to strong local opposition, the name of the town was replaced in 1930 with the compromise of 'Trondheim', while the cathedral and diocese kept their new name. The battle site of Stiklestad is situated in the valley of Verdal, about 100 km northeast of Trondheim.

[2] The most detailed depiction of the passion and translation of St. Olav was written c. 1220-30 by the Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson in his 'Saga of the Norwegian Kings' (*Heimskringla*). Snorri visited Nidaros in 1219-20 and thus had first-hand knowledge of the cathedral and the shrine. However, there is no doubt that most of the details in the description of the death and translation of St. Olav were invented by Snorri.

[3] In the eleventh century, this was still sufficient for the canonization of a saint. The pope and the Roman curia did not get the final say in this matter until the end of the twelfth century, with the bull of Pope Alexander III from 1170 and its confirmation by Pope Innocent III in 1200.

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Soon after, a wooden chapel was built over the site of the king's grave, with the altar placed over the grave. The water of a well that sprang up close to the grave turned out to have healing power, curing many sick people and restoring their health. This wooden chapel was c.1070-90 replaced by a large stone church, the predecessor of the present cathedral, which was built by King Olav III Haraldsson 'the Peaceful', the nephew of St. Olav. This church was situated inside the precinct of the royal residence and it served both as a royal chapel and mausoleum, a bishop's church or proto-cathedral and as a pilgrimage church. It was dedicated to the Holy Trinity, but was usually called Christchurch or sometimes even St. Olav's Church.[4] This church became a cathedral c. 1120 when the king gave it to the bishop, and in 1152/53 it became the metropolitan church of Norway which it remained until the Lutheran Reformation of 1537 which marked the end of the Catholic Church in Norway and the Archbishopric of Nidaros.

The First Phase of the Cult of St. Olav

The cult of St. Olav spread very quickly throughout Northern Europe, especially through the Norse, Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian world. The oldest sources documenting the cult of St. Olav are two Norse poems dating to c. 1040 (*Glælognskvi_a* by Torarin Lovtunga and *Erfidrápa Ólafs helga* by Sigvat the Scald),[5] and by 1050-60 the first liturgical texts concerning the cult of St. Olav are documented in York and London.[6]

By c. 1075, the chronicler Adam of Bremen wrote in his *Historia Hammaburgensis ecclesiae* about Nidaros/Trondheim, the relics of St. Olav 'king and martyr', the many miracles that happened there and how people travelled over long distances to visit the relics of the saint.[7] Adam even gave travelling directions by land

[4] The thirteenth-century seal of the cathedral chapter depicts an enthroned St. Olav and its legend tells that this is 'the seal of the chapter of the church of St. Olav, king and martyr'.

[5] Lars Boje Mortensen and Else Mundal, 'Erkebispestaden i Nidaros – arnestad og verkstad for Olavslitteraturen' [The archiepiscopal seat in Nidaros – the origin and workshop for the St Olav literature] in Steinar Imsen (ed.), *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153-1537* (Senter for middelalderstudier, NTNU, skrifter nr. 15, Trondheim, 2003), 354.

[6] Simon Coupland, *A saint for all nations: The cult of Saint Olaf outside Norway* (Trondheim, 1998), 7.

[7] "Metropolis civitas Nortmannorum est Trondemnis, quae nunc decorata ecclesiis magna populorum frequentia celebratur. In qua iacet corpus beatissimi Olaph regis et martiris. Ad cuius tumbam usque in hodiernum diem maxima Dominus operator sanitatum miracula, ita ut a longinquis illic regionibus confluent hii, qui se meritis sancti non desperant [posse] iuvari." Adam of Bremen, *Beskrivelse af øerne i Norden* [Description of the Scandinavian islands] (Højbjerg, 1978), 55.

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and sea, recommending the sea travel from Jutland in Denmark around the west coast of Norway to Nidaros more than the long and dangerous voyage through the mountains of central Norway.

By the late eleventh century, his cult was established from Ireland in the west to Novgorod in Russia in the east, and a church dedicated to St. Olav was built as far away as Constantinople.[8] By the 1150s, a votive picture of St. Olav was even painted on a column in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.[9]

The construction of the present Nidaros Cathedral began c. 1152/53 in connection with Trondheim becoming the seat of the newly established archdiocese of Nidaros, which enveloped ten dioceses comprising Norway, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, the Orkney Islands, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. The old Christchurch of King Olav III had by now become too small, as the new archiepiscopal liturgy, the increased number of clerics and the steadily growing number of pilgrims made more space a necessity. The metropolitan church therefore had to be enlarged.

The construction work began under the first archbishop Jon Birgisson (1153-57). It was in reality an extension project in which the existing Christchurch was retained and according to this plan it would eventually become the eastern arm of a large, cruciform cathedral.[10] The building work started with the new transepts to the west of the old church, including a new tower which was to become the central tower of the new cathedral. To the west of the transept, the construction of an aisled nave was also begun; most of this nave seems to have been completed before the building plans were changed. These new parts of the cathedral were constructed in the Anglo-Norman Romanesque style, transmitted across the North Sea from important building centres of northern England, especially York and Lincoln. In all probability, a group architects and stonemasons from this region were invited to Trondheim to construct the new cathedral, as the knowledge of stone building in Norway did not extend to building projects of this magnitude.

The building works continued unabated during the reign of the second archbishop Eystein Erlendsson (1157-88).[11] Eystein worked consciously to promote

[8] *Passio et miracula beati Olaui* [The passion and miracles of St. Olav], Frederick Metcalfe (Oxford, 1881), 76.

