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Castles of the Mind in Old Norse Culture: Archaeological and Literary Evidence of St. Clement's Church in Niðaróss

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Abstract 200 words: This article juxtaposes the recently excavated archaeological remains of St. Clement's church in medieval Niðaróss (five wooden churches on top of each other with a material connection to a sixth older church) to the way the church is described in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, the long saga about Óláfr Tryggvason, and the Icelandic *Laxdœla saga*. The main aim of this article is to investigate whether the material continuity of the site, as attested by the archaeology, is directly reflected in the literary sources, or whether cultural continuity is emphasized in a different way in the literary sources. The material and textual evidence will be interpreted to reveal new insights about the nature of and dynamics between natural/material and cultural/ideological continuity in medieval Christendom. The discussion also has further implications concerning interdisciplinary methods in medieval studies and environmental history.

Keywords: medieval urban archaeology, early Christian churches, Óláfr Haraldsson, Óláfr Tryggvason, *Laxdœla saga*, cultural continuity, interdisciplinarity

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Biographical note (200 words): Stefka G. Eriksen has an academic background in interdisciplinary medieval studies, focusing on Nordic archaeology, art history, history, and Old Norse literature. Her main publications and edited books include Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture (Brepols 2014); Tools for Transformation. Liturgy and Religious Practice in Late Antique Rome and Medieval Europe (*ACTA* 2019); and Approaches to the Medieval Self (De Gruyter 2020). This article is part of her ongoing project on changes in the nature-culture dynamics in the medieval North, with a special focus on medieval towns.

Introduction

A recent archaeological excavation in Trondheim, Norway (2016–17), led by archaeologist and researcher Anne Petersén of the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, uncovered what is believed to be St. Clement's church. Allegedly, the church was built by King Óláfr Haraldsson (St. Óláfr himself, Norway's national saint) and is the site where his cult was initiated one year after his death. One of the most remarkable aspects of the excavated site is its continual use from c. 1015 to c. 1350 and the rebuilding of five wooden churches on the same spot, including a material connection to a sixth, even older church, which must have been at another location. The site- and material continuity of this wood-construction is remarkable as during this period many new churches were built in Niðaróss by various kings, and stone gradually became the main material used for these prestigious religious buildings. A main question that emerges is thus — what was the symbolic significance of the rebuilding of the church in wood for two and a half centuries on the same spot?

This question will be investigated through a study of various literary sources retelling the history of the church. In *Heimskringla* (c. 1220–30, a history of the Norwegian kings), the Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson provides the best-known story about St. Clement's church, indicating that it was built by King Óláfr Haraldsson in 1015–16 and is the site where his cult was initiated in 1031, one year after his death. Other literary sources, such as *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (c. 1300), claim that it had already been built by King Óláfr Tryggvason in 997. Yet other text the Icelandic *Laxdœla saga* (c. 1250), mentions a church built by both kings. A closer study of the descriptions of the churches built by the two kings will clarify whether there is a link between them according to the literature, and whether such a literary link can explain or match the material continuity of the excavated St. Clement's church. The aim of the juxtaposition between the physical remnants and the various literary descriptions of the church is to reach a better understanding of the symbolic significance of the wooden church and its actual rebuilding process from the end of the tenth century to the mid-fourteenth century. We will further discuss whether and how the material continuity may correspond to an intended ideological continuity — may the church be seen as 'a castle of the mind', to use Christiania Whitehead's term (2014), i.e. a strongly meaningful physical *and* mental anchor in Old Norse culture?[1]

This article will first account for the main characteristics of the archaeological excavation of the church, before it turns to the literary descriptions of the church in the three texts. The focus will fall on what each text says about St. Clement's church and on the meaning of the literary description in its respective cultural and political context. Thereafter, we will discuss the similarities and discrepancies between the three literary narratives about St. Clement's church and the narrative created by the site- and materiality continuity revealed by the archaeology. In conclusion, we will reflect upon the implications of such similarities/differences for our understanding of the link between natural/material and cultural/ideological continuity, and the value of interdisciplinarity for medieval studies and environmental history.

The archaeology of St. Clement's church

The excavation of St. Clement's church in Trondheim, conducted by Anne Petersén and her NIKU-team, is a remarkable site with great cultural-historical significance.[2] Two aspects of the excavation are essential for this article. First, notable site-continuity was demonstrated in that five wooden churches were discovered on top of each other in a sequence from c. 1015 to c. 1350, the oldest being contemporary to King Óláfr Haraldsson's reign (Church A) and the youngest sheltering a small chapel and an altar (Church E). The chronological development of the various churches is as follows:

Church A (dendro, radiocarbon, and datable finds): Constructed at some point between AD 1010–1020.[3] Size: 6 x 10 m; altar: 1.4 x 1.5 m.
Church B: Radiocarbon dates together with the few datable finds indicate a twelfth-century date, at least for the use of the church. The destruction of Church B happened shortly before AD 1221. Similar size as church A, altar same place.

