

The Establishment of Niðaróss

The Nexus between Urban, Environmental, Political, and Salvation History

Introduction

The study of urban cultures and urbanity is increasingly seen as a central and integrated topic for the study of environmental history, as urban contexts are inevitably linked to, formed by, and in turn forming the environmental context within which they are created.¹ This was already the case in the Middle Ages, since medieval towns were some of the earliest social institutions that left distinct ‘ecological footprints’, as they were dependent on the intensified exchange of energy (food, water, fuel, people), material (wood, stone, raw material), and waste with the surrounding ecosystems.² Some of these topics are also commented on in archaeological and historical studies of towns in medieval Norway.³ However, even archaeologists, such as for example Axel Christophersen, have recently acknowledged the need for better knowledge of medieval nature–culture ontologies as represented in literary and other textual sources, in order to thoroughly understand the historical realities of the interplay between nature and culture in medieval towns.⁴

Even though in ecocritical literary studies, the long-dominant focus has been on the pastoral, as opposed to the civilized/urban environments, which assumes a fundamental opposition of the rural and the urban,⁵ the ecology of the city is increas-

1 Haumann and others, *Concepts of Urban Environmental History*.

2 Hoffman, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, pp. 41–42, 227–40; Magnusson, ‘Medieval Urban Environmental History’.

3 Helle, *Norsk byhistorie*; on Oslo, see Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*; on Trondheim, Christophersen, *Under Trondheim*; on Bergen, Hansen, *Bergen c. 800–1170*.

4 Christophersen, ‘Medieval Urban Environment’.

5 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*; Gifford, *Pastoral*.

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ingly being examined in literary studies, film studies, and narratology.⁶ Ecocritical studies of Old Norse literature form an up-and-coming field, as demonstrated by the present book, but the existing studies mostly elucidate the aesthetics and ideology in Old Norse literary renderings of nature and its elements, without seeing them in connection to urbanity and urban culture.⁷ Most of these studies focus on the Icelandic conditions, but there are also some studies of Norwegian sources and contexts. Nicolas Meylan, for example, sees the adventures of King Sverrir and his men in the wilderness, in *Sverris saga*, as ideological tools to legitimize Sverrir's rule.⁸ He shows that marginal areas and landscapes are central for Sverrir's story, such as his period as a cleric in the Faroe Islands, or his travels through the forests of Sweden (ch. 12) or the marches of Norway (ch. 14).⁹ Further, Meylan argues that the king is represented as having a personal relationship to his land and that he is helped and assisted by it, which may be seen as alluding to both local Nordic and pan-European ideologies.¹⁰ He also points out that the link between the king and the land functions on an ideological level, even though the landscapes are not biblical or hagiographical: 'the forests, the snow, the brooks, the lakes are all too present [...] and emphatically Scandinavian.'¹¹ It is thus demonstrated that even seemingly realistic descriptions of landscapes may be interpreted as serving an ideological purpose, at least in the case of *Sverris saga*.

Studies of urbanization and urban culture, on the other hand, form a separate and independent thematic cluster in Old Norse studies. The literary and symbolic representation of historic urban sites in east Scandinavia is, for example, the focus of an ongoing research project, funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, but the

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- 6 See for example the work of Ursula K. Heise, 'Mapping Urban Nature and Multispecies Storyworlds'; Heise and Christensen, 'BioCities'. See also Adamson and others, 'Introduction', who suggest a similar definition of the environment, namely one that includes urban spaces.
- 7 Abram, *Evergreen Ash*; Egeler, ed., *Landscape and Myth in North-Western Europe*; Lethbridge, 'The Icelandic Sagas and Saga Landscapes'; Leslie-Jacobsen, 'The Ecology of "Eddic" and "Skaldic" Poetry'; Hennig, 'Environmental Scarcity and Abundance'. There are a couple of studies that investigate the link between nature and society in Norwegian sources, but this is not discussed in connection to ideas and metaphors of urbanity, see Bagge, 'Nature and Society in the King's Mirror'; Cole, 'The Political Symbolism of Ants and Bees'; see also Dybdahl, *Klima, uår og kriser i Norge*.
- 8 Meylan, 'King Sverrir's Mythic Landscapes'. For other interpretations of these episodes in *Sverris saga*, see Bandlien, 'Hegemonic Memory'; Ármann Jakobsson, 'King Sverrir of Norway'.
- 9 It is relevant to point out that King Sverrir's movement through the wilderness and his struggle for royal legitimacy culminates in the built urban context of Niðaróss. This is acknowledged by Meylan, but he does not make a substantial point out of it. The king takes his title precisely in Niðaróss — the town's people ring the church's bells for the king and walk in procession towards him. Öretinget is summoned and people from all districts acclaim him a king, after the ancient land's law.
- 10 On the use of this motif in *Skáldskaparmál*, see Frank, 'The Lay of the Land in Skaldic Poetry'. This is also a central element in the pagan *hieros gamos* myth, as depicted by Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup*.
- 11 Meylan, 'King Sverrir's Mythic Landscapes', p. 188. In a similar way, Hennig shows that an instrumental (i.e. realistic) and aesthetic (i.e. ideological) view of nature are not mutually exclusive in the sagas of Icelanders: 'It is precisely through the function of elements of nature as resources that in many cases a more-than-material, mythical, or religious level of meaning is added to the respective text passages.' Hennig, 'Aesthetic Appreciation', p. 59.

environmental perspective is not taken into consideration there.¹² As previously mentioned, historians and archaeologists are also interested in the literary representations of medieval towns in Old Norse literature, but in such studies, literary texts are approached as historical sources.¹³

One very recent exception to this tendency to study the natural and cultural elements of a town separately is a book on literary representations and material manifestations of Jerusalem in medieval Scandinavia.¹⁴ The main perspective of the book is not ecocritical, but the editors point out that the link between nature and urban culture is central to medieval theology and ontology: ‘The narrative of salvation history unfolds between a rural and an urban vision of Paradise.’¹⁵ The end of salvation history is, on the other hand, set in a city, in a societal, cultural, architectural structure, which is both political and theological. The promise of the heavenly Jerusalem is a core element in Christian thought and learning. Jerusalem is a *topos* that is meaningful on several levels: allegorically, it signifies the Christian Church; eschatologically, it signifies the heavenly city, where humanity is destined to reach; morally, it represents the individual Christian soul.¹⁶ As this code of Jerusalem unfolds in time and space, it becomes a storyworld — it is part of a narrative, but it also defines the limits of a narrative. Such a storyworld necessitates the construction of typologies, that comprise similarities and contrasts, between natural/rural and urban/cultural/built elements, all of which are essential for the conceptualization of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem.