[9] Anne Lidén, *Olav den helige i medeltida bildkonst* [St. Olav in medieval pictorial art] (Stockholm, 1999), 50–2. This is the oldest known extant image of St. Olav.

[10] However, this eastern arm was demolished already in the first half of the thirteenth century and nothing remains of it above ground.

[11] Eystein was appointed archbishop by King Inge, and Eystein was his chaplain and chancellor. He was appointed on the death of Archbishop Jon in 1157, but only returned from Rome with his pallium in 1160 or 1161, and the latter year is usually given as the beginning of his reign. However, as *electus* he

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and expand the cult of St. Olav, whose role as the first Norwegian martyr was emphasized. This promotion of the saint took place in various areas, both through the introduction of new legislation, through the writing of literature, through the development of new liturgies and, last but not least, through architecture. During the first twenty years of his reign, Archbishop Eystein enjoyed an almost uninterrupted period of success and he was able to give the new and fledgling archdiocese a solid legal and economic foundation, in addition to creating a rich liturgical life in the cathedral. Eystein had strong political backing which allowed him to concentrate his high ambitions and considerable energy on this work.

The legal and economic foundations of the archdiocese were laid first through its foundation in 1153 by Cardinal Nicholas Brekespear (the later Pope Hadrian IV, 1154-58), which took place during a state assembly in Trondheim, and the introduction of the *Canones Nidrosienses*. Among other things, the cardinal made the assembly recognize the independence of the Church, including the establishment of secular cathedral chapters. In 1163 or 1164, Archbishop Eystein performed the first royal coronation in Scandinavia, when he crowned the young Magnus Erlingsson as king of Norway in the cathedral of Bergen.

As the son of a king's daughter, Magnus had no claim to the throne.[12] This was, according to ancient Norwegian legal tradition, reserved for the male offspring of kings. Probably at the time of the coronation a new law of Royal Succession was introduced, which states that a king must be of legitimate birth (i.e. born in wedlock), which Magnus certainly was.[13] The coronation was meant to give Magnus further legitimacy by compensating his lack of royal birth with the blessing of the Church, and the archbishop was able to extract many privileges from the young king and his father Earl Erling Skakke in exchange for giving them the support of the Church. At his coronation, Magnus had to swear an oath receiving his kingdom as a fiefdom of St. Olav, who was now established as 'Rex perpetuus Norvegiae,' the eternal and heavenly king of Norway. As a symbolic, visual and highly evocative gesture of becoming the earthly vassal of the saint, Magnus also promised to sacrifice his crown to the high altar of Nidaros Cathedral.

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would have been invested with the secular powers of an archbishop, including full control of the economy and all building works of the metropolitan seat.

[12] Magnus was the son of Princess Kristin, daughter of King Sigurd Magnusson Jorsalfar (the Crusader) and her husband Earl Erling Skakke, who was the real power behind the throne.

[13] Erik Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein. Statsmann og kirkebygger* [Archbishop Øystein. Statesman and church builder] (Oslo, 1996), 112. The law also prohibits more than one king at a time and states that a new king must be of a 'sound mind', i.e. not evil or mad.

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In 1171 or 1172, perhaps in connection with a planned second coronation of Magnus in Trondheim when he reached adulthood and became king in his own right, Magnus also issued a wide-ranging Letter of Privileges for the archbishopric.[14] Archbishop Eystein also wrote a new Christian Law for the Frostating law region which was accepted at the popular law assembly. Among other things, the population agreed to pay taxes and fines to the Church in 'burnt' (pure) silver rather than in the king's coinage which had a low silver content.[15] This substantially increased the income of the metropolitan seat and must have been important for the building of the cathedral.

Literary development took place through works like the long poem *Geisli* (Ray of Light), written by the Icelandic priest and poet Einar Skuleson who performed it in Nidaros Cathedral in 1153. In this poem, the idea of St. Olav as a Christ-like figure was first expressed.[16] Archbishop Eystein himself edited and partly wrote a book comprising the life and miracles of St. Olav, *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, around 1180. In this work, the Christ-like or Christological aspects of the life and martyrdom of St. Olav were even more strongly emphasized, a theme that permeates much of the early cult of St. Olav. A Norwegian version of this book was also made in order to be read out for the common people during services in the parish churches. Also from c. 1180 dates the historical work *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, which was written by Theodoricus Monachus and was dedicated to Archbishop Eystein.[17] Roughly contemporary with this book is the anonymous *Historia Norwegiae*, and another history of Norway in Norwegian (*Ágrip* = Excerpts) is dated to c. 1190. Through these literary works, the existence and history of both the kingdom of Norway and the Church of Norway was introduced for an international audience. It has been argued that the motive for writing these works was to demonstrate that Norway had now – a century and a half after officially becoming

[14] This second coronation is not documented with certainty, but the fact that it was at least planned can be inferred through the Letter of Privilege. See also Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, 239.

[15] This law region was identical with the diocese of Nidaros. This law book was called *Gullfjær* [Gold Feather].

[16] Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli. Gjendikting ved Knut Ødegaard* [Geisli. Translation by Knut Ødegaard] (Trondheim, 2003).

[17] Nothing more is known about the identity of this author, but it is safe to assume that he was connected to a monastic institution in Trondheim, perhaps the Augustinian abbey of Helgeseter (*Monasterium Sanctæ Sedis*), which was established by Archbishop Eystein sometime between 1160 and 1180, or the Benedictine abbey of St. Lawrence at Holm (Munkholm). He might also have been in the archbishop's service, in parallel with the contemporary Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, who was the secretary of Archbishop Absalon of Lund and who wrote the *Gesta Danorum* c. 1190–1200.

