Perspectives on Power

A study of the political landscape on the North West coast of Norway in the Viking period.

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Forord

Jeg vil benytte anledningen til å først og fremst takke min veileder Hans Jacob Orning for mange gode, støttende og oppmuntrende innspill som gjorde denne oppgaven mulig. Hver eneste time med veiledning gjorde meg mer og mer inspirert for mitt eget tema, noe jeg ikke kan takke nok for.

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Christian Giffen Sæbø
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Sammendrag

Oppgaven belyser maktsentre på Nordvestlandet i vikingtid, ca 800-1030. Ved å bruke sagalitteratur, arkeologiske kilder og lovverkene som ble utvidet av Håkon den gode, ser jeg på maktinndelingen av området som strekker seg fra Nordfjordeid i sør til og med Kuløya i nord. Diskusjonen i oppgaven går ut på hvordan Nordvestlandet ble styrt, hvorvidt kongene og høvdingene hadde mye makt, om det var et utbredt bondesamfunn hvor det var bøndene som styrte sine egne liv, eller om det var en kombinasjon. Det er brukt mye tid i oppgaven på de arkeologiske kildene, da disse gir det mest konkrete og empiriske bildet av maktforhold, men det er sammenligningen med sagaene og lovene som til sammen danner grunnlaget for min egen tolkning og diskusjon.

Contents

Introduction

When trying to form a picture of a political landscape in the past, it is vital for the historian to look at all types of sources that are available for the time period being studied. The goal of this thesis is to illustrate the political landscape on the North West coast of Norway, covered by today's Møre and Romsdal and Sogn and Fjordane regions, during the Viking period (800s to the early 1000s AD). This thesis will therefore investigate three types of sources. The sagas will provide historical context and display the region from a king's perspective. Archaeological sources will provide empirical evidence. Lastly, I will look at the two laws, *Gulatinget* and *Frostatinget*, which were set up during this period, and see what they say about the political structure. These three types of sources will be separated into their own chapters and then discussed on their own before they are tied together in the concluding parts of this thesis.

Historiography

The historiography of this region during the Viking period is both rich and detailed. There are many sources and archaeological investigations which are relevant for this thesis. If we look at the written literature, there are numerous works written about the unification of the country during the reign of Harald Hårfagre and later. Most famous is perhaps Per Sveaas Andersen's *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet: 800-1130*, which gives an overview of this period from a national perspective.[1] On a more local level, there is also an abundance of literature. One book which has been used to a small degree in this thesis, is *I balansepunktet*, edited by Stein Ugelvik Larsen and Jarle Sulebust.[2] This extensive piece of work covers the history of Sunnmøre from the Viking period until the Early Modern period. It covers many topics relevant for this thesis, however with a very narrow focus on Sunnmøre as a powerful centre throughout the Viking period. The title of the book, *I balansepunktet*, also refers to Sunnmøre as the point of balance between the two larger centres of Nidaros and Bergen. The issue with this is twofold: Bergen did not become a powerful centre until the early thirteenth century, and referring to Sunnmøre as a point of balance places perhaps more emphasis on the importance of the area than it should. Nevertheless, the book suffices as a starting point for most of the topics discussed in this thesis. Another book that focuses on a specific region is

[1] Andersen, P., & Mykland, K. *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet : 800-1130* (Vol. B. 2). Bergen: Universitetsforl. 1977.
[2] Eds: Ugelvik Larsen, Stein and Sulebust, Jarle. *I balansepunktet.* Sunnmørsposten forlag, Ålesund, 1994

Soga om Sogn og Fjordane, written by Harald Johannes Krøvel and Harald Endre Tafjord.[3] Following the same popular historical method of *I balansepunktet*, this book paints a very detailed picture of Sogn og Fjordane in the Viking period. While its focus is on the county as it is today, it covers several different matters in a broader perspective.

Starting with the sagas, there is some literature that focuses on the credibility and use of the sagas as sources. Theodore Andersson's work from 2006 serves as a good starting point when looking closely at the Icelandic sagas, as it focuses specifically on the most famous ones.[4] Furthermore, Gisli Sigurdsson provides a detailed and extensive analysis of the sagas as he focuses on key reoccurring themes.[5] Bjarne Hodne's dissertation from 1973 also provides valuable knowledge about the sagas as he bases his research on Knut Liestøl's work.[6] Liestøl was the first person on Norway to write about the historical merits of the sagas and their credibility.

Turning to archaeological sources and the works written about the archaeological investigations, this thesis relies heavily on the work done by archaeologists and their findings. There are a vast number of investigations that have shaped how the North West coast has been portrayed through the Viking period, most likely due to the credibility of these investigations. Most of the archaeological investigations in the region build upon the work done by Per Fett, an archaeologist who spent his career recording all prehistoric sites on the West coast. He was the first to look at burial mounds and other visible sites in the terrain to establish potential centres of power and locate where people lived specifically in the Iron Age. I have not included much of Per Fett's work for the reason that there are other and newer investigations of the same topics which have found more material.

One archaeologist who continued the work of Per Fett, and one that will be heavily used in this thesis, is Bjørn Ringstad. His Magister degree from 1986 which localises prehistoric centres of power, stands as one of the most important archaeological sources when looking at the West coast as a region.[7] His investigation into mainly burial mounds highlights the potential centres from early Iron Age to the Viking period. Most of his degree focuses

[3]Krøvel, Harald, Harald Endre Tafjord, Torkjell Djupedal, and Masaoki Adachi. *Folk I Fjordrike : Før 1763*.. Bergen: Fagbokforl, 2017.
[4] Andersson, Theodore M. *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006
[5] Gísli Sigurðsson. *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition : A Discourse on Method*. Vol. No. 2. Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature. Cambridge, Mass: Milman Parry Collection ; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2004.
[6] Hodne, Bjarne. *Personalhistoriske Sagn : En Studie I Kildeverdi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973.
[7] Ringstad Bjørn, *Vestlandets største gravminner : et forsøk på lokalisering av forhistoriske maktsentra* (1986).

specifically on the largest burial mounds, and by grouping them together, he localises where there could have been powerful centres. Ringstad's work into archaeological sites on the North West coast only continued after his Magister degree. He moved from studying the broad perspective of centres of burial mounds to more specific areas. These areas include Hustad, Frei.[8] They are examples of some of the many areas that have been investigated in the last thirty years, and will be important for this thesis.

Another archaeologist who uses Ringstad as a base for his own investigations is Helge Sørheim. His work revolves around Borgund at Sunnmøre and goes a long way to highlight Borgund as one of the main centres in the region.[9] Sørheim is the most recent person to investigate Borgund closely, but his work is also based on Asbjørn Herteig's investigations of the central place in the 1950s.[10] Much of Sørheim's research was included in his Doctorate thesis from 2010 where he discussed the theory of central places, towns, cities and cross roads, and how these related to each other. The theory that he brings up in his thesis is important for my own thesis, but on a smaller geographical level as his degree included the entire West coast.

Brit Solli has been the most recent person to investigate Veøy in Romsdalen as one of the first Christian centres in Norway.[11] She spent three summers on the island which resulted in a Doctorate degree in 1993. Her thesis looks at the many findings of burial sites on the island that point to an early Christian settlement in a region where the new religion was starting to get a foothold. Solli also looks at Veøy in a broader context with the surrounding areas.

In terms of literature on legislation, there are many who have written something about the legal system on the North West coast. Aforementioned *I balansepunktet* and *Soga om Sogn og Fjordane* attempt to highlight the impact of the laws in both Sunnmøre and Sogn og Fjordane. There are unfortunately few sources that have been written about the North West coast specifically, as it has been natural to focus on either *Gulatingsloven* or *Frostatingsloven*. As we will see later, they were both established by the same king so there might not have been

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[8] Ringstad, Bjørn. "Hustad før kong Øysteins tid» in *Gammalt frå Fræna 1996."* Fræna sogelag, 1996.
Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997.
Ringstad, Bjørn, "Hustad i førkristen tid – møte med Kvitekrist" in *Hustad kirke 125 år*
Ringstad, Bjørn, "Aure i Sykkylven : Gårdsbosetning gjennom 3000 år." *Arkeo 1996 nr 2*, 13-17. (1997).
[9] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010
[10] Herteig, Asbjørn. *Kaupangen på Borgund*. S.l.: Borgund og Giske bygdeboknemnd. 1957
[11] Solli, B. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into the poetics and scientifics of archaeology.* Dissertation for the degree Dr. art. University of Oslo, 1993.

significant differences. One book which is very valuable when looking at *Gulatingsloven,* is Knut Helle's *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.*[12] Helle accounts for most aspects of society and the different relations between the classes of society: the farmer, the chieftain and the king. On a more general level on how the laws functioned in practice, Jørn Øyrehagen Sunde's book provides a brief history of legislation during the Viking period.[13] He does not include the *leidang* system in his analysis, which is important for this thesis, but he focuses more on how the judicial process looked like and how it changed over the course of several hundred years. I will also include two books here that describe the Viking period society. Alexandra Sanmark's *Viking Law and Order* describes how gathering places for both religious rituals and law discussions were vital for people in the Viking period to have a sense of belonging and sharing common interests.[14] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's *Det norrøne samfunnet* gives a general look on the Viking period society, by dealing mainly with the relationship between farmer chieftain and king.[15] He also mentions how the administrative centres became important for the organisation of the country from a judicial perspective.

Sources and Method

As mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter, this thesis will focus on three different types of sources. For the first chapter, I will look at the king's sagas of Harald Hårfagre, Haakon the Good, Olav Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson written in *Heimskringla.* These sagas will lay the foundation for the historical context of this thesis and will therefore be discussed first. Along with the king's sagas, I will include *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's Saga* to provide additional context. These two sagas will also provide valuable information about the political system on the North West coast as the main persons in these sagas visited the area. *The saga of Olav Tryggvason* written by Odd Snorreson will also provide valuable context. My discussion of these sagas concentrate on what they say about the North West coast in order to find out about the relationship between the kings and the rest of the people. It is not the intention of this thesis to analyse the sagas as sources by questioning the authors' credibility and their motivation, but rather focus of the contents of the sagas. The discussion of the credibility of the sagas will still be discussed as a part of the introduction to the saga chapter and will be based on the works of Theodore Andersson and

[12] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001
[13] Sunde, Jørn Øyrehagen. *Speculum Legale – Rettsspegelen.* Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2005
[14] Sanmark, Alexandra, *Viking Law and Order.* Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
[15] Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar. *Det norrøne samfunnet : Vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden*. Oslo: Pax. 2008.

Gísli Sigurðsson.In the last part of the saga chapter, I will give an overview of where the different kings and chieftains were located throughout the sagas. This will be used to give a sense of where people lived and what kind of centres they might have lived in.

The archaeological chapter will cover several aspects of archaeology to show the many findings that have been done in the region. The first part of the chapter will discuss the relevant theory. Bjørn Ringstad's Magister thesis will then be used to establish an overview of the centres of large burial mounds in the region. This will provide a valuable first insight to the areas that will be explored later in the chapter, but the centres that are defined in the thesis are also valuable to understand where there might have been previous centres.

The main part of the archaeological chapter starts with the discussion of the specific areas that I have chosen to focus on. These areas are: Eid, Selja, Giske, Borgund, Rauma, Veøy, Hustad, Frei and Kuløya. They will be discussed separately to understand the significance of each area, and later compared to one another. As for the sources of each place, I am dependent on using the archaeological investigations that have been done and the literature that has been written about them. This is one of the larger limitiations of this thesis, as it has to rely on literature where the archaeologists have already interpreted their investigations. However, the numerous books and articles written about the investigations should suffice to establish a clear picture of the findings. These areas have been chosen due to the amount of archaeological investigations that have been done. This does not mean that there are no other places which could have been investigated in this thesis, but adding more areas will not likely add any significant information to the discussion. As we will see in the archaeology chapter, these areas are spread out over the whole region, ensuring that the whole picture of the political structure on the North West coast is included.

As sources for the first two places, Eid and Selja, will rely heavily on Krøvel and Tafjord's *Soga om Sogn og Fjordane,* as it is comprehensive and the newest piece of literature written about these two areas. Along with it, Ringstad's thesis and *Selja – Heilag stad i 1000 år*, edited by Magnus Rindal, will provide valuable archaeological evidence. Ringstad and Rindal use specific findings as starting points, while Krøvel and Tafjord put the findings into a broader perspective about how these two areas mattered for Sogn og Fjordane. I will also include some of the events recorded in the saga to discuss the historical context of the sagas with the archaeological findings.

Moving to Giske and Borgund, Herteig and Sørheim will be the most used archaeologists. Both of them highlight Borgund as a vital centre on the North West coast, predominantly due to the findings of trading sites, a *ting* mound and a hall suited for a chieftain. As mentioned in the historiography section, Sørheim's Doctorate thesis relates to this thesis in terms of how both seek to understand central places and their functions. However, his thesis focuses on the entire West coast, and less on the North West coast, which means that he includes fewer places on the North West coast than what this thesis does. He also uses a much broader timeframe, as he analyses each central place from Iron Age and through the Middle Ages. His and Herteig's work on Borgund are therefore placed in a new light in this thesis. Sørheim is also the editor of a book where Arne Larsen has written about the archaeological findings on Giske. The Giske-section is also influenced by Ringstad's investigations.

Moving to Veøy and Rauma, I will look at Brit Solli's dissertation from 1993 and Sæbjørg Nordeide's book from 2011. Both of these analyse Christian evidence from Veøy and Rauma respectively. Veøy is seen as one of the most important religious centres in the region, so the focus will be on the island. While Solli uses most of the focus of her dissertation on the island, Sørheim includes Veøy in his analysis over central places. Combined, they provide valuable information about Veøy's position in the region, specifically as a religious centre.

The last three areas, Hustad, Frei and Kuløya, will be discussed using Bjørn Ringstad's investigations. These are areas where there have been fewer findings, perhaps due the theory that fewer people lived in these areas compared to the other ones. When it comes to Kuløya, Britt Solli also covers this area as the findings there are directly linked to Christianity and are therefore related to Veøy.

The last chapter, looking at legislation, will provide a finale perspective on the structure of power on the North West coast. This chapter will draw benefit of the fact that laws were written down and are therefore available today. The chapter will discuss both *Gulatingsloven* and *Frostatingsloven*, as these laws were active on the North West coast. While we know what was written in these laws, it is more difficult to say whether they were followed strictly by those under the jurisdiction of the laws. Because of this, I have chosen to include some literature which will provide additional context. Knut Helle's *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova* serves as an excellent starting point, as it accounts for most aspects of life as written in the laws, but also the practical uses of these laws. I will once again use Krøvel and Tafjord's *Soga om Sogn og Fjordane*, as it focuses on how Sogn og Fjordane was divided into *skipreider*, and simultaneously accounts for the new *leidang* system.

Theory

There are some key theories, or theoretical models, that I am going to apply throughout the thesis. The first and most prominent theory, the centre and periphery model, will be introduced in the archaeology chapter. This theory will be applied to the archaeological findings on the North West coast to attempt to find important centres and add another perspective to the structure of power in the region. Firstly, I will use Arne B. Johansen's article in Birgitta Wik's book from 1991 to define centre and periphery from an archaeological point of view.[16] This book serves in general as a very natural starting point for future discussions about the centre and periphery model. Evolving from the centre and periphery model, Dagfinn Skre will be used to define the most important aspect of this model, centrality. The term centrality comes from the same initial model, but will be more important to define centres in the region. Skre's article explores the importance of trade in a central place as he uses Old Uppsala as an example to illustrate his reasoning.[17] I will also include Alexandra Sannmark's work about the religious practices at central places, as religion was also vital to establish centres.[18]

As a contrast to the centre and periphery model, I will briefly include a discussion about the territorial division of the North West coast. This model is not as heavily discussed as the centre and periphery model, but it still gives insight into how the region might have been structured. It is a theory developed from the sagas and the laws, as it moves the focus to the kings and how they controlled specific areas. This theory is prominent in Sveaas Andersen's *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet: 800-1130,* where centres are deemed less important for the unification of the country.

Throughout the thesis, I will attempt to establish a sense of who was politically in control over the region. By focusing on three different types of sources, it is natural that we will get different views on this topic. I will therefore present the different models of society that we can expect to find at each stage. As the first chapter is about the kings and the sagas, it is only natural to believe that the kings were in control and that they held supreme power over the region. By only looking at the sagas, we might think that society was controlled by the king, a

[16] Wik, Birgitta.. *Sentrum - periferi : Sentra og sentrumsdannelser gjennom førhistorisk og historisk tid :* Den 18. nordiske arkeologkongress, Trondheim 28.8.4.9.1989 : Vol. 1. Trondheim: Universitetet i Trondheim, Vitenskapsmuseet. 1991.
[17] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium
[18] Sanmark, Alexandra, *Viking Law and Order.* Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

kongesamfunn. Such a top-down look is rarely presented in academic literature as the only model of society, since it does not go into detail about everyday life for the common people. A *kongesamfunn* only suggests who might have been the king over a certain people or area, but it does not say anything about the other functions of society, for example the laws or religious practices. Nevertheless, this model of society should not be discarded as the king had some power over the region, but it more interesting to look at the extent of this power.

Going down one step on the hierarchy-ladder, we come to the chieftain and how the powerful local men could influence society. A *høvdingsamfunn* means that the chieftains were more or less in control over his local area and that society was built up by several chieftains and their centres. The king was less important in such a society as he became a distant figure who did not care much for the chieftain's rule over his smaller area. Evidence that support such a society points to the many farms and central places where the chieftains lived and controlled the local economy. If we follow the words of Frode Iversen, administrative centres and land were the basis for power, and as the chieftain was in control over these aspects, he held the actual power.[19] The evidence that will support a *høvdingsamfunn* are undoubtedly the archaeological sources. It is difficult to find evidence of how the kings ruled over an area as there were very few kings, but since there were far more chieftains, they are easier to track.

The final model for society is the one that focuses on the farmers, a *bondesamfunn*. Such a society points to the farmer as the person who controls most aspects of his life, without strict intervention from either chieftain or king. As we will see in the chapter on the laws, there are several historians who say that there was a *bondesamfunn* during this part of the Viking period. This is linked to who was allowed to go to *tings* to decide upon matters relevant for the common people. Notable historians who have adapted this view is Knut Helle and Merete Røskaft. Helle naturally defines the society as a *bondesamfunn* because people who attended the *ting* were equal and that they represented an egalitarian society. Røskaft points to the farmers as people who stood as a contrast to the king in society. She also includes the chieftains as a part of her analysis when she says that they were "first among equals".[20]

[19] Iversen, Frode. *Eiendom, Makt Og Statsdannelse : Kongsgårder Og Gods I Hordaland I Yngre Jernalder Og Middelalder.* Bergen, 2004. Page 18
[20] Røskaft, Merete. *Maktens Landskap : Sentralgårder I Trøndelag Ved Overgangen Fra Vikingtid Til Kristen Middelalder, Ca 800-1200.* Trondheim 2003. Page 207

Structure

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, this thesis will look at three different sources: the sagas, archaeological sources and laws. The first chapter will focus on the king's sagas, but also *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's Saga.* Prior to the discussion of the specific sagas, I will account for the credibility of the sagas and how they are used in this thesis. The second chapter will focus on sources based on archaeological investigations. Finally, the third chapter will discuss the laws, both *Gulatingsloven* and *Frostatingsloven.* I will use translations of the actual laws to present what they say about the North West coast, in addition to secondary literature which will provide context to the laws.

Chapter on Sagas

As there is only a very limited number of written sources, these few are therefore extremely vital to shed light on the historical landscape. In this case, Snorre Sturlason's *Heimskringla* is one of the very few written sources that my thesis can rely on. Unfortunately, even *Heimskringla* cannot be regarded as a safe source as it was written in the early thirteenth century. Nevertheless, it remains valuable for the thesis as it provides a historical context which will be discussed together with the archaeological sources later. *Egil Skallagrimson's saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's saga* also provide valuable information about my topic, which is why I have chosen to include them as well.

The purpose of using these sagas is to highlight the importance of the North West coast during the reigns of the kings presented below. It therefore becomes natural to interpret what is written as recordings of the past. It is widely known that the authors of the sagas could take liberties when writing about the events more than 200 years prior to when they were written down. What this means, is simply that some of the material that I discuss might not be true, or somewhat exaggerated. Nevertheless, the main purpose here is to show what the different sagas say about the North West coast. In order to prove and answer the different questions related to my thesis, the later chapters of this thesis will provide sufficient evidence when compared together with this chapter.

Before proceeding with the actual sagas, the credibility of the sagas should be mentioned. The sagas that I have chosen to include in this chapter were written much later than the events they record. Even though this chapter accounts for the events as they are written down, it would beneficial to be aware of some of the issues when presenting the contents of the sagas. More related to my thesis, I am questioning how the authors of the sagas obtained their knowledge about the events they recorded, and potentially how much of this information was true or fabricated for the sake of telling the story. According to Theodore Andersson, there is no doubt that the Icelandic sagas are based on oral prehistory; that the stories told in the sagas have some foothold in oral history which has been passed down through generations.[21] There is, however, significantly more doubt as to how much of the sagas are based on oral history and how much has been filled in by an imaginative author. Knut Liestøl believes that oral

[21] Andersson, Theodore M. *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006. Page 3

family sagas had existed in Norway long before the Icelandic sagas were written down.[22] He has also calculated how long oral traditions could last and still have historical merit. Liestøl believes that oral histories cannot last longer than 300-400 years and still be considered historically accurate.[23] The main reason for why oral histories could last this long, is undoubtedly due to family honour and pride. To use an example which will be further discussed later: the Giske-ætt which became very powerful during the reign of Olaf Haraldsson most likely had family members who were proud to be of that family. It could have been a family tradition to uphold the stories of how their family became so powerful, meaning that their story would be difficult to forget once it had been cemented into their family tradition. Such stories could also be corrected by the local community if told inaccurately.[24] This kind of tradition poses a small issue. Stories that were passed down through generations were viewed as historically accurate, but they were told with a certain entertainment factor.[25] The historical accuracy could therefore diminish over time as the facts could have been overshadowed by the story's entertainment value.[26]

What oral history and story-telling tradition has of impact on Snorre Sturlason's written work is difficult to determine. There is no doubt that the sagas which are discussed here are based on oral history, but the question of the story's credibility remains unsolvable. It is more likely, however, that Sturlason and other saga authors used the benefit of hindsight. For example, Sturlason most likely knew that Arne Armodsson was one of the founding fathers of the Giske-ætt. Since the ætt became more powerful, as mentioned above, it is likely that Sturlason used his knowledge of Arne Armodsson and the rest of the Giske-ætt when writing about events that happened before they became powerful. This might have been possible due to a strong family tradition, where the origins of the family were in focus when passing down their history to newer generations.

The structure of this chapter will follow *Heimskringla* as a main source and analyse what it says about the North West coast. This will be done by using the chapters of the different kings as starting points for the discussion of what sort of a picture the saga authors make of the

[22] Gísli Sigurðsson. *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition : A Discourse on Method*. Vol. No. 2. Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature. Cambridge, Mass: Milman Parry Collection ; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2004. Page 4
[23] Hodne, Bjarne. *Personalhistoriske Sagn : En Studie I Kildeverdi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973. Page 8
[24] Ibid. Page 8
[25] Andersson, Theodore M. *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006. Page 7
[26] Ibid. Page 7

region. I will therefore start by describing what the sagas literally say and then analyse the different passages. Along with the king's sagas, I will include *Egil Skallagrimon's saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's saga* where they belong timewise to further establish what sort of picture is made.

Harald Hårfagre (approximately: 872-931 AD):

After the death of Halvdan Svarte, Norway lacked one king to stand behind. Several chieftains sought to seize power, but after several smaller battles, Harald Hårfagre, with the aid of his uncle, Guttorm, managed to claim Norway as his dominion. At this point in time, around 870, Norway did not comprise of the large geographical area that we know of today, but rather just the western part of the country. As the story famously goes, Harald Hårfagre tried to make the daughter of King Eirik his wife, but she refused as she would not marry a king who only controlled such few counties.[27] Therefore, Harald Hårfagre promised to take control over the entire country, and not cut or groom his hair until his task was complete.