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[1] Whitehead uses the term in her study of the allegorical significance of architectural elements in medieval literature. Here the term is borrowed to discuss the specific example of St. Clement's Church and its literary description in Old Norse literature.

[2] For the basic facts of the excavation, see: https://historictrondheim.com/st-clements-church/#klemenskirken-gjennom-350-ar (accessed 20 April 2020); see also Petersén et al. forthcoming; Petersén 2019.

[3] The report from the excavation also includes some C14 results suggesting that the church may have been built c. 1050. The report discusses two possible interpretations for what that may mean. If church A is dated to 1050, it cannot have been built by King Óláfr Haraldsson, who died in 1030 according to his saga. This does not necessarily impede the argument in this article, which concerns the ways cultural continuity is expressed materially and textually, and not the direct correspondence between archaeology and texts. This will be further commented on in the conclusion of the article.

Church C (dendro, radiocarbon, and datable finds): Built 1221 or shortly thereafter. Stands into the second half of the thirteenth century. The altar is enlarged compared to B.
Church D (radiocarbon, datable finds): Built in the second half of the thirteenth century, possibly destroyed by fire c. 1300. The altar is enlarged compared to B.
Church E (radiocarbon, datable finds): Built c. 1300. Destroyed by fire c. 1350.

The continuity of rebuilding a church in wood is noteworthy, as during that period it was most common that important religious and secular buildings were rebuilt in stone.[4] Second, in the post holes of the oldest church, the remains of a destroyed and burnt baptismal font were discovered. This may suggest that an even older church existed in another location that was considered to be of symbolic significance for the establishment of the oldest of the churches on our site. To understand better the significance of these features, and especially the material continuity between the six churches, we will now turn to the description of the church in literary sources that mention the church: Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*; *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, and *Laxdæla saga*.

Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*

We will begin with the most famous source that mentions St. Clement's church in Niðaróss: Snorri's *Heimskringla*, and more specifically the saga about Óláfr Haraldsson and Magnús the Good. *Heimskringla* was originally written c. 1220–30. Snorri compiled his sagas based on a range of sources, including other existent sagas about various kings, oral tradition, European literary culture, and other locally transmitted historical knowledge (Johansson 2019; Helgi Þorlaksson 2019).[5] The first time we hear of St. Clement's church is in chapter 53 of the saga about Óláfr Haraldsson, who comes to the area and is taken as king there without any opposition. He builds a king's palace and St. Clement's church, "where it now stands"/ "í þeim stað, sem nú stendr hon" (Snorri Sturluson, ch. 53, p. 70). The king also gives land to peasants and tradesmen whom he likes and who want to build. This happens in the winter of 1015–1016.

The church is mentioned several more times. We read, for example, that one year after King Óláfr's death, his coffin was opened and he was placed at the altar of St. Clement's church, his body smelling sweet and his hair and nails all having grown (Snorri Sturluson 1945, ch. 244). The church's bell Glǫð, given to the church by King Óláfr himself, has a miraculous role in some of the battles of his son King Magnúss (Snorri Sturluson 1951a, ch. 27). These references conform well with literary models in other Nordic and European medieval literature: the sweet smell of a body and grown hair and nails are typical modes of demonstrating sanctity in medieval hagiography.[6] The sound of a church bell is also often seen as transformative — awakening and inspiring people to see God and even change their faith from paganism to Christianity.[7]

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[4] For an overview of the churches built in Niðaróss, see Christophersen and Nordeide 1994; Christophersen 2020.

[5] For a review of the manuscripts that *Heimskringla* is preserved in, see Guðrún Nordal and Jon Gunnar Jørgersen 2018. See also Table 1.

[6] On the symbolism of the sweetness and its relationship to God, see Fulton 2006.

[7] The same motif appears in other Old Norse sagas, such as *Parcevals saga* and *Orvar-Ödds saga*; for a discussion see Eriksen 2018. For a discussion of the significance of church bells in other literary motifs, see Wellendorf 2010. The symbolic meaning of the church bells is also explicitly described in the Stave church sermon, in the Old Norse Homily book: the church bells symbolize the priests who sing beautiful songs and prayers for God and the congregation, as well as God's message that helps us to be good Christians, see Salversen 1971, 102–103.