Another important point demonstrated in the book is that in the Christian tradition, the heavenly Jerusalem is often represented in female terms, as the *mother* (Matt 23. 37; Luke 13. 34), the *daughter* of Zion (Isa 62. 11), or as the *bride* of God (Rev 21. 2).¹⁷ At the same time, the earthly Jerusalem is defined as ‘the city of the great king’, i.e. the living God (Matt 5. 35). The heavenly and earthly Jerusalem, or nature and cultural/built environment, are thus intertwined in the same way as the female (mother, daughter, and bride) and the male roles (son, father, and groom), and fertility and abundance is a major element of that *topos*. The significance of the nature–urban culture symbiosis is thus a major element of Christian ontology, that is realized through numerous metaphors and symbols.

In my own chapter in this anthology, I show how descriptions of Jerusalem, and of travel to Jerusalem, as for example in the Old Norse itinerary *Leiðarvísir*, were intended to be read together with allegorical stories about journeys to Paradise

12 The project is called ‘Modes of Modifications (MoMod, 2017–2025)’, financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond and led by Karl G. Johanson, University of Oslo, which includes sub-projects on urban literary culture in eastern and southern Scandinavia, executed by Jonatan Pettersson, University of Stockholm.

13 See n. 3.

14 Aavitsland and Bonde, eds, *Tracing the Jerusalem Code*. See especially Ekroll, ‘St Olav, Nidaros, and Jerusalem’, who studies the allegorical meaning of the architectural development of medieval Niðaróss.

15 Aavitsland and others, ‘Prelude’, p. 5.

16 Aavitsland and others, ‘Prelude’, p. 6.

17 Cited from Aavitsland and others, ‘Prelude’, p. 4.

or the Heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁸ The common element between these descriptions of physical and cognitive/imagined travel is that they combine the movement through rural landscapes and the arrival in built, architectural, 'urban' contexts.¹⁹ The journey is not just the means to the end destination but is rather an integrated and essential element of the destination, which ultimately is heavenly salvation.

Even though the book on the Jerusalem code exemplifies an impressive variety of ways in which this central message was communicated in Old Norse literary and material sources, the book does not discuss the implications of this richness for our understanding of medieval nature–culture ontologies. Bearing in mind the centrality of the natural–urban axis in medieval thought, the main aim of this chapter is to investigate whether this natural–urban axis was also significant for the literary conceptualization of actual urbanization and urban history in Old Norse sources. My working hypothesis is that the interplay between natural landscapes and urbanity were so central to medieval thought that it had a twofold impact. It shaped the idea of Paradise and the Heavenly Jerusalem, and also it was actively used to explain medieval urbanization and its central role for the socio-political history of medieval Norway, as well as for the salvation history of the whole nation.

In this chapter, the focus will be on Niðaróss, the most significant religious and political urban centre in Norwegian history. More specifically, I will study the literary representation of Niðaróss in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, as this compilation of kings' sagas tells us both about the very establishment of the town in its natural environment, as well as about the development of the town's role through history.²⁰ Even though the town is mentioned in many sagas, the most relevant two are the sagas about King Óláfr Tryggvason and King Óláfr Haraldsson, who are the two kings who are most directly connected with the founding and establishment of the town. The former managed to Christianize the district, but only temporarily, while the latter not only completed the Christianization of the area and the whole of Norway, but he was also acclaimed a national saint, with his cult starting in his own town church dedicated to St Clement in Niðaróss.²¹ The two sagas will be read as separate stories with their own respective narrative structures, but also as parts of Snorri's grander narrative about the Norwegian kingdom.

The two sagas will be read on three levels and the main questions that I will investigate on each level are respectively:

- **The urban environment:** How is Niðaróss described? What happens in the town? How is the built environment in the town described? What activities take

18 Eriksen, 'Physical and Spiritual Travel across the Christian Storyworld'.

19 Other articles in the anthology investigate the role of the natural landscape for the representation of Jerusalem, see for example Bandlien, 'Jerusalem and the Christianization of Norway', and Males, 'Imagining the Holy Land in the Old Norse World'.

20 The Old Norse version of the texts are cited from Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, I and II, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, while the English translation is based on Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, I and II, trans. by Finlay and Faulkes.

21 For a detailed survey of the literary representation of St Clement's church and its attribution to various kings in various Old Norse Sources, see Eriksen, 'Castles of the Mind in Old Norse Culture'.

place there, and who are the agents that are responsible for the formation of the urban environment?

- **The urban–rural continuum:** What narrative function does the town have, as opposed to its rural/natural surroundings? How does the story proceed from the rural to the urban, and back, and which episodes take place in the rural vs the urban context?
- **Urbanization as a symbol of salvation:** What is the symbolic significance of the town and of its natural/rural surroundings, and of the interconnections between these?

Even though the urbanization process Snorri writes about takes place in the tenth/eleventh centuries, the results of this investigation will be interpreted within the cultural and political context of thirteenth-century Norway and Iceland, because this is when the sagas were written. The results will be compared to other analyses of rural and urban contexts in contemporaneous Old Norse texts. This survey will give us a better understanding of the meaning of the literary descriptions of Niðaróss in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, as seen in juxtaposition to its natural environment, and will thus expand the ecocritical literary approach in Old Norse studies, by including urbanity in the environmental equation. This study will also increase our insight into how people thought of the symbiosis between nature and culture in thirteenth-century Old Norse society. Further, the investigation will clarify what literary studies can offer and add to archaeological and historical studies of medieval urban culture and environmental history.²²

The Story of Niðaróss in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (ÓsT)*

The Urban Environment

Niðaróss is first mentioned in *ÓsT* (ch. 65) as a town in the area of Þrándheimr, where the king gathers his forces. Chapter 70 mentions that the king makes a royal site out of Niðaróss:

Þá lét hann reisa þar hús á Niðarbakka ok skipaði svá, at þar skyldi vera kaupstaðr, gaf monnum þar toptir til at gera sér hús, en hann lét gera konungsgarð upp frá Skipakrók. Lét hann þannug flytja um haustit öll fong þau, er þurfti til vetrsetu, ok hafði hann þar allmikil fjölmenni.²³

(Then he had buildings put up on Niðarbakki and planned it so that there should be a market town there, giving people sites to build themselves houses there, and he had his palace built up above Skipakrókr. He had all the supplies

22 However, the explicit comparison between the 'real' town and the represented town, i.e. a comparison between archaeological, historical, and literary sources, falls outside the scope of this article.