Early in the saga of Harald Hårfagre, he starts to seize control over the North-West territories of Norway. *Heimskringla* tells that a man called Huntjov was the king of the Møre county and that together with his son Solve Klove formed a considerable military force. Over the Romsdal area, Solve Kolve's grandfather, Nokkve, had control.[28] These chieftains gathered a great army and faced Harald Hårfagre on his way down from Trondheim. From the pages of *Heimskringla*, there are few words of the supposed great battle of Solskjel, but it says very bluntly that Harald Hårfagre won the battle.[29] Huntjov and Nokkve were both slain, but Solve Klove managed to escape. After the battle, Harald Hårfagre seized control over the North-West coast and stayed there over the summer as he restored law and order over his new dominion.[30] Over the summer, Harald Hårfagre became a close friend of Øystein Glumra's son, Ragnvald Mørejarl. As Harald Hårfagre left for Trondheim during the following autumn, he instated Ragnvald Mørejarl as chieftain over Nordmøre and Romsdal. According to *Heimskringla,* Ragnvald Mørejarl was both wise and powerful, and he was nicknamed after these two attributes.[31]

The saga describes how Solve Klove had stayed in hiding over the winter and raided Harald Hårfagre's men around Nordmøre. This forced Harald Hårfagre to again travel from

[27] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009 Page 48
[28] Ibid. Page 51
[29] Ibid. Page 51
[30] Ibid. Page 51
[31] Ibid. Page 52

Trondheim to extinguish the rebellion in his kingdom. Solve Klove had, prior to the second battle of Solskjel, found new allies in Fjordane. Together with King Arnvid of Sunnmøre, Solve Klove made and appeal to King Audbjørn of Fjordane so convincing that they all agreed to fight Harald Hårfagre together.[32] The battle, as described in *Heimskringla*, was of a traditional one, as the ships of Harald Hårfagre and the opposing trio were bound together so that the men could jump from their own ships to the enemy ships to fight in close combat.[33] Harald Hårfagre's rage secured him the victory as he proved his excellence in combat. King Arnvid and Audbjørn were both killed in the fight, but once again managed Solve Klove to escape. According to Snorre Sturlason, Solve Klove managed to raid Harald Hårfagre's territories in the years to come.

At this point in the saga, the use of "Møre" can be confusing. We learn that Huntjov was the king of Møre, and that Arnvid was the king of Sunnmøre, meaning *Møre* in this context means Nordmøre. It is however noted by Jarle Sulebust that when the sagas mention Møre, they mean Sunnmøre in effect.[34] This makes it difficult to show what is actually meant by the term *Møre* as it is often written in the saga. Hårfagre gives, as noted above, Ragnvald Mørejarl the control of Nordmøre and Romsdal after the victory over Nokkve and the king of *Møre,* Huntjov. So when Sturlasson writes that Huntjov was the king of Møre, it would make sense that Huntjov actually was the king of Nordmøre. It is my impression that *Møre* is used for the general area of Sunnmøre and Nordmøre and that, after the second battle of Solskjel, Ragnvald Mørejarl controlled this area. When Sulebust writes that *Møre* in effect is Sunnmøre, he might be referring to *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* and *Grette's Saga* where many of the events happened at Sunnmøre. It should also be noted that whenever Møre is mentioned later in either *Heimskringla* or the other sagas, it can sometimes mean the islands directly next to the sea. This would exclude Romsdalen as a part of Møre.

The story of the two battles of Solskjel, where Harald Hårfagre first defeated Huntjov, Nokkve and Solve Klove, then in the second battle, Arnvid, Audbjørn and Solve Klove, is also written in *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga*. The first time the North-West coast of Norway is mentioned in Egil's saga is in chapter three. Just prior to this, it is recorded that Harald Hårfagre has taken control over the Namdal-county, where Egil Skallagrimson supposedly arrived in Norway after his departure from Iceland. The speech that Solve Klove holds for

[32] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 52
[33] Ibid. Page 53
[34] Larsen, Sulebust, Larsen, Stein Ugelvik, & Sulebust, Jarle. *I balansepunktet : Sunnmøres eldste historie*. Ålesund: Sunnmørsposten forl. 1994. . Page 14

Arnvid before the second battle is the same speech that is recorded in Snorre Sturlason's *Heimskringla.*[35]After this speech, Arnvid promised to help Solve Klove to defeat Harald Hårfagre. Arnvid called for help from King Audbjørn, who was the king over the Hirda-county, further south in Sunnmøre. And so, Audbjørn and his men united with Arnvid and Solve Klove at Nordmøre. Egil's saga notes how the battle of Solskjel is of large scale with many casualties on both sides. Harald Hårfagre was the victor of the battle, King Arnvid and Audbjørn were killed, while Solve Klove escaped. Vemund, the brother of the fallen King Audbjørn, took control of the Firda-county, while Harald Hårfagre instated his close friend Ragnvald Mørejarl to rule over the Møre counties and Romsdal in his stead. Harald then left for Trondheim 'with a lot of people around him'[36]

The picture that the sagas makes of the North West coast during the unification of Harald Hårfagre, shows that the different regions were divided by several kings. Huntjov, Nokkve, Arnvid and Audbjørn are all referred to as kings and chieftains in the saga.[37] This shows both a division of power in these areas, as they called themselves kings and were therefore supreme in their regions, but also that the "kings" only ruled over a smaller area, whereas Hårfagre sought to rule the whole region. Since the kings in the smaller areas were in effect chieftains with no ruler above them, they should be considered chieftains for later comparison. Hårfagre's replacement for these chieftains, Ragnvald Mørejarl served the same role as the earlier chieftains, in the way that he was in charge of protecting and ruling the people in his area.

Placing new chieftains in conquered areas seems to be a reoccurring theme. It is written in *Heimskringla* that Hårfagre placed Håkon jarl Grjotgardsson as the new chieftain of Firdafylke.[38] This is however different from what is written in *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* where Hårfagre gives Firdafylke to Roald jarl[39] It is recorded in *Heimskringla* that Håkon jarl Grjotgardsson died while trying to claim Firdafylke from Atle jarl, making it likely that Hårfagre made Roald jarl the new chieftain over the area after the death of Grjotgardsson. This shows that the king was dependent on promoting chieftains whom he knew would support him and defend his new kingdom. This allowed the king to travel and conquer new areas, knowing that the already conquered areas would be defended. The effect that this had

[35] Heggestad, Leiv (translator) *Egilssoga.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 1965. Page 13.
[36] Heggestad, Leiv (translator) *Egilssoga.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 1965. Page 15.
[37] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 51
[38] Ibid. Page 54
[39] Heggestad, Leiv (translator) *Egilssoga.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 1965. Page 16

on the majority of the people who lived in such an area, was most likely minimal as the chieftains were simply replaced by a new one. The common people would still have to support whoever was considered the most powerful person in the area. This gives the impression that the chieftains were to a certain extent easily replaceable to suit the needs of the king.

After the great battle of Hafrsfjord, Harald Hårfagre had finally defeated all enemies on the Western coast, and so, he had successfully taken control over Norway. However, chapter 22 in the saga tells how the Western coast was continuously raided by Vikings. When Harald Hårfagre tried to defeat them, they escaped across the sea to the West, but continued to come back. After much frustration, Harald Hårfagre decided to follow them and killed all Vikings on Shetland, the Hebrides and the Orkney Islands. It was during one of these battles that the son of Ragnvald Mørejarl, Ivar, fell. Because of this, Harald Hårfagre decided to give Ragnvald Mørejarl control over the Orkney Islands and Shetland. In the two following chapters, Harald Hårfagre continues to show utmost respect to Ragnvald Mørejarl as Hårfagre lets Ragnvald cut his hair after what *Heimskringla* estimates to be roughly ten years.[40]

The reign of Harald Hårfagre must be seen as the point when the North West coast was unified. Hårfagre was the king, but he made his good friend Ragnvald the chieftain over the region, in theory making Ragnvald the most powerful person in the absence of Hårfagre. It was natural for the king to have an ally and friend in the chieftain since loyalty was of utmost importance. Given that Ragnvald lived somewhere at Møre, this area must have been a powerful centre. If we accept that Hårfagre did not have any enemies left on the North West coast after the battle of Solskjel, we must assume that there were not any other chieftains as powerful as Ragnvald. This makes it likely that the power was centralised to one place, and that Huntjov, Nokkve and Audbjørn, who were kings of Nordmøre, Romsdal and Fjordane, respectively, were the last kings in these areas to rule over the smaller regions. This did perhaps not matter to farmers as the kings were replaced by chieftains sometime later, but the centralisation gives the impression that there was no longer any contest of these areas.

[40] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 61

Haakon the Good (approximately: 933-961 AD):

Being the youngest son of Harald Hårfagre, Haakon the Good was sent away to England to be raised by King Athelstan. He was sent back to Norway after the news of his father's death around the year of 932. After landing in Trondheim, he received great supports from the chieftains there and challenged the rule of his brother Eirik, who stayed further south in the country around Viken.

Haakon was not a great warrior like his father or brother Eirik. He did, however, seek to restore law and order over his kingdom, but also introduce Christianity. Chapter 11 of the king's saga notes very bluntly that during his reign there was a general peace and there were prosperous years for both merchants and farmers.[41] The same chapter explains how Haakon established Gulatingsloven on the west coast in collaboration with Torleiv Spake and Frostatingsloven in Trøndelag in collaboration with his good friend Sigurd Jarl.[42]

The saga explains how eight chieftains from Trøndelag decided to raid Møre and burn down three churches and kill three priests. When Haakon returned to Møre after this, the farmers were furious with the king and wanted him to take responsibility for the losses. Sigurd Jarl urged him not to wage war against the chieftains in Trøndelag as the mightiest army in the whole country was stationed there.[43] The king then stayed at Møre the following winter and spring to gather a force large enough to attack the chieftains in Trøndelag. The perhaps most interesting part about this chapter, is that one of the chieftains who was a part of this decision, Tore Skjegg, was from Hustad. Hustad is the area between Romsdal and Nordmøre, one of the areas that Ragnvald Mørejarl should have had complete control over. While this event happened maybe 40-50 years after Ragnvald Mørejarls death, it shows how the allegiance of the chieftains could easily change over time with new chieftains rising up.

From chapter 19 in the saga, *Heimskringla* explains how the sons of Haakon's brother, Eirik, returned from Denmark and started to raid Viken.[44] They would later go back to Denmark, but return to Ulvesund, much closer to Haakon. At this time, *Heimskringla* tells in chapter 22, that Haakon was staying on an island called Frei at Nordmøre.[45] Frei became the place for a large battle between the sons of Eirik and Haakon's forces. After showing great tactics, Haakon

[41] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009Page 82
[42] Ibid. Page 82
[43] Ibid. Page 87
[44] Ibid. Page 87
[45] Ibid. Page 89

was able to defeat the sons even though the attackers outnumbered the king's forces. It was prior to this battle that Haakon met with Egil Ullserk who was the most powerful farmer at Frei. Ullserk tells the king that he was a bannerman for Hårfagre and that he had retired from fighting to be a farmer. Ullserk also tells the king that he was worried that after so many years of peace, he would die from old age. He explains that he would much rather die for the cause of Harald Hårfagre's son.[46]

The story of the later parts of *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* happen during Haakon the Good's reign. From chapter 64 in the saga Egil says to his friend Torstein that he wishes to travel to Sogn in Hordaland to prepare for his journey to Iceland the coming summer. Along with 11 other men, they travel to Romsdalen where they are able to join a boat over to Møre. The saga records that they arrive at Hod (Haried), but the translator notes that the farm they arrive at, Blindheim, is on the island called Vigra.[47] There, Egil meets a wealthy family. Fridgeir is the *lendmann* of the family, Gyda his mother and Fridgeir's sister, who is recorded as beautiful and well-dressed in the saga. Egil observes that she is sad and cries a lot, which is when Gyda explains to Egil that there is a man called Ljot the Pale who has challenged Fridgeir to a duel (*holmgang*). The reason for this, as Gyda explains, is because Ljot wanted to marry Fridgeir's sister, which Fridgeir refused. The *holmgang* was to take place on an island called Vorl, or Vallerøy as noted by the translator.[48] Egil offered to take Fridgeir's place in the *holmgang* which Fridgeir accepted. It is noted that Fridgeir was not strong and had never been in battle before. Egil, a much stronger man, would have a good chance at beating Ljot. After the arrival on Vorl, and after trading some insults, Egil defeated Ljot by cutting his foot off and Ljot died a short time after. After the battle, Egil and Fridgeir returned to the home of the family before Egil continued on his road to a man called Tord in Sogn.

Taking the last paragraphs into consideration, it is clear that during the reign of Haakon the Good, there is no clear chieftain who rules over the larger area of Møre and Romsdal. Instead, there are less significant chieftains and powerful farmers, like Egil Ullserk, who control their own smaller area. It would be likely that there was some sort of power vacuum after the death of the such a powerful chieftain like Ragnvald Mørejarl, but the sagas tell a completely different story of how there was general peace in the region. It is likely that the chieftains or powerful farmers managed to live in peace since most of them accepted Haakon as their king.

[46] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 89
[47] Heggestad, Leiv (translator) *Egilssoga.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 1965. Page 148.
[48] Ibid Page 149.

Heimskringla portrays Haakon the Good as a very kind man who wanted the best for his people, and that he did not want to "control" them, like Harald Hårfagre had done.[49] The fact that Haakon the Good also tried to get his people to adopt Christianity, could have been seen as a peaceful act. The exceptions were of course the chieftains in Trøndelag who sought to destroy Christianity, as described above, but since Haakon, with the advice of Sigurd jarl, decided not to punish the chieftains, he managed to maintain peace during his reign.

Olav Tryggvason **(approximately: 995-1000 AD):**

Olav Tryggvason was raised by Vladimir the Great in Russia, where he became chieftain over some of the army that belonged to Vladimir. After Olav Tryggvason earned substantial power, Vladimir was concerned and Olav was forced to leave. While Olav was raiding the British Isles, Håkon Jarl had denounced Denmark as the overlord of Norway and also the Christian religion which infuriated the Danish. This caused the great Sigvalde Jarl to encourage other Jomsviking chieftains to rally with him and sail towards Norway to defeat Håkon Jarl. Both Håkon and Eirik Jarl started to gather Norwegian forces throughout their controlled areas. Chapter 39 of Olav Tryggvason's saga describes how Sigvalde Jarl arrives just north of Stad. One of the chieftains, Bue, encountered a farmer who told them that Håkon was seen at Hjørundfjord with maybe a ship or two, but no more than three.[50] Håkon and Eirik were actually in Hallkjellsvik in the Voldafjord with roughly 180 ships. When the Norwegians were informed that the Danish were close, they rowed to Hjørungavåg where the two forces met. The battle was even, though the Norwegians had far more ships. The Jomsvikings fought with more bravery than Håkon's men, but in the end Sigvalde escaped with many ships and the rest were killed or given a pardon.[51]

After the death of Håkon Jarl, Olav Tryggvason became the king of Norway. He wished, in conjunction with the Danish king Harald Gormsson to baptise his people and instate Christianity as main religion. As the Danish king controlled Viken, most of the people there were baptised. Olav Tryggvason spent a long while in Viken and was because of this a good friend of the Danish king. Chapter 54 of the saga demonstrates to what extents Olav Tryggvason would go to to ensure that his people followed the correct faith. He would punish or even kill those who did not conform.[52]

[49] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 89
[50] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 138
[51] Ibid Page 141
[52] Ibid. Page 152

Olav Tryggvason's eagerness to meet and baptise his people is very clearly recorded just a few chapters after he went to Viken. After Viken, he travelled to Rogaland, then to Gulatinget to meet with the chieftains in the area. It was not often that the king imposed himself on the *ting* which was normally left to the chieftains and farmers who wished to discuss the laws of the common people, but on this occasion, it was the chieftains who invited the king to speak with them.[53] It was important for the king to be able to reach an agreement with the chieftains in the area, as they were the people who would carry out the king's orders with their own people.

Another saga which is important to account for, before continuing with *Heimskringla*, is the *Saga of Olav Tryggvason* written by Odd Snorreson as it contains chapters which account for events prior to the next *Heimskringla* chapter. Chapter 25 in this saga tells the story of how the people at Selja existed. Two powerful men from Fjordane travelled past Selja on their way to Trondheim. While passing the island, they saw a light shine from the sky upon the island and they found a head of a person where the light was shining. The two travellers brought the head to Olav Tryggvason in Trondheim, where the king interpreted the head as a sign of the Christian faith and immediately christened the two travellers.

The following chapter, chapter 26 in the saga written by Odd Snorreson, accounts for when Olav Tryggvason along with the bishop in Trondheim visited Selja and found more human remains. The king, who was guided to the island by a farmer who had seen a bright light coming from the island, decided to build a church on the island, making it one of the most Christian places in the country.[54]

Returning to *Heimskringla*, chapter 59 marks an important event in the history of the North-West coast. The king called a meeting at Dragseid, inviting people from Sogn, Fjordane, Møre and Romsdal. His goal was to convince his people to accept Christianity and discard the old practices. Meeting the people with a large army, he proposed an ultimatum: accept Christianity or fight the king. As recorded by Snorre Sturlason, the people could not stand against the king with such an army behind him and chose to be baptised.[55] In just one sentence, Snorre continues to write that the king went north to Nordmøre and that county as

[53] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 154
[54] *The Saga of Olav Tryggvason*, by Odd Snorreson, written approx. 1190. Available online at: http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Olaf_Tryggves%C3%B8ns_Saga_-_af_Odd_Munk_(C.C.Rafn) [Last accessed 01.03.2018]
[55] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 155

well adopted Christianity too.[56] The location for the meeting described in chapter 59 was by no means a coincidence. Dragseid is less than 20km from Selja, the place where Olav built a church. Dragseid is also a part of Stadlandet, one of the areas in Norway were the sailing conditions are the worst. By gathering all the most powerful people in the nearest regions, he essentially imposed his own faith on everyone by taking complete control over the meeting. It is not clear in the sagas that the people who came to Dragseid were different than the ones who were at Gulatinget. Dragseid is obviously further north and the saga says explicitly who were gathered there, but it seems that it was important for the king to reach an agreement with the people at Gulatinget, who were most likely the local lawmen. These two *ting* meetings are the prime example of how the Christian faith came from "above": that the king christened chieftains and other powerful people, who could then christen the people in their own communities. The sagas of Olav Tryggvason show that he was even more eager than Haakon the Good to christen the people. While Haakon tried a slower approach, Olav claimed that those who did not accept the same faith as him, would be killed. This proves, at least at the meeting at Dragseid, that not all the people on the North West coast had become Christians after Haakon the Good's reign.

After the death of Olav Tryggvason at the battle of Svolder, the North-West coast of Norway was divided between the victors. The Swedish king Olav received Sunnmøre, Nordmøre and Romsdal, but passed them on to his son-in-law, Svein Jarl, who was the son of Håkon Jarl. At the very end of the Olav Tryggvason saga, it says that all laws and common norms were upheld, but the Christian religion was now the true faith.[57] It is unclear from the sagas who were the different chieftains during Olav Tryggvason's relatively short reign. It is clear that there were quite a few, definitely not one chieftain like Ragnvald Mørejarl. It is likely that the chieftains who lived during the reign of Haakon the Good had passed their power on to their family, maintaining the same amount of chieftains.

Olaf Haraldsson (approximately: 1015-1030 AD):

After spending several years on the European continent, but mostly England, Olaf Haraldsson returns to Norway as noted in chapter 29 in Haraldsson's saga. According to the Skaldic poetry in this chapter, Olaf defies the storm while crossing the sea from England to Norway. The poem portrays the king as a man who does not stray away from dangers, but faces them

[56] Ibid. Page 155
[57] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 188

with great courage.[58] The poem concludes by saying that the king and his men arrived on the Western coast of Norway, which is where Snorre starts his story about Olaf's landing on the Norwegian coast.

Snorre writes that the king arrived on the island named Selja, just outside of Stad. The king noted that it must be a fortunate day as they arrived on this particular island, with the name meaning 'luck', according to the translator.[59] When the king and his men stepped down from their boat and onto land, Olaf slipped and uttered to his men: 'I fell'. One of his men, Rane, then replied: 'you did not fall, my king, you just got a steady foothold in this country'. To this, Olaf laughed and replied: 'that may well be, God willing'. The king and his men continued to Ulvesund after a brief stay on Selja.[60] It might be seen as a great coincidence that Olaf Haraldsson lands at the same place that Olav Tryggvason had discovered and built a church just a few years prior Haraldsson's landing. This event highlights Olaf Haraldsson as a holy man, perhaps even more so than Olav Tryggvason

Seven years after his landing on Selja, Snorre records the next time Olaf travels in the North-West coast of Norway. From chapter 111 Snorre writes that the chieftains Torfinn and Bruse came from the Orkney Islands to swear loyalty to Olaf. That following summer, Olaf travelled through Møre and arrived at Romsdal during the autumn. From there, he travelled to Lesja and Dovre and captured all the best men and forced them to accept Christianity or die. Those who accepted to the king's offer had to give their sons to the king to ensure loyalty to the faith.[61] It is clear from this chapter that some areas of the North West coast still had not adopted Christianity. However, unlike any of the other sagas before, Lesja and Dovre are much further inland. It could have taken longer for these areas to convert to Christianity since it was common for the kings to travel along the coast. It also seems that the local chieftains who supported the king could not carry out the christening process in new areas. In the chapter prior to this one, Sturlason writes about the chieftain Arne Armodsson, who most likely was in control over Sunnmøre. Even though Arne Armodsson was powerful and close to the king, it seems that he was only used to manifest Sunnmøre as a powerful centre to continue the support for the king.

[58] Ibid. Page 203
[59] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 203
[60] Ibid. Page 203
[61] Ibid. Page 290

Later, Olaf travelled from Nidaros with a big army ready to travel southwards. He came to Northern Møre and gathered the *leidang* fleet from there and Romsdal. He then brought all his men to Herøy, Sunnmøre and waited there with his army. While he was there, he often held *husting* to hear what the locals had issues with and if there was anything that the king could do. During one specific *husting*, Olaf brought up the issue that the Faroe Island people had not paid taxes for a long time and he wanted some of the people at the *husting* to travel there and make sure they pay what they owed him. It was Karl Mørske who offered to do the king's biding when nobody else wanted to do so. Olaf was very pleased with Karl Mørske, so Olaf invited him to be his guest for the night where they would plan his journey to the Faroe Islands.[62] The *husting* that Olaf Haraldsson held at Herøy shows how the king could influence the local law systems to be changed according to his wishes. Like the *ting* at Dragseid held by Olav Tryggvason, Olaf Haraldsson almost forced the people who attended the *ting* to carry out the king's wish. As some people declined to travel to the Faroe Islands, it seems that those people were shamed for not accepting the king's proposal. This is confirmed by the speech given by Karl Mørske. Such a reaction from most of the men who attended the *ting*, suggests that the king was not a close friend of everyone there. It also suggests that such a proposal was uncommon for the king to ask of his people. This relates to the king's position at the *tings* and how much authority the king could have. This will be discussed further in the chapter on the laws.

One of the last times that Olaf visits the North-Western coast of Norway is recorded in chapter 178. According to Snorre, Olaf spent some nights in Steinvågen, which is today known as Ålesund. During his stay, he was informed by some men who had come from Frekøysund that Håkon jarl and many of his men had arrived at Frekøysund, ready to kill Olaf. After sending scouts to find out how large of an army Håkon jarl had brought, Olaf decided to sail towards Valldal, while passing Nørve, Hundsvær, Vegsund and Skot. He stayed with the chieftain named Bruse, and the king was kindly welcomed among Bruse's people. After a short stay, the king escaped towards Lesja and further South towards Hedmark.