The church is also mentioned as a topographical reference in the town, when other churches are built.[8] The building of churches (as well as bridges and hospitals) by the early Christian kings was a common literary topos, symbolizing the king's responsibility to rule on earth as God rules in Heaven, as well as providing shelter for travelling souls on their physical and spiritual journeys. The physical building of St. Clement's church thus has metaphorical significance, possibly under the inspiration of European literary models. These would have been familiar to the author through the intellectual connections he had with the Benedictines in the North of Iceland, as well as the Augustinians, and the learned Sturlungar, to which we will return in greater detail below (Johansson 2019; Helgi Þorláksson 2019).

Snorri's attribution of St. Clement's church to Óláfr Haraldsson may also be understood through the lens of his political context. To simplify the political game, it can be said that in the contemporaneous conflict between the Church and the secular power, Snorri had deep affiliations with the Church and the Augustinians. He was one of the founders of the Augustinian Viðey cloister in 1225–26, which may be viewed as a politically strategic move. He must have been aware that the Church was gaining much power in Iceland, but it was impossible for him to oppose the reform politics that the Church was promoting. The Church and the Augustinians, along with Archbishop Eysteinn, were at the forefront of promoting Óláfr Haraldsson as the national saint St. Óláfr, a situation which may also explain why Snorri promoted the same king as the ideal Christian king and builder of St. Clement's church.

Before we turn to the next source, it should be mentioned that even though Snorri claims that Óláfr Haraldsson built St. Clement's church, he relates that Óláfr Tryggvason also seemed to have a church in Niðaróss, and that Óláfr Haraldsson engaged in the rebuilding of some of the premises first built by Óláfr Tryggvason.

In the saga about Óláfr Tryggvason, Snorri tells us about the non-Christian Kjartan Óláfsson and other Icelanders approaching Niðaróss (ch. 81–82). Although they tried to sail away from town as they knew that the king tried to convert everyone, the weather worsened and they could not leave. On the day of St. Michael (29th of September), the king held mass and the Icelanders heard it and liked it. The king asked them then if they wanted to accept the new faith and they agreed, on the condition that the king promise them his support, which he duly did. Kjartan, Bolli Bollason, and all of their men then converted to Christianity. The church where these events took place is not named but, for now, it suffices to note that Snorri knew that Óláfr Tryggvason had also built a church in Niðaróss, and that he had held mass there.

In the saga about Óláfr Haraldsson, Snorri tells us that the buildings which King Óláfr Tryggvason had previously set up had not been maintained by Earl Eiríkr (who settled at Hlaðir, where his family had its roots). Some of the buildings had collapsed, but others still stood. King Óláfr Haraldsson had the buildings repaired and renovated, rebuilding what had collapsed (ch. 41). No explicit mention is made of a church as part of these premises, but the reconstruction of buildings is notable and relevant for us.

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta

The second source that mentions a St. Clement's church is *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, composed in Iceland, c. 1300 (Ólafur Halldórsson and Nielsen 1993).[9] This saga deploys the material recorded by Snorri and combines it with other histories of the king written by Benedictine writers such as Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson, to which we will return below.[10] In chapter 161, this long saga about Óláfr Tryggvason tells us that the king builds a king's palace at Skipakrok and a church (without a name), and that he gives land to those who want to build (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958, 359). A few chapters later (163–164), the author adds:

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[8] Snorri Sturluson 1951a, 21, 107; Snorri Sturluson, 1951b, 121, 125.

[9] On the manuscripts, where the saga is preserved, see Ólafur Halldórsson and Nielsen 1993, 9; see also Table 1.

[10] Another source used in the Longest saga was *Laxdœla saga*, to which we will return in the next section.

> þar let hann ok reisa Clemens kirk[iu.] Var kirkia su algior ok buín at iolum. Ætlaði konungr ok biskup at þar skylldi veíta í iola tiðir i kirkíunni (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958, 369–370).
>
> There he also let Clement's church be built. The church was completed and ready by Christmas, so the king and the bishop thought that Christmas mass should be held there (My translation).

The year is 997.[11]

This paragraph is followed by an episode where the king engages in a swimming competition with the Icelander Kjartan Óláfsson, who is also mentioned by Snorri. Kjartan does not know that he is competing with the king himself and the king almost drowns his competitor, revealing his own identity after his victory. Subsequently, Kjartan and his kinsman Bolli Bollason, among others, attend the Christmas mass at the newly built St. Clement's church, just to see and hear how the Christians celebrate this holiday. They have stated earlier that they are not interested in accepting the Christian religion, but they hear the church bells and the beautiful singing and sense the sweet smell of incense. Not surprisingly, a bit later the two Icelanders are baptized by the king and become his men (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958, 370).

The story is thus not so unlike the one told by Snorri, except for the lack of the swimming competition in Snorri's account and the difference in when the episode happens: St. Michael's Mass in Snorri vs Christmas here. The main difference is of course that the church built by Óláfr Tryggvason is named as St. Clement's church here, while it is not named by Snorri.

