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The Making of a Centre in the Periphery: Writing and Rhetoric at the Archdiocese of Niðaróss

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Ceterum magnus dominus et laudabilis nimis, qui de lateribus aquilonis ædificavit civitatem suam, austri placido flamine aquilonis dissipavit duritiam et gentium efferarum obstinatos ac feroce animo calore fidei tandem emollivit (*Acta*: 127).¹

But the great master, praiseworthy beyond measure, who built his city in regions of the North, he – by the mild breeze of the South – eased the hardness of the North, and at last softened the obstinate and wild spirits of the fierce nations with the warmth of their faith.²

In this introduction to the *vita* of St Ólafr, *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, the author stresses the peripheral location of Niðaróss at the borders of the Christian world. This reflects an awareness of the distance between the central parts of Christianity, namely Rome and Jerusalem, and that the inhabitants of Niðaróss were aware that they lived in the periphery. Niðaróss is described as a periphery both geographically, in the North, but also religiously, in that the coldness of the non-Christian people in these regions is contrasted to the warmth of the Faith from the more southern parts of the world. By the time the *Passio* was written, however, Niðaróss had become the centre of a new archbishopric in the North, and the Christian Faith was firmly established. The description in *Passio*'s introduction therefore contrasts with its contemporary situation, setting up the pre-Christian state of things as the past and St Ólafr as the turning point for when the North came to be included in the warmth of the Christian Faith and the Church. Behind this eloquent and rhetorically well-adjusted text, we find a collaborative initiative at the archbishop's see, with the second archbishop of Niðaróss, Eysteinn Erlendsson (1157–1188), being personally involved in this.

Yet the *Passio* is only one of several means by which Eysteinn and his contemporaries constituted and consolidated Niðaróss as a new centre in the periphery. This article will discuss how this goal was achieved by means of writing and rhetoric; other means, like architecture and art, were also in play in addition to writing and rhetoric, but these are not

1 In this edition, the *vita* is edited under the title *Acta sancti Olavi regis et martyris*, but it is also commonly referred to as *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, and will be referred to elsewhere in this article as the *Passio*.

2 All translations are the authors' own unless otherwise stated.

the focus of study here. The organisation of the church itself was also an important instrument for creating a religious and administrative centre in the periphery. Consequently, when the pope decided to establish an archbishop's see in the town of Niðaróss, the structure was already there to facilitate the process. Nevertheless, as we will discuss in what follows, the construction of a Christian religious centre in the peripheral North was given great impetus by an illustrious archbishop through his active and broad use of writing and by actively engaging the already established cult of St Ólafr in his rhetoric.

We will focus on three aspects of written communication, which may disclose the possible strategies behind the archbishop's programme: the variety and quantity of the texts, the choice of language, and the dissemination of the texts, all within the scope of the first decades after the establishment of the archbishopric. The medieval texts comprise a wide range of genres, and theology, rhetoric, and grammar were central parts of the education in the cathedral schools and universities. Our first question is how this knowledge was implemented into the literate culture of the newly born archbishopric, represented by the genres and types of texts produced at the see to demonstrate the skills of its inhabitants. Our second question is related to the choice of language in these texts. Whilst Latin was the predominant learned language, texts in the vernacular were written in Iceland and Norway since at least the twelfth century. What role did the choice of language have in the communication with the surrounding environment? The third aspect of communication is the distribution of texts. The dissemination of texts, the extent of their distribution, and the directions in which they were distributed, are central to define where a possible centre might be. Lars Boje Mortensen (2000: 165) observes two phases in the process of incorporating the North into the Christian realm, characterised by the movement of people to the North in the first phase and the return movement of people to the South and back again in the second phase. While we appreciate that texts are made by, directed at, and transported by people, and thus that the movements of people and texts are related, we will focus here on the movement of texts rather than people, as we contend that a religious and literate centre will be recognised on the one hand by its ability to attract people, and on the other by its ability to produce and disseminate texts of significance.