Grette Åsmundsson's Saga is the last saga that will be mentioned in this chapter. It contains the story of Grette who travels to Norway from Iceland. Grette's first visit to Norway happens in chapter 17 of the saga. At the beginning of the chapter, Grette was sent away from Iceland,

[62] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 344

but he was not given a pleasant send-off. His father, Åsmund said to him that he would not receive a sword from him, because he had not ever listened to his father. Grette's mother, on the other hand, gave Grette a valuable sword. Upon his arrival in Norway, after crossing the sea with many storms, Grette and his fellow travellers arrived at Haramsøy, Sunnmøre. The last sentence of the chapter describes a large village with a chieftain's farm.

The following chapter starts with the description of the chieftain on the island, Torfinn. It says that Torfinn was a great chieftain. The boat that Grette and his men arrived in was brought up on land by the people on the island, and the men were some days later sent further South. Grette, however, stayed with Torfinn on his farm, where he lived for some time. While Grette stayed with Torfinn, he did not do any work, but he ate the food that Torfinn had. Torfinn did not want to reject Grette any food since Torfinn was a kind and wealthy chieftain.

During the days, Grette travelled around to the smaller islands around Haramsøy. He met a farmer named Audun who lived on a farm named Vindheim. One evening, Grette spotted a pile close to Audun's farm. Audun said it was the burial pile of Torfinn's father, Kår the Old. Grette then asked Audun to bring him digging tools so that he could go inside Kår's grave. Audun said to Grette that he should not open the grave and that Torfinn would become his enemy if he did. Grette did not listen, he opened the grave and brought out the gold and silver he could manage. While Grette was digging in the grave, it seems he was fighting ghosts as he had drawn the sword that was given to him by his mother. Audun believed Grette had died in the grave and had therefore cut the rope that Grette had used to climb down. Grette then brought the goods to Torfinn's farm, where Grette arrived late for dinner that evening. Torfinn acknowledged that gold and silver should no longer be buried in graves, so Torfinn accepted the goods that Grette had brought to him. In the last sentence of the chapter, it is noted that nothing else happened after, but Torfinn went to bed the following nights with a sword close to him.[63] In this chapter, and chapter with the description of Torfinn, we learn that he is a very kind chieftain and offers great hospitality to Grette. What this might say about the chieftains at Sunnmøre becomes speculative, but one theory might be that Christianity, which was widespread at Sunnmøre at this time, promoted such kindness and hospitality. Since Torfinn also accepts the gold and silver that Grette digs up from Torfinn's father's grave, it might be because of the new faith, where the custom of burying people with valuable items became less popular.

[63] Ommedal, Arne (transl.) *Soga om Grette Åsmundsson.* Det norske samlaget, Oslo, 1977. Page 50

Up until chapter 25 of the saga, Grette travels several times to Trøndelag and back. It is recoded that Grette was ill-tempered and often made enemies, some of which he killed. Torfinn, who at this time had become Grette's friend, vouched for Grette every time someone wanted Grette to pay for killing their friends. Because of Torfinn's kindness, none of the jarls of Trøndelag stayed his friend.[64] When Grette left Torfinn, which happens at the end of chapter 25, Torfinn gave him nice clothes as a token of their friendship. Torfinn hoped that Grette would come back to him some day. Soon after, Grette travelled further north to find a boat which belonged to some merchants and he then travelled back to Iceland.[65]

Discussion

As has been shown in this chapter, there were many different chieftains who ruled different areas over the four time periods that I have accounted for. The sagas do not mention every chieftain, but perhaps the most important ones. What I wish to give an impression of in this summary, is a more visual overview of most of the people that have been mentioned in this chapter. This is to show where the chieftains lived and where there might have been centres of power, at least according to the sagas. The maps presented below show the whole region, but the different areas have been divided. The lines that have been drawn to mark the different areas are based on today's borders, but it is very important to note that the sagas do not say anything about the extent of the chieftain's area of control. This means that the lines drawn are only used to show the approximate borders between the areas. It is likely that the most of the chieftains, except for maybe Ragnvald Mørejarl, only controlled the area where they lived,

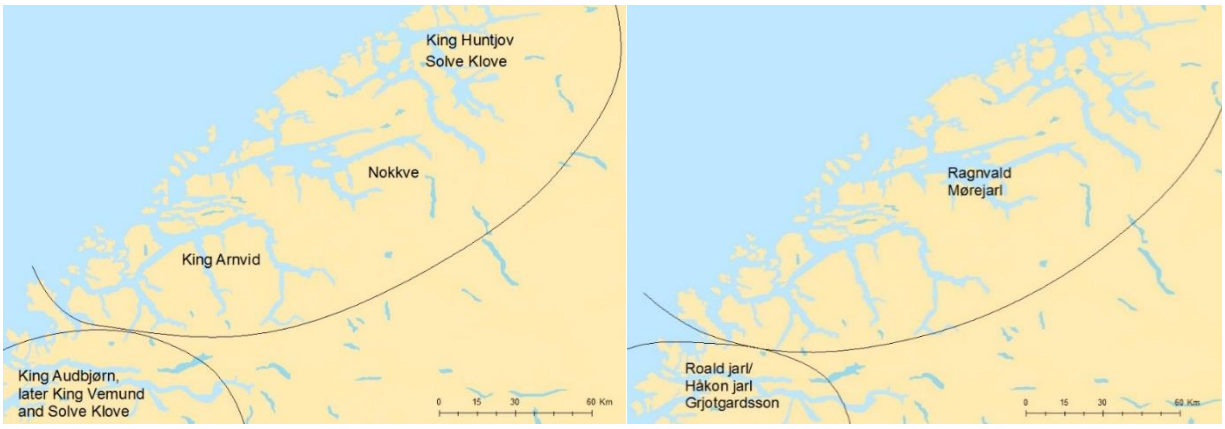

Fig. 1.1 and fig. 1.2: The changes of chieftains before and after the unification of the region by Harald Hårfagre. Created by Margaret Giffen

[64] Ommedal, Arne (transl.) *Soga om Grette Åsmundsson.* Det norske samlaget, Oslo, 1977. Page 68
[65] Ommedal, Arne (transl.) *Soga om Grette Åsmundsson.* Det norske samlaget, Oslo, 1977. Page 68

so it must not be assumed that they controlled the entire area where they are placed on the map.

The first period, during the reign of Harald Hårfagre, is where we see the most change of leaders on the North West coast. The two maps (figures 1.1 and 1.2) show the differences before and after Hårfagre's battle to gain control over the region. The first map shows the few chieftains who ruled their own smaller areas. It can be assumed that Huntjov, Solve Klove and Nokkve were close since they were related by family. After the few battles where these chieftains were defeated, Ragnvald was put in charge, firstly over Nordmøre and Romsdal, the two northernmost areas here, then Sunnmøre as well. It seems likely that Ragnvald Mørejarl only controlled the coastal areas, and most likely not the inland parts. While the sagas do not mention any other chieftains in this area, it is likely that Ragnvald had allies or friends who helped him stay in control over such a large area.

The second period is the reign of Haakon the Good (figure 1.3). There was no supreme chieftain like Ragnvald Mørejarl, as the sagas portray a more split North West coast. Perhaps the most interesting aspect about this map, is the location of Hustad and the chieftain Tore Skjegg. As mentioned in the section about Haakon the Good, Tore Skjegg was a man who opposed the king and Christianity, and was one of the chieftains who decided to "destroy" the religion further down the coast. Since he became a chieftain sometime after Ragnvald Mørejarl's death, it implies that Ragnvald did not control the whole area. It becomes speculative to discuss how Tore Skjegg became a chieftain at Hustad, but the alternatives are that he was either a local person who inherited the power, or he was an outsider who became chieftain through the use of force or other means.

Fig. 1.3: The different chieftains during the reign of Haakon the Good. Created by Margaret Giffen

The position of Frei and Egil Ullserk's farm shows that the Trøndelag chieftains, like Tore Skjegg, did not control all the areas from Hustad and further north. Though Ullserk was a

farmer and not a chieftain, he was definitely a man with some sort of power in the local area. His kindness towards Haakon the Good shows that the memory of Harald Hårfagre still remained and that the people who knew Hårfagre were keen to show hospitality towards his son.

Fig. 1.4: The areas related to Olaf Haraldsson's reign. Created by Margaret Giffen

The final map (figure 1.4) shows the different people and chieftains who are mentioned in *Olaf Haraldsson's Saga* and *Grette's Saga*. I have chosen not to include a separate map for Olav Tryggvason as there only a few areas that were important on the North West coast during his reign. These areas were Dragseid and Selja, which are marked on all the maps. As we can see from this map, Sunnmøre is highlighted as an area of importance. *Heimskringla* refers to the chieftains Arne Armodsson and Bruse, while *Grette's Saga* refers to Torfinn who lives at Haramsøy. The fact that both of the smaller sagas, *Grette's Saga* and *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga*, refer to chieftains who are very close to each other in terms of distance at Sunnmøre, shows that this might have been an area of considerable power. Also with the inclusion of the *ting* at Herøy, as well as Arne Armodsson who was the chieftain at Giske, Sunnmøre rises as the perhaps most important place on the North West coast, at least during the late Viking period.

While the location of these events might not say something specific about the centres of power on the North West coast, they show where chieftains most likely had control, and where most people lived. It is clear that Sunnmøre became more of a centre especially during Haraldsson's reign, but it is difficult to say anything more about the other places, at least from the perspective of the sagas. It was the purpose of this chapter to show where the centres of power could have been according to the sagas, which I have done by accounting for the events that were written down and compared the location of these events with the different time periods.

Chapter on Archaeological Sources

One of the most important aspects of this thesis is to outline how the political landscape was shaped in the region. Can we, as previously investigated, use Heimskringla as a source to establish who had the power over the people and say something about the structure of society? The answer might have seemed obvious at the time of writing: the kings were supreme in their respective reigns and they were in control. Archaeological sources, however, can tell a different story. Items or structures found in the ground can show how all other people lived and what their lives were like. It is the purpose of this chapter to outline the many archaeological investigations and their results to show how the North West coast of Norway was politically structured in the Viking period. In the first part, I will introduce some of the key theories that can be applied to highlight political power in the archaeological sources. The theories will be applied to the selected key areas in the latter parts of this chapter. The middle parts of this chapter will focus on the general overview of how we can define centres of power. By using Bjørn Ringstad's dissertation from 1986, I will define how centres in the Viking period can be located by looking at burial mounds, specifically how their size and concentration say something about the amount of people who lived in the area and their power.

As mentioned above and in the previous chapter, the goal is to highlight the Viking period. The sagas that were mentioned span from approximately 900-1030 AD. This chapter will focus on the same timeframe, but when including archaeological findings, it is natural to include earlier findings to show what the Viking period is based on. The prime example is burial mounds. Even though some of them can be dated as far back as to 400 AD, they were still mounds in the Viking period as well, meaning that they had some importance during the period. It can also be useful to look ahead of the proposed timeframe to see if an area became more powerful or influential shortly after the Viking period. One example, which will be discussed later in the chapter, is King Øystein Magnusson and his burial at Hustad in 1123. Though it is difficult to establish a connection from his death to the Viking period, his burial at Hustad made the area and the largest farm there more famous and we can imagine that the farm he was buried at had significant power only a hundred years earlier.

Network Theories

When looking at archaeological sources, my foremost goal is to establish some sort of network theory that is applicable to the region. Dagfinn Skre uses the phrase *nodal points* to describe areas of some importance to the theory, like a place where people lived: a community or a village.[66] These nodal points are the main parts of a network, but it is vital to find the link between them. There are numerous of ways to describe how a network of communities, villages or cities are tied together. Factors that usually combine these areas are political, social, economic, geographical and religious. None of the factors are necessarily vital or exclusive in any way, they are simply the five main reasons for why a certain community would be closely tied to another. This chapter will look to the archaeological sources to see how the communities, villages and towns on the North West coast are tied together, and potentially what factors which combine them are. The main reason that archaeological sources are used for this purpose, is that there are few other types of sources that can tell the same story.

When looking at *Heimskringla* it is easy to get the impression that territorial division, at least on a regional basis, was a topic of little importance. One example is located Olav Tryggvason's saga, when Olav travelled along the North Western coast and Christianised the people as he travelled. He was also, to a certain extent, establishing control over the areas he visited: those who would not follow him, were killed. *Heimskringla* pays this event little attention, and concludes that Olav managed to gain followers and that there was little to no opposition.[67] Naturally, it is almost impossible to imagine that this example is completely true as the saga says nothing about the people who supposedly became "the King's people" following this event. There was support for Olav Tryggvason, as we know this area was the first area in Norway to build churches, but we do not know from the saga how everyone reacted to Olav's claim over the North West coast.

Centre and Periphery

Since the burden of evidence falls upon archaeological sources - how then can we look at these sources to create an image of how the North West coast was structured, primarily politically, but inevitably also economically, socially, geographically and religiously? A

[66] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium. Page 198
[67] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 155

theoretic approach, which has been widely used by archaeologists to explain the relation between communities, is the concept of centre and periphery. The concept of centre and periphery is used to describe the relationship between a centre and a periphery. A centre can only exist in contrast to what surrounds it, or not the centre.[68] In the words of Arne B. Johansen: "a town always has a surrounding countryside; a farm always has a wilderness around it."[69] A centre is not necessarily always a town or a farm, and a town or a farm is not necessarily a centre. In other words, a centre may vary according to the matter of perspective. A capital city is most certainly a "centre", but given the context of time for this thesis, it would be difficult to define a capital. Examples of such centres are cities like Bergen, after the eleventh century, or Trondheim, but also the most powerful villages in the local community, like Giske, Haram, or Hustad could be described as "centres". Ellen Fjeld has created her own definition of centre and periphery through her thesis. She defines a centre as an area which serves one or more "centre-functions" for either a smaller or larger periphery.[70] From these general definitions, it is necessary to specify a more narrow definition for topics concerning different types of centres.

The most interesting part of the centre and periphery concept, at least in regards to this thesis, is how the centre works. Dagfinn Skre explores in his article the importance of centrality when looking at the centre and periphery model. Centrality, or "central places", is the study of how specific areas were used for a specific purpose, and that area's development over time. The term was first used by the German geographer Walter Christaller, and Skre attempts to revive Christaller's term by applying it to Scandinavian archaeology.[71] Christaller's main focus in his centrality theory is the *place* and *function* of a central place.[72] The *place* is naturally the geographical area of the central place. The perhaps more interesting *function* refers to the use of the area by the local people and the surrounding communities.[73] The *function* is therefore something that satisfies the inhabitants by doing some sort of activity to

[68] Wik, Birgitta.. *Sentrum - periferi : Sentra og sentrumsdannelser gjennom førhistorisk og historisk tid :* Den 18. nordiske arkeologkongress, Trondheim 28.8.4.9.1989 : Vol. 1. Trondheim: Universitetet i Trondheim, Vitenskapsmuseet. 1991. Page 23
[69] Ibid. Page 23
[70] Fjeld, Ellen, in Jan Henning Larsen and Egil Mikkelsen, *Økonomiske og politiske sentra i Norden ca 400-1000 e. Kr.: Åkerseminaret, Hamar 1990* Oslo: Universitetets oldsaksamling 1992. Page 67
[71] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium. Page 199
[72] Christaller, Walter *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland : Eine ökonomisch-geographische Untersuchung über die Gesetzmässigkeit der Verbreitung und Entwicklung der Siedlungen mit städtischen Funktionen*. Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer. 1933
[73] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium. Page 199

achieve their needs – "typically economic, juridical, cultic, social and political needs".[74] Size is also a vital factor for the central places. From the theory, the central places are ranked by their place in a hierarchical system, where the larger the place, the more likely it is to be more significant. One could say that if a place is of a high order, it has a higher centrality than those of a lower order.[75]

To further understand the theory of centrality, Skre uses the example of Old Uppsala in Sweden, an example I deem valuable for the purpose of this chapter. From the archaeological sources, we know of five large burial mounds in Old Uppsala, one of which was most likely used for the settlement of judicial disputes, a *ting*-mound.[76] Alongside the large mounds, there are several other smaller mounds. The mounds combined with the evidence of large hall buildings and a marketplace says something about the importance of Old Uppsala.[77] Even in Olav Haraldsson's Saga in *Heimskringla* this place is mentioned as the place where the chief sacrifice was done. The Saga also mentions that Swedes came from all over the country to witness this and to go to the market.[78] It is also noted that even after people had adopted the Christian religion, they still came to Uppsala to trade and attend meetings.[79] While we must be critical of *Heismkringla* as a source, there cannot be any doubt that Old Uppsala was indeed a very important central place of a high order. The scale of such a place would be difficult to mirror in terms of the North West coast of Norway, but it is useful to show an important example.

It is also important to look specifically at the defining factors of a central place. One of the factors that Skre outlines is trade and how trading sites often portray what type of order a central place could be. Acknowledging that trading sites are extremely diverse, Skre uses three parameters to describe their degree of centrality: "a) how far from the site its trade extended; b) the site's political context; and c) its permanence of habition."[80] The first parameter is linked to how influential the central place is in terms of trade. If there is a certain item that is only available in a central place, merchants from other places could travel there to further distribute to a greater market, naturally leading to a greater revenue for the original

[74] Ibid. Page 199
[75] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium Page 200
[76] Ibid. Page 200
[77] Ibid. Page 200
[78] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 245
[79] Ibid. Page 245
[80] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium. Page 199

seller. The site's political context is important since the political influence determines other functions of the trading site. Permanence of habition is mainly linked to whether or not there are permanent inhabitants in the area. If a trading site can only be accessed during a specific time of year, or if a site only sells goods that are seasonally available, the trading site is likely to have non-permanent inhabitants. If a town, which usually does not have sufficient means of producing the necessary goods all year, is dependent on nearby farms, it becomes a seasonal trading site as it gathers the producers to promote trade in a border area.[81]

By looking at trade as an isolated aspect of centrality, Skre does not include the other aspects which also help define Old Uppsala as a central place. The mounds and large halls at Old Uppsala give some insight into what else might have defined the place as central: law, religion and politics most likely were practiced in the same place. The perhaps most important aspect other than trade is how the central place often reinforced the idea of who was the most powerful person in the area. It could have been a king or chieftain who gathered his people to show kindness to ensure them that he was in control over the society. Skre discusses this type of feudalistic society on a general level in his doctorate degree from 1988. He suggests that there was a lord/vassal-relationship, where both parts recognised each other to receive benefits in the society.[82] It is assumed that both parties were considered to be free men who chose to stay in such a relationship.[83] The central place therefore became a stage where this relationship was maintained. It is also likely that the central place was the home of the lord in the relationship, making it the natural gathering point for showing political allegiance.

Since many chieftains lived in the central places, it was natural that they became centres to discuss law, or aspects of life which concerned people living in the local society. During the Viking period, as Alexandra Sanmark writes, law was discussed at certain assembly areas.[84] These areas had been chosen for their accessibility, but it became natural to have these assembly areas in the central places that already were visited by people for other reasons, like trade or religion. Western Norway was, after Haakon the Good, divided into law provinces that passed laws for the entire province.[85] How law was practiced on the North West coast, is the topic of the next chapter so the discussion of these assembly areas will be continued there.

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[81] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium. Page 206
[82] Skre, Dagfinn, *Herredømmet: Bosetning og besittelse på Romerike 200-1350 e. Kr.* Universitetet i Oslo, 1996. Page 6
[83] Ibid. Page 6
[84] Sanmark, Alexandra, *Viking Law and Order.* Edinburgh University Press, 2017. Page 37.
[85] Ibid. Page 37

Sanmark notes in her book that central places were more powerful when more people had a reason to gather in the place. When people gathered to discuss law, it became important to further attract others to the same place. This was to ensure the "collection and upholding of collective identities".[86] One of these identities could be religion, which was a significant reason to meet others of the same faith, both pre- and mid-Christian times in Norway. Other identities could simply be cooking and eating, but also sports and games.[87] It might seem that central places were a means of the elite to uphold their power in the local society, the central places were also important for all free people to share and take part in the common society. Both the elite and everyone else benefited from a central place where the each individual's interests were practiced and upheld.

A periphery is naturally everything that surrounds these centres. They both occur at the same time as there has to be a contemporary link between the two.[88] This does not mean that a short geographical distance and a contemporary link suffice to call something a centre and periphery; there has to be a "meaningful" link. It is also vital to establish that one cannot discuss the existence of a centre without any reference to the periphery, and vice versa. A centre is only a centre in relation to its periphery.[89] The way to discover such areas could be to look at the conditions of living. The centre, like a village, will usually have more people living closer together, whereas the countryside surrounding this village would be more scarcely populated. Does this one aspect mean that the particular village is the centre and the particular countryside is the periphery? Not necessarily. While the population of the two areas are different, there could be other, more defining aspects which make them the centre and periphery. The aspects do not always have to be opposite or different, but they often, by nature, highlight the differences of the two areas.

In relation to my thesis, this could pose a small challenge. While there have been archaeological excavations which have illuminated how people lived a thousand years ago, these excavations were rarely targeted at areas which can be considered a periphery. From the example above, Giske, Haram, and Hustad were perhaps natural places to start searching for archaeological material since these are places where there were more inhabitants. It is natural for archaeologists to search the areas where there are traces from the past, like farming land,

[86] Sanmark, Alexandra, *Viking Law and Order.* Edinburgh University Press, 2017Page 117
[87] Ibid. Page 117
[88] Skre, Dagfinn «Centrality, Landholding, and Trade in Scandinavia» in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia.* Editors: B. Poulsen and S.M. Sindbæk. 2011, Belgium. Page 206
[89] Ibid. Page 206

mounds, houses and roads. It could be a waste of time and resources to search where there has not been any visible traces in the landscape. The surrounding areas which could be considered a periphery, at least on the North West coast, have therefore not been the focus. Luckily, there have been many recent excavations in the region that have located areas which could be described as a periphery. These areas will be examined later.

Archaeological Method

It is necessary at this point in the thesis to show how archaeological sources in general might prove where there might have been different centres or other areas of importance. These points are not specific to my thesis, but rather how archaeologists in general work to define centres or areas.

1. The first, and the point which will be investigated further later in the chapter, is the visible monuments that can be found in the landscape. These are burial mounds and large rocks placed in the landscape for a specific purpose.
2. The second point is how findings of artefacts might tell us something about the people who lived in an area. Findings of rare materials or gems most definitely proves wealth. Findings of weapons and shields could mean that there had been a powerful farm nearby, as farms often were outfitted with some weapons.
3. The third point is how buildings or other constructions tell us something about the practical use of an area. If there is evidence of a graveyard or a church, then that tells us something about the religion of the people, while the findings of a large hall might mean that the area had been a home of a powerful person.
4. The fourth and is how names are used to tell us something about the significance of a place. Some names like “hus”, or “kaupang” give clues as to what the area might have been used as.[90]

While archaeological sources that are to a certain degree relevant for my thesis are not necessarily difficult to locate, there are some issues with using them in the first place. One major issue is how archaeological findings only tell the story of what was actually found. As with other topics from the middle ages, we, historians and archaeologists, only have fragments of what that used to exist. Even if what we find has some historical value, that finding might only tell one side of a story; the fragment shows only one part of a greater

[90] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 37

picture. The task of the historian is then to attempt to create a view of the greater picture where the fragment plays a role, without forcing too many subjective views and opinions into the view. This is also the reason why my focus on what has been written about the findings is so important. In many of the cases, which will be presented later in the thesis, the person who writes about the findings is often the person who was the leader of the excavations. While the conclusion of the finding's historical impact written by the archaeologist might be questioned, the findings themselves, at least from my perspective, cannot. What this will lead to is inevitably several guesses and potential conclusions which can be difficult to prove.