To understand the meaning of this difference and the saga as a whole, we may look at the literary context of the text, i.e. the Benedictine milieu in the North of Iceland, and especially the monastery Þingeyrar, where writers such as Oddr Snorrason, Karl Jónsson, and Gunnlaugr Leifsson wrote. Most significant here is that Oddr wrote a saga about Óláfr Tryggvason in Latin, c. 1190, which served as one of many inspirations for the writing of *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Oddr's saga exists only in its Old Norse translation done shortly after it was written. Gunnlaugr made a revised version of Oddr's saga about Óláfr Tryggvason, which has survived only in translation and in fragments, some of which appear in manuscripts containing *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (Ólafur Halldórsson (ed.) III 2000, 57–58; 64–66; Grønlie 2017, 40–41). The latter text itself was prolifically copied in the same Benedictine context in the fourteenth century (Ólafur Halldórsson and Nielsen 1993; ONP 1989).

The works written by Oddr, Karl, and Gunnlaugr may also be read in the context of the contemporary struggles between the Church and secular power. Oddr's saga about Óláfr Tryggvason portrays him as a missionary king. Oddr creates a typological link between Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson by using baptismal imagery (Grønlie 2017, 43). In his prologue Oddr defines Óláfr Tryggvason as *fyrirrennari* (precursor) of Óláfr Haraldsson, just as John the Baptist was to Christ, although Oddr struggles with the former's lack of posthumous miracles, an essential criterion for a non-martyred saint (Grønlie 2017, 55). Gunnlaugr also changes the character of Óláfr Tryggvason from an exceptional hero to a penitent monk, who is much more torn between the secular and the ecclesiastical, which highlights even more the struggle between the two powers (Grønlie 2017, 45–46; Haki Antonsson 2012). Haki Antonsson (2018, 503) points out that Oddr configures St. Óláfr as Christ and foregrounds the double typology of Christ as the antitype of John the Baptist and of St. Óláfr as the antitype of Óláfr Tryggvason.

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[11] On the historical facts about King Óláfr Tryggvason's knowledge of St. Clement's cult from Kiev and England, see Crawford 2004.

The main position of the Benedictines in the North in the conflict between the Church and the secular power was against the Augustinians and their ideas for church reform, and in support of the king and the traditional aristocracy (Helgi Þórlaksson 2006). So, while the Augustinians, headed by Archbishop Eystein, promoted Óláfr Haraldsson as the ultimate ideal king, the Benedictine monks conversely promoted Óláfr Tryggvason as their apostle. For Oddr, Óláfr Tryggvason was even ‘postoli Norðmanna’ (the apostle of the Norwegians), as he had converted Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Orkney, the Faroes, and Shetland (Grønlie 2017, 50; Helgi Þórlaksson 2019, 66–67). It is thus not surprising that the building of St. Clement’s church in Niðaróss is attributed to Óláfr Tryggvason in a text such as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, which was starkly impacted by the writings and ideologies of authors such as Oddr Snorrason and others from the Benedictine environment that promoted the significance of Óláfr Tryggvason as a typological model for Óláfr Haraldsson.

Laxdœla saga

The third text we will look at — the Icelandic *Laxdœla saga* (mid-thirteenth century) — mentions that both kings had their churches.[12] In chapter 40, we hear the same story about Kjartan travelling to Niðaróss with a few other prominent Icelanders. The saga tells of the Icelanders’ decision not to adopt Christianity and about the swimming competition episode between Kjartan and King Óláfr Tryggvason. Kjartan and Bolli discuss the new religion, its value or lack thereof, and refuse to accept the new faith. They even plan to burn the king in his quarters. The king hears of this treacherous plan but decides to spare Kjartan’s life, after the latter is brave and honest enough to admit that he had made the plan. The king says to Kjartan:

> Farið nú í friði ok í griðum, hvert er þér vilið af þessum fundi; skal eigi pynda yðr til kristin at sinni, því at guð mælir svá, at hann vill, at engi komi nauðigr til hans (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 121).
>
> Leave this meeting then in peace and proceed in safety, whatever course you choose; no one will force you to adopt Christianity for the time being, for God has said that he wishes no man to be forced to turn to him (Kunz 1997, 61).

Kjartan is glad for the king’s kindness but sees through his attempt to tempt them to join the Christian community, by sparing their lives. He still declares that he refuses to accept the new faith. Nonetheless, the king recognizes that Kjartan’s faith is in his own strength and independence, and not in Thor and Odin, and is happy to wait for him to change his mind.