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Christian – entered the European community of civilized Christian kingdoms on par with other, older nations that had been Christian for several centuries.

The liturgical development of Nidaros cathedral as a metropolitan church began with the compilation of the *Ordo Nidrosiensis*, which created the liturgical model for the entire archdiocese. For the cult of St. Olav, a whole new liturgy was created, including the *Officium Sancti Olavi* (the Office of St. Olav) and the *Historia Olavi* (the Music of St. Olav). Here St. Olav is described as *rex iustus* – a just king – and *rex et martiris* – king and martyr. The Office also contains the well-known hymn *Lux illuxit laetabunda* ('Light and joy flooded across the country'). Much of the St. Olav music was loaned from the St. Augustine music (*Historia Augustini*). St. Augustine was clearly of central importance to Archbishop Eystein; he probably belonged to the Augustinian order and had studied at the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris c. 1140-50.[18] When writing in Latin, he used the name Augustinus, for example in the dedicatory inscription from 1161 in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in Nidaros Cathedral, and he founded at least four, perhaps as many as six, Augustinian abbeys in Norway during his reign, one of them in Nidaros.

New Plans for the Cathedral

The new king and his forceful father Earl Erling Skakke, who was the real power behind the throne, probably also showed their gratitude to the archbishop and the Church in other ways. In 1165, a relic of the Holy Blood arrived in Nidaros, probably a gift from the new royal family.[19] This relic might have originated at Fécamp Abbey in Normandy, where a small bottle of this precious relic had been kept for hundreds of years. Some years earlier, another important relic of Christ had reached the cathedral: a splinter of the True Cross which King Sigurd the Crusader received from King Balduin I and Patriarch Ghibbelin in Jerusalem in 1110.[20]

The arrival of the Holy Blood relic coincided with the construction of a new part of the cathedral: a small, free-standing chapel built on the north side of the

[18] Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, 35–49.

[19] The relic consisted of a few drops of blood contained inside a golden ring. Its arrival in Nidaros is mentioned in the Icelandic Annals.

[20] According to his Saga in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, King Sigurd had promised to give the relic to Nidaros Cathedral, but instead he gave it to the church he built at Kongehelle. After Kongehelle was burnt by the Vends in 1135, the relic finally came to Nidaros.

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chancel and only connected to it through a corridor.[21] It is highly probable that this chapel was built to house the relic of the Holy Blood, and it could also have been intended as the burial place for the new royal dynasty established shortly before.[22] During the 1869-71 restoration of this chapel, a child's grave was found inside the south wall, and burial inside the walls of a church was a royal prerogative in medieval Norway. Most Norwegian kings before c. 1200 were buried inside the walls of Nidaros Cathedral, close to the relics of St. Olav who was the brother of King Harald the Hardruler and the ancestor of all later Norwegian kings until 1387. It was therefore natural for the new dynasty, claiming descent from the same king and being vassals of the saint, to plan their burials in the same church, resting close to the relics of St. Olav and two important relics of Christ.[23]

The cult of St. Olav was also visually promoted by creating a new, large shrine for the body of the saint. When Olav was made a saint in 1031, his uncorrupted body was kept in the wooden coffin in which he was buried and the coffin was first covered with costly textiles. This coffin was later entirely covered with gilt and decorated silver plaques, probably by King Magnus the Good, the son of St. Olav (reigned 1035-47). At a later date, this first coffin was enclosed in a new, large shrine. A description of it was given by the Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson in his *Saga of St. Olav* that was written c. 1230. Snorri had undoubtedly seen the shrine during his stay in Trondheim in 1219-20 and describes it as shaped like a stave church with a gabled and crested roof, dragon heads on the gables and an arcade below it. The first coffin was placed inside this second shrine and was probably visible through the arcade. Snorri attributed the making of this large shrine to King Magnus the Good, but it is hardly possible that a shrine of such large dimensions could have been made in Norway c. 1040. In my view, it is more probable that this second shrine was made with the aid of another Magnus, for example King Magnus Erlingsson sometime after his coronation in 1164, perhaps as a visible symbol of his vassalage to St. Olav. However, after the death of Magnus in battle in 1184 and the rise of the new dynasty of King Sverre, it was no longer convenient to attribute this

[21] Due to the later extensions of the cathedral, this chapel is today more integrated into the cathedral than it originally was. It became a chapter house in the late thirteenth century, at which time the portals were blocked up and a new passage to the octagon opened.

[22] Margrete Syrstad Andås, 'Relikviekapell og kongelig mausoleum?' [Relic chapel and royal mausoleum?] in Kristin Bjørlykke, Øystein Ekroll and Birgitta Syrstad Gran (eds.), *Nidarosdomen – ny forskning på gammel kirke* [Nidaros Cathedral – new research on an old church] (Trondheim, 2010), 296–318.

[23] When the burials were planned in this chapel and not in the walls of the old choir, this may have been because by the 1160s, the plans for a total rebuilding of the old choir and replacing it with an octagon were already well advanced.