23 *ÓsT*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 318.

that were needed for winter residence there transported there in the autumn, and he kept a very large number of people there.)²⁴

This short description reveals that the town was the site of a royal palace, that other buildings were built around it, and that resources were brought to the town for the king and his people and exchanged at the market.

In the subsequent narratives, the town is mentioned many more times. This is the site where many men come to visit the king, which very often encompasses an attempt, by the king, to baptize his guests. His rhetorical methods are sometimes convincing, and other times not, as is for example the case with heathens such as Hárekr (ch. 75), Haukr and Sigurðr, or Eyvindr the Lapp. One well-known example of the town being represented as the site of successful missionary work is when the prominent Icelanders Kjartan Ólafson and others (Halldórr Guðmundarson, Kolbeinn, etc.) arrive in Niðaróss (ch. 81). They are initially sceptical about accepting the new faith, and attempt to sail away with their ship, but are stopped by unfavourable winds. But when the king celebrates Michael's Mass, the Icelanders Kjartan and Bolli are so enchanted by it that they accept Christianity and become the king's men.

The king's presence in town turns it thus not only into a royal site, but also a site with important religious and social functions. In the latter episode, we see that various natural powers (the wind) and cultural energies (the celebration of the Mass) turn the town into a strong centre for spreading the Christian religion. However, little else is said about the dynamics between the town and its natural environment, except for mentions of the market, where resources from the rural environment must have been exchanged.

The king not only tries to baptize people who come to him in Niðaróss, but it is also from Niðaróss that he initiates various missionary activities. He sends Þangbrandr to Christianize Iceland (ch. 73). This first attempt is only partially successful and in chapter 95, it is mentioned that the king sends men to Christianize Iceland again, namely Gizurr hvíti, Hjalti Skeggjason, and the priest Þormóðr. This time they bring the new religion to the Alþingi and it is accepted in the law. The king also orders Leifr Eiríksson to Greenland to preach Christianity there (ch. 96). It is also in Niðaróss that the king himself builds the famous ship *Traninn*, to which we will return below, with which he sails to Hálogaland to baptize people there (ch. 77).

Sometimes, Niðaróss is also the site of specific events. One winter, when King Óláfr and his queen, Þyri, stay in town, we hear that the queen is unhappy there. She had previously escaped from Vinðland, where she had to be married to a heathen man. She had fled into the forests and travelled swiftly without stopping until she arrived in Niðaróss, where the king had listened to her, and taken her as his wife. However, the queen now mourns the loss of all her property in Vinðland and urges the king to get it back for her. To please her, the king gets her a big angelica at the market one day. She is not impressed and accuses him of not daring to meet her

24 *Heimskringla*, I, p. 198.

brother King Sveinn in Denmark and fight for her property. She declares that he is not as brave as Haraldr Gormsson who gained possession of everything and got his dues and taxes.

This leads the king to summon an assembly in the town; he announces that he is taking a levy abroad in the summer, and demands a contribution from all the men in every district, in the form of troops and ships (ch. 93). The king himself is leading the ship Ormr inn langi and selects the best men to be on his ship. Traninn is a part of the expedition too, together with eleven other large ships and other smaller ships. Once again, the town is a starting point for a major political and religious mission, caused by an interaction between the king and his queen there.

As we know, King Óláfr Tryggvason is unsuccessful on this expedition, as he is ambushed into fighting against the coalition of the Danish king, Sveinn, the Swedish king, Óláfr, and the Norwegian earl, Eiríkr Hákonarson. The king fights to the end on Ormr inn langi, but at the end escapes by diving into the water.²⁵ This episode leaves two possible options — that he survives but withdraws, giving up his mission, or that he loses his life in this highly symbolic manner. After this, King Óláfr never comes back to power and Norway is divided between the three enemies. It is said that even though Earl Eiríkr and his son had adopted Christianity, they continued observing their old customs and were good and popular rulers (chs 97–98).

The Urban–Rural Continuum

So far, we have seen that King Óláfr Tryggvason founded Niðaróss, that the town was the site where many converted to Christianity but was also the starting point for many missionary journeys. In order to fully understand the role and symbolism of the town, we have to study its narrative role in the saga as a whole. What leads to the founding of the town and what is the role of the town in the king's later travels?

When King Óláfr first becomes king, he spends his summer in Vík, and he sets himself a target of Christianizing all of Norway or dying in the attempt. He starts his mission, travelling all over the country and baptizing people; those who refuse to accept the new faith are punished, maimed, or killed. The king is successful in many areas, such as Agðir and Hǫrðaland, Sygnir, Firðir, Sunnmœrir, Raumdœlir, and Ringaríki (ch. 60).

In a few places, he meets more resistance. In Rogaland, the king meets the people at the *þing*, and when the heathen chieftains try to argue against the king, their ability to talk is obstructed in some miraculous way and thus everyone at the assembly is baptized (ch. 58). At Norð-Mœrr and Hlaðir, the king knocks down a temple and the idol of the pagan god, steals a golden ring from the temple's door and burns it. The king plans to continue north, but he hears that in Hálogaland, there is an army gathered which is ready to fight him, so he turns south and goes back to Staðr and east to Vík.

25 On the symbolic significance of swimming, drowning, and baptism, see Hamer, '*Njáls saga*' and its *Christian Background*, ch. 1, pp. 1–20.

Two other towns are mentioned. In Konungahella, the king meets Queen Sigríðr (ch. 61) and their meeting turns into a violent episode when he refuses to marry her since she is ‘heathen as a dog’. From there, he travels to Túnsberg (ch. 62) and holds an assembly where he proclaims that everyone who engages with witchcraft and sorcery must leave the country.²⁶ He meets the sorcerer Eyvindr kelda (Bog) and tries to kill him, but the latter escapes.

The king’s residence at Qgvaldsnes in Kqrmt is another important central site (ch. 63). Two important episodes happen there. First, Eyvindr kelda and his men try to approach the residence by working their magic and creating fog and darkness which prevents the king’s men from seeing their ship. But then the thick fog that they had created by magic turns towards them, preventing them from seeing. The king’s men capture them and later on they are tied up on a reef which is covered at high water and they lose their lives there. Second, the king gets a visit by an old man, who has one eye, is a clever talker, and knows many stories about all lands (ch. 64). The king and the man talk all night, even though the bishop advises the king to sleep. The man tells him about old chieftains who used to worship their cows, who are buried in the grave-mounds around and many other stories. At the end the man leaves a thick piece of meat for the king, and the king knows that this must have been Óðinn and orders the food to be thrown out.