Next, the saga tells us that a church was built and the town was expanded. The church was completed by Christmas and Kjartan suggests to his men that they observe the service held by Christian men (ch. 40). Listening to the mass is a memorable experience for the Icelanders and they subsequently agree to be baptized and to become the king’s men, Kjartan being the king’s favorite. This is the same episode as in *Olafs saga Trygvasonar en mesta* and (to a certain degree) as in the saga about Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla*. In *Laxdœla saga*, the church, and the liturgy performed in it, are presented as the medium for the conversion of the skeptical Icelanders. The time when this happens is central too, as it is at Christmas, the birthday of Christ, that Kjartan, the most prominent and excellent of all Icelanders, is convinced to accept the Christian faith. In the rest of the saga, Kjartan is presented as an exceptional Christian, fasting as no one before in Iceland and being full of humility, love, and goodness even in the final scene of his life, when he refuses to fight against his kinsman Bolli, who kills him.

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[12] For the manuscripts of *Laxdœla saga*, see ONP p. 323. On its main manuscript, Möðruvallabók, see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2015; on the writership of the manuscript, see Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson 1994. See also https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0132 [last accessed 30 April 2020]. See also Table 1.

The other episode relevant for us comes later in the saga, when Þorkell Eyjólfsson, Guðrún's fourth husband, sails off to Niðaróss to obtain timber for a church he wants to build back home in Iceland, at Helgafell. In Niðaróss, he is welcomed by King Óláfr Haraldsson, who hosts Þorkell and his son Gellir during the winter and gives them many gifts. The saga relates that this same winter the king had a church built which was large and impressive and with well-crafted details. In the spring Þorkell asks the king to give him timber to build a church of his own, to which the king agrees. One morning the king has risen early and sees a man up on the church. He recognizes Þorkell, who is measuring the largest beams, the crossties, joists, and supports. The king asks him whether he plans to build a church of the same size and asks him to cut two ells off all beams, which will still give him the greatest church in Iceland. Þorkell answers that he does not plan to cut any length off the beams and that if the king refuses to give him the timber, he will get it elsewhere. The king answers:

> Bæði er, Þorkell, at þú ert mikils verðr, enda gerisk þú nú allstórr, því at víst er þat ofsi einum bóndasyni, at keppask við oss; en eigi er þat satt, at ek fyrirmuna þér viðarins, er þér verðr auðit at gera þar kirkju af, því at hon verðr eigi svá mikil, at þar muni of þitt allt inni liggja. En nær er þat mínu hugboði, at men hafi litla nytsemð viðar þessa, ok fari því firr, at þú getir gǫrt neitt mannvirki ór viðinu (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 217).
>
> You are man of great worth, and of no small ambition. Of course, it's absurd for a farmer's son to compete with us. But it is not true that I begrudge you the timber. If you should manage to build a church with it, it will never be so large as to contain your own conceit. But unless I am mistaken, people will have little use of the timber, and even less so will you be able to build any structure with it (Kunz 1997, 113–114).

Despite the king's astonishment and his comment, Þorkell obtains the timber and transports it to Hrutafjordur in Iceland. The next spring, on Maundy Thursday, he makes preparations to leave with the timber and to sail to Helgafell. The weather worsens, the wind increases, and a storm comes up, causing the drowning of Þorkell and all his men, and the washing ashore of all the timber. The saga says that this happens "four years before the fall of King Olaf the Saint" (Kunz 1997, 117), i.e. Easter of 1026.

As mentioned above, while *Laxdœla saga* does not mention the names of the two churches, the kings are not known to have built any other churches during their lifetimes, if we believe the literary sources. So could this be a reference to the building and rebuilding of St. Clement's Church?

The saga does not mention any rebuilding process, but the author creates a complex literary narrative with multiple connections between these two episodes, and between the two characters in focus, namely Kjartan Óláfsson and Þorkell Eyjólfsson. Drowning, and respectively surviving after a shipwreck, is a major literary tool in *Laxdœla saga*, aimed at alluding to Christian virtues and vices, Biblical and salvation history (Hamer 2014, ch. 1).

Kjartan is baptized on Christmas day, a day after he almost gets drowned by King Óláfr Tryggvason in a swimming competition. He dies on the Thursday after Easter, and it is explicitly mentioned that he observes a strict fast throughout Lent, as no one else before in

Iceland. The liturgy for that Thursday gives hope that one's faith would safeguard one's soul. The themes of the day's liturgy are the conversion of the nations and the rebirth out of the waters of baptism. Baptism and penance are described as complementary. The swimming competition episode, where King Óláfr almost drowns Kjartan — but does not — may be seen as pointing towards the later baptism of Kjartan by the king. Kjartan is baptized after the king's eloquent speech, or sermon, during the Christmas mass. This leads him to reconsider the value of the Christian faith, thus demonstrating his own humility and readiness to show piety. We have seen that the depiction of this same scene in the other texts is different from the scene in *Laxdœla saga* (Hamer 2014, 45–46), which may testify that "the author of *Laxdœla saga* had considerable expertise in religious literature, so that he was able fluently to transfer ideas from it into his own history" (Hamer 2014, 49).