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shrine to Magnus. Instead, the second shrine was quietly attributed to the uncontroversial King Magnus the Good who was already connected with the first shrine and whose grave was situated close to his father's shrine. It was this 'revised' version that was given to Snorri during his visit in 1219-20. Magnus the Good was buried close to his father's shrine and his grave is probably still located under the south ambulatory of the octagon, where it would have been a point of interest for those ambulating around the shrine.[24]

Yet the greatest and most lasting work of Archbishop Eystein in order to enhance the visual and symbolic importance of St. Olav was the rebuilding of the old chancel of the cathedral, which protected the grave and shrine of the saint. This new retro choir was clearly not envisaged when the Romanesque cathedral in Anglo-Norman style had been planned in the 1150s, and it must be regarded as an expression of the swiftly growing importance of the cult of St. Olav from the 1160s onwards. There was also clearly a conscious plan behind the choice of design; its form and decoration signal a complete break with the earlier building phases of the cathedral, and it is the singular occurrence in Scandinavia of a centrally planned *martyrion* or martyr church.

The new part of the cathedral was shaped like an octagon; it also introduced the first elements of Gothic style in Scandinavia more than a generation before this style is found in any other churches in the region. However, the decorative carvings on the ambulatory walls, which are the oldest parts of the structure, are more Late Romanesque than Early Gothic. The central room, which was built after the ambulatory walls, has a distinct Early Gothic character. It contained the saint's grave, the high altar and the shrine. The central room is encircled by an ambulatory containing three small, square rooms or chapels towards the north, the east and the south. The central room was reserved for the clergy, and the ambulatory made it easier for the pilgrims and other laypeople to move around the shrine without disturbing the clergy.

The octagon, especially the ambulatory walls, is very richly decorated with stone carvings both inside and outside made in the soft local soapstone (steatite). Indeed, it is so richly decorated that the entire octagon can be regarded as a '*gebautes*

[24] Magnus was originally buried in the Church of St. Olav that he had founded a few hundred meters north of the Christchurch. When the latter was completed, his body was moved and reburied outside the south wall of the choir. When the octagon was built, the grave was incorporated in the new building. In the Icelandic *Flateyarbók* [Flat-island book] codex from c. 1380, the grave of King Magnus is described as being inside the church, 'in front of the archbishop's room', which probably was the south room or chapel of the octagon and functioned as the archbishop's vestry where his pallium and other liturgical vestments were kept.

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Reliquienschrein', a building which in itself is a reliquary or shrine, which was designed to signal from afar by its centralized form and pointed roof that it contained the grave and shrine of a saint. Also, traces of colour show that all carved decorations were once brightly painted, a feature which would have greatly added to the festive impression. It is well possible that some of the inspiration for this floral decoration derived from the description of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem: 'And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers' (v.18)…And he carved all the walls of the house with…palm trees and open flowers' (v.29).[25]

The construction of the Nidaros octagon was, in my opinion, probably begun no later than the 1170s, when the western part of the Romanesque cathedral was nearing completion. Since nineteenth-century historians have dated the start of the building work to between 1183, when Archbishop Eystein returned from his three-year exile in England, and his death in January 1188. This must be a misunderstanding, however, based on the conception that the octagon was inspired by buildings that Eystein saw during his stay in England, especially Becket's Crown in Canterbury Cathedral which was being constructed at this time.[26] Also, with is mixture of Romanesque and Gothic style elements, the octagon was revered as the very first Gothic building in Scandinavia.[27]

However, looking at the ground plan of the octagon it becomes clear that, rather than being the *beginning* of the Gothic cathedral, the octagon is the *completion* of the Romanesque cathedral. When the octagon was conceived it was added to the old, single-aisle nave of the eleventh-century Christchurch of King Olav the Peaceful, so that its ambulatory begins and ends inside the central nave of the Gothic choir. There is absolutely no indication that the present, early thirteenth-century aisled Gothic choir had even been envisaged when the construction of the octagon ambulatory began. If so, the ambulatory of the octagon would surely have become directly connected with the aisles of the choir so that the stream of pilgrims and visitors could move fluently around the church and the shrine without disturbing the liturgy in the central part of the octagon and in the choir.

This architectural solution had been introduced in important pilgrim churches already from the late eleventh century onwards, such as in Santiago de Compostela, St. Sernin in Toulouse and in St. Foy in Conques. Further north, Abbot Suger's choir from the 1140s in St. Denis Abbey near Paris was an outstanding

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[25] 1 Kings, Chapter 6.

[26] Gerhard Fischer, *Domkirken i Trondheim I-II* [The cathedral in Trondheim I-II] (Oslo, 1965), 129–31. Fischer even envisages that the archbishop had some kind of 'revelation' when seeing this building.

[27] *Ibid.*, 132.

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example of this kind of ground plan, which Archbishop Eystein surely was familiar with from his student days in St. Victor in the same period.

As it is, the aisles of the Gothic choir never became connected with the ambulatory of the octagon, and even today all visitors must therefore enter the area directly in front of the high altar before entering the ambulatory. This creates many practical problems with directing the stream of people during large church services and other ceremonies. It is therefore more correct to regard the octagon as a building firmly rooted in the architecture of the twelfth century and a part of the Romanesque cathedral rather than a precursor of the rebuilding of the greater part of the cathedral that took place during the thirteenth century.

Moreover, I find it more rewarding to regard the octagon as the architectural equivalent or parallel to the large legal, literary and liturgical work that was executed at the same time in order to establish the cult of St. Olav as a major Scandinavian cult and as the eternal king of Norway. In this context, one can understand why the ambitious archbishop might look for inspiration to the churches marking the most important elements of the history of the heavenly king Jesus Christ.