So far, we see the king travelling through the land and the main agency is that of the king on his mission, which is often assisted by favourable natural conditions. It is after these successes over heathen powers all over the east, south, and west of Norway, that the king gathers his forces and heads towards the district of Þrándheimr, and more specifically towards Niðaróss (ch. 65). He summons people from the area to an assembly at Frosta, but the farmers immediately start preparing for an armed conflict; they meet up at the assembly fully armed. The king invites the people to adopt Christianity, but they refuse and threaten to treat him the same way as they treated Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri. The king is very open to a dialogue, so he agrees to join them at their rituals and to see what they are all about. What follows is the famous midsummer festival at Mærin, where the king destroys Þórr’s statue, demonstrating how powerless the heathen god is, and kills the farmers’ chieftain Járnkeggi. After that the king travels around in the district of Þrándheimr and everyone accepts the new religion (ch. 69).

When in the next chapter (ch. 70), we hear about the founding of the town, this background story reveals that a main function of the town is for the king to be, or to have his own site, in close proximity to the rebellious heathen farmers, so that they can feel his presence and his power as a Christian king. The stories about the missionary activity all over the land culminate with the king’s arrival in the Þrándheimr area and the establishment of Niðaróss. The founding of the town appears as a powerful manifestation of the king’s Christian power and energy. The town becomes the physical anchor of the mental process that is to be triggered by the missionary activity. Knowing the background story for the establishment of the

²⁶ *Heimskringla*, II, pp. 193–94.

town turns the few details that are mentioned about the town itself (the building of the royal palace, his men's living quarters, and the marketplace) into the tip of the iceberg, which is formed by Óláfr Tryggvason's missionary activity all over the land.

Once the town is established, it continues functioning as the stronghold of Christian power, and as already mentioned many people accept the new religion in the town itself, and new missionary activity is initiated from the town. An appropriate example is the king's trip to Hálogaland. On the shore of Hálogaland, the king meets Rauðr who is described as a great pagan and sorcerer. He is known to always have a favourable wind wherever he sails, which he achieves with the help of magic. When the king sails in the fjord to visit Rauðr, the king's ship is met by bad weather, and they are forced to wait for a week (ch. 79). Outside the fjord the weather is fine. The king returns back to the same site later and the weather becomes bad again. Bishop Sigurðr takes the case in hand and promises to address God for help with this 'fjándakraft' (devilish power).²⁷ Bishop Sigurðr gets out all his Mass vestments, lights candles and incense, sets a crucifix up on the prow of Traninn, reads from the Gospel and says many other prayers, and sprinkles holy water all over the ship. This turns the ship into a Christian oasis that manages to penetrate the storm that protects the shore and that is maintained by pagan sorcery. All the king's ships follow Traninn and manage to traverse the bad weather and reach the shore, where they invite people to take the Christian religion and those who do not want to take up Christianity (including Rauðr) are killed.

This example shows that when the king ventures out of his town, his Christian stronghold, he often comes to areas and places that are governed by other energies, which cause bad weather, thick fogs, and difficult conditions. With the help of his bishop, who turns the ship into a temporary church-like structure, the king and his troops get the support of the Christian God and manage to break down the pagan defences and gain control over new areas and souls.

Urbanization as a Symbol of Salvation

The story about the establishment of Niðaróss in *ÓsT* thus conforms well to the main Christian narrative, according to which, salvation history unfolds between a rural and an urban context, and Jerusalem, with its cultural and architectural structures, represents the theological summit of the Christian storyworld. In a similar way, we have seen that King Óláfr Tryggvason meanders his way through the whole land and its cultural and natural environments, he fights against sorcerers and pagan energies, but always emerges successful from these encounters. On all occasions, this happens with the help of the Christian God who brings lightness and disperses fogs and storms. A few of the central places where the king meets these pagan energies are represented as cultural, built, or even urban environments, such as Qgvaldsnes, Konungahella, or Túnsberg. But these places are not described in any detail and the ultimate final stop for the king's missionary activities all over the lands is the town

27 *ÓsT*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 326; *Heimskringla*, 1, p. 203.

of Niðaróss. This is his main Christian stronghold, from where he can execute his mandate as the representative of God and continue baptizing his people, in the town itself, as well as in far-away peripheral areas.

The king's travels through the land not only lead to the establishment of his urban royal stronghold in Niðaróss, but during these travels, we see that the king has a special relationship with and control over the natural environment. This link is not necessarily represented in male–female terms, as is common in the Christian narrative, but it still symbolizes that the Norwegian king, with his special ability to control his natural environment, also from his urban stronghold, was part of the Christian storyworld. The king needs thus both nature and urban/built culture to achieve his mandate and realize his main role.

Examples of how King Óláfr uses various natural elements to proclaim his message may be seen in the episode when he captures Ástriðr's hawk, plucks off all of its feathers, before sending it to her, which leads to Ástriðr accepting the new faith (ch. 57). In Christian thought, the hawk (or the falcon) could be seen as a symbol of the all-seeing and wise God and the hawk shedding its old feathers could symbolize regeneration, the casting off of old habits, and the acceptance of the Christian faith,²⁸ which is a perfect explanation for this scene in the saga. Another natural element that is used symbolically in a couple of episodes is the flower angelica. First, an angelica stalk pipe (*hvannnjólatrumba*) is put down the throat of the sorcerer Rauðr,²⁹ in order to make him change his faith (ch. 80). The second time angelica is mentioned is when the king obtains the flower (*hvannnjóli*) at the market at Niðaróss for his queen Þyri (ch. 92). Angelica, derived from the Latin *angelicus*, meaning 'angelic', is symbolic of the coming of the angel, the communication of the Christian message, and in both episodes, the angelica is literally used as a medium to transmit the Christian message and the king's power.³⁰

King Óláfr Tryggvason uses not only natural, but also other cultural/built elements in his mission to Christianize the pagans and his representation of God. The main built element that is embedded with strong symbolism is the ship. Even though the ships in the saga are built/cultural elements, they have names and qualities that are highly symbolic of nature and its elements. Chapter 72 retells of the building of the ship *Traninn*, in which the king travels to Hálogaland and baptizes people with great success. It is explicitly said that the king builds a great longship on the sandbanks by the Nið, with thirty rowing benches, high at stem and stern and not of great capacity. As we know that the town is the site of many baptisms, the ship itself may be seen to be invested with the same powers and agency of the Christian God. This is especially clear in the scene when Bishop Sigurðr turns the ship into a religious space in chapter 80. The way the ship, assisted by God, finds