Þorkell, on the other hand, dies on Maundy Thursday. This is the day of the Last Supper, the moment when Christ builds the Universal Church. Hamer argues that to a medieval audience the mentioning of King Óláfr's building of a church would have been symbolic of the building of the institution of the archbishopric in Niðaróss. So, while king Óláfr Haraldsson is building the institution of the Church of the entire North, Þorkell desires to build an equally large church in his homeland. Letting Þorkell drown on Maundy Thursday, the saga author juxtaposes and compares his haughtiness to Christ's establishment of the Universal Church and King Óláfr Haraldsson's establishment of the institution in the north (Hamer 2014, 37). Humility is a main quality in the Gospel for Maundy Thursday, Joh. xiii, 1–17, when Christ washes his disciples' feet and encourages them to follow his model of humility. Haughtiness and humility are qualities that are thematized in the passage of the saga. The king comments on Þorkell's pride and suggests that it is so great that it will never find room in a church. This is followed up later in the saga (ch. 76) when the ghosts of Þorkell and his men are seen outside the old church building in Helgafell after their drowning. They stand outside, water dripping off their clothes, and they are never allowed to enter.

Building up the saga and these two characters along this theological and liturgical timeline, clarifies the differences between them: Kjartan is almost drowned, but survives, while Þorkell drowns; Kjartan is proud, but demonstrates humility and penitence, while Þorkell does not and consequently loses his life. Kjartan is baptized on the second day of Christmas (dedicated to St. Stephen) and dies on the Thursday after Easter, the day of the conversion of the nations and the rebirth out of the waters of baptism. Þorkell dies on Maundy Thursday because of his haughty attempts to build a church as large as the one built by Óláfr Haraldsson.

The materiality and textuality of St. Clement's Church

So far, we have seen three different narratives about the building and usage of St. Clement's church. *Heimskringla* and *Laxdœla saga* mention that both kings had a church, the former mentioning that St. Clement's church was built by Óláfr Haraldsson. *Óláfr saga Trygvasonar en mesta* only tells the story of Óláfr Tryggvason and claims that he built St. Clement's church. The differences in attributions can be explained by means of the writers' cultural contexts and political affiliations: Snorri wrote in an environment which promoted St. Óláfr as a national saint, while *Óláfr saga Trygvasonar en mesta* was written in a milieu that promoted Óláfr Tryggvason. *Laxdœla saga* was concerned with Icelandic identity as part of salvation history, at least if Hamer's reading and interpretation are accepted. The comparison of these three texts only confirms that even when texts served as sources for the composition of other texts (as in our case), textual transmission in the Middle Ages was deeply characterized by variance, making it possible for one and the same story to be used in very different contexts and with different purposes.

Comparison of the analyzed literary material and the archeological data leads to three main conclusions. First, the dating of Church A, 1015–1022 corresponds very well to the time Snorri suggests that King Óláfr Haraldsson built his church. Snorri's explicit clarification — "where it [St. Clement's church] now stands" — may suggest that the church was still standing there when Snorri wrote his saga (which may be confirmed by the archaeology, see Table 1) and/or that a previous older church may have existed somewhere else earlier. Further, we know that at the time Snorri wrote *Heimskringla*, c. 1220–1230, there were indeed many other churches in Niðaróss, which makes such an explicit specification of the site of St. Clement's church necessary: the site had to be distinguished from a potentially previous site and from other existing churches.[13] The dating of Óláfr Haraldsson's church according to *Laxdœla saga*, a few years before Þorkell's death in 1026, also matches the dating, albeit more roughly.

Table 1. An overview of literary sources mentioning St. Clement's church, their dating, manuscripts, and correspondence to the archaeological layers.

The saga:	**Mentions a church from:**	**The saga is dated to:**	**The saga is preserved in mss from:**
Heimskringla	1015–1022 (contemporary to church A)	1220–30 (contemporary to church C?)	-14 c. mss with Norwegian connections (church E?) -17 c. copies of 13 c. mss
Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta	997 (not found, but possibly elsewhere)	beginning of 14th c. (contemporary to church E)	Northern Iceland: -Flateyjarbók, 1387–1395 -Bergsbók, c. 1400 -AM 61 fol., c. 1400–1499 (no church)
Laxdœla saga	997 and 1015–1022 (no church/ elsewhere and church A)	mid-13th c. (contemporary to church C/D)	Möðruvallabók, 1330–1370, Northern Iceland (church E?)