Holy Places in Jerusalem

Even though Norway and the Atlantic Islands were situated *ad finis terrae*, near the end of the known medieval world, the twelfth century marks the definite inclusion of these lands into the European Christian Commonwealth. The establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros, made by Cardinal Nicholas travelling from the Roman curia all the way to Nidaros, was the last symbolic act of this inclusion. In the 1150s, the Icelandic abbot Nicholás Bergsson went on a pilgrimage all the way to Rome and Jerusalem and he wrote a small 'guidebook' describing how to get there and what to see along the way.[28] This indicates that there was a strong interest in pilgrimage in Scandinavia even to remote places like Jerusalem at the opposite end of the known Christian world. During the years 1108-11, King Sigurd Magnusson led a large fleet of Norwegian pilgrims and crusaders to the Holy Land, an expedition which earned him the honorary name *Jorsalfar* 'the Jerusalem-traveller/Crusader.'

Also in the mid-1150s, a fleet of fifteen ships left Norway and the Orkney Islands on a combined crusade and pilgrimage trip under the leadership of the earls

[28] Jan Ragnar Hagland (ed.), *Til Romaborg og Jorsal. Reiseguide frå 1100-talet av abbed Nikolás Bergsson* [To Rome and Jerusalem. A traveler's guide from the twelfth century by Abbot Nikolás Bergsson] (Trondheim, 2003).

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Erling Skakke and Ragnvald Kale. They were accompanied by Bishop Vilhjalm of Orkney as their spiritual guide.[29] A large number of people, probably numbering several hundred persons, were on board and they would all have witnessed the splendour of the newly restored Holy Sepulchre Church and the important other religious sites of Jerusalem and its vicinity, including an excursion to the Jordan River to bathe in its water. It is well possible that Erling's wife, Kristin Sigurdsdotter, joined this pilgrimage and that she is the woman depicted kneeling by the feet of St. Olav in the painting of him in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Indeed, it is well possible that the painting, which is dated to c. 1150–60, was donated by her. She might have had personal reasons for visiting exactly this church; a couple of years later she gave birth to a boy called Magnus who was to become king of Norway.

In addition to these large expeditions, there must have been many smaller groups or individual travellers who have left no trace in the written sources, among them many priests and monks. There should thus be little doubt that there were a large number of people in mid-twelfth century Norway who had first-hand knowledge of how the crusaders had transformed Jerusalem into a city with a religious landscape where pilgrims could experience much of the history of Christ and other Biblical and Early Christian saints.

The pilgrims thus moved in a total religious environment where both buildings and nature united into a total experience. The expectations of the pilgrims on approaching the aim of their journey were first met on the place where they first could set their eyes on the Holy City, a place that was called *Mons Gaudii* or Montjoie – the hill of joy. Similar Montjoies were found at some other important pilgrimage sites, especially Rome and Santiago de Compostela.

The most important church in Jerusalem was the Holy Sepulchre Church, a rotunda containing the burial chamber (*aedicula*) where the body of Jesus rested for three days and nights before he rose from the dead. The rotunda was originally built c. 320-30 by Emperor Constantine the Great and his mother Helena. The rock-cut burial chamber identified as the one in which Jesus was buried was cut free of the hill surrounding it, and this piece of rock became the centre of the large rotunda. This rotunda contained a central room, an ambulatory with a gallery and three small apsidal chapels facing north, west and east. The aedicule itself had a circular or polygonal ground plan surmounted by an open lantern, and its outside was covered with costly marble.[30] The Holy Sepulchre Church was restored and partly rebuilt by the Frankish crusaders in the 1130s and 40s, and it was rededicated on 15 July 1149,

[29] *Heimskringla*, *Soga om Haraldssønene* [Heimskringla, The Saga of the sons of King Harald] chapter 17.

[30] Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud, 1999), 68 and 82.

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on the 50th anniversary of the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099.[31] The rotunda itself was covered with a tall, pointed roof with a circular opening (*oculus*), but otherwise its shape was little changed and it still retains much of the Constantine fabric. To the east of the rotunda, a new Romanesque choir was added which also contains an ambulatory and three apsidal chapels. In addition to being a pilgrimage church, the Holy Sepulchre Church was also the seat of the Latin patriarch, the coronation church of the kingdom of Jerusalem and the burial place for the kings of Jerusalem. An abbey of Augustinian canons was also connected to the church.

Apart from the grave, the rebuilt church contained a number of locations associated with the Last Passion of Christ, especially the Rock of Calvary but also many other places with less historical basis. Notwithstanding the historical truth of these claims, a visitor to the church could move around the building and pray and meditate at a string of locations connected to the last days of Christ, all gathered under one roof.

The second important church was the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat as-Sakhra*) on the Temple Mount. This was a Moslem shrine built c. 690 around a part of the exposed rock which Moslem tradition pointed out as being the place where the Prophet stood on his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem or his ascension to Heaven. This building was wrongly identified by the Crusaders as the temple of Solomon and was called by them *Templum Domini*.[32] A number of biblical episodes were also connected to the exposed rock and the man-made cave below it. The building was made into a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and it was also served by an abbey of Augustinian canons which was attached to it. This building consists of a perfect octagon with a double ambulatory and a circular central room covered by a cupola. It is featured on most of the twelfth-century maps of Jerusalem found in Western manuscripts, often more prominently than the Holy Sepulchre Church. There was in fact a rivalry between the two churches about which had the highest status.