28 On falcons, see Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, p. 18.

29 The saga adds that some say that the king put his trumpet down his throat.

30 For a more detailed discussion of the physical qualities of the plant angelica through history, see Teixitor-Toneu and others, 'Sweetness beyond Desserts'. For a discussion of the significance of *hvann*, as in *Hvannadalur*, a valley in northern Iceland, see Egeler, 'Landscape Meditation on Death'.

a channel of good weather through the devilish storm around, may be seen as a biblical/Old Testament reference from the Book of Exodus to Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea. Further, the name *Traninn*, signifying a crane, is a Christian symbol for guarding and protection, which perfectly suits the function of the ship in this very episode.³¹ Ships, or arks, have deep Christian connotations as the vessel that leads to the salvation of the soul, and are common elements in Old Norse literature, in art, and even in church interiors.³² On the other hand, the ship of the sorcerer *Rauðr* has the symbol of a dragon or a snake, which is a typical pre-Christian pagan or devilish symbol. When the king gets control of this ship, he calls it *Ormr in skammi* (The Short Serpent). Later on, the king builds another, larger fantastic ship after the same model, and calls it *Ormr inn langi* (The Long Serpent) (ch. 88). The way the ship is described transforms it into the king's ark, into the king's (and thus God's) extension, a main tool to baptize new souls and spread God's word. In *Snorri's ÓsT*, the ships originate from and are anchored at the king's urban stronghold, Niðaróss, but they are essential and truly indispensable for his travel in and through the natural environment, and the conquering of new contexts and the souls populating them. It is thus the constant symbiosis between the urban/built, on the one hand, and the natural/wild, on the other, that emerges as the most starkly symbolic element that turns *Snorri's* story about the establishment of Niðaróss into a story about the Christianization and the salvation of the land and its people.

Niðaróss in *Óláfs saga Helga* (ÓsH)

The Urban Environment

Even though we have extrapolated a clear historical, narrative, and symbolic image for Niðaróss from *ÓsT*, the history of the town continues to evolve in *ÓsH*, where it is further consolidated. The first time we hear about Niðaróss in *ÓsH*, it is briefly described as a place belonging to the enemies of King Óláfr Haraldsson. While his enemies sail out of the fjord, the ship of King Óláfr is rowed in. The saga adds that the weather was calm (ch. 41).

The king gathers his Yule provisions and heads towards Niðaróss (ch. 42). The narrator reminds us that Óláfr Tryggvason had had a marketplace set up there, 'sem fyrr var ritit' (as was written above),³³ but the buildings that King Óláfr Tryggvason had built during his time 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 straight away starts to fix and renovate the standing

31 Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, p. 14; Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, pp. 168–69.

32 On the imagery and symbolism of the ship/the ark in Old Norse literature, see Hamer, 'Njáls saga' and its Christian Background, ch. 1, pp. 1–20.

33 *ÓsH*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 53; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 32.

buildings and to rebuild those that had collapsed. He has many men with him and all the necessary provisions for his stay there for Yule.

We hear about the area of Þrándheimr and Niðaróss once again after the important battle of Nesja, where King Óláfr Haraldsson defeats the pagan earls and now knows that he cannot trust them. In chapter 53, the king is accepted at all the assemblies in Vík but he hurries up north to Þrándheimr, as the most important part of the country is there, and he plans to get it under his control, while Earl Sveinn is abroad. He is accepted as a king in the area and establishes himself in Niðaróss. Snorri tells us that the king builds a royal palace and St Clement's church, 'sem nú stendr hon' (where it still stands).³⁴ He gives land to his men to build dwellings. He stays in the town with many men, as protection against the disloyal pagans. The king is soon after accepted as a king in the area (ch. 56), he is established in the town and uses it as a main site and the starting point for his activities.

We have a few interesting details about some of the buildings built by the king. The royal palace, for example, has doorways at both ends (ch. 57). The high seat is in the middle of the hall and the king has Bishop Grímkell, other clerics, and councillors sitting next to him. The king is visited by many important men, and they drink ale; he appoints men to offices, and he establishes salaries and rules. He has housecarls and many servants; the king's followers sleep in the residence too. The king has a large room where he holds his meetings. Such descriptions give us an idea of the physical buildings that constitute the town, and especially the town as a royal site, but little is said about the nature and the natural environment in and around the town.

We learn more about the king's morning rituals and everyday duties in his urban residence (ch. 58). He rises early, gets dressed, and washes his hands; he goes to his church and hears morning prayers and matins. He has meetings with people, settles disputes, makes announcements. He summons the wise people around him; he listens to law recitals and makes new laws; he establishes Christian laws with Bishop Grímkell and he is dedicated to the ambition to get rid of heathendom and heathen practices. This information expands even more on the image of the king's life in his town. The royal image is constituted by his physical built surroundings, by his laws, and by his Christian faith and rituals.

It is also from this site that the king hears about how Christianity is observed in other places, as for example in Iceland. He hears that people there still eat horseflesh and abandon their children. The king sends word to Iceland ordering people to keep the Christian rules better. He also inquires about how the new religion is observed in Orkney, Shetland, and the Faroe Islands, in order to evaluate whether he needs to proclaim his law and the Christian law more firmly (ch. 58). Further, the king travels south, where he discovers that at many places in the countryside, people are maintaining their heathen habits. People are baptized, but they neither know nor follow the new rules. This is especially the case in the inland areas, while the coastal areas are better (ch. 60).

³⁴ *ÓsH*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 70; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 43.

Another function of the town in *ÓsH* is as a site for the collection of taxes from the king's land. The people in the area express their loyalty to the king by paying taxes to him, and not to the Swedish king Óláfr. The people of the Swedish king who try to collect taxes unrighteously are caught and hung by King Óláfr (p. 47).

So far, the description of the physical town is not very different from the portrayal of the town in *ÓsT*: the town is established by the king, he builds his residence there, he has a church there, he has his people there to help him fight the heathens, and he makes sure that there are enough provisions for everyone in town. While Óláfr Tryggvason sends people, or travels himself on missionary activities from Niðaróss, it is also from Niðaróss that Óláfr Haraldsson makes sure that Christian rules are observed in his kingdom, by sending people to check the habits of people in remote destinations, or by travelling himself. There are, however, some differences too. In *ÓsH*, the town as a physical anchor is connected even more directly to the establishment of the king's legal kingdom, to his own spiritual activities, and to his tax-collecting.