Second, the existence of an earlier church, built by Óláfr Tryggvason, as mentioned by all three texts, is also made plausible by the archaeology, as the postholes of Church A contained pieces of a destroyed and burnt baptismal font from another church which must have been situated elsewhere. Regrettably, none of the texts mention any explicit material connection between the two churches, nor do they mention any rebuilding of the church in wood. There is of course no way of knowing whether the pieces of this baptismal font may have belonged to the St. Clement's Church build by Óláfr Tryggvason in 997. C. Fr. Wisloff (1966–71, 82) has argued that a church built by Óláfr Tryggvason was supposedly destroyed by fire one year before Óláfr Haraldsson built his church in 1015–16. Of course, the historical reality at that time makes this hypothesis plausible. In the conflict between King Óláfr Tryggvason and his enemies, the Lade jarls, the town was burned several times. A church built by the king could easily have been destroyed and burned (Crawford 2004, 112).

Third, even though the literature mentions neither the *re*building of the churches nor their materiality, it creates connections between the two kings, their churches, and the churches' users in other ways. *Laxdœala saga* especially provides a literary fictionalization around the building of the two churches, one of which is clearly attested by the archaeology, while the other is made plausible. In the archaeology the two churches are directly related, while in the literature the typological link is created between the literary characters of the kings who built the churches and the Icelanders engaging with the two churches. The humility and good morals of Kjartan, who accepts his faith due to the mystery of the Christian mass in St. Clement's church, is contrasted to the haughtiness of Þorkell and his attempt to "copy" the physical manifestation of the Universal Church. The episode about Óláfr Haraldsson's church addresses explicitly the size of the church and its materiality. We remember that the size of the recently excavated Church A is not very large, only about 6 x 10 m, but that the size of the altar in churches C and D was slightly larger than that in church B. We do not know if the writer of *Laxdœla saga* had been in Niðaróss before he wrote the saga in the 1270s and if he had seen the existent church, maybe even its rebuilding, but the relatively small size of the church may perhaps have been a reason for omitting the actual name of the church in his literary fictionalization. Most significantly, in *Laxdœla saga*, he turns the church into a monument, 'a castle of the mind', alluding to the building of the Universal Church. Through his fiction he declares the impropriety of the idea of building a copy of the church elsewhere.

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[13] For a list and discussion of medieval churches in Niðaróss, see Christophersen 2020.

The ideas of cultural continuity and innovation, copying and "rebuilding processes" of various kinds thus emerge as important in both source groups. In the archaeological material, one church is built reusing a central element from another church in its fundament, and five churches are built literally on top of each other and in the same type of material, i.e. wood. In the literary material, continuity is achieved through the transmission of one and the same episode, though with variance, from one text to another and through typologies built between the historical and literary characters, the way they engage with their churches, and the course of their Christian lives, framed by the liturgical calendar, and thus by salvation history.

Physical and Literary "Castles of the Mind"

These results may be interpreted in several ways. First of all, it should mentioned that the rebuilding of the church in timber through the centuries may simply have been due to the lower costs of building in timber compared to building in stone, because of the easier and greater availability of the material (in Norway, but not in Iceland). Additionally, the fact that more people had the necessary expertise to build in timber, as opposed to stone, simply made it easier.[14] Of course, the Church and the royal institution began to proclaim their status and power by building extensively in stone already during the 1100s. Building in timber because of its lower costs does not, therefore, seem to be a reasonable explanation for the very particular history of the St. Clement's church.

Another possible explanation of the church's history may be found in the symbolic meaning of wood in medieval culture. In Christian theology, trees and wood are elements in some of the most central salvation motifs, such as the Ark of the Covenant, the Tree of Life, and the Cross, to mention only a few. All of these ultimately suggest that the material of the wood is absolutely central for and a main carrier of salvation symbolism. This was also well known in Norway, as attested by numerous texts that thematize these topics, such as *The Old Norse Homily Book* (on the symbolism of the Cross), *Barlaams saga* (on the symbolism of the Tree of Life), and even the above-discussed *Laxdœla saga* (on the symbolism of the Ark). This explanation is relevant for understanding why the church may have been rebuilt in wood over the centuries, but adds no extra insight about the meaning of the reusage of a piece of a broken and burnt baptismal font from an even older church in the oldest church on the site — nor is this explanation relevant for understanding the literary typologies and their link to the archaeological continuity. To understand this, we need to search into other aspects of medieval culture.