A second issue that presents itself when working with archaeology, is the time of which the archaeological findings cease to have more importance than other historical sources. This is naturally due the fact that archaeology as a subject tends to cover prehistoric times, whereas historical sources more or less 'take over' the burden of evidence after this period. For many archaeological papers, this change seems to happen around the Viking period, or just after, where there are still many archaeological sources, but an increasing amount of historical ones. This sometimes poses a problem in some geographical areas since there is no clear overlap of sources, which leaves a cavity of information that both archaeological and historical sources do not manage to prove.

Going forward, it would be beneficial to know exactly what a mound is. Mound, "haug" in Norwegian, is generally used as the word for burial sites. Though the word does not mean a burial site, but rather what we see in the landscape, a small hill, it is widely used for any burial site of unspecific size. There are however other, more specific terms which are used to define the size and perhaps religious or cultural values of the mound. In his presentation of the West coast's largest mounds Bjørn Ringstad defines them as any mound that is at least $400m^3$.[91] He notes that other archaeologists, like Bjørn Myhre and Åke Hyenstrand, use a specific diameter and height measure to define the largest mounds.[92] The technicalities of what defines a specific mound might not be too important for this part as I will mostly account for the most important mounds that have been written about.

Before looking specifically at the different mounds, it would be helpful to know how burial mounds might be a sign of any sort of power. Through archaeological findings, burial mounds tell a story about the status of the person who is buried. As in every society, people are

[91] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 15
[92] Ibid. Page 15

different in terms of wealth, social status and religious aspects. How a person was buried during the Viking period often depended on these features, but local and traditional relations also impacted the burial customs.[93] Joseph Tainter points out that the burial process is a way of communicating the status of the buried by using various symbols and items that best describes the person.[94] At the same time as symbols and items might be an attempt at showing what status the buried had in society, Tainter also says that there are other ways to show the person's status. This includes the burial chamber shape and size, the construction of the chamber, the location of the mound and the remains of the buried.[95] While these are ways to show the status, they are not general for all mounds, as the definition of status in society is not the same everywhere.

Overview of the North-West Coast

With the lack of written historical sources that encompass my thesis, archaeological findings and excavations become vital for my project to map how society and distribution of power among people was shaped in the North-West. This chapter stands as a significant contrast to the previous chapter about the sagas since this chapter will portray a more scientific and empirical analysis of how people lived and how society was structured. While the sagas provide valuable information about the numerous kings and chieftains who lived in, or simply visited, the region, they only tell the story of these people and what great deeds were done that were important enough to be remembered by others who later passed the information on to be written by the authors of the sagas. Naturally, this part of the chapter will therefore focus solely on material that has been written about archaeological findings in the area of my thesis.

This part of the chapter will first and foremost outline the different burial mounds which have been found all over the Western coast of Norway in order to give an overview of which areas I will focus on later. To do this, I have chosen to use Bjørn Ringstad's thesis from 1986 as a main source. While there are many reasons to not follow one source, there is no doubt that his dissertation is used by many for the same purpose.[96] Ringstad's dissertation is also one of the few sources which goes into detail about the work of Per Fett, the archaeologist who originally tried to create an overview over the burial mounds on the West coast. Ringstad's

[93]Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 15
[94] Tainter, Joseph. Mortuary Practices and the Study of Prehistoric Social Systems. *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory, 1*. 1978. Page 113
[95] Ibid. Page 121
[96] Both Sørheim (2010) and Opdahl (1998) base their research on the same source

dissertation is still preferred as he also tries to account for the various links between the many burial mounds.

The Mounds in a Historical Context

In his Magister dissertation, Bjørn Ringstad attempts to localise the prehistoric centres of political power. His focus is limited to the largest burial mounds on the West coast of Norway, including some on the North-West coast. He specifically defines the largest burial mounds as those that are the larger than $400m^3$, but also those that are several mounds closely linked together. One of the main starting points that Ringstad follows throughout his dissertation to define political power centres is that the largest burial mounds needed some sort of effort, resources and planning to be built. He says that generally, the larger the mound, the more resources and planning needed to go into the building process.[97] I intend to follow the same starting point as Ringstad when looking specifically at those burial mounds which are situated on the North-West coast.

The burial mounds might tell a story about what has been buried, but they often also give some information about their purpose through their names. Some mounds are named after a king or a local chieftain, like Håkonrøysa at Averøya.[98] Others are simply called "Kongshaugen", implying that it is the burial place of a king, and some are even named after their practical purpose ("Kaffihaugen", "Smiehaugen", "Bjerkehaugen".)[99]

As to why the burial mounds were built, we need not look any further than Ynglinga saga. From chapter 8: "For men of consequence a mound should be raised to their memory, and for all other warriors who had been distinguished for manhood a standing stone; which custom remained long after Odin's time."[100] Ringstad questions that the burial mounds were built for the sole purpose of burying an important person there.[101] He thinks that the large mounds served more as a place of gathering. A society is kept together by sharing some rituals or traditions, and by continuing the roles that each person has. According to Ringstad, one of these rituals were the burial ritual as people from a village, town or city would gather to

[97] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986.
[98] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986.

[99] Ibid. Page 15

[100] Ynglinga saga. Available online at: http://omacl.org/Heimskringla/ynglinga.html [Last accessed 21.09.2017]

[101] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 31

express their social roles and maintain the social structure of their society.[102] The ritual of burial itself could have been used by the powerful people in the society to maintain a specific norm. For example, if a warrior had died, the person would have been buried with his weapons. During the ritual, the powerful people could then influence the ritual to focus on the greatness of being a warrior or someone who would fight for the common land shared by the society. Therefore, in a more general way of saying it, the burial mounds could become a way for the powerful to enforce their way of living and ideals upon others. They were used as instruments for manipulating the social hierarchy.[103]

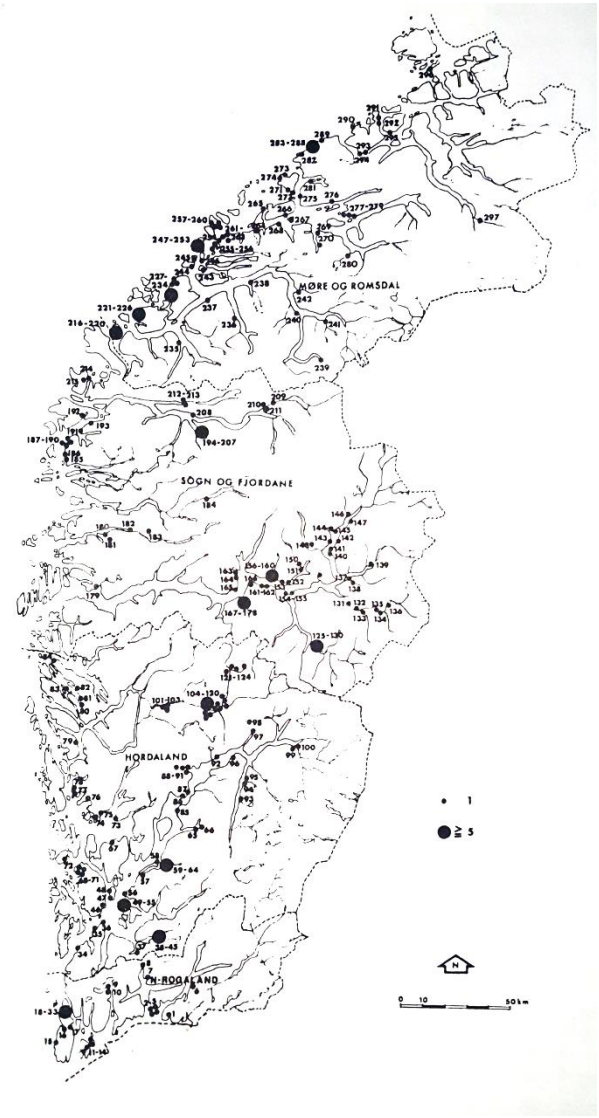


Fig. 2.1. From Ringstad (1986). The numbers shown on the map are a part of Ringstad's own sorting system, and are not important for this thesis.

The research that Ringstad has done, encompasses the entire West coast region of Norway, reaching from Northern Rogaland to the border between Møre og Romsdal and Trøndelag. From Fig. 2.1, we can see the burial mounds, where the larger circles represent a higher concentration of mounds. In total, he has located and accounted for almost 300 large burial mounds, dating from late Bronze Age until the Viking period. Out of the 300 burial sites, roughly 100 of them are located on the North-West coast. Only about 8 of those 100 of the burial mounds are from the Viking period. By this, Ringstad means that they were most likely

[102] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 32
[103] Ibid Page 32

built during the Viking period, since the oldest artifacts found in the mounds have been confirmed from that period.[104] This does not mean that older burial mounds are of no use. The older burial mounds could have served as a place of gathering for a society. They could also show how a town or village prospered long enough for them to stay in the same place. For the next part of this chapter, I will highlight those burial mounds that could have played an important political role on the North-West coast.

The Mounds

The mounds presented below are those on the North West coast which Per Fett discovered and that he could date to the Viking period. They are not included later in the chapter as there are more important areas to discuss, but I have chosen to present them here to show the surprisingly low number of burial mounds from the period. The reason why I deem these burial mounds to have a lesser importance than other mounds, is primarily because that these mounds were not connected to a central place within the timeframe of this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, older burial mounds can also be important for the discussion of central places during the Viking period. Since only a few of the mounds are from this period, the later parts will primarily discuss mounds from earlier than the Viking period.

Starting just north of Stad, Ringstad accounts for a mound at Nedre Stokkset in Sande. Named "Holerøysa", it is a mound built with mixed soil and several larger rocks.[105] One of the three graves in this mound is dated from the early Iron Age, but two others are dated from approximately 800 AD and 900-950 AD respectively. The findings in the two newer graves are not as valuable as the items in "Rundehågjen" and "Skjoratippen", and the graves do not seem to have any evidence of a coffin in which the bodies would have been buried.[106]

Some of the other mounds from the Viking period include "Monshaugen" at Hove in Stordal and "Elvestadrøysa" at Malefeten in Fræna.[107] Archaeologists have not actually done any systematic diggings into these mounds even though they are some of the larger mounds in the region. There is, however, according to Ringstad, some evidence of some diggings in the outer parts of the mounds. He reckons that these diggings could have happened at any point in

[104] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 198
[105] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. page 132
[106] Ibid Page 132
[107] Ibid Pages 136 and 146

history out of simple curiosity for their contents. "Monshaugen" is recorded to be 20 metres in diameter and 2,5 metres tall, and "Elvestadrøysa" is approximately 27 metres in diameter and also about 2,5 metres tall.

Centres of larger mounds

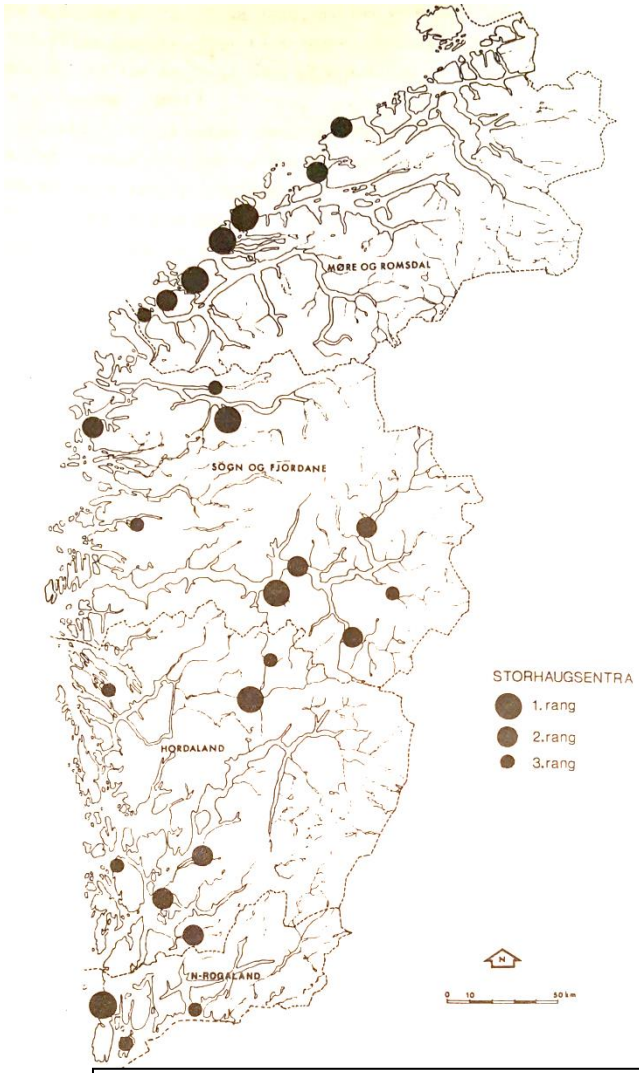
Though the archaeological research into these mounds might be interesting, the mounds themselves are not the focus of this thesis or Ringstad's dissertation. What is far more relevant is the concentration of larger mounds in certain areas which can be used to define a centre of greater mounds (storhaugsenter). In this way Ringstad tries to locate concentrations of power and see if there is a relation between centres of greater burial mounds and powerful villages or towns. To define a centre of greater burial mounds, he uses three criteria:

1. The maximum distance between the burial mounds that belong to the same geographical centre is approximately 5 kilometres.
2. The centres are part of a naturally confined area which separates the centre from other nearby areas
3. The combined building mass for the burial mounds within the centre is greater than 2800m^3.[108]

The aspect of when the burial mounds are dated has not been taken into account. By grouping the larger burial mounds together, Ringstad is able to create centres by ranking the different concentration of mounds from 1 to 3, where rank 1 is the is the largest centres by volume and rank 3 is the smallest, but with a minimum of 2800m^3. Specifically, the centres in rank 1 have a combined building mass of over 9000m^3, rank 2: 4200 – 6300m^3 and rank 3: 2800 – 3550m^3.[109] It is only reasonable to think, as Ringstad says, that the largest groups of mounds, those in rank 1, are areas of larger power, both politically and economically, since the size of the centres relate to the labour force and the economical frame to support the building.[110]

After attempting to group all the mounds together, Ringstad finds out that the North West coast has three rank 1 centres:, Giske, Haram and Ulstein. From Fig 1., the rank 1 centres can

[108] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 231
[109] Ibid Page 236
[110] Ibid. Page 236



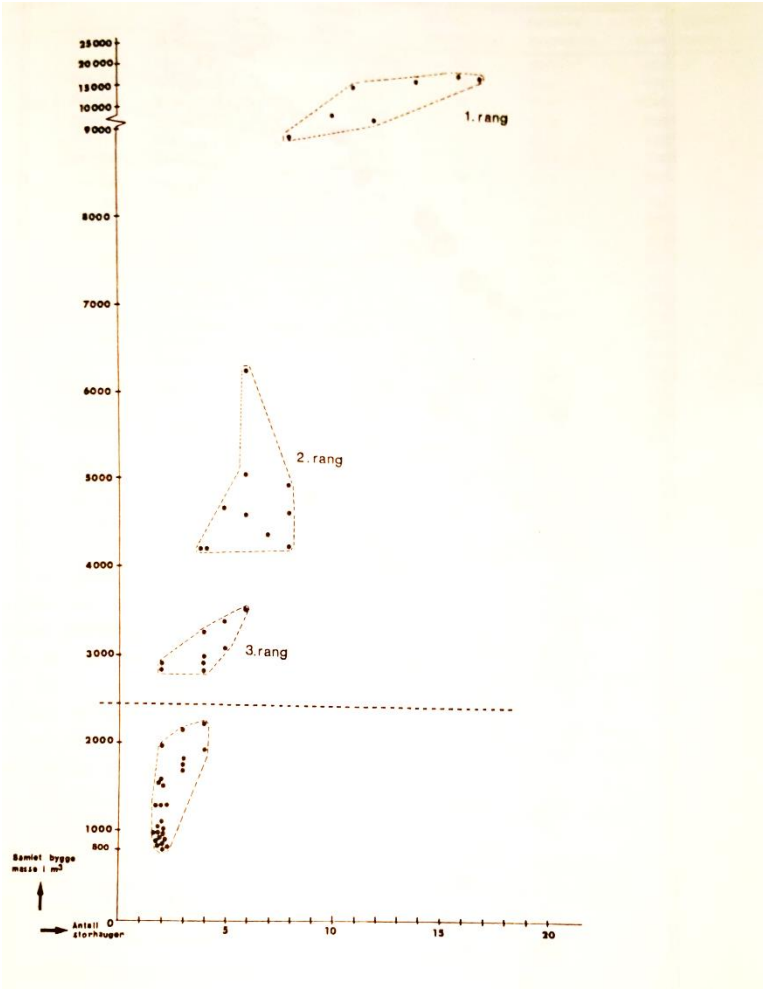


Fig. 2.2 and 2.3, from Ringstad (1986). Fig. 2.2 (to the left) shows the areas which can be defined as centres of large burial mounds by rank 1, 2 or 3.
Fig. 2.3 (to the right) shows how the mounds have been ranked. The x-axis shows the number of burial mounds and the y-axis shows the combined building mass in m^3.

be located as the three larger circles on the North West coast. There are some rank 2 centres in the region: Gloppen, Hustad, Aukra and Western Gurskøy. The two mounds discussed earlier in Eid barely qualify to be a rank 3 centre, but there is also Kvamsøy, just North of Stad.[111] Out of the rank 1 centres, which are all fairly close to each other geographically, there are a total of 43 burial mounds from Ringstad's investigation. This alone highlights the potential economic and political power that existed.

[111] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. page 239

Common for most of the power centres is the sea. The name Norway, the North way, refers to the costal path along the country and the traffic that followed the coast.[112] Ringstad attempts to explain exactly what makes the centres of larger burial mounds strategically placed in relation to the sea. For the centre at Gurskøy, Ringstad notes that this is area is vital for travelling further North than Stad.[113] Ulstein, Giske and Haram control the entrances to the fjords going inland: Ulstein controls the entrance to Voldafjorden, Giske controls the entrance to the Sunnmørsfjords and Haram controls the entrance to Romsdalsfjorden.[114] All of these centres are located on islands and peninsulas which act as natural shelters for strong winds. The centre at Hustad, on the other hand, is situated in a place where there are few islands and the sailing conditions could be very tough. This could be the very reason that there is a centre at Hustad, people who sailed past were almost forced to stay close to land. After the establishment of a centre there, it could also be easy to control as boats would need to come close.[115] The location of these areas in relation to their function, it will be covered further later in the chapter.

Specific Areas on the North West Coast.

In the earlier parts of this chapter, I outlined the areas of the region that can be defined as centres due to how the burial mounds are concentrated. While the greater lines were drawn, it is still important to look more closely at most of the places where there have been archaeological findings from the Viking period. A common misconception revolves around that Viking society often was fragmented, without meaningful links between places. It is clearer with the sources available today that areas and centres formed economic and political links between each other.[116] This part of the chapter will therefore follow a specific structure by accounting for each place and say something about how archaeological sources portray the history of each place and potential links that combine the places.

The process of choosing what areas to focus on can be difficult. I, as a historian, can only focus on what has been found and use that as evidence for this thesis. There has luckily been

[112] Hjejle, Bernt, et al. *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder Fra Vikingetid Til Reformationstid : 12 Mottaker-Orlogsskib*. Vol. 12, Rosenkilde Og Bagger, 1967. Page 337
[113] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 266
[114] Ibid. Page 266
[115] Ibid. Page 267
[116] Vea, Marit S, Myhre, Bjørn, & Karmøy.. *Rikssamlingen og Harald Hårfagre : Historisk seminar på Karmøy 10. og 11. juni 1993*. Kopervik: Karmøy kommune. 199. Page 44

extensive research into the findings of the various excavations. My main goal of this chapter is therefore to assess these areas through sources and attempt to place each area into a larger picture. This will mainly be done by trying to find different kinds of links (centre-periphery). Due to the timeframe covered in this thesis, written sources are the primary focus here. *Heimskringla* gives, as already illustrated, a good overview of where the Norwegian kings had allies, and where they might have had enemies. The sagas might give a clue as to what towns and places to look at, but it is the archaeological sources that can first and foremost pinpoint these areas, as well as giving more accurate information about them. This chapter will therefore use some of the written sources as a supplement to look further at specific areas on the North West coast.

The areas that I have chosen are by no means a complete list of central places on the North West coast. There are several places that I do not mention below (Hareid and Kvamsøy, to name a few), but I have chosen some central places in the region that I deem to be of highest importance. The first two areas, Eid and Selja are natural starting points, as they are the furthest South in the area of discussion. Borgund and Giske were perhaps the largest centres and are vital to discuss due to the many sources and extensive archaeological investigations that have been done. Following Borgund and Giske, Veøy and Rauma are a natural continuation as they are located slightly further North. These two areas are significantly less researched as they were smaller centres and most likely fewer people who lived in this region during the Viking period. The final three areas are Frei, Kuløya and Hustad, all located relatively close to the areas controlled by the ladejarls. These are areas that have strong relations to the Viking period as proven by archaeological sources.

Fig. 2.4: Showing all the areas that will be discussed. The circle around Rauma is only to show that Rauma is the area South of Veøy, not a specifc town or farm.

Eid in Nordfjord

Starting with the most southern area, Eid in Nordfjord, henceforth referred to as Eid, has been recognised as one of the most central places during early Viking Age.[117] Some Viking period mounds have been found at Myklebust in Eid. Two mounds have graves dating from 800 AD, but there are also other graves from early Iron Age. From the first mound, "Rundehågjen", archaeologists have found bolts and nails, most likely from a boat, two swords, two spears, arrowheads, pearls, pieces from a board game, dice made out of bone and an Irish bronze plate.[118] The boat remains have led archaeologists to believe that the remains are from one of the largest ships that have been found. Though there is nothing left of the ship apart from the bolts, nails and other metal artefacts which belonged to the ship, archaeologists believe that the layer of coal in the mound is equal in size to the length and width of the ship.[119]

From the second mound, "Skjoratippen", there are six graves with significantly more items than the first. It is not the purpose of this thesis to go through them all, and the items are similar to the ones in the first mound. Nevertheless, the second mound is unique in the way that is contains six graves, which is a rarity. All the graves but one are dated to be from 700-950 AD and five out of six graves contains remains of men, one of a woman.[120] What is also special about the two mounds, is that they are situated only 50 metres from each other, giving a sense of a community in this area during older Iron Age and Viking period.

It is believed that Eid was a central place during the early parts of the Viking period.[121] The boat which was buried in Rundehågjen was most likely buried with a powerful chieftain, around the year 870.[122] This chieftain was likely in control over both Eid and Gloppen as these two areas are close together. From Ringstad's map showing the centres of burial mounds, Gloppen and Eid are ranked as rank 1 and rank 3 centres respectively, but the many

[117] I choose to write just Eid instead of Nordfjordeid which is today the name of the town. Eid is used as the historical name for the area. Eid in Nordfjord simply a clarification of what Eid I am writing about, as there are many places in Norway named Eid.
[118] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 127
[119] Sagastad, «The Myklebust Ship». Available online at http://sagastad.no/en/the-myklebust-ship/ [Last accessed: 14.02.2018]
[120] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 129
[121] Krøvel, Harald, Harald Endre Tafjord, Torkjell Djupedal, and Masaoki Adachi. *Folk I Fjordrike : Før 1763.*. Bergen: Fagbokforl, 2017. Page 76
[122] Ibid. Page 75

mounds at Gloppen are older than the few mounds at Eid.[123] This has lead historians to question whether Eid replaced Gloppen as the centre of power during the Viking period.[124] While this an interesting uncertainty, it is more likely that these two areas profited of each other, both in terms of trade and protection.

The reason why Eid might have been a powerful centre, is related to its position in the area as it is located more than 50 kilometres inland in Nordfjord.[125] Its position did not give it control over the sea, but it controlled all travel in the fjord and also traffic between the villages and farms in the area.[126] Eid can therefore be seen as a centre of power where the power was spread out over the farms in the local area, including Gloppen. By being further inland than the other centres, Eid also had far superior soil compared to the areas on the coast.[127]

Coming back to the boat that was found at Eid, archaeologist Bente Magnus believes that the boat is linked to Harald Hårfagre and his attempt to unify the country. She suggests that the chieftain who was buried with the boat was Audbjørn of Fjordane, who fought and lost to Harald Hårfagre at the second battle of Solskjel, approximately 876 AD.[128] Eid, and the rest of Fjordane was, after the battle, seen to be under the control of Hårfagre.[129] It is therefore unclear what happened at Eid after Hårfagre's time, but it is likely that the area soon became friendly, or at least in allegiance, with the future West coast kings like Haakon the good and Olav Tryggvason.