The emergence of a cult

To contextualise the background and location of Niðaróss, we will initially present an overview of the period between King Ólafr's death in 1030 and the establishment of the Archdiocese of Niðaróss. The role of St Ólafr is fundamental for understanding Niðaróss's significance, as his cult represents the foundation of the archdiocese's existence. According to the Old Norse *konungasögur*, the Christianisation of Norway took place from the mid-tenth century onwards through the efforts of several kings. It was Ólafr Haraldsson, however, who became the martyr to whom the honour was soon ascribed of having finally succeeded in converting the people of Norway. At the time, Norway was part of the Archdiocese of Hamburg–Bremen, and the church's organisation was intricately connected to the country's royal powers. Ólafr, born in Norway in the late tenth century, was a descendant of the great Norwegian king Haraldr *hárfagri* ("fair-hair"), but had to flee abroad to escape the enemies of his father. As a young man, he set out for Norway to claim the crown and to convert the people to Christianity; in 1016, he became the sole king of the

Norwegian realm. Nevertheless, the Danish king Knútr agitated the people against him, and Ólafr had to flee to Garðaríki (today's Russia). Once again, he gathered men to return to Norway and claim the crown. On July 29, 1030, however, Ólafr fell at the Battle of Stiklastaðir near Niðaróss.

There is textual evidence of a cult connected to Ólafr not long after his death in 1030. In England, written liturgical texts are preserved in manuscripts from about 1050–1060.³ Ólafr is also described as a saint in other early written sources outside of Scandinavia, such as in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, written ca. 1075 (see *Gesta*: 267). In addition, skaldic poems from Ólafr's lifetime and from shortly after his death indicate a change in emphasis in depictions of him, from an initial focus on Ólafr as king and warrior to an image of him primarily as king and saint *post mortem* (see Jørgensen 2016: 365 and 382).⁴ Not only do these skaldic poems display a cultural change in descriptions of Ólafr, but poems like Þórarinn *loftunga*'s ("praise-tongue") *Glælognsviða* and Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* stand as testimonies from ca. 1035–1045 to an early cult connected to Ólafr from shortly after his death (see *Glækv* and *ErfÓl*). The king's life was further connected to the Christianisation of Norway in his being a perpetual and physical inhabitant of the church through his relics being kept in the shrine there.

In these skaldic poems, several miracles are described. In *Glælognsviða*, Þórarinn claims that Ólafr's body is still incorrupt and that his hair and nails continue to grow (see *Glækv*: 870, st. 5), and declares that bells ring by themselves over his shrine (see *Glækv*: 871, st. 6). He also says that many people came there to be healed (see *Glækv*: 873, st. 8).⁵ The same miracle of Ólafr's hair continuing to grow is mentioned in Sigvatr's *Erfidrápa* (*ErfÓl*: 692, st. 23), where the hair is also said to cause wonders, as well as the claim that those who visit the shrine are healed (*ErfÓl*: 693, st. 24). Also mentioned in *Erfidrápa*, but not in *Glælognsviða*, is that the sun is said not to have shone at the Battle of Stiklastaðir, an image taken up again in the later prose sagas about Ólafr around 1200 and beyond. The form of these works, which use the traditional skaldic metres, as well as their being composed in the vernacular language, strongly suggest that these poems were composed primarily to influence an Old Norse-speaking audience; consequently, their composition represents the movement of oral texts about St Ólafr, with a strict metrical form, being transmitted among a predominantly local audience.

In the eleventh century, and indeed even earlier, other written texts were already in motion from other centres to the peripheral North. Missionaries, priests, and bishops

3 See, for example, the manuscripts Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422 (ca. 1060), which includes three prayers for Ólafr, and London, British Library, Harley 2961 (ca. 1050), which includes a *brevarium* (see Gjerløw 1967: col. 561).