The third centralized church in Jerusalem was the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives to the east of the Old Town, built over the place from which Jesus ascended to Heaven according to tradition. In the late fourth century, a circular church was built over this site, but by the time of the Crusader conquest in 1099 this church had largely fallen into ruin. It was completely rebuilt by the Crusaders in the early twelfth century in the shape of an octagon with a square, central room resting on four large pillars. In the centre of the church stood a small,

[31] Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus*. Volume iii, *The City of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 2007), 21.
[32] *Ibid.*, 400.

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octagonal aedicule containing the exposed piece of rock with a set of footprints said belong to Jesus. The central part of the church was presumably covered by a dome.[33]

A fourth church completed the main route of the pilgrims in Jerusalem. This was the Church of the Virgin Mary on Mount Sion, which was built on the site of the Last Supper and it incorporated the *Cenacle* room where the Last Supper was believed to have taken place. This church also incorporated the grave of St. Stephen and the site of the Dormition of the Virgin.[34] This church was not a centralized building but a large basilica, and like the three other churches mentioned above it was also served by a community of Augustinian canons. The Augustinian order thus had a strong grip on spiritual and liturgical life in Jerusalem during the period until 1187 when the city was recaptured by the Muslims. It is safe to presume that detailed knowledge about the religious conditions in Jerusalem was widespread within this order. An example of the symbolical importance of Jerusalem in the Augustinian order can be seen in the writings of Richard of St. Victor in Paris (c.1100/30 – 1172), such as in his commentaries on the Book of Ezekiel and the measurements and plan of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[35]

The choice of an octagonal building in Nidaros above the saint's grave must be regarded and understood in the religious context of the second half of the twelfth century. This was the age of the crusades and it is my view that the choice of an octagon in Trondheim was inspired by a strong desire to highlight the Christological elements of St. Olav, and that the octagon was designed to demonstrate this. In twelfth-century Jerusalem, the three most prestigious churches all had a centralized ground plan, two octagons and one rotunda.

Trondheim as a Pilgrimage Town—a Jerusalem of the North?

As we have seen, during the second half of the twelfth century the cathedral of Nidaros was consciously transformed and rebuilt into a metropolitan church reminiscent of other pilgrimage churches in Europe and the Holy Land, with an octagonal choir surrounding the grave and shrine of St. Olav, several relics of St. Olav and a number of royal graves. The cathedral also contained two important relics of Christ, some drops of the Holy Blood and a piece of the True Cross. But

[33] *Ibid.*, 79. The reconstruction of the central room is hypothetical.

[34] *Ibid.*, 261–74.

[35] Catherine Delano-Smith, 'The Exegetical Jerusalem: Maps and Plans for Ezekiel Chapters 40-48', in Lucy Donkin and Hanna Vorholt (eds.), *Imagining Jerusalem in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2012), 41–77.

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what about the town of Nidaros itself? Did it contain other features that can be regarded in this light?

Nidaros was founded in the year 997 by King Olav I Tryggvason (995-1000) and the town grew slowly but steadily over the next 150 years. The first church in the town c. 997 was dedicated to St. Clemens, and during the eleventh century there are mentions of several more churches being built, such as the Church of St. Gregory (c. 1040-50), the Church of St. Olav (c. 1040-50), the Church of St. Mary (c. 1060-66), the Christchurch /Holy Trinity Church (c. 1070-90) and the Church of St. Margareta (c. 1070-90). This last church belonged to the Great Guild which was founded by King Olav III the Peaceful and stood next to a large guild hall close to the shore of the fjord, close to the meeting-place of the *Eyrating* assembly which proclaimed every new king. It was also known as the Cross Guild because of the large cross that was raised near the church or even St. Olav's Guild because he was the patron saint of the guild.[36] The aristocracy of Trøndelag, both in the town and the countryside, were members of this guild and met here for regular feasts and drinking sessions. All these churches were built by the various kings of the period, perhaps assisted by the local aristocracy.[37]

During the first half of the twelfth century, the number of churches in Nidaros steadily increased, such as the Church of St. Nicholas which was built in the royal residence by King Eystein Magnusson (1103-23). This church, the third church inside the royal residence, was probably built in preparation of the division between the monarchy and the Church. Until that time, bishops had been economically dependent on the monarchy and the churches in the royal residences were also the bishops' churches. There were as yet no cathedrals in the sense that a church belonged to a bishop, but all this changed c. 1120 when the Church was organized into proper dioceses. The introduction of the tithe also gave the Church an economy independent of the monarchy.

In towns like Oslo and Stavanger, the building of the new cathedrals of St. Hallvard and St. Swithun began. In Nidaros, I see the construction of St. Nicholas Church in connection with the Christchurch and its adjoining area being split from the rest of the royal residence. The Christchurch then became the property of the bishop and thus a true cathedral, and a new bishop's residence was

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[36] Terje Bratberg, *Trondheim byleksikon* [Dictionary of Trondheim town] (Trondheim, 1996), *Miklagildet* [The Great Guild].

[37] The building of these churches is mentioned in the various sagas of the Norwegian kings, written down in the thirteenth century, but there are no contemporary sources confirming this.

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established on the south side of the cathedral.[38] The Church of St. Nicholas thus became the new palace chapel instead of the Christchurch.