Selja

From the sagas, we know that the island Selja is given much attention as the place where Olav Haraldson arrived after many years abroad. Prior this event, however, Olav Tryggvason had already made it one of the most important places for the Christian religion in the country.[130] This is because of the findings of some corpses which were believed to be the bodies of St.

[123] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 125
[124] Krøvel, Harald, Harald Endre Tafjord, Torkjell Djupedal, and Masaoki Adachi. *Folk I Fjordrike : Før 1763.*. Bergen: Fagbokforl, 2017. Page 75
[125] Ibid. Page 78
[126] Ibid. Page 78
[127] Ibid. Page 78
[128] Magnus, Bente. «Småkonger og politiske sentra i fjordane i tidlig vikingtid» In Nytt fra Utravingskontoret i Bergen. 1992. Page 73
[129] Krøvel, Harald, Harald Endre Tafjord, Torkjell Djupedal, and Masaoki Adachi. *Folk I Fjordrike : Før 1763.*. Bergen: Fagbokforl, 2017. Page 78
[130] Krøvel, Harald, Harald Endre Tafjord, Torkjell Djupedal, and Masaoki Adachi. *Folk I Fjordrike : Før 1763.*. Bergen: Fagbokforl, 2017. Page 119

Sunniva and her followers in 996.[131] The corpses were hidden in a cave, where, according to the legend, Sunniva and her followers lived in after the escape from Ireland.[132] The purpose of this part is not to debate the legend of St. Sunniva, nor to discuss what the sagas say about Selja, but rather to show what the archaeological investigations have found out about the area.

There have been a few interpretations about whether or not Selja was first visited by sailors from the West as the sagas suggest. These theories have not had any hold in archaeological proof as the theories were made in the late nineteenth century. According to Hommedal, historian Gustav Storm believed in 1878 that the remains of human bone was indeed from Irish priests.[133] Another historian, P.A. Munch, believed that Selja had been a settlement for people in pre-historic times.[134] From archaeological investigations in the early 1990s, archaeologists believe that Selja had been an area of seasonal habitation since 200-570 AD, matching the theory of P.A. Munch.[135] Any remains of bones that might have been found during the Viking period would then most likely be from this period, at least 400 years prior to the supposed arrival of Sunniva. It must also be noted that during the investigations, there were no findings of human bone around the area where Sunniva and her followers supposedly lived.[136] This does not mean that there has never been any bones in the specific area, as it is a possibility that whoever found the bones during the Middle Ages managed to collect them all.

How certain can we then be that St. Sunniva and her followers arrived at this island in the mid-900s? As with many other cases in history, we cannot guarantee anything. What is perhaps a more interesting question is how Selja was used as a centre for spreading Christianity in Norway, given the that the stories from the sagas are close to true. Selja must be seen as a central place for both Olav Tryggvason and Olav Haraldson when trying to convert people to the Christian faith. Its placement in the landscape, just south of Stad and the open sea, made Selja a natural place to seek refuge if the weather did not allow boats to sail past. It was perhaps not that surprising that Olav Haraldson landed at Selja. As Hommedal writes, the village of Selje, located nearby on the mainland, has evidence of mounds from the

[131] Hommedal, Alf Tore, in *Selja – heilag stad i 1000 år* (Magnus Rindal ed.) Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1997. Page 47
[132] Rekdal, Jan Erik, in *Selja – heilag stad i 1000 år* (Magnus Rindal ed.) Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1997. Page 103
[133] Hommedal, Alf Tore, in *Selja – heilag stad i 1000 år* (Magnus Rindal ed.) Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1997. Page 47
[134] Munch, P.A. *Det norske Folks Historie*. First part. Christiania. 1853. Page 296
[135] Hommedal, Alf Tore, in *Selja – heilag stad i 1000 år* (Magnus Rindal ed.) Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1997. Page 47
[136] Ibid. Page 62

late Iron Age, and two farms most likely from the same period.[137] The village could have been the actual centre where people lived, but the island represented a religious significance.

Selja's position as a religious centre during the late Viking period seems, at least from the two sources that I have consulted, heavily influenced by the sagas about Olav Tryggvason and Olav Haraldson. The island and the nearby farms were most definitely a centre for Christianity from 1070 and onwards, when the West coast's first bishopric was established here.[138] Prior to this period, however, there are no traces of Irish artefacts or clues which can prove the legend of St. Sunniva. Despite of this, Selja must still be seen as the place where the aforementioned kings tried to constitute further the Christian faith on the West coast.

Borgund

From the *Saga of the Faroe Islands*, we know that Sigmund Bresteson came to Møre to meet with Håkon Ladejarl. He sailed to Steinvågen first, a place not far from today's Ålesund, before he rowed across the fjord to Borgund where he met the Earl. As with *Heimskringla*, the *Saga of the Faroe Islands* was written around 1220, which proves to a certain extent that Borgund was a known place at that time.[139] The only time that Borgund is mentioned in *Heimskringla* is in chapter 178 in Olaf Haraldson's saga. The king also sailed to Steinvågen and stayed there for the night, while Aslak Fitjaskalle stayed in Borgund. Aslak, who was a powerful ally of Olaf, was killed by Vigleik Arnesson the following morning at Borgund.[140] The sagas show roughly where all this happened, but they do not say

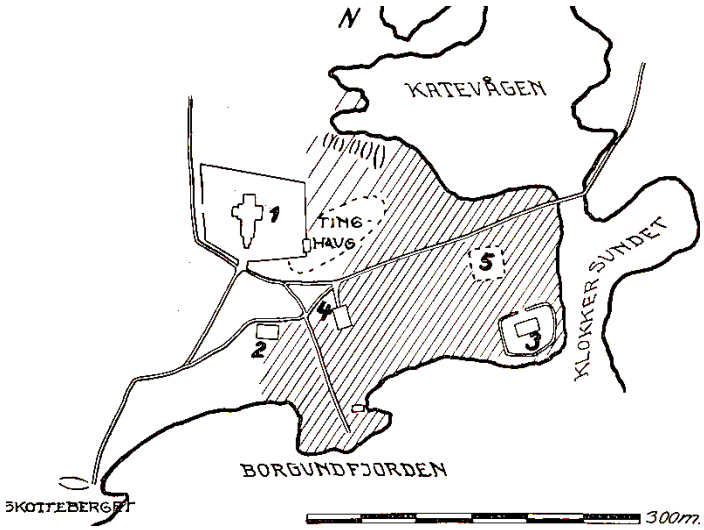


Fig. 2.5. Map of Borgund. 1. Borgund Church. 2. Main building of the Parsonage. 3. Main wall of the Mary Church. 4. Main wall of the Peter Church. 5. Excavation site. Shaded area: the assumed area of the market place. (Picture and picture text from Herteig, 1957)

[137] Ibid. Page 63
[138] Hommedal, Alf Tore, in *Selja – heilag stad i 1000 år* (Magnus Rindal ed.) Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1997.Page 43
[139] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 316
[140] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 376

much else about the people at Borgund, which is why we need to focus on the archaeological sources.

The geographical placement of Borgund has been questioned for a long time. When the priest Hans Strøm writes in 1776 that he could not understand where the prosperous marketplace was, which caused him to doubt the sagas, it was simply because there had not been any significant remains found that was linked to the marketplace.[141] While there were some findings during the nineteenth century, it was not until Per Fett's work in the mid twentieth century when archaeologists found major parts of the old marketplace.[142] The later excavations, especially the ones done by Asbjørn E. Herteig from the 1950s and later, which this part is primarily based on, have shown the precise location of Borgund through the findings of items which have been dated between 600 AD to 1400 AD.[143] It is firstly the churches built around 1100 AD that have defined the area for archaeologists and helped them locate other artefacts from earlier periods.[144] From Fig 5, we can see the marketplace was ideally placed along the fjords, with many available docking sites. The availability for boats was naturally a key feature for any market place near the sea.[145]

From Fig. 2.5 we can see how Borgund was a strategic place to have a town. The storms, which came in from the sea via Borgundfjorden, receded in Klokkersundet and Katevågen, as the areas to the west of the town provided natural shelter. Also due to its distance from the open sea (roughly 7 km), it became a place where the people from the peripheral islands met with the people for the inland to trade.[146] It is perhaps due to its accessibility, as Sørheim discusses, that Borgund remained a market place for the majority of the Viking period and early Middle Ages. Borgund would in fact be difficult to protect against invading forces, so it would not a smart to make the town a centre of power by establishing a chieftain there.[147] Instead, Borgund would be a peripheral trading site of the more powerful towns on, for example, Giske.

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[141] Strøm, Hans. *Physisk og Oekonomisk Beskrivelse over Fogderiet Søndmør, beliggende i Bergens Stift i Norge. Anden Part.* Sorøe. Børsums forlag. Faksimileutgave, Oslo 1957. Page 86
[142] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 317
[143] Ibid page 318 and Herteig, A. E. *Kaupangen på Borgund.* Borgund og Giske bygdeboknemnd, Bergen 1957. Page 1
[144] Herteig, A. E. *Kaupangen på Borgund.* Borgund og Giske bygdeboknemnd, Bergen 1957. Page 2
[145] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 318
[146] Ibid. Page 320-321.
[147] Ibid. Page 321.

The manifestation of Borgund's position introduces the question of its importance during the Viking period. Can the archaeological sources prove anything about status of the marketplace: was it a central area for trade, used by everyone who lived in its proximity? Were there any battles there which say something about what political power the area belonged to? If anything at all, what do the archaeological sources say? To first say something about who controlled Borgund: Frode Iversen writes that we know that the neighbouring farm, Skuggen, was controlled by the Ladejarls.[148] Skuggen was not in the immediate proximity of Borgund, but close enough to have some influence at Borgund. He also strongly suggests that Skuggen could have been a king's farm to Håkon Jarl.[149] This would prove that, at least during the Viking period, that Borgund was not established as a Christian centre, as the Ladejarls were heathens. So the theory of Borgund's establishment as a marketplace is strengthened by the proximity of non-Christians. It is also appropriate to mention that the name Borgund is often used as a shortened version of "Borgundkaupangen", where the name specifically refers to the area as a marketplace.

When diving into the archaeological sources, Herteig's work is invaluable in the way that he discovered and accounted for the archaeological findings. He estimates that there were 15 – 20 pre-historic houses of many shapes and sizes at Borgund.[150] All houses are estimated to be from the end of the Viking period until 1200-1250 AD. Out of the many houses that Herteig believes was there, one is specifically interesting due to the amount of evidence that has been found, and the importance of the building as a hearth-room (årestue). Herteig notes that there is no doubt that people lived in this house, but he also points out that, due to the nature of the interior, the house could also have been used for festivities.[151] He discusses further how the house could also have been a *ting*-house, making it one of the more important political houses in Borgund.[152]

Out of the findings that might be related to trade, Herteig has located sub-terrain holes for the disposal of fish bones, shells and other waste related to fish.[153] From the tools required to fish, Herteig has found many artefacts required for different types of fishing, but also tools that

[148] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010. Page 320
[149] Iversen, Frode. *Eiendom, makt og statsdannelse.* Universitetet i Bergen, 2004. Page 23
[150] Herteig, A. E. *Kaupangen på Borgund.* Borgund og Giske bygdeboknemnd, Bergen 1957. Page 5
[151] Ibid. Page 17
[152] Ibid. Page 17
[153] Ibid. Page 27

were used to prepare the fish.[154] The size scale and quantity of these tools do not only show what the inhabitants might have used for living, but also how larger quantities of fish was prepared. This might be linked to how the fish was traded to others who came from elsewhere. Herteig concludes his book by portraying Borgund as a town where hunting and fishing were the main sources of income and that the excess of these goods was sold.[155] He also supports the theory that Borgund acted as a meeting point for trade between the sea and the inlands.[156]

From what Herteig has discovered and written, we must see Borgund as a market place which was not contested by force. It is not clear whether or not the Ladejarls were in complete control over the area, but it is reasonable to think that they did have some political power over the area during the Viking period. As the archaeological sources cannot prove that Christianity was the accepted faith at Borgund during the Viking period, it more reasonable to think that it came later. The reason why Borgund was deserted after the fourteenth century is almost undoubtedly due to the Black Plague, which naturally halted all trade. However, another reason could be that trade was more connected to Bergen after the twelfth century.

Fig. 2.6. Map of outer parts of Sunnmøre. From Opedahl's Master thesis 1998.

Giske

The island Giske is recognised as one of the wealthiest and most prosperous areas on the North-West coast in the Viking- and Middle Ages. Its location on the coast, where almost every ship was forced to sail past, made it a natural place for an established centre of power. The area which is defined as the *kommune* today, is the four islands of Vigra, Valderøy, Giske and Godøy. All of these islands have evidence of past political power in form of burial

[154] Ibid. Page 27
[155] Herteig, A. E. *Kaupangen på Borgund.* Borgund og Giske bygdeboknemnd, Bergen 1957Page 49
[156] Ibid. Page 48

mounds. Here it is the island of Giske that is in focus, not the other islands which today make up the *kommune*.

From the sagas, there is some mention of Giske. While it is not proven, the thought that Harald Hårfagre's loyal friend, Ragnvald Mørejarl, was one of the first chieftains of Giske, has tempted historians, like Sulebust to further connect the mighty chieftain to the island.[157] Ragnvald's son, the perhaps more famous Gange-Rolv, led an invasion of Normandy in 911.[158] Some time after the supposed rule of Ragnvald Mørejarl, Giske was controlled by a man called Arne Arnmodsson, the son of Arnmod who fought at the battle of Hjørungavåg. This was the start of the famous Giske*ætten* (family), who became wealthy and had close relations with the king. The most famous story from *Heimskringla* tells how the sons of Arne became friends with Olav Haraldsson, but also how one of the sons, Kalv, fought against his own brothers and Olav Haraldsson at the battle of Stiklestad in 1030.[159]

Out of the archaeological findings on Giske, and the other islands, the burial mounds have dominated the scope of research. From Fig. 6, we see that Mjeltehaugen is the mound on Giske which is most important, and not without reason. With its 30 meter diameter and a height of 6-9 meters, Mjeltehaugen is a significantly large mound.[160] From three excavations in the nineteenth century, archaeologists have reached a consensus that the mound itself dates from the Bronze Age.[161] Out of other findings on the island, other archaeologists, like Per Fett, have found items which date to the Viking period and earlier.[162] The items, Fett believes, are from a man's and a woman's grave, and include two buckles, a ring, scales for measuring weight and a shield.[163]

Other than the burial mound on Giske, there have not been many archaeological findings from the Viking period or Middle Ages. The church on Giske is one of the few remaining pieces of evidence of the Middle Ages. There has been, however, some issues in dating the year that the church was built, but there seems to be a consensus that it was finished early in the twelfth

[157] Sulebust, Jarle. "Stormenn og spillet om Norges krone" in *I balansepunktet.* Eds: Ugelvik Larsen, Stein and Sulebust, Jarle. Sunnmørsposten forlag, Ålesund, 1994. Page 30
[158] Giske, Elias H. *Giske Kyrkje og litt historie.* Sogelaget, 1965. Page 11.
[159] Larsen, Arne J. Arkeologisk og historisk streiflys over Giske. In Helge Sørheims, *Arkeologi og kystkultur : foredrag ved seminaret "Arkeologi og kystkultur" på Sunnmøre museum 25-26/10*. Sunnmøre Museum, 1997. Page 47
[160] Ibid. Page 38
[161] Ibid. Page 38 and Giske, Elias H. *Giske Kyrkje og litt historie.* Sogelaget, 1965. Page 8
[162] Ibid Page 39
[163] Ibid. Page 39

century.[164] Up until 1992, archaeologists believed that the church was the only remaining building, but after diggings in 1993 and 1994, the historical museum of Bergen found remains of low stone walls near the church boathouse. The walls made up two rooms, which are believed to be a part of a house.[165] North of the walls, the archaeologists also located burnt wood and planks which they believe were part of a house that existed in the same time period as the stone walls. A C^{14} dating has showed that the houses are from the late Viking period and early Middle Ages.[166] It is these two buildings along with the church and Mjeltehaugen that make up the structural remains of the Bronze Age, Viking period and Middle Ages on Giske. The several fires that have been recorded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were so damaging to the structures that most likely were on Giske that the only other remains of buildings are some burnt pieces of wood.[167]

What then can be said about the supposed powerful family that lived on Giske? Can we prove anything about the people who lived there during the Viking period through the archaeological sources? By purely looking at the size of Mjeltehaugen and following Ringstad's calculations of how many working days it would take to build such a large mound, there is no doubt that there was a substantial population who lived on Giske during the Bronze Age and the were wealthy.[168] How Giske maintained its position as a wealthy society into the Viking period is difficult to give accurate reasons for, however Johs. Bøe attempts to give a reasonable explanation when he writes in 1942 that Giske, and the surrounding islands, were in no doubt lucky to geographically placed where all travel and trade had to pass. The people who lived on the islands also had great access to the sea, which promoted a self-sufficient society.[169] This was the foundation for a prosperous society on the small island.

This brings us over into what we should have expected to find on Giske: any proof of trading. Trade was, and still is, one of the main factors of how societies would obtain wealth and power. We know that the Giske-family was powerful and close to Olav Haraldsson, and that itself brought great power and authority to the small island. This would make trading a way of mending that power. As there is no evidence of such activities on Giske during the Viking

[164] Giske, Elias H. *Giske Kyrkje og litt historie.* Sogelaget, 1965. Page 2
[165] Larsen, Arne J. Arkeologisk og historisk streiflys over Giske. In Helge Sørheims, *Arkeologi og kystkultur : foredrag ved seminaret "Arkeologi og kystkultur" på Sunnmøre museum 25-26/10*. Sunnmøre Museum, 1997. Page 40
[166] Ibid. Pages 42-43
[167] Ibid. Page 46
[168] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Pages 19-22
[169] Bøe, Johs. Fra ledens fortid et forsøk. In *Viking.* Oslo, 1942. Page 189

period, we must assume that there was little to no trading happening. Some historians believe that the Giske-family acted more as a military and authorial power, which controlled and regulated trade in the region.[170] The region included Borgund as a market place. If the power and authority of the Giske-family, which came directly from the king, was used to control the coastal region of Sunnmøre, then having a marketplace further inland would make more sense. This helped form a special relationship between Giske and Borgund. Further discussion of these two areas will follow in the summary part of the chapter.

Veøy

Veøy is an island in the Romsdalsfjord. As an island in the vein for seafarers to sail inland, Veøy, with its insignificant geographical size of just 1,1 km^2, lies in the middle of the fjord.[171] From the written sources, there is no mention of Veøy until the Saga of Magnus Erlingsson, where the neighbouring island of Sekken was used as a battlefield in 1162. There is also some

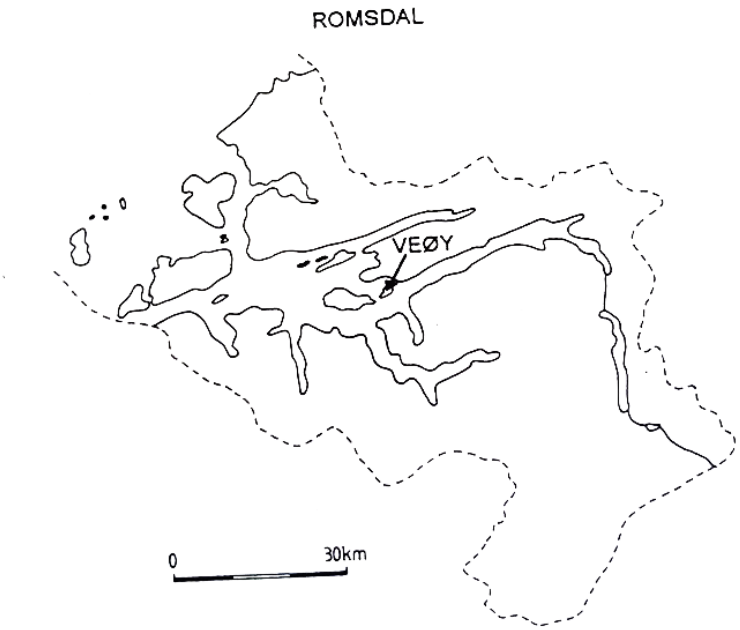

Fig 2.7 Map over Romsdalen. From Solli (1993)

[170] Larsen, Arne J. Arkeologisk og historisk streiflys over Giske. In Helge Sørheims, *Arkeologi og kystkultur : foredrag ved seminaret "Arkeologi og kystkultur" på Sunnmøre museum 25-26/10*. Sunnmøre Museum, 1997. Page 49

[171] Solli, B. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into the poetics and scientifics of archaeology.* Dissertation for the degree Dr. art. University of Oslo, 1993. Page 59

mention of Veøy later in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but none earlier than the first described.[172] Therefore, the proof of Veøy's importance during the Viking period is only based on archaeological sources. One of the main sources that I will use in this chapter, is Brit Solli's dissertation from 1993, in which she writes about the results from when she excavated the island during three summers from 1990 to 1992.