The most significant difference between the town's function in the two kings' lives concerns their deaths. As mentioned, Óláfr Tryggvason dives into the sea from his ship in the heat of his last battle and is never seen again. Óláfr Haraldsson, on the other hand, is killed at Stiklastaðir, 'miðvikudag fjórða Kalendas Augusti-mánaðar' (on Wednesday, the fourth day before the kalends of the month of August).³⁵ His death and post-mortem existence through his miracles continue to be closely related to and essential for the formation of the town of Niðaróss.

We know that when the final battle of King Óláfr starts, the weather shifts from being fine, bright, and sunny to the sky and the sun turning red, followed by a mysterious darkness (ch. 226). The darkness causes the battle to proceed slowly since people cannot see, but the king's formation is gradually thinned out. Eventually, the king receives three deadly wounds, from Þorstein knarrarsmiðr, Þórir hundr, and Kálfr Árnason. After the first blow the king leans against a stone and starts praying to God (ch. 228). The darkness that is mentioned at the beginning of the battle surrounds the scene even at the very moment of the death of King Óláfr (ch. 235).

As we know, post-mortem miracles performed by St Óláfr start straight after his death. First, Þórir hundr's wound is healed by touching the king's blood on the very same site where he died (ch. 230). Then, the king's body is hidden in a small cottage nearby and an old blind man gets his vision back by rubbing the king's blood on his eyes (ch. 235). Then his body is hidden in a pasture and a light, like a candle flame, is seen burning above where the king's body rests (ch. 236). Later, the king's coffin is taken to a place above the town of Niðaróss, in an empty storehouse and is later buried beside the river in a sand dune (ch. 238).

After that, even more miracles of St Óláfr occur and people's opinions about their previous king change. This leads to a decision to dig up King Óláfr's body, and to place it in his St Clement's church in Niðaróss, twelve months and five days after he had died. The episode is well known: Bishop Grímkell opens up the coffin, which looks brand new, and discovers the glorious, sweet smell of the saint's body, his pink

35 *ÓsH*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 393; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 263.

complexion, and grown hair and nails. The king's holiness is tested by burning his hair, which remains unburnt. It is then decided that King Óláfr is truly a saint. His body is wrapped up in costly cloth and velvet and placed on the altar of St Clement's church (ch. 244).

In chapter 245 we hear about how the churches of the town are built on the sites where the king's body had been. At the place where he had been buried, a beautiful miraculous spring appears and a chapel is built there, which is replaced by Christ church, 'er nú stendr í þeim stað' (which stands there now),³⁶ as Snorri writes. Ólafskirkja is built at the location of the storehouse where the king's body was left overnight. Óláfr's street is the name of the path where the king's body was carried up from the ship, 'ok er þat nú í miðjum bænum' (and this is now in the middle of the town).³⁷ This passage makes it very clear how King Óláfr's death and the movement of his saintly body is imprinted in and is thus strongly conditional for the town's development. Even after his death, the king is closely linked to the formation of his town, and also to the natural environment around it. The town, within its own environmental frame, becomes an even stronger physical symbol or anchor, of not only the life of King Óláfr, but also his death and afterlife. His holiness, so closely connected to the town, provides a clear and direct link to God's plan and salvation history in general.

The Urban–Rural Continuum

In order to achieve his goals (to Christianize people) or to reach his final destinations, which is often Niðaróss, the king travels through many rural and a few other urban centres, such as Túnsberg, Sarpsborg, and Konungahella. Urban centres abroad, such as London, Rome, Jerusalem, and Uppsalar are also part of the urban map in the saga, even though the king does not visit all of them. There is thus a constant movement between rural and urban contexts, and the role of the urban contexts is inseparable from their rural surroundings.

There are many examples that may illustrate the significance of the rural contexts for the full realization of the king's powers in the urban contexts. One such episode takes place in Lappland (ch. 9). When people hear that the king is coming, they all run away to the woods. The king and his men follow them there, but it is difficult for the king to protect himself and his men, because the Sami use the wood as protection for themselves. Many of the king's men are killed. 'Þeir Finnar gerðu um nóttina æðiveðr með fjölkynngi ok storm sjávar' (During the night the Lapps caused furious weather by magic, and a storm at sea).³⁸ The king manages to sail close to the winds, and later on, the king's good fortune helps him win over the Samis' magic.

An important, and rather symbolic, example for King Óláfr's kingship is his arrival in Norway, at the island of Sæla (meaning bliss, happiness), off Staðr. The

36 ÓsH, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 405; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 271.

37 ÓsH, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 405; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 271.

38 ÓsH, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 11; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 8.

saga tells us how the king steps onto the muddy land with one foot and falls on his knee with the other leg. His man Hrani tells him: ‘Eigi felltu, konungr, nú festir þú fœtr í landi [...] Vera má svá, ef guð vill’ (You did not fall, king, you are now taking your stand in the land. [...] It may be so, if God will).³⁹

Sometimes the lands the king passes are rich and fertile, while on other occasions, they are poor and barren. The way the lands are described is often linked to the people who live there and to their relationship with the king. Simply put: fertile lands belong to the king’s people, while infertile lands are possessed his enemies.⁴⁰ For example, on his travels through the lands of King Sigurðr (the husband of Ásta, the king’s mother), King Óláfr sees men reaping corn, others who are binding it, some are driving the corn home, some are piling up ricks or getting them into barns (ch. 33). He asks for a conference with Ásta, Sigurðr, and his foster-father Hrani and announces that he has the ambition to gain possession of all the realm that belonged to King Óláfr Tryggvason. King Sigurðr comments on the ambitiousness of his plans and warns him about his international enemies. Óláfr expects that the people would help him, just as they had helped King Óláfr Tryggvason. His mother Ásta also prefers her son to become the supreme king of Norway, even if that means that he does not get to live much longer than Óláfr Tryggvason; dying of old age is a worse option (ch. 35). This specific rural district, with its fertile lands and hard-working people, becomes thus the perfect site for King Óláfr to declare his ambition to become king, which, as we know, takes him to Niðaróss.

After the king decides to reclaim Norway as his kingdom, he travels all over the country, claiming his kingship. He is gradually acknowledged in Upplönd, Heiðmörk, Guðbrandsdalar, Raumaríki, Þótn, Haðaland, and Valdres (ch. 37); and then in Orkadalr, Gauladalr, Strind, and Eynir in the Þrándheimr area (ch. 38). At this point, he establishes himself in Niðaróss, as we have seen above.