Nidaros also built its first monasteries in the early twelfth century: the Benedictine Abbey of St. Lawrence at Nidarholm was founded in 1103 by the aristocrat Sigurd Ullstreng, and St. Mary's Nunnery at Bakke was founded some time before 1150. By 1120 and certainly by 1150, Nidaros thus had the ecclesiastical infrastructure that was necessary for an Episcopal seat. Some of the town churches, which are first mentioned during the thirteenth century, might also have been founded before 1150, such as the Church of St. Peter. Apart from the cathedral and several chapels in the royal and archiepiscopal residences, sixteen churches are known in medieval Trondheim and at least ten of them date from before 1150.[39]

The size of the medieval population of Nidaros is notoriously difficult to estimate, as there are no sources preserved concerning this question, but most historians have settled on an urban population in c. 1300 of about 2500-3000 persons. In 1150, the population would have been perhaps half this number.[40] The high number of early churches in Trondheim is also found in other early Scandinavian towns such as Bergen, Roskilde, Lund and Visby. When Cardinal Nicholas Breakspear arrived by ship in Trondheim during the late autumn of 1152, he would therefore have seen a small town with low, wooden houses interspersed with ten to twelve whitewashed stone churches rising above the houses of the townspeople. None of the churches were particularly large and most had a simple two-cell structure with a rectangular nave and a square chancel; a couple of the churches probably also had a west tower. The largest church, the cathedral, stood on the highest point of the peninsula on which the town was situated and would have dominated the whole area. There was as yet nothing visual about Trondheim pinpointing the town as something particular or different from other Northern European towns, or indicating that it was a centre of pilgrimage.

Two generations later, by the end of the twelfth century, Trondheim was a quite different place. This was partly due to the steady growth of the town, but Nidaros had also acquired several new and unique features not found in any other Norwegian or even Scandinavian town. The establishment of the archbishopric of Trondheim in 1152/53 brought new requirements. A suitable palace for the

[38] Øystein Ekroll, *Arkeologi og myter. Kva skjedde omkring Nidarosdomen før år 1200?* [Archeology and myths. What did really take place around Nidaros Cathedral before 1200?] (Trondhjemske Samlinger, Orkanger 2006), 16.

[39] Øivind Lunde, *Trondheims fortid i bygrunnen* [Trondheim's subterranean past] (Trondheim, 1977), 210.

[40] Grethe Authén Blom, *Trondheims historie 997-1997* [History of Trondheim 997-1997] vol. i (Trondheim, 1997), 18 and 150.

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archbishop was founded on the south side of the cathedral, and in the 1160s a two-floor stone hall was built here by Archbishop Eystein, the first known stone hall in Scandinavia. This hall is still preserved, albeit with some later modifications, and it was a telling image of the power of the archbishop.

On the north side of the cathedral, the residences of the canons were gradually established from the 1150s onwards and in the same area a pilgrim hospital was also established, dedicated to St. Mary.[41] This hospital is mentioned in one of the miracles in the *Passio Olavi* from c. 1180 so it was certainly in existence by then, as it is difficult to imagine that it should pre-date the establishment of the archbishopric in 1153. A hospital catering for sick and old pilgrims was a common feature at many pilgrimage churches, especially where no monastery was attached. The most splendid example was the great complex built by the Hospitalers of St. John in Jerusalem, just to the south of the Holy Sepulchre Church, but also the hospitals attached to both the Abbey of St. Victor and the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (L'Hôtel-Dieu).

In order to attract visitors to the town, it was important to improve access and communications to Nidaros, as well as make it easier to transport food provisions and building materials like stone and timber to the town from the surrounding countryside. In the regional laws of the Early Middle Ages, until the introduction of the first National Law in 1276 by King Magnus IV Håkonsson, the bishops were responsible for building and maintaining roads and bridges in their dioceses. The bishop's local representatives were authorized to demand one day's work annually from every adult male to repair the roads and bridges.[42] Along the coast, the many place-names like 'Salhus' are a remainder of the 'soul-houses', that is, houses built for the benefit of travellers and for the souls of those who built these houses and endowed them with firewood. Across the Dovre mountain range south of Nidaros, the mountain lodges such as Hjerkinn and Drivstua date back to at least the twelfth century and still exist to this day.

In Nidaros, the wide river Nid was a great obstacle for travellers from the south and the east. In 1179, a bridge spanning the river is first mentioned in connection with a battle between Earl Erling Skakke and his new opponent King Sverre, leader of the *Birkebeiner*. This bridge was a major construction project, being more than 150 meters long, and consisted of a wooden plane resting on a large number of triangular log-built, stone-filled boxes. Across the bridge-head on the town side stood a tower that could effectively stop any enemy trying to force themselves into the town. Similar bridges with defence towers are found all over

[41] Ibid., 171.

[42] *Frostatingslova* [Law of Frostating], trad. Jan Ragnar Hagland and Jørn Sandnes (Oslo, 1994), Kristendomsbolken, §19.

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Western Europe, although they are mostly built of stone, such as the famous Pont d'Avignon.

The importance of communications is also demonstrated by a small, but telling fact: in the *Saga of King Sverre*, a point on the southern road to Nidaros across the hills to the west of the town is called *Feginsbrekka*. At this place in 1179, the king first sight caught of Nidaros and he dismounted his horse, kneeled and prayed.[43] The name is a Norwegian translation of the Latin *Mons Gaudii* or the French *Montjoie*, and it clearly reveals that Nidaros now had acquired a religious importance that is never mentioned in connection with any other Norwegian towns. The location of *Feginsbrekka* must have been physically marked in some way, perhaps with a cross or an altar, and it must have given travellers an uninterrupted view of the town and especially the cathedral. It also shows that the clerics of Trondheim were very much aware of what it took to establish a pilgrimage site and that they well knew the symbolic significance of similar places of pilgrimage.