4 The skaldic poems are transmitted as part of much later prose texts, but most are generally thought to have been transmitted in a fairly similar manner in the oral tradition. Still, some poems and verses may have been composed specifically for later prose texts, especially the sagas.

5 *Glækv* (872, st. 7) mentions candles burning on the altar, which some scholars take to be a reference to an account of a miracle in assuming that the candles light themselves in the way that the bells ring by themselves (see Mortensen/Mundal 2003). Yet the stanza says only that the candles burn up from the altar and that they are pleasing to Christ; this suggests that the flame of the candles are burning upwards rather than flickering, which we read as a sign that the offering has been accepted (see Magerøy 1948: 27–28). This could also be seen as an indication of an already established ecclesiastical practice of keeping candles lit in honour of St Ólafr.

brought written texts with them to the North either as part of kings' entourages, independently, or because they were sent by bishops in other Christian regions. Texts originating abroad were also imported and circulated within the North, even after a literate culture was established there with manuscripts being produced locally.

The Church as an institution developed and consolidated itself further in Norway in the decades after Ólafr's death. The bishoprics of Niðaróss, Bergen, and Oslo were established around 1070 as parts of the Archdiocese of Hamburg–Bremen, and fell under the Diocese of Lund from 1103. The bishopric of Stavanger was established in 1125, and that of Hamar in 1153. In the latter year, Niðaróss was appointed by the pope to be the location for a new archdiocese in the North Atlantic area, at that time the most remote part of the Christian world, as a further step by the curia to expand and consolidate the organisation of the Church. Cardinal Nicolaus of Albanos (later Pope Hadrian IV) attended the inauguration, which took place in 1153 in connection with the celebration of St Ólafr on July 29, in the cathedral where Ólafr's shrine was kept. This was the result of a lengthy process that started more than two hundred years earlier, when the people of the Norwegian realm gradually accepted and adapted to the new religion of Christianity, a process that had as one of its pivotal points the death – and the subsequent martyrdom – of Ólafr Haraldsson.

The Latin literate culture of Niðaróss

The inauguration of the archdiocese was the starting point of a lively literate production there, a written discourse that, as far as the extant sources reveal, was produced in Latin. Yet little is preserved from the first few years when Jón Birgisson was archbishop. It is only after 1157, when Eysteinn Erlendsson becomes the *electus* of the archbishopric, later receiving his *pallium* in 1161, that a programme for making Niðaróss a centre comes to light.

At this point, there is no trace of the use of the vernacular, Old Norse, in manuscript writing, contrary to its extensive use in runic inscriptions. In the last half of the twelfth century, we see the evidence of the first manuscript texts in Old Norse, yet Eysteinn's choice of language for written communication was Latin – the language of the Church, of learning, and of international communication. Fragments of a *vita* of Ólafr must have already existed before Niðaróss was established, and the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* was soon revised by Eysteinn, with additional accounts of miracles being added in the following decades (see Mortensen/Mundal 2003: 360).⁶ One of the miracles is claimed to have been experienced by Archbishop Eysteinn himself and is told in the first person, in such a way that the archbishop could testify that the saint was not only a myth from the past, but also present and active in his own time. In addition, this framing can be seen as the archbishop manifesting himself in the discourse that affirmed Ólafr as a saint and an inhabitant of the cathedral, which by extension would have legitimised Niðaróss as the centre of the archbishopric. The friendship between St Ólafr and the archbishop must have been seen as a powerful alliance by the surrounding society.

6 *Passio Olavi* is preserved in several versions (see, for example, Mortensen/Mundal 2003). The main differences are in the length of the *vita* section and in the number of miracles.