Before accounting for the findings on Veøy, it would be beneficial to have a sense of the topographical design of the island. From Fig 2.8. - we can see that Veøy is split in two, with

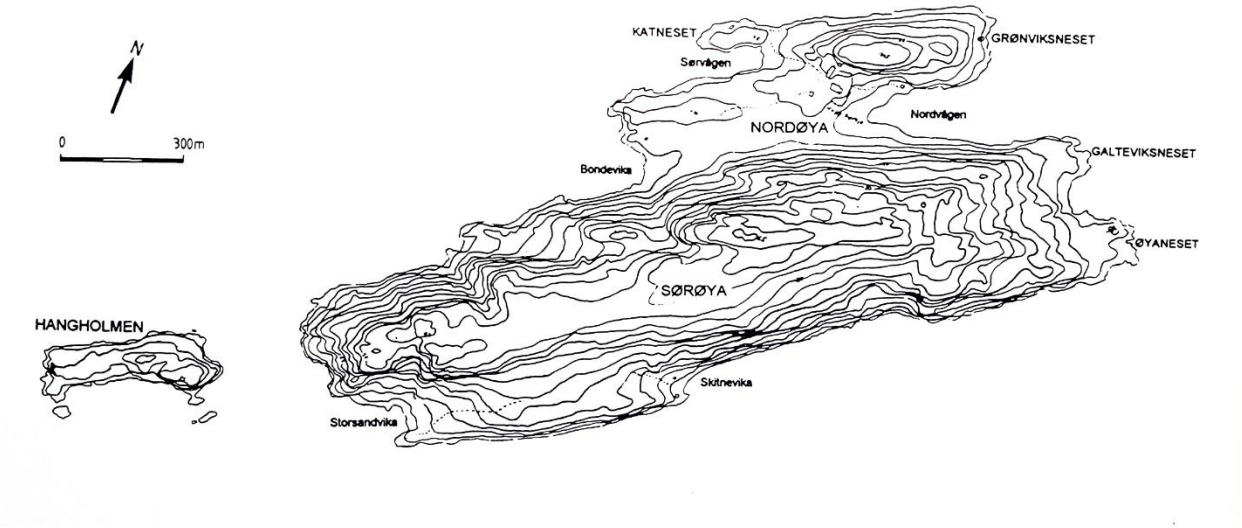

Fig 2.8. Topographical map of Veøy. From Solli (1993)

Nordøya and Sørøya. They are very different naturally, as the southern part has more vegetation and good soils, and the northern part is more open and flat. It is also worth noting that the name at the very top of Fig. 2.8., Katneset, is very similar to Katevågen at Borgund. According to Sørheim comes *kat*, or *kati*, from the word boat, meaning that the area was suitable for boats to port.[173]

Out of the archaeological findings on Veøy, it is important to mention the stone church which was built around 1200 close to Nordvågen on Nordøya. Solli mentions that Nordøya is the part of Veøy which has been researched the most, firstly because of the church, but also because of Sørøya's vegetation, which might have caused Sørøya to be less habitable.[174] It is

[172] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 325
[173] Ibid. Page 325.
[174] Solli, B. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into the poetics and scientifics of archaeology.* Dissertation for the degree Dr. art. University of Oslo, 1993. Page 145

close to the stone church that archaeologists like Asbjørn Herteig, and later Solli, have succeeded in finding several trenches and remains of stone walls which have been the foundation of buildings. As Solli had access to more modern technology, like a C^{14} dating system, she was able to date stone foundations and burnt timber from AD 870-1255.[175][176] She also found some graves which can be dated from the same period. The period described does not show the uncertainty of when the findings are from, but rather the entire range of years that the dating system has successfully been able to analyse. For example, graves and burnt timber has been successfully dated to the early 900s, but also some graves from later years.[177] The graves were not in burial mounds, but rather in two separate graveyards. Though there is no evidence left of any human remains, the graves are undoubtedly Christian. This might prove Veøy to be a place of the Christian faith long before the general change in religion elsewhere in the country. The name *Veøy* also implies that the island was religious or holy (from *Vèeyrar*, meaning *holy island*)[178]

To possibly show how Veøy was a central place through the archaeological sources, Solli points to six different aspects which may have made Veøy suitable for it: 1) There have been people living on the island since the early stone age. 2) At the end if the Viking period, two docks were built in Bondevika. 3) Activities that caused *black soil* can be traced back to the tenth century. 4) The name *Veøy* does not only imply the holiness of the island, but also pre-Christian activities. 5) The location of the island is ideal for trade between the inland and the outer rim connected to the sea (Fig. 7). 6) In the middle of the tenth century, two rectangular areas were designated as graveyards.[179] From these aspects, Solli concludes what she deems to be likely: that a wealthy family or a single wealthy person gained control over the island during the tenth century and converted the inhabitants to Christianity. The person or family was most likely economically connected to Haakon the Good, and later Olav Tryggvason, as

[175] Solli, B. Kjøpstedet på Veøya i Romsdal. PDF. Available at: http://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/11373/kjopstedet-pa-veoya-i-romsdal.pdf?sequence=1 [Last accessed: 06.11.2017] Page 118
[176] The C^{14}-dating tool is used to measure the remaining amount of the isotope C^{14} which is left in a living organism. This tool is widely regarded as accurate, at least with a margin of 100 years.
[177] Solli, B. Kjøpstedet på Veøya i Romsdal. PDF. Available at: http://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/11373/kjopstedet-pa-veoya-i-romsdal.pdf?sequence=1 [Last accessed: 06.11.2017] Page 118
[178] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 328
[179] Solli, B. Kjøpstedet på Veøya i Romsdal. PDF. Available at: http://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/11373/kjopstedet-pa-veoya-i-romsdal.pdf?sequence=1 [Last accessed: 06.11.2017] Page 121

they were the earliest kings to introduce Christianity to the North-West coast. The findings do not, however, show any specific evidence of a market place.

In an attempt to place Veøy in context of time and its geographical placement, both Solli and Sørheim have concluded that Veøy was one of the first Christian places in Norway, possibly as a "pocket" for the faith to survive in an otherwise heathen environment.[180] It was perhaps due to the nature of an island, that Veøy was more protected than other places and managed to maintain the Christian faith. Therefore, Veøy is seen as a centre of religion on the North West coast, more so than a market place. This is only based on what has been found by archaeologists, so the potential other uses of the island cannot not be disproven.

Rauma

As a continuation after Veøy, it falls naturally to discuss the archaeological findings in the other parts of Romsdal. When looking at Fig. 2.7, we can see the fjord going directly South before it turns East. Rauma is today the kommune which stretches from the northern end of that fjord and all the way to where the city of Åndalsnes lies today. The kommune is named after the river Rauma which runs out into the fjord from the East. The river, and the valley it runs through, is what connects Romsdalen to the inland (Gudbrandsdalen), as it also runs past Lesja.

Rauma, or Romsdalen in general, has often been overlooked in archaeological discussions of Møre og Romsdal.[181] This has been purposely done as there are not as many specific and significant findings from this area. The exception is of course Veøy. What has been far more fruitful to focus on is Sunnmøre and Trøndelag. Nevertheless has Sæbjørg Nordeide managed to analyse the different graves which have been found to give some insight to the Christianisation of the region. She worked with a museum in Trondheim to map the different artefacts that were found in the 85 known graves from Rauma. She has also looked at how the people were buried, whether the tradition was cremation or inhumation.

Out of the 85 graves from the Late Iron Age, we know that the ratio of male to female graves is roughly 6:1 (67:12, 6 unknown). The number of artefacts per grave is on average 4.9, however a much larger 7.3 in the Viking period suggests an increase in items towards the late

[180] From Solli's PDF page 122, and Sørheims dissertation page 328
[181] Walaker Nordeide, Sæbjørg. *The Viking Age as a Period of Religious Transformation: The Christianization of Norway from AD 560-1150/1200.* Brepols, Belgium, 2011. Page 132

Iron Age.[182] In the female graves, all but one contained valuable materials such as copper alloy, amber, silver, glass and gold.[183] Three graves even included imported items for the British Isles, Germany and the Arab regions.[184] Other items included more ordinary tools for women to be buried with: cooking pots, weaving utensils and textiles. From the male graves, Nordeide does not find anything unusual about the items as they are also quite ordinary: tools for agriculture, a few weapons in each grave, a knife, sometimes a hammer, and a whetstone.[185] Nordeide suggests that the vast majority of the men were most likely "smiths, boat builders, or carpenters, as well as being farmers".[186]

What Nordeide suggests in her conclusion about the burial traditions of Rauma, is that the region slowly adopted the Christian faith and its burial practice, with more cremations rather than inhumations. From the findings in the graves from the Viking period and late Iron Age, people from this area were inlikely to have been involved in any significant battles in the Viking period, due to the lack of weapons found in the graves. Nordeide challenges the theory that the Christian faith came from the West, the sea, as she thinks that Veøy played a key role in spreading the religion in the latter parts of the Viking period.[187]

Frei

In an article from 1997, Bjørn Ringstad accounts for the Frei-farms and the local burial mounds.[188] We know the Frei-farms from The Saga of Haakon the Good in *Heimskringla* when Haakon visits Nordmøre to stay with his good friend Egil Ullserk.[189] Though it is not specified that Egil Ullserk lives at one of the two Frei-farms, it is assumed since he is buried in the local mound later in the saga.[190] The saga also tells the story of how Egil Ullserk died while fighting for Haakon the Good against the sons of Eric Bloodaxe.[191] The island Frei is therefore seen as of large historical importance. However, it is also important to include the archaeological research to understand the community on the island.

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[182] Walaker Nordeide, Sæbjørg. *The Viking Age as a Period of Religious Transformation: The Christianization of Norway from AD 560-1150/1200.* Brepols, Belgium, 2011. Page 132
[183] Ibid page 132
[184] Ibid. Page 132
[185] Walaker Nordeide, Sæbjørg. *The Viking Age as a Period of Religious Transformation: The Christianization of Norway from AD 560-1150/1200.* Brepols, Belgium, 2011. page 135
[186] Ibid. Page 135
[187] Ibid. Page 140
[188] Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997.
[189] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 89
[190] Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997.
[191] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 91

The burial mounds on Frei are both large and numerous, which stands as a contrast to other areas at Nordmøre, where there are not as many mounds. The mounds on Frei are both large round mounds, but there are also some longer and narrower mounds, which were primarily used for boats.[192] Due to what is written in *Heimskringla*, traditional folklore has always presumed that the people who died during the battle between Haakon the Good and the sons of Eric Bloodaxe, are the ones who are buried there, including Egil Ullserk.[193] Unfortunately, this has been difficult to prove. While it is likely that Egil Ullserk is buried there, since he lived on the island, archaeologists from the nineteenth century were far too focused on *Heimskringla* as a valid and true source.[194]

The most likely use of the burial mounds on Frei was for burying the people who lived there. This is because of the two farms on the island. The people who worked and lived on farms were often buried nearby in the local mound. The same cannot be said for warriors who died after a battle. As Ringstad notes, the burial mounds were reserved for the people who actually "belonged" to the island.[195] The size of the largest mound also qualifies under Ringstad's definition of a large mound, approximately 400m^3. This tells us something about the economic power and labour force on Frei. From what *Heimskringla* tells, the farms were large and important enough for Haakon the Good to visit. Unfortunately, there has not been any scientific excavation of these mounds, but some items have been found which have been dated to the Viking period and late Iron Age, which does prove Frei to be an island with substantial wealth[196]

What then can archaeological sources tell us about the Viking period community on Frei? Ringstad believes the farms were prosperous from late Stone Age/early Iron Age as there have been findings of several tools used for fishing and agriculture.[197] However, what is far more recent and relevant, is the graveyard that has been found. Kristian Williamsen believes that there has been a church on the island since the Middle Ages, since the first recording of a

[192] Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997.
[193] Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997. Page 51
[194] Ibid page 52
[195] Ibid Page 52
[196] Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997. Page 53
[197] Ibid page 58

church was documented in 1478.[198] Ringstad even thinks that the church was built in the late Viking period.[199] From the sagas, we know that Haakon the Good was one of the first kings to build churches in Norway, and since Frei is the neighbouring farm to one of the king's farms at Birkestrand, it is likely that one of the first churches in Norway was the one on Frei.[200] Further and potential evidence of a church in this region is found in chapter 18 of the saga of Haakon the Good. Some of the chieftains in Trøndelag, who strongly opposed the Christian religion of Haakon the Good, decided to sail down the coast to "destroy Christianity."[201] The result was the burning of three churches and the killing of three priests.[202] The saga does not mention Frei specifically, but it highlights Møre as a region of large importance as a spearhead for the Christian faith in Norway.

Frei can be compared with Veøy in the way that they are both seen as places where Christianity came first. As we do not know exactly when a church might have been built at Frei, it is reasonable to think that it came sometime after the church on Veøy. Given that the church at Frei was built during the late Viking period, as Ringstad believes, Frei would then be an important place for the conversion from the heathen religion to Christianity. In political terms, it is not known through archaeological sources what status Frei had.

The Kuli-stone

While many of the specific areas that are discussed in this chapter are significant in their own way, the archaeological sources do not necessarily have to illuminate a place or area of importance. The Kuli-stone, found on Kuløy at Nordmøre, has since it was re-investigated in 1957, sparked a debate about the Christianisation period of Norway. It is a proof that a single artefact could tell us something about the religious state of the North-West coast, but also more about the people's relationship to some of the kings who attempted to convert the people to Christianity. The inscription on the stone reveals that it was raised in memory of a man called Ulvjot, but more interestingly, it states that: "twelve winters had Christendom been in the realm."[203]

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[198] Williamsen, Kristian, & Frei Kulturstyret.. *Kulturhistorie for Frei : H. 1* (Vol. H. 1). Frei: Kulturstyret.1981. Page 5

[199] Ringstad, Bjørn, "Et glimt inn i "Egil Ullserks Rike" -Freigården i forhistorisk tid og tidlig middelalder." Årsskrift (Nordmøre historielag). Kristiansund : Historielaget 1997. Page 59

[200] Ibid page 59

[201] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 87

[202] Ibid page 87

[203] Solli, B. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into the poetics and scientifics of archaeology.* Dissertation for the degree Dr. art. University of Oslo, 1993. Page 259

The debate surrounding this stone is threefold, and they all refer to different kings. Aslak Liestøl, who was one of the first to interpret the stone, suggested that the inscription referred to the *ting* at Dragseid, Sunnmøre, in 996. *Heimskringla* tells how Olav Tryggvason gathered people from Møre, Romsdal, Sogn and Fjordane to convert them all.[204] It is not unlikely that people from Kuløya came to Dragseid to attend the meeting. Liestøl believes that if the stone was from another time, for example during the reign of Olav Haraldsson, the wording on the stone would be different.[205]

The second analysis of the origin of the stone refers to the first king who attempted to convert Norway to Christianity, namely Haakon the Good. Fridtjov Birkeli suggests that the stone was raised some time during the 960s as Haakon the Good attempted to christen the West coast around 950s.[206] His suggestion is based upon the theory that the Christianisation of Norway continued during the reign of Haakon the Good and that had been going on for longer than what the sagas account for.[207] The third interpretation of the Kuli-stone dates the stone to Olav Haraldssons time. Nils Hallan believes that since the word *Nóregi* is used, whoever made the inscription must have referred to Norway as a whole country, and not the local *ting* at Dragseid. This, he argues, means that the stone was erected twelve years after the gathering in Moster in the 1020s, a meeting that the king "chaired"[208]

According to Solli, there was an excavation carried out around the area where the stone was first found. The major finding was something that resembled a wooden bridge over a swampy area. The carbon-dating of the wood revealed that it was from 995 ± 60 AD, and further analysis showed that the bridge had been constructed around 1034 AD.[209] If one believes that the bridge and the Kuli-stone are connected, then the third interpretation seems more likely as it fits perfectly with the timescale. How this relates to the landscape of political power is, however, a more difficult question to answer. If we assume that the stone dates back to the 960s, then we must accept that at least some parts of the North-West coast were converted and

[204] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 155
[205] Liestøl, Aslak. *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer. 4 : XI. Hordaland fylke ; XII. Sogn og Fjordane fylke ; XIII. Møre og Romsdal fylke.* Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, Oslo, 1957. Page 286
[206] Birkeli, Fridtjov. *Norske steinkors i tidlig middelalder : et bidrag til belysning av overgangen fra norrøn religion til kristendom.* Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1973. Page 124
[207] Solli, B. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into the poetics and scientifics of archaeology.* Dissertation for the degree Dr. art. University of Oslo, 1993. Page 259
[207] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 159
[208] Hallan, Nils. «Kulisteinen og kristenrettsvedtaket på Mostertinget» in *Du mitt Nordmøre*, 1966. Page 25.
[209] Solli, B. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into the poetics and scientifics of archaeology.* Dissertation for the degree Dr. art. University of Oslo, 1993. Page 259

that Haakon the Good was to an extent successful in his mission. This does not imply that the entire region was converted, but there is a likelihood that smaller communities had accepted the faith that the king had proposed. This would suggest that the more powerful, perhaps heathen, chieftains did not have complete control over their areas. The lack of any concrete proof of the Kuli-stone shows that there are different theories which could say something about the people on Kuløya. People on the island could have been secluded from central areas, but the island is on the coast between Sunnmøre and Trøndelag, which meant that the island could have been visited many times by travelers.

Hustad

The final area that I will discuss is the area of Hustad. Hustad is a part of Fræna *kommune* in the Northern part of Romsdal and Southern parts of Nordmøre. As previously mentioned, the coastal stretch at Hustad is considered one of the most difficult places to sail in Norway, undoubtedly due to the lack of shelter from large islands, shallow waters and smaller islands and reefs.[210] This could be one of the reasons why the area became populated, as sailors simply were forced to travel close to land.

Fig. 2.9. From Ringstad (1986) Northern Romsdal. The long stretch of land without any islands outside of it is a part of Fræna *kommune* today.

From the archaeological sources, Ringstad has accounted for the many burial mounds in the *kommune*. We know that Ringstad has defined the area as a rank 2 centre of large mounds, meaning fewer and smaller mounds than Giske, but larger and more mounds than Eid. Visitors who travelled to the coast have described the mounds and the general landscape at Hustad many times. In 1773, a principal named Gerhard Schøning received money from the Danish state to travel across Norway to discover ancient artefacts and mounds. He wrote that Hustad, in the olden days, used to be a famous place and one of the king's most important farms.[211] He also wrote of the sea to the North, which was always open and fearful.[212] Schøning also mentions the many mounds and cairns: "den største Mængde af større og mindre Steenrøser, jeg nogensteds har

[210] Store Norske Leksikon, Hustadvika. Available online at https://snl.no/Hustadvika [Last accessed 06.02.2018]
[211] Parelius, Nils. *Oldtidsminner i Bud og Hustad : registrert i 1963 og 1964*. Kulturvernetm 1964. Page 7.
[212] Ibid. Page 7

seet, saa mange at jeg maatte lade det beroe med at tælle dem"[213] Schøning simply means that there are so many cairns in the area that he would not be able to count them. Ringstad believes that Schøning is referring to the many mounds and cairns at Malefeten. I have previously mentioned Elvestadrøysa in this area as one of the mounds from the Viking period. Malefeten is, according to Ringstad, a large area on the beach where there are an impressive amount of mounds. In 1890, ten of these mounds were investigated and remains from the Viking period were found in eight of the ten mounds.[214]

Traces from the Viking period are not only present in the many mounds and cairns. *Heimskringla* mentions Hustad farm as the place where king Øystein was buried in 1123.[215] With this, *Heimskringla* also places Hustad farm as one of the few king's farms on the North West coast. Ringstad argues that the farm at Hustad could be much older than the year of king Øystein's burial. According to traditional onomastics, Ringstad believes that the name "Hustad" might be from the period 400-1000 AD, as it was common to add the latter part of the name, "stad", to farms and central areas in the Viking period and before.[216] It is not possible to confirm the age of a farm from simply analysing the name, but after some archaeological investigations, traces of buildings have been found which can be dated to the Iron Age. There is no proved relation between these houses and the king's farm at Hustad.[217]

Due to the supposed permanently settled people at Hustad during the Iron Age, it became a natural place for the Christian faith to receive foothold during the Viking period. As a place where seafarers almost were forced to pass, it is not too far-fetched to imagine that Hustad was visited by the first Christian kings in Norway. According to Ringstad, the most recent mounds in the area has been dated to approximately 950 AD.[218] One explanation could be that the Christian faith started to gain support in the area. There is no evidence left of the first church, but it is believed that there was a church at the farm when king Øystein was buried.[219] When Christianity was still new on the West coast, it relied heavily on the king who imposed the religion on his people. It would then be natural for a king's farm, such as the one at Hustad during the death of Øystein, that there was also a church there. Ringstad entertains the

[213] Ringstad, Bjørn. *Vestlandets Største Gravminner : Et Forsøk På Lokalisering Av Forhistoriske Maktsentra.* 1986. Page 146
[214] Ibid. Page 146
[215] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Magnussønnenes saga.
[216] Ringstad, Bjørn. «Hustad før kong Øysteins tid» in *Gammalt frå Fræna 1996.* Fræna sogelag, 1996. Page 14
[217] Ringstad, Bjørn. «Hustad før kong Øysteins tid» in *Gammalt frå Fræna 1996.* Fræna sogelag, 1996. Page 22
[218] Ringstad, Bjørn «Hustad i førkristen tid – møte med Kvitekrist» in *Hustad kirke 125 år.* Page 25
[219] Ibid. Page 30

idea that Hustad could have been a place where Haakon the Good built one of the original churches in the region. It is difficult to bring any evidence which would support Ringstad's idea, but it is not unlikely either that one of the first churches in Norway could have been raised at Hustad.[220]

Finally, it is worth mentioning how Hustad's location is significant in the unification of the country. During Harald Hårfagre's reign, he managed, according to the sagas, to establish alliances and defeat enemies which made him the sole king of Norway. It is nearly impossible to imagine that Hårfagre, and future kings, had enemies at Hustad, due to how unforgiving the sailing conditions could be around the area. This would make Hustad a natural place for Hårfagre and Haakon the Good to have a loyal and strong friend as the leader of the farm, which most likely existed at this point. If the leader of the farm at Hustad was close to the king, it supports Ringstad's idea that the place could have been one of the first places in Norway to build a church.

Discussion of the Areas and Theories / Summary of Archaeological Findings.

In this chapter, I have presented some areas of importance during the Viking period and the findings that have defined them as significant areas. The next step is therefore to look further into finding logical links between some of the areas where possible. These links cannot be proven directly through archaeological sources, but the sources do show whether an area was prosperous, either economically, religiously or politically, which can give a certain view on life in general in the region.

Borgund, or the Borgund*kaupang*, must be seen as one of the largest central places in region. From the various defining terms on network theories, Borgund fulfills most of the criteria for a successful market place, with links to specifically Bergen, and its location made it very accessible for many. It also became a gathering place for the Christian faith, most likely during the Middle Ages. Skuggen, the nearby Jarl-farm, had most likely some political influence over Borgund, which might have led to its existence in the first place. All of these aspects established Borgund as a religious and administrative centre, making it one of the more important nodal points on the North-West coast. It is reasonable to think that Borgund

[220] Ibid. Page 32

was a part of Bergen's extended circumference of trade in the later parts of the Middle Ages, as goods, specifically fish, were transported to the city to be redistributed. [221]

It becomes necessary to mention Giske in the light of Burgund. As previously discussed, the most powerful family in the region lived on the small island to the West of Borgund, and had significant ties to the king, most famously Olav Haraldson. This link of alliance with the king was unique during the Viking period, making the family on Giske a centre of political power on the North-West coast. As previously mentioned, little evidence of this power actually remains in the archaeological sources, but it is first and foremost through the sagas that we have established the importance of the family. If we also look back at Ringstad's map over the West coast of Norway, we can see that there are several rank 1 centres of large burial mounds on or nearby Giske. This might not say anything specific about Giske during the Viking period, but there is no doubt that people who lived on the island and in the surrounding area prior to that period were wealthy at some point. Due to the lack of sources on Giske from the period in question, the link between the more political island and Borgund becomes even more important. If we entertain the idea that I proposed in the part about Giske, it further points to Borgund as a gathering place which was to a certain degree protected by Giske as an island near the entrance to the fjord leading to Borgund. I have not found any evidence of hostility between the people on Giske and people at Skuggen, so it is difficult to say if there were any major conflicts. Another reason that Giske and Borgund were connected during the Viking period, is the lack of findings of any trading buildings or equipment on Giske. One would expect there to be similar findings, like the ones at Borgund, at Giske if such activities took place on the small island. [222]

The discussion about Giske and Borgund leads to the more overall discussion about the location of

[221] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010. Page 332
[222] Sørheim, Helge. *Sentralsted, tettsted, knutepunkt og by: Bosetningshierarkier og sentraldannelser på Vestlandet fra jernalder til middelalder.* Dissertation for the degree dr. philos. Bergen, Norway, 2010.Page 333

areas and their function. I have chosen to include once more the map of the North West coast to highlight this point. As shown, Giske and Borgund are the two areas discussed in this chapter that are the closest to each other. As we see from network theory, central places are defined by their location and their function. In this case, it seems as if Giske and Borgund both fulfill the criteria to be regarded as one central place: Giske was the political and military power, whereas Borgund was the area for trade and gathering for other activities such as practicing religion. This link is unique for Giske and Borgund on the North West coast.

The location of Rauma and Eid as places further inland, but still connected to the sea through their respective fjords, were significant for travel from the sea and connection to the mainland. As described in the part about Eid, the area used as a central place where farms and villages further inland could connect to the sea. This would not be a problem as those who travelled past this area were most likely friends with the local cheiftain. Even though there was no significant centre in Rauma during the Viking period, it most likely formed a connection with Veøy to become a natural place to stop when travelling further inland.

These areas also had worse conditions for fishing than the areas located directly on the coast. The areas located further inland had better soil for agriculture and were therefore less reliant on the sea for food. It is likely that Rauma and Eid traded superior agricultural goods for fish at trading sites. These two areas are by no means the only places this might have happened, as it probably happened most places along the coast, but Eid in particular seems to have had this function.