The archbishop of Nidaros clearly also had a mandate to defend the town against enemies. Very few of the early Scandinavian towns were fortified, but within a European perspective a proper town had to be defensible. During the fighting in 1179, an earth and timber fortification is mentioned that had been built by order of Archbishop Eystein across the narrow neck of the Nidaros peninsula. In connection with the bridge tower, both roads leading into the towns could be blocked. In 1206, there is also mention of a stone tower by the mouth of the river Nid, where watchmen could control all traffic to and from the river harbour and raise the alarm if an enemy approached.[44] In the vicinity of this tower, at the point where the river joined the fjord, there was also the large cross which is mentioned in the eleventh century, probably as a visible marker for all travellers approaching Trondheim that this was a Christian town and that it contained a safe harbour.[45]

The prayer of King Sverre at Feginsbrekka was successful: he won the ensuing battle in which the old Earl Erling Skakke was killed and the archbishop fled the country, but it took another five years before King Magnus met the fate of his father and Sverre was the sole king of Norway. In this decisive phase, Sverre could also play the archbishop's own game: in order to strengthen his grip on the region, King Sverre built a castle in 1183 on a protruding rock near Feginsbrekka west of the

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[43] *The Saga of King Sverre*, ch.3-5.

[44] Øystein Ekroll, *Borg, voll og kastell – kampen om Trondheim 1179-1205* [Castle, earth-works and towers – the struggle for Trondheim 1179-1206] (Trondhjemske samlinger, Trondheim 2007), 91.

[45] Such stone crosses are found along the coast of Western Norway, marking the places of safe passage or safe harbours. A large number of place names containing the name *kors/kross* (cross) are found all along the Norwegian coast.

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town and he named it Sion. This name carries a wealth of meaning, and can be interpreted as an expression of King Sverre's view of his situation. Sion is often used as another name for Jerusalem, but it was originally the name of the castle of King David, which he built on a rock in Jerusalem. David was called by God to become king of Israel, and to overthrow King Saul who had become a tyrant even though he had been anointed by the prophet Samuel.

Without a doubt, King Sverre consciously placed himself in the same situation as David; Sverre depicted himself as a rightful rebel against a false king (Magnus) who, even though he had been crowned and anointed by the archbishop (a parallel to the prophet Samuel), still was not a rightful king because he did not have the birth right, according to tradition. In other words, Magnus was a usurper who had deprived Sverre of the throne of Norway which was his rightful inheritance as the son of King Sigurd Munn. Sverre, who was trained as a priest and clearly knew his Bible, thus transferred an important element of the Biblical topography of Jerusalem to Trondheim, while the archbishop seems to use contemporary Crusader topography as his reference.

Conclusion

It must have been Archbishop Eystein himself who, on various levels probably from 1157 and certainly from 1161 onwards, was the driving force behind the conscious effort to transfer some elements of the symbolism of Jerusalem, the centre or navel of the world (*umbilicis terrae*) to this small town near the edge of the world (*finis terrae*). Eystein had successfully managed to establish a literary framework that placed St. Olav firmly inside the Christian cosmology and made him the eternal king of Norway. Eystein also transformed the old cathedral into a shrine that was permeated with the architectural symbolism of the martyr shrines in Rome and other locations, especially the churches associated with the passion and resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem.

Nidaros was situated at one extreme of the Christian medieval world, but so were other important pilgrimage sites like Santiago de Compostela and Jerusalem. In spite of their position in the geographical periphery, these two latter towns were at the centre of Christian imagination in Europe in the twelfth century. In addition, the town of Nidaros had been developed into a Christian urban landscape dominated and surrounded by religious institutions. In addition to the Christian institutions inside the town, Nidaros was also spiritually protected by monasteries on three sides of the town: the Benedictine monks to the north, the nuns to the east and the newly

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established Augustinian canons to the south, which created a 'prayer ring' around the town. To the west of the town, the new castle of Sion protected Nidaros from dangers approaching along the road from the south. The cathedral and the shrine of St. Olav thus constituted the centrepiece of the entire ecclesiastical landscape.

It is uncertain whether there was also a processional landscape within this structure, that is, whether there was a liturgical connection between some or all of the churches. It is certain that the shrine of St. Olav was carried around the town in the annual procession on St. Olav's Day (29 July). The *Passio Olavi* mentions that the shrine was habitually put on the ground in the cathedral churchyard so that people could touch it. This may have been on the site of St. Mary's Church, where the shine was kept for twenty to thirty years. There were two other churches in Nidaros that mark sites where the shrine had been kept, and these churches might also have been included in the processional route.

The *Ordo Nidrosiensis* relates that the Palm Sunday procession went from St. Mary's Church to the cathedral, a distance of a few hundred meters.[46] The shrine of St. Olav was also carried in processions through the town on special occasions, such as for the arrival of a new archbishop or when a new king was being acclaimed at the *Eyrathing* by the harbour. It was customary for a new king to swear this oath putting his hand on the shrine, probably as a way of showing he became the vassal of the saint. The shrine was even carried in procession when a fire was raging through the town and on several occasions this helped quench the flames. St. Olav was thus also the vigilant guardian of the town.

In less than a century, a remarkable transformation had thus taken place in Nidaros. From being a small town in the late eleventh century with a saint who had a certain Scandinavian following, by the late twelfth century, Nidaros had become a successful metropolitan seat with a religious infrastructure that placed it firmly within the mainstream of European Christendom.

[46] This church is the present St. Mary's Church founded c. 1207, not the one built by King Harald the Hardruler c. 1050-60 and demolished by Archbishop Eystein c. 1160–70.