In the Middle Ages, typology was a main mode of conceptualizing continuity and innovation, which was based mainly on the dominant Christian mindset, on biblical history, and on the relationship between the Old and the New Testament and biblical exegesis.[15] The main typological couples are Adam and Christ, and Eve and the Virgin Mary. As their examples indicate, typology consists of both similarities and inversion, and inversion is possible only when the two elements share common characteristics (Haki Antonsson 2018b, 503). Adam is tempted by the Devil; Christ withstood temptation. Adam leads mankind out of Paradise; Christ leads them back to salvation. Eve commits a sin, but Mary is free from sin. Both elements of the typology are, however, central to the history of humankind — we need both Adam and Christ and Eve and the Virgin Mary in order to constitute the story of the Fall and the new chance for salvation offered to humanity. Thus, both similarity and contrast/ disruption are necessary elements for "proper" cultural continuity in the Middle Ages.[16]

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[14] For a detailed discussion of the costs of building of churches in stone vs timber in medieval Norway, see Stige 2016.

Medieval attitudes to cultural continuity may be seen in relation to Hans U. Gumbrecht's classification of medieval culture as a presence culture (as opposed to a meaning culture) (2010, 39). Presence cultures, according to Gumbrecht, are obsessed with the possible loss or erosion of knowledge, because in such cultures knowledge is considered to be something that is revealed. Human existence and thought are understood as a part of pre-existing cosmological structures, and continuity of, or typological building upon, such preexistent structures (and even cyclical patterns) were thus central in medieval culture (Gumbrecht 2010, 39–40).

The centrality of typology and its dual nature, i.e. comprising both similarity and change, are discussed extensively in medieval studies, based on many source-groups. Archaeological and architectural evidence suggests that copying and cultural continuation in the Middle Ages was based on the fragmentation and reuse of something old in the production of something new, or the combination of old and new in new ways (Krautheimer 1942).[17] The same may be said about medieval textual composition and translations, as we have also seen in our case-study, which was tightly connected to the academic traditions of grammar and rhetoric (Copeland 1990). Art-historical material has also been interpreted to indicate that material destruction was a central and complementary process to material and ideological creation in medieval culture (Kumler 2019). This is due to the "economy of salvation" in Christian culture: just as Jesus's physical body had to be brutally harmed for him to resurrect, so does human salvation necessitate moral and spiritual improvement, which may often demand physical offerings, such as fasting, manual labor, and self-denial and ascetism. "Newness" in medieval material, literary, scientific, and religious discourses was thus characterized by an ethical ambivalence and symbolic blending between the old and the new (Ingham 2015).

The analysis of the newly excavated St. Clement's church in Trondheim and the literary representations of the same church, suggest that the ideology of rebuilding, copying, and innovating also conditioned the creation of cultural continuity in medieval Norway and Iceland. Materially, this was done through the destroying and rebuilding of physical buildings, and literarily by the creation of typologically linked characters in literature and blending old narratives in new textual contexts. The rebuilding of the church in the strongly symbolic material wood for over two and half centuries testifies to its importance for the town, its inhabitants, and the Church. The literary depictions of the church confirm this through the typological connections between the literary characters engaging with the church and the symbolism of the church, seen in relation to the Christian liturgy and mentality. The material evidence and literary descriptions of the church turn it into ‘a castle of the mind’, or a symbol of the ideology and cultural continuity in medieval Norway.

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[15] For a study of the Bible as a result — or even a state — of a literary and scholarly transition process, see Smalley 2006.

[16] Many have written about the fact that typology was a known cultural tool in the Nordic contexts too, see Haki Antonsson 2018b, 503; Antonsson 2018a.

[17] This may be seen as parallel to similar ritual practices earlier, such as the burying of gold foil amulets (*gullgubber*) in the pillar sockets of chieftain halls and other major domestic buildings; for discussion and references, see Eriksen 2019. A relevant and potentially comparable site is the Iron Age cult-site at Uppåkra, Sweden, but such comparison falls outside the scope of this article. For more information on Uppåkra, see https://www.medieval.eu/uppakra-a-central-place-in-sweden-from-the-first-millenium/.

A final implication of this comparison concerns the relevance of interdisciplinary method in medieval studies and environmental history in general. Direct links between archaeology and literature are often difficult to prove, and the comparison in this article has confirmed that. However, comparison between the ideological premises for the creation of material and textual culture in the Middle Ages, as has been done in this article, increases our insight into medieval attitudes towards the link between nature, natural resources, and their practical and symbolic value on the one hand, and culture and cultural continuity on the other. The article has demonstrated that nature and its very materiality is a central inseparable part of culture and cultural statements: nature is a vehicle for culture, and cultural continuation is impossible without nature and its resources. Such results foreground the essentiality of interdisciplinarity when conducting both medieval cultural and environmental studies.

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