The *Passio* was copied in several manuscripts and distributed from Niðaróss all over Scandinavia and northern Europe, from Gotland in the east, to Iceland and Ireland in the west, to France in the south (see, for example, Mortensen 2000). This resulted in the consecration of churches and altars to Ólafr in all these areas. By means of the *vita*, Niðaróss soon became an even more central destination for pilgrims from all over Europe. This is another example of the “movements” to and from Niðaróss, as described by Lars Boje Mortensen (2000: 165). With Niðaróss now established as a centre in this capacity, and with Ólafr and his shrine established as part of a rhetorical force, texts were created and moved from Niðaróss to the outside world. This led to movements back to Niðaróss, which consisted not only of texts from another centre moving to a peripheral Niðaróss, as in the earlier phase, but also of people travelling as pilgrims to the new religious centre.

The influx of pilgrims and the gifts donated to Ólafr’s shrine were essential elements in the economy for the archbishop and the construction of the cathedral at Niðaróss. Eysteinn played an active role in the construction of the cathedral; in the St John’s chapel in the southern part of the cathedral, an inscription apparently by Eysteinn, here with his Latin name form Augustinus, declares that the altar in the chapel was consecrated on 26 November 1161, in praise of Our Lord Jesus Christ and in honour of the saints John the Baptist, Vincentius, and Sylvester (Syrett 2002: I, 142–148 and II, 7–9). Considering that Eysteinn received his *pallium* in 1161, the consecration of St John’s chapel must have been one of Eysteinn’s first duties as archbishop after coming back from Rome. The inscription runs in one line on all three walls of the chapel and are easily legible; it is written in Latin, in Latin script, and thus theoretically communicates with all of Latin Christendom. This can be seen as yet another written manifestation of Eysteinn and as evidence of his efforts to make the cathedral the physical centre in the archbishopric, in line with the centres of other archbishoprics all over the world. Even though this inscription stands primarily as a dedication, it also has the function of consolidating the archbishopric, with the cathedral as its physical and organisational centre.

There are two other dedications inscribed in the cathedral, most likely some decades younger than the one in St John’s chapel. One of these inscriptions (Syrett 2002: I, 148–151 and II, 10) makes a rhetorical point by combining St Stephanus and St Ólafr in the dedication (see Ekroll 2021: 291); both were the first martyrs in their own time, and each in their own way marks a new era. Whilst the inscription in the chapel names Eysteinn, the two younger ones do not mention a commissioner at all, even though the likely commissioner was Eysteinn himself or his successor Eiríkr Ívarsson, who died in 1202 (see Syrett 2002: I, 148–154 and II, 10–11). What the inscription in the chapel does by mentioning Eysteinn, then, in contrast with the others, is visibly to connect the archbishop to the construction of a part of the cathedral in the very beginning of his time as archbishop and at the outset of the archbishopric’s history. This may suggest that Eysteinn, more than his successor, was particularly active in his use of writing to establish and consolidate his position, using inscriptions in addition to manuscript texts to establish himself as a discursive presence and to consolidate the legitimacy and authority of the archbishopric and himself as archbishop. Two inscriptions, now lost but known from reports made in the eighteenth century, support this. One is the inscription that may have been from Alstadhaug church and another one from Sakshaug church: both declare that Eysteinn had consecrated the churches, the first in 1169 and the second in 1184. According to the reports on these inscriptions, they were

written in Latin with Latin script (see Kleivane 2021: 132). These churches are close to Niðaróss, but they must still be considered to be in the periphery relative to the centre represented by the cathedral town. All churches must be consecrated by a bishop, and in the context of the small number of written documentations from medieval Norwegian churches that mention a church's consecration – and the even fewer that mention a specific bishop in connection to that consecration – the fact that Eysteinn is explicitly mentioned in inscriptions on more than one occasion as having consecrated a church, suggests that he saw writing as a means to an end that went beyond documenting the actual consecration as such. Indeed, each of these inscriptions can be understood as a visual means by which distinct places within the archbishopric could be linked to its central presence in Niðaróss via the figure of Archbishop Eysteinn, despite those places themselves being more peripheral.