Selja, Giske, Frei, Hustad and to a certain degree, Kuløya all had some sort of relation to the king. While the proof that establishes the connection between Giske and Olav Haraldson, Frei and Haakon the good, is difficult to provide through archaeological sources, we must still consider the impact on the political power that the kings had. The Giske family were powerful and remained powerful throughout the Viking period. The people at Frei were most likely close to Haakon the Good, and important enough for him to visit. If the church at Frei was built during the Viking period, then that might suggest that they accepted the Christian faith from Haakon. Hustad was a natural place for the kings to have an ally due to its location at one of the most difficult places to sail in Norway. This was the same for Selja. Even though it was and became an important place for religion, it was used by the kings Olav Trygvason and Olav Haraldson to manifest their Christian faith on the North West coast. Considering Kuløya and the Kuli-stone, which there is no mention of in the sagas, the kings might not

have visited the island personally, but the stone refers to an act or a gathering of a king. This means that one of the kings had influenced the people who raised the stone, and that they most likely accepted Christianity due to that king. As for the other areas, it seems that the kings had substantial influence over all these areas. Giske and Borgund portray a prosperous society in the Viking period. Frei and Hustad resemble separate centres that relied heavily on their own agriculture and other ways of gathering, but nevertheless strong and powerful.

Another large aspect that must be discussed is religion. The archaeological sources place a large emphasis on this aspect as it is one that is fairly easy to find proof of. There is no doubt that many, and eventually all of these places became Christian throughout the Viking period and early Middle Ages. Perhaps the most interesting part about the Christianisation of the North-West coast, is how and when the specific areas became Christian. The main theory places Veøy as the first Christian centre in the region. It is likely that Veøy remained a "pocket" for the religion, as previously mentioned, and that the religion did not spread to the surrounding areas until later, as Nordeide believes. Veøy, and potentially Frei and Hustad, were also most likely the places that had the earliest churches. If the ladejarls did sail South to destroy Christianity, as described in chapter 18 in the Saga of Haakon the Good, then it is reasonable to think that they attacked Hustad and/or Frei. Since the supposedly destroyed three churches, it might have been natural to target Sunnmøre, as Frei and Hustad are in Nordmøre. The churches at Hustad and Frei were also fairly close to Trøndelag, where the ladejarls lived. It is not believed that the ladejarls attacked the church at Veøy as archaeologists like Solli would otherwise have found some evidence of a large fire.

The presence of Christianity, especially during the later parts of the Viking period, must be connected to the kings who attempted to christen the region. Frei, as previously discussed, had strong connections to Haakon the Good, the first king who tried to convert the people. The people on Giske became especially powerful with the rise of Olav Haraldson, the king who many people point to as the one who successfully christened the country. There is unfortunately not much proof about the Christians on Veøy, but the most likely scenario refers to a man or family of high order who were close friends with either Haakon the Good or Olav Tryggvason. The man or family most likely made Veøy their religious centre, from which the religion later spread to other parts of Romsdalen. Hustad had, most likely, connections to both Harald Hårfagre and Haakon the Good, meaning that the area probably became Christian early. Lastly, the stone found at Kuløya shows that the kings had influence over the people who most likely lived distantly from centres of greater political power. As it is difficult to

establish a precise timeframe for when the people on Kuløya were christened, it, unfortunately, becomes challenging for the historian to say anything more definite about it.

Chapter on the Laws on the North West Coast

During the previous chapters, I have accounted for the written and archaeological sources and how they portray the landscape of political power on the North West coast. The final aspect that I will investigate to further illuminate political power in the region is the law, and how the two laws, *Gulatingsloven* and *Frostatingsloven,* shaped the region throughout the Viking period. This chapter will therefore analyse the two different laws, which were active in their respective areas in the region. Firstly, this chapter will introduce the geographical division of both laws. This will include looking at the areas where the laws claim to hold jurisdiction. The second part of the chapter will look at the division of the region through a military aspect: how the *leidang* and *skipreider* became paramount in defining areas which were powerful enough to build and maintain ships. The later parts of this chapter will firstly focus on *gilder* and how families could influence the judicial process, before focusing on how the king influenced and affected the laws. In addition, both laws will be compared in turn, as the different topics are discussed. Prior to this however, I will account for the history of the law on the North West coast.

The previous chapters have given evidence of smaller communities on the North West coast, where areas were divided between chieftains who controlled their own separate area. Law was also divided for larger parts of the Viking period and Middle Ages, as the law for the entire country, *landsloven,* was introduced in 1274.[223] Even though *landsloven* combined the country by name, it still contained adapted laws for each part of the country: *Gulatingetsloven* was still the name for the jurisdiction on the West coast of Norway, including Sunnmøre, and *Frostatingsloven* was the name for the jurisdiction in Trøndelag, including Romsdalen and Nordmøre. Though these laws were said to rule over the people in its jurisdiction, the Vikings were still heavily influenced by the laws and *tings* that were in place before the more regional laws of *Gulatinget* or *Frostatinget*. The place where laws were made, the *ting,* was always in a central place, most likely close to the most powerful farm, and all free men could attend the *ting* and have a say in the matters. These *tings* were naturally established as a place where meetings were held, either to discuss law or other matters. The necessity to discuss matters with fellow community members explains the many *tings* that existed. Ideally, it provided a forum where farmers were free to express their views and opinions as everyone was

[223] Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar. *Det norrøne samfunnet: vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden.* Pax forlag, Norway, 2008. Page 14

considered equal in social status. Only men could attend the *ting* meetings as women were considered as having lower status than men. It is important to reiterate that these *tings* were already in place and had been functioning for a long time before the introduction of the regional laws.

In a more simple and local society, the social connection between people became important for their political roles. Society was driven by a more practical way of living, where publicly given gifts and announcements of friendship were regarded as ways of establishing a social connection. Jon Vidar Sigurdsson has written specifically about the social hierarchy during the early Viking period and how the relationships between the hierarchical levels were maintained. The most relevant relationship was the one between the chieftains and farmers, where farmers often supported the local chieftain economically in exchange for military protection.[224] It was in this sort of society that the chieftain was perhaps the leader of the *ting*, but where the farmers who supported this chieftain were considered equal under the local law. As the majority of the population were farmers, Knut Helle, and to a certain extent Sigurdsson, have referred to this type of a society as a farmer-society (*bondesamfunn*).[225] The farmers were mostly in control of their own lives, and decisions regarding the local society were made by the local society. As for the difference between farmer and chieftain, Merete Røskaft notes that, at least in Trøndelag, the chieftains were "first among equals". This might not have been the case everywhere, as chieftains had different amounts of power, but Røskaft highlights that it was the chieftain's job to talk on behalf of the farmers.[226]

Introduction of the Laws and Geographical Organisation of the *Tings*.

From the middle of the tenth century, new law systems started to emerge. It is believed that Haakon the Good established *Gulatingsloven*, which attempted to combine the West coast of Norway under one jurisdiction.[227] This is, however, a simplified version of the story, as there are theories about an already established law, which Haakon only expanded.[228] Nevertheless, *Gulatingsloven* was the active law from about the 930s, and remained active until the introduction of *Landsloven*.

[224] Ibid and Sigurðsson, *Den vennlige vikingen.* Pax forlag, Oslo 2010. Page 31
[225] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001. Page 11
[226] Røskaft, Merete. *Maktens landskap.* Historisk institutt, Trondheim, 2003. Page 207
[227] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001. Page 30
[228] Ibid. Page 20

Gulatingsloven was established at Gulen, close to the entrance to the Sogn fjord. The initial region of *Gulatingsloven* included the areas over which Harald Hårfagre had seized control: Hordaland, Sogn and Fjordane. It later expanded to include Sunnmøre to the North and Agder to the South as shown in Fig. 3.1. The different areas were considered separate counties in *Gulatingsloven*, and as we will see, these counties were much larger than the ones under *Frostatingsloven*.[229] There are, however, some issues with placing Sunnmøre under *Gulatingsloven*. Firstly, there are no contemporary sources that prove Sunnmøre to be a part of *Gulatingsloven*, and secondly, Sunnmøre had been controlled by powerful chieftains during the Viking period (Ragnvald Mørejarl), an aspect which could have made it more difficult to include Sunnmøre under the same law. This was perhaps only the case in the early years of *Gulatingsloven*, as there is a consensus among historians that Sunnmøre belonged to *Gulatingsloven* after 950.[230]

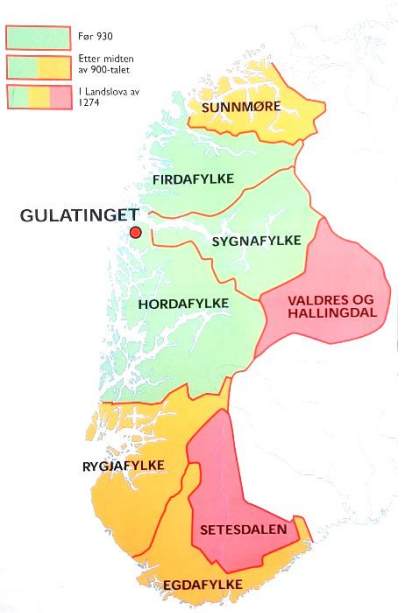


Fig. 3.1: The jurisdiction of *Gulatinget*. Green counties show areas that were under the jurisdiction prior to 930, yellow counties show the expansion in the mid-900s and red counties were included in 1274 (*Landsloven*). From Helle 2001, page 27.

When Sunnmøre was included in *Gulatingsloven*, it adopted the set of laws that was written in Gulen. Gulen became the meeting point for whenever cases were appealed to the highest instance, but also if the laws themselves were discussed. The *ting* at Gulen was a *lagting* or *representasjonsting*, meaning that whoever was elected from the respective counties could attend the meetings. The law also limited the amount of men who could attend from each county: 102 from Hordafylke and Rygjafylke respectively, 80 from Firdafylke, 64 from Sygnafylke, 27 from Egdafylke and, perhaps surprisingly, as many as the county would like to send from Sunnmøre.[231] The meetings therefore had 375 men attending, plus the number of men from Sunnmøre. Since the number of men from Sunnmøre was not specified until the

[229] The word «county» is used here as a direct translation of the Norwegian word «fylke». From fig 1., we can see that the *Gulating* seperated the region into different counties.
[230] Sulebust, Jarle. "Sunnmøre fylke" in *I balansepunktet.* Eds: Ugelvik Larsen, Stein and Sulebust, Jarle. Sunnmørsposten forlag, Ålesund, 1994. Page 22
[231] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001. Page 65

mid-1160s, we can only assume that the northernmost county remained a periphery of the highest order of law during the Viking period.

It must be noted at this point that there was a significant difference between the laws and how they were practised. While the laws passed at Gulen technically were laws, the practical use of those laws might not have prominent everywhere in the jurisdiction at the very beginning. There were still local *tings* at farms and in villages that had their own set of rules, but also tried to adapt to the laws passed at Gulen. The new laws passed became a new layer of laws for the local *tings* to incorporate. These local meetings also decided which representatives should attend the *ting* in Gulen. Helle writes that the men who were chosen or elected to represent their region most likely were the wealthiest farmers, or at least farmers of a higher social status than others. The most elite group of men, those who had close connections to the king, were not considered appropriate candidates, as they were regarded as people "outside" the law, who should not intervene in the making of the farmers' laws.[232] Though Sunnmøre could in theory send as many men as they would like to Gulen, they were, as every other county, forced to pay the representatives a month-worth of food for the journey. The representatives were also allowed to bring plenty of ale, paid for by the local *ting*.[233] It is likely that the costs of sending a representative dissuaded many local *tings* from doing so.

As with *Gulatinget, Frostatinget* was also established by Haakon the Good. The *ting* that Haakon set was also based on a previous system of *allting*, where all men could attend if they wished. It is therefore believed that Haakon introduced the same system as in Gulen, where representatives had to be elected. The reference for this is found in the Saga of Haakon the Good, where is says that he, together with his friend Sigurd jarl and other powerful men in Trøndelag, met at the peninsula Frosta.[234] There is some disagreement, however, that Haakon actually created, or "set" the *ting* at Frosta. The name of the farm at Frosta where the *ting* was held by Haakon was Logtu (*lov-tunet),* implying that the area had been the centre of a *ting* long before Haakon's arrival.[235] Frosta's location also made it a natural place for *allting,* as the peninsula was easy to access by all surrounding counties. Although there is close to no historical proof as to who "set" the *ting* at Frosta, it is likely that Haakon only introduced the representation system and expanded the area of jurisdiction.[236]

[232] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001Page 68
[233] Ibid. Page 69
[234] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 82
[235] *Lov-tunet* directly translates into law square.
[236] Hagland, Jan Ragnar and Sandnes, Jørn. *Frostatingslova.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo 1994. Page XVII

The jurisdiction of *Frostatingsloven* initially covered the eight small counties of Øynafylke, Sparbyggjafylke, Verdølafylke, Skøynafylke, Stjordølafylke, Strindafylke, Gauldølafylke and Orkdølafylke. These eight counties were most likely also part of the oldest law system in Trøndelag, dating back to pre-Christian times.[237] Fig. 3.2 shows the counties and how they are all closely connected to Frosta, the narrow peninsula in Strindafylke. The map also shows Nordmørafylke to the West, which became a part of *Frostatinget* probably sometime around Olaf Haraldsson's rule. As mentioned earlier, Romsdalen, or Raumsdølafylke, was also included later, however it is not known exactly when. When Romsdalen, Nordmøre, and Naumdølafylket were added, they were considered peripheral counties of the original eight core counties.

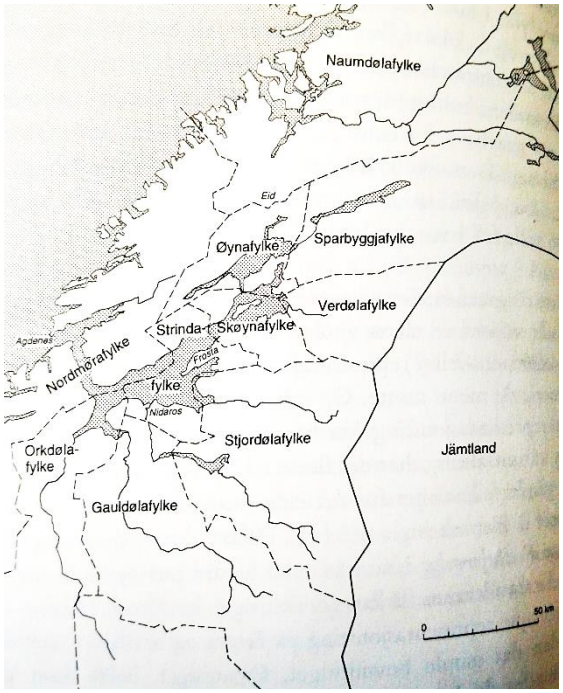


Fig. 3.2: map over the jurisdiction of *Frostatinget*. From Hagland's and Sandnes' *Frostatingslova*. Page XVI

As with Sunnmøre in *Gulatinget,* the three counties added later were not represented in the same way as the other counties at the *ting.* Each county in Trøndelag had a pre-defined number of representatives: four of the main counties were allowed 60 men, while the remaining four were allowed 40.[238] Romsdalen, Nordmøre and Naumdølafylket were allowed to send men, but it is uncertain how many. It is also not certain whether they sent any representatives at all. After 1274, however, these three regions had one permanent representative each.[239] There are some recordings of a fourth county sending representatives to the *ting* at Frosta, which could refer to Sunnmøre, but it is far more likely that the last representative came from Hålogaland to the North. There is no mention of costs of travel for the representatives to Frosta. This is most likely due to the shorter distance that had to be travelled to reach the *ting*. While the representatives from Trøndelag most likely were paid

[237] Hagland, Jan Ragnar and Sandnes, Jørn. *Frostatingslova.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo 1994. Page XV
[238] Ibid. Page XX
[239] Ibid. Page XX

some for the journey, it is more difficult to say anything about the potential representatives from Nordmøre and Romsdalen.

It is worth taking a look at the structure of the different types of *tings*. The most local *tings* only mattered for those in the local society, whereas the *ting* at Gulen or Frosta decided matters for the whole region. In the case of the local *tings*, it was up to whoever lived in the region to call for a gathering. All parties of a conflict could do so to have it resolved. For example, if a man were accidentally killed by another man while cutting timber, the man who committed manslaughter could call for a *ting* to show evidence of the accident, before anyone from the family of the killed man could carry out revenge.[240] The other party could also call for a *ting*, if the killed man had been found in the forest. In both cases, the evidence presented was crucial for the verdict of the case. The judges, who were always chosen representatives after the introduction of both laws, could then decide on a verdict. For this to happen, one quarter of the chosen representatives in the local area had to be present.[241] The judges could pass a verdict, but they did not always have to make a decision on the settlement, as it was preferred that the involved parties agreed between themselves on a reasonable compensation.

In the event that less than one quarter of the representatives attended the local *ting*, the case would move on to the next instance. A case could also move on to the next instance if the judges had not reached a consensus from the local *ting*. According to *Gulatingsloven*, the judges of the local *ting* needed a consensus to pass a verdict. Whether this was actually practiced is questionable, but it highlights the importance of unity by the representatives.[242] At the higher instance, a verdict needed a three-quarters majority vote to pass as a final and non-appealable verdict. It was possible to pass a verdict with a smaller majority, but the losing party then had the possibility to appeal the verdict to a higher instance.[243] Having a system in the higher instance *tings* where more representatives attended also helped in reaching more fair verdicts. At the local *ting* a family could come to the meeting with a large group of warriors, effectively influencing the representatives. At larger *tings*, there were more representatives, and therefore they could negate some of the influence if one party decided to show up with military force.

[240] Sunde, Jørn Øyrehagen. *Speculum Legale – Rettsspegelen.* Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2005. Page 83
[241] Ibid. Page 84
[242] Ibid Page 84
[243] Ibid. Page 84

Sunde believes that the appeal- or higher instance structure of the *tings* was not a hierarchical law system, but rather a lateral system, as the higher instances did not "overrule" the lower ones. Sunde bases his view on the notion that even though the parties of a conflict had the possibility of appealing to a higher instance *ting,* this was not common practice, as the higher instance *tings* dealt primarily with more important cases with consequences for the entire region. Therefore, the higher instance did not prioritise appeal-cases from the smaller *tings,* making the law system lateral, with different types of cases being processed in different types of *tings.*[244] Sulebust presents an alternative to the lateral system in viewing the structure of the *tings* at Sunnmøre as a hierarchical system. In his view, the lowest instance was an unknown amount of town*tings,* the next instance was a *ting* usually organised near the *leidang* fleet, then came the county*ting* and finally *Gulatinget*.[245] He does not mention in detail how cases were handled within the *tings* on the different stages of the hierarchy, as he focuses mainly on how one could appeal to the higher instance if needed.[246]

Leidang and *Skipreide*.

As previously mentioned, Haakon the Good was involved in the organisation and expansion of both *Gulatingsloven* and *Frostatingsloven*. It was natural for the laws to have similarities, especially regarding the specific laws that were related to the king. With the introduction of the *leidang,* Haakon essentially created a system which supported his position as king, while at the same time contributed to a safer environment for the farmers. The *leidang* system forced farmers to serve a military duty to their king in order to maintain the peace. The king could call upon the help of the local *leidang* to help him if needed.[247] This essentially meant that the *leidang* was a type of conscription to protect the country from potential attacks. *Leidang* was not always called upon, as farmers could attend the *leidang* fleet as a tax, though this was not introduced before the end of the twelfth century.[248] Farmers would receive the support of the king, economically and militarily, in exchange. This new law moved the fragmented Viking society closer together. From being ruled by many different chieftains and

[244] Sunde, Jørn Øyrehagen. *Speculum Legale – Rettsspegelen.* Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2005. Page 85.
[245] Sulebust uses the term *leidangting,* which is not an established *ting* in other sources. Sulebust most likely refers to a *ting* which was often held near the local *leidang* fleet, meaning that there were more powerful people at this *ting.*
[246] Sulebust, Jarle. "Sunnmøre fylke" in *I balansepunktet.* Eds: Ugelvik Larsen, Stein and Sulebust, Jarle. Sunnmørsposten forlag, Ålesund, 1994. Page 19
[247] Ersland, Geir Atle. *Forsvaret : frå leidang til totalforsvar***.** Gyldendal undervisning, 1999. Page 19
[248] Hødnebø, Finn (Ed.), *Kulturhistorisk leksikon.* Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, Oslo, 1965. Page 432

kings, the *leidang*-law required the farmers to contribute to the military force of the king, making the king's position in society safer.[249]

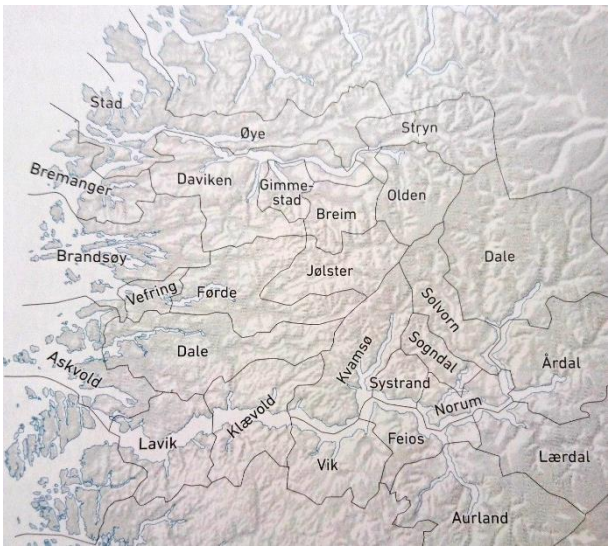
Leidang was not only a military system for the king to use, it also became a local governing body between the smallest *tings* at farms and villages and the supreme governing body (*Gulatinget* or *Frostatinget*). This meant that farmers, most likely the wealthier and more powerful ones, could attend a smaller *ting* than *Gulatinget* or *Frostatinget* to discuss matters relating to the local region. From these *tings* farmers could appeal to the higher governing body if needed. These meetings were often held in places where the *leidang* fleet was stationed. One of the points on the agenda of the *tings*, at least in *Gulatingsloven*, was to keep a record of the people in each region. This was done to ensure that those who could serve in the *leidang* were accounted for. Any leader of a farm who chose not to include someone in the record was penalised for each person.[250] As for other matters that were supposed to be discussed at the *leidang ting*, the laws do not specifically say, but it is likely that these *tings* were the ones that the king would visit, if he was in the region.

Both laws present similar versions of the new *leidang* system. Farmers and others with sufficient resources were to build boathouses and boats, which could be used by the king if needed. If some who were able refused to build, or if the building process failed, then the ones responsible were heavily fined.[251] The size of the new boats is not specified in the laws, but *Gulatingsloven* states that the *leidang* should consist of the largest boats available. Each *skipreide* therefore had a responsibility to build and provide for their ships. The last paragraph in the chapter on the *leidang* system in *Gulatingsloven* specifies the size and number of ships that each county should provide: Sunnmøre should provide 16 ships with 25 benches, Romsdal 10 ships with 20 benches and Nordmøre 20 ships with 20 benches.[252][253]

Along with the ships, each region was supposed to have a certain number of *skipreider*: Sunnmøre had 8, Romsdal the same and Nordmøre had 16.[254] A *skipreide* was a designated geographical area which was required by law to contain a part of the leidang fleet.[255] All areas

[249] Ibid. Page 19
[250] Robberstad, Knut. *Gulatingslovi.* Samlaget, Oslo, 1937. Page 268
[251] Hagland, Jan Ragnar and Sandnes, Jørn. *Frostatingslova.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo 1994. Page 120
[252] Robberstad, Knut. *Gulatingslovi.* Samlaget, Oslo, 1937. Page 284
[253] The word «bench» is translated from the Norwegian word *sesse*. A *sesse* was a bench that stretched across the ship and had two oars belonging to each *sesse*. There were two roers to one *sesse*, one oar each. The number of *sesser* therefore implied the size of the ship.
[254] Robberstad, Knut. *Gulatingslovi.* Samlaget, Oslo, 1937. Page 284
[255] Hødnebø, Finn (Ed.), *Kulturhistorisk leksikon.* Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, Oslo, 1970. Page 546

that were considered to be part of *Gulatingsloven* and *Frostatingsloven* were split into *skipreider* in order to plan how many ships each region was supposed to build. Sunnmøre, which in general was a more prosperous region than Romsdal and Nordmøre, had Borgund as a definite area for shipbuilding, but other areas also included Volda, Ørsta and Ulstein, to mention a few. According to Asbjørn Øverås, the obvious place for a *skipreide* in Romsdal was Veøy, for reasons accounted for in earlier chapters.[256] The amount of ships and *skipreider* needed from Nordmøre is perhaps surprisingly high, but from the geographical size of the county in 1277, it seems that Nordmøre had many, but smaller *skipreider*.[257] The locations of these *skipreider* however, are difficult to identify. It is reasonable to think that Tingvoll, Aure and perhaps Frei or Birkestrand were the centres of some of them.