After he settles down in the town, he starts travelling to areas and lands where there are political, economic, or religious conflicts, such as Raumaríki (ch. 75), Uppsalar (ch. 77), as well as the urban centres Túnsberg (ch. 83), and Konungahella (ch. 87). After solving his problems with the king of the Svíar, King Óláfr goes back north to the Þrándheimr area and spends the winter there (ch. 95). Thereafter, the king visits other districts, where he introduces Christianity — Heiðmörk, Þótn, Haðaland, Hringaríki, Raumaríki, Vík, and Túnsberg again (ch. 114), Valdres, and other areas. He returns to Niðaróss once again and it is said that this is the tenth winter of his reign as a king (ch. 121).

Chapter 124 is a summary of what has happened up to now — King Óláfr has Christianized the whole country, and he has introduced his laws. Orkney is under his control, and he has many alliances in Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroes. He

39 ÓsH, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 36; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 22.

40 See chapters 106–09 for an episode on the shortage of corn in the Þrándheimr area, which may be interpreted from this perspective. Another well-known example of the king being in control of the natural environment and the weather is the episode where he meets the chieftain Dala-Guðbrandr at his farm Hundþorp (chs 111–13).

has even sent timber for a church to be built at Þingvöllr, where the Alþingi is held. In all these stories Niðaróss appears as the main manifestation of royal power in Norway and the starting point for further missionary activities. The land in itself, and its people, are thus the main resources that come under the king's control with the Christianization and the introduction of the new laws.

The movement of the king between important rural contexts and his town of Niðaróss is thus a major narrative feature of *ÓsH*, but a few other towns are mentioned too. Túnsberg is, for example, described as a busy trading town, with people from many countries, where people have relatively good Christian habits, but not as a site that is central for the development of the kingdom and its Christianization.

Sarpsborg, on the other hand, is a town that is important for the king on various occasions. It is established after a conflict between King Óláfr and the king of the Svíar in the Vík area (ch. 61). The farmers explain that there have always been conflicts there and that they are happy to be loyal to the Norwegian king, but they worry that he would go off north (where the main part of the kingdom is) and leave them without support in the conflict. The king then promises to stay in the area until the conflict with the Swedes is resolved. He takes his ship up along Raumelfr and establishes a new town at the waterfall Sarpr, thus using the landscape for protection. A royal residence and a church of St Mary are built. Sites are marked out for dwellings too. In the autumn he brings provisions for the winter and stays there. He bans the export of herring and salt to Gautland and while the Gautar struggle without these resources, the king arranges a great Yule feast and invites all the leading farmers to stay with him.

Later on, when the troubles with King Knútr inn ríki (of Denmark and England and part of Scotland) start (ch. 130), King Óláfr makes an alliance with the Swedish king and the two are ready to help each other. Óláfr stays in Sarpsborg, in order to be close in case of any danger from the Danish king. Once again, it is clear that the king stays where the conflict is. At this point, Norway is Christianized and there are not so many conflicts in the north. The king can thus allow himself to stay away from Niðaróss, in another town that serves to represent his physical presence in the area. Even though Sarpsborg is not the centre of the narrative in the same way as Niðaróss, we see how the events which occur in the rural hinterland are central for the establishment of this town too.

Urbanization as a Symbol of Salvation

This narrative account clarifies how important the rural contexts are for the development of the kingship of Óláfr Haraldsson and the establishment of the town of Niðaróss. Just as in *ÓsT*, various natural elements and resources are strong allegorical symbols that foreground even more the significance of the symbiosis between rurality and urbanity for the development of the Christian kingdom.

As in *ÓsT*, nice weather and light are symbolic of the closeness and the power of the Christian king; fogs, storms, and darkness symbolize the lack of the power of the king and God. The land, its sands and waters, rocks and dunes, also appear as main symbols throughout the saga. We remember that when the king arrives

at Sæla, he falls on his knee in the mud, which is said to symbolize that he takes his stand in the land, with God's will (ch. 29). We remember that the fertility and abundance of the land that is under the king's control is a common element of the Christian paradigm, where the king is closely related to his prolific land. Even after his death, the king is closely linked to his land — people realize that it has been unfortunate that they had deprived King Óláfr of 'lífí ok láði' (life and land).⁴¹ In the moment of his death, when he is first wounded, the king leans on a rock. The sand dune under which his coffin is hidden later becomes an important site, that testifies to the king's sanctity.

Describing the land in such symbolic terms may be seen as parallel to the way the very soil of the land, including its rocks and waters, was also seen as sanctified in the conceptualization of the Holy Land, or *Terra sancta* in medieval culture. This was the main place on earth for divine intervention and this is exactly what made Jerusalem into the world's conceptual and symbolic centre. Material elements of the Holy Land, such as stones, mud, and dust, could thus function or have the same role as actual relics from Christ's passion, as they were symbols of the city's authority and holiness.⁴² In a similar way, we can see that Snorri presents the land, its sands and waters, rocks and dunes, that have been in immediate physical proximity to the living or dead body of King Óláfr, as sites of bliss and miracles and thus constructs a typological parallel between the Holy Land and the Niðaróss area, as well as between Christ and St Óláfr. The sites of King Óláfr's death and his post-mortem miracles occur in the rural hinterland of the town of Niðaróss and in the town itself, and these events are collectively essential for the formation of the town of Niðaróss. This strengthens even further the link between the king, his land, and his town, and connects this constellation not only to political history, but also to a much greater extent to salvation history, compared with *ÓsT*.

Natural, Cultural (Built), and Ideological Typologies in *Heimskringla*

Rurality and urbanity are thus strongly intertwined in the stories of the two kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson. In the two respective stories, the town of Niðaróss was important on a historical, on a narrative, as well as on a symbolic level. The typological connections between the two kings, their lands, and their towns strengthen even further the symbolic entanglement between the royal figure, nature, and urban culture.

The two kings travel through the same areas, Christianizing the people, and the repetition of movements and processes strengthens their final effects. On various occasions, Óláfr Haraldsson is explicit that he aims and wishes to control the same

41 *ÓsH*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 411; *Heimskringla*, II, p. 275.

42 Aavitsland, 'Jerusalem', pp. 17–18.

lands as his predecessor Óláfr Tryggvason.⁴³ We know that the two kings have similar problems with the pagan chieftains in the Þrándheimr area and the story that Snorri creates, of the fall and reconquest of Niðaróss by the Christians, may even remind the reader of the story of the fall and reconquest of Jerusalem that would have been known to a thirteenth-century author like Snorri.

Not only is the movement through the rural landscapes similar in the stories about the two kings, but so too is the end destination of their missionary expeditions — they both culminate in Niðaróss. The typological cultural connection between the two kings' towns is made explicit in the saga, when Snorri describes in detail how Óláfr Haraldsson rebuilds and renovates some of the buildings built by Óláfr Tryggvason. We know that Óláfr Haraldsson extends the built environment of the town, as he expands on his kingship, by establishing Christian law all over the kingdom on a different level than Óláfr Tryggvason.

The typological relations between the way the two kings move through the rural environment and the way they anchor their power in their town are thus central elements in the representations of their kingships. Even though many scholars have pointed out the strong typology, encompassing both parallels and discrepancies, between the two kings,⁴⁴ here we see how this typology is anchored on a solid symbiotic relationship between the king's movement through the land and the establishment of his urban/built environments.

Parallels between Literary Representations and Realities

It is not a goal of this chapter to compare the literary representations of Niðaróss to actual archaeological remains in Niðaróss and the surrounding areas, but it is relevant to point out that the built topography of twelfth-century Niðaróss was clearly modelled on the holy city of Jerusalem.⁴⁵ Other scholars have highlighted that a 'realistic' historically correct representation of nature in literature does not have to contradict ideological and allegorical interpretations of these representations.⁴⁶ In this case, the parallels between literary representation and material/architectural development foreground even further the significance of seeing the town as a part of its natural environment.

43 See for example chapter 69 of *ÓsH*: when King Óláfr Haraldsson sends a messenger to the king of the Svíar, he offers peace as long as he gets the lands that King Óláfr Tryggvason held before him. See chapter 100, where the way Óláfr Tryggvason distributed power in Orkney is taken as a model for how Óláfr Haraldsson should do it.

44 See Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*. On typology as a known literary tool in the Nordic contexts, see Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation*.

45 Ekroll, 'St Olav, Nidaros, and Jerusalem', p. 286.

46 Hennig, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscape in the Sagas of Icelanders', who engages in a dialogue with and is critical of Waage, 'Landscape in the Sagas of Icelanders'. See also Meylan, 'King Sverrir's Mythic Landscapes'.

King Sverrir builds his castle *Zion* or Sverresborg in Niðaróss. By calling his castle *Zion*, Sverrir refers to King David and his castle of the same name, and to his opponents, King Magnús Erlingsson and Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson, as respectively the false king Saul and the prophet Samuel who anointed the wrong man. The city, or a field by the cathedral in Niðaróss, is also the site of King Sverrir's victory against his main opponents Earl Erlingr Ormsson skakki and Archbishop Eysteinn.

The rural hinterland around Niðaróss also contributes to the modelling of the town on Jerusalem. The hill of Byåsen, from which pilgrims would have had their first glimpses of the town's cathedral, was in 1179 called Feginsbrekka (Hill of Joy), an Old Norse translation of the Latin *Mons Gaudi* (Mount Joy).⁴⁷ The other main rural site that becomes a part of the modelling of Jerusalem in Niðaróss is Stiklarstaðir, the site of King Óláfr Haraldsson's death. We have read that the king leaned on a rock when he was first stabbed. *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* says that a church was built on that site, which was dedicated in the early 1160s. Crosses were placed around the battlefield marking important places. Furthermore, a small shed was supposedly set up on the site of the building where the king's body was hidden, and where the king's blood was supposedly still visible. It is easy to imagine how the constellation of the church built by/on the rock, the crosses on the battlefield, and the small shed may have been seen as a site echoing Golgotha for medieval pilgrims.⁴⁸

Even though Snorri does not make explicit references to all these sites, we have seen that he configures Niðaróss as a central nexus between rural, urban, political, and salvation history. Moreover, Snorri himself mentions Jerusalem, or Jóršalaland, in the introduction of *Heimskringla* and thus presents the history of the Norwegian kings, which is the grand frame for our study of the literary representation of Niðaróss here, as proceeding through the time and space of the Christian storyworld, whose main centre is Jerusalem.⁴⁹

Summary and Conclusion

The working hypothesis in this article was that both natural landscapes and urbanity, and the symbiosis between them, are so central to the Christian storyworld, that they shaped not only the idea of Paradise and the Heavenly Jerusalem in Old Norse culture, but also Old Norse representations of medieval urbanization. Our main results are that the history of Niðaróss is inseparable from the story about the Christianization of Norway by the two Óláfrs, which encompasses a meandering and a repetitive movement through numerous rural contexts in Norway and culminates in the urban centre of Niðaróss. The towns represent the strongholds of the primary representative of God on earth, i.e. the king. If the towns are the physical anchors of the king and

47 Ekroll, 'St Olav, Nidaros, and Jerusalem', p. 283; Bale, 'From Nidaros to Jerusalem; from *Feginsbrekka* to Mount Joy', pp. 191–92.

48 Ekroll, 'St Olav, Nidaros, and Jerusalem', pp. 288–89.

49 For a discussion of the significance of this passage, see Aavitsland, 'Jerusalem', pp. 14–15.

the Christian God, the land, the rural contexts are the physical sites that make the movement through chaos and towards order and salvation possible. Christianization is impossible without the establishment of an urban anchor, which on the other hand is impossible without a prior movement through an environmental and spiritual wilderness. Just as the image of the heavenly Jerusalem is a blend of the natural and built environment, so too is the image of the historical town of Niðaróss. The literary description of the town is a narrative that encompasses movement through rural and urban contexts. In the same way, important rural sites (such as Stiklarstaðir) are essential parts of the symbolism of the physical town itself, following the prime example of Jerusalem.

A main conclusion in this chapter is that the symbiosis between natural and cultural (in this case urban) elements is a central and integral part of medieval Christian ontologies. This conclusion is highly relevant for archaeological and historical studies of medieval urban culture and environmental history, as such an ideology may have influenced the way real urbanization strategies were realized.⁵⁰ The conclusion has implications for further ecocritical studies of Old Norse and other medieval and modern literatures as it demonstrates the relevance and necessity of including the study of cultural/built elements as integral parts when investigating various aspects of natural and environmental aesthetics and ideologies.⁵¹ The chapter's main result is equally significant for future studies of urban or political histories, as it foregrounds the necessity of including the wider environment in such investigations.

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⁵⁰ This will be the aim of the next stage of my work on the topic.

⁵¹ As mentioned in the introduction, this is the opposite of what is argued by Gifford in his book *Pastoral*.

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