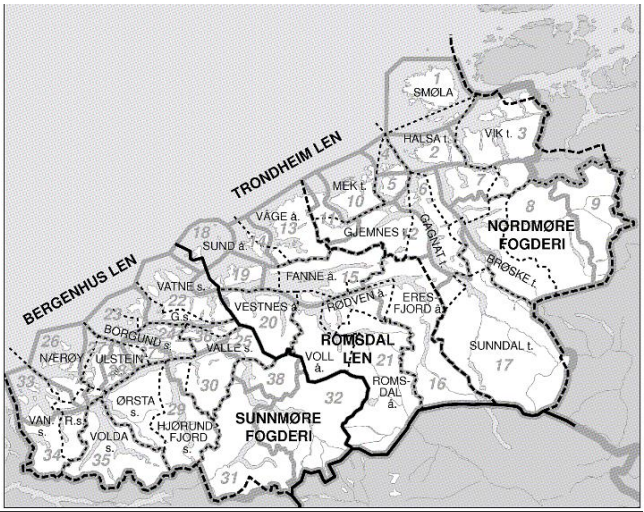


Fig. 3.3. From Krøvel and Tafjord (2017) Map showing the *skipreider* in Fjordane.
Fig. 3.4. From *Norsk historisk leksikon* (2004). The dotted lines show the *skipreider* as of 1650.

While there is some uncertainty as to how the North West coast was divided into *skipreider* during the Viking period, there are sources that confirm what the division looked like later. Both the maps presented here show clearly how the areas were divided, and how they functioned as separate administrative centres. The map showing Fjordane shows the *skipreider* from the Middle Ages, but the Møre and Romsdal map shows what they looked like in 1650. It is difficult to say whether the *skipreider* from 1650 were the same 600 years before, but the main point of these maps is to show that law effectively divided the two large areas into smaller administrative areas.

Both laws specify how the ships were organised in terms of how the crew was chosen. The king had authority to choose the captains, while the captain in turn could choose the rest of

[256] Øverås, Asbjørn. *Romsdalssoga.* Romsdal Ungdomssamlag, 1928. Page 155
[257] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001. Page 164

the crew.[258][259] Not surprisingly, those who were chosen to be either captain or crew were penalised by a small fee if they chose not to join. It was natural for the captains to choose men who worked at farms, but who were not responsible for the maintenance of the farm. The reason why captains preferred men who were not directly responsible for the work at the farm, is that being responsible for farm work sometimes made it difficult for the farmer to leave. If the crops were ripe, or if the farmer had to stay at home for any other reason, it made him unreliable as a soldier on a *leidang* ship.[260]

The *leidang* law would in theory grant substantial power to the king. He would naturally choose captains whom he knew he could trust and who supported him. According to Sulebust, it was initially the *lendmens* job to choose captains.[261] Being chosen captain gave the person substantial power as he was promoted to a military position of power in the local area. This, as Sulebust argues, made the Giske family far more powerful as they were *lendmen* to several kings after the laws were introduced. Katavågen in Borgund was supposed to be the gathering place for the whole *leidang* fleet in the county, and by being so close to Giske, it strengthened their position.[262] A reference from the sagas also shows the Giske-Borgund connection. In the Saga of Haakon Haakonsson, the Giske *lendman* Peter Pålsson was the captain of the "Borgund boat", a powerful ship in the *leidang*.[263]

Gilder

Later in the Viking period, it became more and more important for people to create groups in which they shared views, opinions and lifestyles with the other members. Since the laws were usually practiced in the local community, it became necessary for the people to be unified, making the *ting* process easier. From the beginning of the eleventh century, *gilder*[264] started to emerge. They were groups that supported each other and had shared interests. According to Sigurdsson, little is actually known about *gilder* in most parts of the country. All evidence we

[258] Robberstad, Knut. *Gulatingslovi.* Samlaget, Oslo, 1937. Page 271.
[259] Hagland, Jan Ragnar and Sandnes, Jørn. *Frostatingslova.* Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo 1994. Page 122
[260] Sulebust, Jarle. "Sunnmøre fylke" in *I balansepunktet.* Eds: Ugelvik Larsen, Stein and Sulebust, Jarle. Sunnmørsposten forlag, Ålesund, 1994. Page 26
[261] Sulebust, Jarle. "Sunnmøre fylke" in *I balansepunktet.* Eds: Ugelvik Larsen, Stein and Sulebust, Jarle. Sunnmørsposten forlag, Ålesund, 1994 Page 26.
[262] Ibid Page 26
[263] Saga of Haakon Haakonsson. Available at http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Haakon_Haakonss%C3%B8ns_saga [Accessed 10.12.17] Chapter 205 and 277.
[264] The word *gilde, gilder* in plural, is closely connected to the word «guilds» in English. Here, I have chosen to use the Norwegian word as «guilds» usually refer to groups of merchants and craftsmen, which were more common in central Europe in the Middle Ages. *Gilde* in this context refers to a group of mostly farmers, not people who lived in large towns or cities.

have of *gilder* are three statutes and roughly 200 place names that point to the existence of *gilder*.[265] The need that farmers had to organise into groups like these was naturally linked to having friends that they could rely on. In terms of the law, *gilder* often had their own jurisdiction and in effect dealt with a significant amount of internal conflicts.[266] Sunde notes that it became more popular for groups, *gilder* or others, to have a safe space for *tings* to take place. As the laws were not always followed, norms were established in smaller groups.[267] It became easier for the people in the group to follow the norms as they knew that everyone else operated by the same rules as themselves. Even though some laws specified a punishment for a crime, a local *ting* would usually established its own precedence when passing a verdict and giving a punishment, making it clear what punishment followed each crime in each local *ting*. If one party disagreed about any of the verdicts and punishments, a conflict could quickly develop between this party and the rest of the *gilde.* In order to avoid these types of conflicts, *gilder* focused on being inclusive, rather than exclusive, to maintain a safe space for the people in the *gilde*.[268]

How Powerful Families Could Pressure the Law-Process

It is clear from both laws that they served as systems which those under their jurisdictions were to follow. They do, however, recognise that the law could not always reach every instance that was technically under its jurisdiction. Cases between private actors in society were often settled between those actors instead of at a *ting*. If it were not strictly necessary for a case to be brought to a higher instance, the actors would save effort and money by solving the issue privately. This did not imply, as Helle notes, that the laws encouraged people to take the law in their own hands, effectively discarding the set laws.[269] An exception was the laws concerning revenge for murder and physical harm, where people were freer to avenge an act they deemed worthy of revenge.

When a homicide, or another sever act of violence, was purposefully carried out, the victim or the victim's family was responsible for the act of revenge. *Gulatingsloven* specifically states that it would be a good thing to avenge an act of homicide, if the killed man was part of a

[265] Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar. "Bondegilder I Norge og gildet I Gildeskålsokn.". From Stige, Morten and Ekroll, Øystein (eds). *Gildeskål gamle kirke*. Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2014. Page 57.
[266] Ibid. Page 63
[267] Sunde, Jørn Øyrehagen. *Speculum Legale – Rettsspegelen.* Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2005. Page 87
[268] Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar. "Bondegilder I Norge og gildet I Gildeskålsokn.". From Stige, Morten and Ekroll, Øystein (eds). *Gildeskål gamle kirke*. Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2014. Page 64
[269] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001. Page 85

group (a group is defined as a gathering of five men).[270] The law also states that those who seek revenge for the homicide should not be hindered in any way. *Frostatingsloven* mentions that a revenge-killing sometimes was the duty of those who witnessed the initial homicide.[271] In most other cases, both laws encourage that a settlement should be reached between the involved parties in order to avoid a judicial process.

If a crime had been committed and revenge was not immediately possible, cases often became matters to solve between families. If a person from one family was accused of a crime by another family, then the two families were often involved to solve the case. The accused person often received support and protection from his family, but this also drew the rest of the family into the matter. An accusation was therefore not always targeted at a single person, but also his family. If the accusing person or family wanted compensation for their loss, for example if a sheep was stolen from them, then they would accuse not only the person who stole the sheep, but his entire family. These matters often lead to the more powerful family winning in local settlements, as they could pressure the other part into less favourable compensation conditions. As an example from the North-West coast, one could see that it was possible for a powerful family, like the Giske-family, to take advantage of such a system. It was, however, the purpose of the laws later to account for the power of some families by making sure that cases went to the *ting* if families failed to reach a settlement themselves.[272] It is also unlikely that the Giske-family used its power to influence the settlement in any cases, as the family rose to power later in the eleventh century, a time when the laws became more widespread. As a consequence, local settlements where one party used its power to influence the process became increasingly rare.

[270] Robberstad, Knut. *Gulatingslovi.* Samlaget, Oslo, 1937. Page 173
[271] Sunde, Jørn Øyrehagen. *Speculum Legale – Rettsspegelen.* Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2005. Page 58
[272] Helle, Knut. *Gulatinget og Gulatingslova.* Skald forlag, Leikanger, 2001. Page 88

Conclusion

The goal for this thesis has been to illuminate the political structure of power on the North West coast in the Viking period (800s to the early 1000s AD). The three main chapters of the thesis have portrayed the different perspectives on how the political structure in the region was shaped throughout the Viking period. This conclusion will summarise the three chapters and explain the different pictures that each chapter makes and tie them together. I will also look into how the different perspectives either exclude or complement each other.

Three different perspectives on the North West coast

From the chapter on the sagas, I went through the different kings portrayed in *Heimskringla* while I added *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's Saga* where their stories fitted with the timeline of the kings. The North West coast was then presented as it was written in the sagas. A drawback with the sagas is that they have to be interpreted as they were written. It is known that they lack credibility on some areas, meaning that some parts of the saga chapter could be based on misconceptions and exaggerations from the author of the sagas. As long as we are aware of the drawbacks, the sagas still provide valuable input in showing the political structure through the perspective of the kings.

The picture that is drawn from the saga chapter is one that heavily revolves around the kings. The sagas in *Heimskringla* are after all about the kings, so the focus on them is natural. They give the impression that there are many important men and kings who mattered a great deal for the history of the region. From the sagas, it is clear that there are two reoccurring themes. The kings wanted to unify the country and Christianise the people. The details about how this happened are questionable, but the greater mission of the kings still stands. After successfully conquering the area, Harald Hårfagre gave Ragnvald Mørejarl control over the region, making Ragnvald the most powerful chieftain in the area. During Haakon the Good, there seemed to be general peace in the region, apart from the one incident where some of the Trøndelag chieftains decided to burn down three churches. Olav Tryggvason enforced the Christian religion in the region as he gathered chieftains at Dragseid to persuade them to do so. Lastly, Olaf Haraldsson's reign highlights the king's allies at Sunnmøre, most notably Arne Armodsson and Bruse. *Egil Skallagrimsson's Saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's Saga* both portray meetings with chieftains in the region.

The impression that we get from the sagas is quite clear: they tell the history of kings and chieftains who dealt with the politics of the region. Little attention is given to farmers or other common folk. Such a presentation gives the impression that society in the region was run by the kings or the chieftains. The kings could force chieftains and farmers to accept Christianity, albeit through the use of military pressure, as well as place new chieftains in newly conquered areas, as was the case in the "Saga of Harald Hårfagre". Also related to the sagas, is the theory of territorial division. The kings controlled areas, and in these areas the king was the ruler. This portrays a *kongesamfunn*, where the king held supreme power over his subordinates.

From the archaeology chapter, I presented what the archaeological sources say about the political power structure. This was done by first looking at the relevant theory model, centre and periphery, before investigating the specific areas on the North West coast where there have been archaeological investigations. In order to establish an overview of the relevant areas to investigate further, I used Bjørn Ringstad's Magister degree as a starting point. His research defined the centres of large burial mounds in the region and used the geographical placement of the centres to say something about the links between them. The last part of the chapter focused on specific areas that were the most important central places in the region.

From the archaeological sources, a different impression is given of the conditions on the North West coast compared to what we read in the sagas. The archaeological sources only give evidence of what has been found through investigations, and not stories of what might have happened. Since this is a history thesis, I have not been able to analyse the archaeological findings myself, but I have been dependent on the written work of archaeologists who conducted these investigations. The written sources show that there were many places on the North West coast that could have been potential centres of power. Judging by the findings of the archaeologists, it is clear that the specific places discussed in the chapter were different in the way that they served as central places. We get the impression that Borgund served as the most important central place in the entire region, but also that Borgund was not the only central place of importance. Veøy and Selja were the main religious centres, while Giske, Eid, Hustad and perhaps Frei were centres that were the homes of different chieftains. What the archaeological sources essentially have done, is to highlight where the chieftains lived, creating a sense of a society that evolved around the chieftain's farm. The fair number of smaller central places also shows that political power was spread out in the region. This naturally links to the centre and periphery model, which was described in the archaeology chapter. All of these areas should be defined as centres, though they served

different purposes. The most complete central place was Borgund, but even this centre at Sunnmøre lacked the aspect of political importance as it was first and foremost an economic centre. The chapter also focuses on the chieftains who lived in these centres. We know from the archaeology and the sagas that there were many chieftains, but the archaeological sources strengthen their position in the society.

In the chapter on the laws, I looked at *Gulatingsloven* and *Frostatingsloven* to find out how their introduction by Haakon the Good affected the lives of the people on the North West coast. I accounted for how the region was split up into counties, and then into *skipreider.* Furthermore, the function of the *ting* was presented to show how the farmers could control their own lives through the judicial process of the *ting.*

The chapter on the laws shows a new perspective of how the region could be portrayed from a political perspective. As *Gulatinget* and *Frostatinget* became the highest instances of the *ting*, essentially combining the smaller *tings* in their respective regions, new laws were set into practice that drew clear geographical borders between the areas in the jurisdiction. The new laws were focused on farmers and how they should act in accordance with each other. It was also the farmers who attended the *tings*, giving them the power to decide on matters related to themselves. The kings, who were in many cases "outside" the law, were given some power as they could choose the captains of the *leidang* ships. The *leidang* therefore became the farmers' way of protecting themselves as the king could call upon the *leidang* fleet to defend against attackers. These ships were built in *skipreider,* ensuring that most communities assisted in the ship building process. From this chapter, we see that the farmer is given substantial power, which stands as a contrast to the previous two chapters. The laws gave the common people a way to influence political matters without the need to seek advice from the king.

The chapter on laws presented two of the key theories for this thesis. The *skipreider* system supports the theory of territorial division of the region, as it splits up the whole region without focusing on the centres and their location. The laws also gave the farmers substantial power over their own lives, resembling the theory of a *bondesamfunn*.

Comparison of the perspectives

It is clear that the three main chapters of this thesis present different views of the political power structure in the region. The sagas present how the kings controlled the areas by becoming allies with great chieftains, but also by pressuring the people to accept Christianity

and its traditions. The archaeological sources portray a region where different centres of power represented the political power structure. Though some centres were more important than others, they represented areas where chieftains lived and had their main farms, showing that political power was spread out. The final chapter on laws shows how the region was divided and how the farmer and other common people actually had significant power to decide over their own lives. It is the purpose of the rest of this concluding chapter to show the similarities and contrasts of these three different perspectives. I will also investigate whether these perspectives can be complementary or if they exclude of each other.

The Sagas and the Archaeology

Starting with the first two chapters, we have seen that they complement each other on several areas. Even as a starting point for some of the specific places that were discussed in the archaeology chapter, I referred to the sagas to give some historical context to the areas before jumping in to the archaeology. However, it is difficult to connect archaeological findings to the sagas, as we cannot guarantee that the findings and the sagas are directly connected. As used in this thesis, the archaeological sources complement the sagas greatly. This has mainly ensured the manifestation of central places: the kings usually visited the most important places, and the archaeological sources have shown rich findings in many areas that have been defined a centre. Most of the time, however, the sagas have been general about the location of the most powerful farms. Giske and Borgund are barely mentioned in the sagas, but the archaeological sources have shown that these were the greatest centres in the region. In the sagas, it was more important to write about which king was visiting, and not the where his visits were. We can also assume that Snorre Sturlason was not always sure exactly where the king visited, but he knew the general area. The kings were also more occupied with politics and religion, meaning a trading centre like Borgund might not have been so important to them, but rather who controlled such a centre.

The other two sagas discussed, *Egil Skallagrimson's Saga* and *Grette Åsmundsson's Saga*, highlight Sunnmøre as a larger area of chieftain farms. Both of the farms the main characters of the sagas visit, are located in the area that Ringstad defined as a large centre of burial mounds. It seems, however, that these chieftains were not the most powerful ones. Nevertheless, it is likely that they were part of the trading system which had Borgund as a centre. The reason why Borgund might have been left out of the sagas is perhaps due to this reason, that the centre was mainly for trade and not for politics. I have previously argued that Giske and Borgund were connected, as the lack of evidence of any trading on Giske points to

Borgund as the natural trading site. This might have been the case for the farms at Haramsøy and Vigra as well, which are very close to Giske.

Another example of where the archaeological sources complement the sagas is the places that the kings used to spread their religious agenda. The archaeological sources confirm to a great extent that the places highlighted in the sagas were indeed important for the Christian faith in Norway. There is no doubt that Selja, Veøy and perhaps Frei were areas of significant importance for Christianity. Selja has been given much attention in the sagas, as both Olav Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson came to the island. The archaeological sources back up the theory of early church buildings on the island, essentially giving credit to the sagas.

It is perhaps not a surprise that there have been archaeological findings in areas that have been presented in the sagas, as they have been natural starting points for the investigations. Archaeological investigations have located many more areas that have escaped the focus on the kings in the sagas. Without the archaeological investigations, it would be impossible to grasp the effects that the kings had on the people. One example is how the stone found at Kuløya shows that the Christianising process was successful to one of the kings who tried to convert the people to Christianity. Veøy was not mentioned in the sagas either, but was clearly a centre of Christianity during this period.

As for the contrasts between these two chapters, it is clear that they present two different views of who controlled the region. The sagas focus on the kings as rulers, while the archaeological sources point to chieftains who lived in the centres as the people who ruled. This is naturally due to the lack of evidence of the king in the archaeological sources. The king becomes a less visible character when looking at the archaeology, at least in terms of political influence. Concerning religion, we know that chieftains and farmers became Christian during the reigns of Haakon the Good, Olav Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson, meaning that the kings must have had some impact on the people.

The Sagas and the Laws

We know that *Gulatinget* and *Frostatinget* were places for farmers to visit in order to discuss matters related to their lives. The highest instance of the *tings*, however, were also places for the king to meet people and affect their lives with his views. Since we also know that the highest instance was represented by men from the entire region, it was the most optimal way for the king to present his views while being open for discussion among the chosen representatives from the different areas. It is clear that the king was not a supreme figure that

could overrule the *ting*, but he was in a position to freely make suggestions for new laws and also chair the *ting*. As the representatives from each area were in clear majority, the king was sometimes forced to negotiate with them.[273]

From the chapter on the sagas, we know of a few cases where the king either organised a local *ting*, or visited *Gulatinget*. From *Olav Tryggvason's Saga*, the king travels to the *Gulating* to convince the people to accept Christianity as the new religion. The people say to the king that they will become his enemies if he forces them to accept Christianity against their will, but that they are willing to compromise if given sufficient compensation. The king and the people agree to the proposal that the king will marry his sister to one of the most promising men at *Gulatinget*, Erling Skjalgsson.[274] This event shows that the king was willing to reach a settlement with the people even though he had brought a large army to the *ting.* The king needed to maintain friendships with the people at *Gulatinget* to keep his kingdom and ensure that he did not make enemies who would try to rise against him.

Another *ting* is held shortly after Olav Tryggvason's visit to *Gulatinget*. At the *ting* at Dragseid, Olav Tryggvason demanded that the people accept Christianity. As he had brought a large army to the *ting*, it became impossible for people to say no, as that would lead to them being outlawed and possibly killed by the king. This shows the power that the king could have over people if he decided to bring an army. An example of when the king was not present with a large army, is Olaf Haraldsson's *ting* at Herøy. Though he was there with the *leidang*fleet, the saga says nothing about him using the fleet to gain advantage at the *ting*. As it is recorded in the *saga*, Haraldsson wants one of the men to travel to the Faroe Islands to claim taxes that the people had not been paying. The men at the *ting* were very hesitant until one man, Karl Mørske, decided to take on the mission from the king. This event shows that the people were not forced by the king to do something, but that they would be rewarded for carrying out his wish.

It is clear from the respective chapters that the sagas and the laws have different views on who should hold political power. The sagas, as previously mentioned, revolves around the kings and what great deeds they did to strengthen their power and reputation. The laws, on the other hand, paints a more egalitarian picture of how society was structured. While the laws present exactly how the *tings* should be organised, they do not mention what would happen if the king

[273] Krøvel, Harald, Harald Endre Tafjord, Torkjell Djupedal, and Masaoki Adachi. *Folk I Fjordrike : Før 1763*.. Bergen: Fagbokforl, 2017. Page 147
[274] Sturlason, S. *Heimskringla.* Ed. Finn Hødnebø. J. M. Stenersens Forlag. 2009. Page 154

was present. As seen from the examples in the sagas, the king undoubtedly influenced, and perhaps disturbed, the local *ting* process.

The Archaeology and the Laws

As for how the archaeological sources match up with the laws, it seems they serve the same role as the sagas. As the archaeological sources helped to manifest the central places, they also highlight the location of the *ting* places, often found in the same central place. It is likely that the places discussed in the archaeology chapter had a mound or area where the local *ting* was set. The archaeological sources therefore suggest that there were many different *tings* that *Gulatinget* and *Frostatinget* incorporated into their jurisdiction.

The laws present a territorial structure of the North West coast in the way that power is organised. With the introduction of *skipreider*, the whole region was split up into areas and *ting* places were spread out. This stands as a contrast to the centre and periphery model, where power was concentrated in the few powerful centres. These two models can be complementary as there were centres of different sizes and significance.

At this point, I would like to combine the laws and the sagas in terms of how they portray the theories presented in this thesis, and compare them to the archaeological sources. The sagas portray a *kongesamfunn* while the laws portray a *bondesamfunn*. These types of societies are not mutually exclusive, as they focus on different aspects of the structure of society: the king is the ruler, but the farmers control most aspects of their own lives. Both of these types of sources also focus on a territorial division of the region. The contrast to these sources is therefore the archaeological sources in the way that they present a *høvdingsamfunn* where chieftains lived in centres, and that these centres were places of power. It is possible to say that the archaeological sources present a new perspective on the structure of power in the region. It would be wrong to say that either one is the correct way of viewing the structure of power, as the sources provide evidence for their perspectives.

Finally, I will say something about the actual power structure on the North West coast as it has been presented in the main chapters. Even though each chapter points to different perspectives or pictures of how the structure was, it is the conclusion of this thesis that the power structure on North West coast was a combination of the three perspectives. By only looking at the sagas, and especially the king's sagas, we get a view that the kings ruled the region through allied chieftains, and that the kings had significant influence over the people. The archaeological sources show that there were many centres, and with them many

chieftains, but the sources lack historical context to explain matters that cannot be proved through archaeology. If we only looked at the laws, we would think that the region was mainly a *bondesamfunn*, which was controlled and maintained through the laws passed by the farmers. The three chapters show that they do not paint the complete picture of the political structure individually, but that they together describe a comprehensive and detailed picture.

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