In the early phase of his service as archbishop, Eysteinn made efforts to establish a sound and strong church organisation, and seems to have cared for the uniformity of the church (see Bagge 2003). An Augustinian monastery, Elgisetr, was founded in 1183 at the latest, nearby the cathedral for regular canons, who were connected to the cathedral (see Gunnes 1996: 194). The church law compilation *Canones Nidrosienses* was composed during the first decades after the inauguration; it secured the education and good behaviour of the priests and canons there. Eysteinn also kept a lively correspondence with his bishops and with the pope. From more than ten preserved letters dated from the 1160s and early 1170s from Pope Alexander III, it is apparent that Eysteinn sent him enquiries and questions concerning the running of the church organisation of Niðaróss, which was thus in line with the other archbishoprics regardless of its distance from Rome. The direct line of communication between Eysteinn and the pope, testified by the presence of the papal letters, must have provided the archbishop and his decisions with authority over his subjects. Through writing to the pope regularly, Eysteinn would have increased his visibility as archbishop in the eyes of his superior, thereby also aligning his archbishopric with other prominent centres in the Christian world despite its geographical distance from them.

The archbishop's correspondence with the bishops in the archdiocese and with the pope, his superior, bears witness to an active leader aware of his powers and of his new role in the hierarchy of the church. This is yet another element of a movement of texts in Latin to and from Niðaróss, only now in a more evenly balanced and established relationship with Rome, the largest gravitational centre in Christendom. Furthermore, this textual programme seems also to have been intended to raise up Niðaróss's profile to match those of other 'peripheral centres' in the Christian world, in that it more firmly situated the archbishop as a prominent player within the Church's organisation.

Eysteinn also formed a strong alliance between the church and the King of Norway. In 1163/64, the archbishop crowned the five-year-old Magnús Erlingsson, thereby emphasising the king's reliance on the church; in return, the king agreed to protect the church and to allow its investiture. The protection was symbolised by St Ólafr as *Rex perpetuus Norvegiae*, the eternal protector of the Archdiocese of Niðaróss.

Vernacular texts in the centre

The texts discussed above are all written in Latin, the *lingua franca* of the Middle Ages. Not long after the establishment of the archdiocese, however, texts in the vernacular were also produced. One of the oldest preserved fragments in Old Norse, AM 655 IX 4to, contains a translation of the *Legend of Blasius*, known in Old Norse as *Blasiuss saga*. Some linguistic features connect the fragment to the Niðaróss area around 1150 or soon afterwards (see Mundal 1995: 12); the provenance and date suggest that the translation was undertaken specifically at the scriptorium at the Cathedral. Furthermore, the *Passio* was translated into Old Norse only a few decades after the inauguration of the archbishopric.⁷ The vernacular thus seems to have been a rhetorical tool used to make the cult of St Ólafr accessible to those who did not read or write Latin. The Old Norse version of the *vita* is without doubt based on a Latin version, but differs in its use of biblical allusions and quotations and on the level of details pertaining to the names of people and places (see Mortensen/Mundal 2003: 368). These differences, as well as the choice of language, indicate that the Old Norse version was intended for another audience: people within the Archdiocese of Niðaróss, rather than those in the outside world.

One of the texts composed for the inauguration of Niðaróss in 1153 is the skaldic poem *Geisli* (see *Geisl*: pp. 5–65), performed by the skald Einarr Skúlason before Jón Birgisson, Niðaróss' first archbishop, and the papal delegation. At the time the brothers Sigurðr, Eysteinn, and Ingi, the sons of King Haraldr Gilli, ruled in Norway; their saga in *Heimskringla*, composed some seventy years later, suggests that all were present at the inauguration (see *Hkr*: III, 332). We must also assume that a congregation of lesser prominent people would have been present, who may have been less skilled in Latin, and the poem *Geisli*, composed in Old Norse and in a well-recognised metre, would then address this audience in particular. *Geisli* is not associated directly with the (later) Archbishop Eysteinn; it is earlier than his ascension to the position of archbishop, and, according to the later saga *Morkinskinna*, it was King Eysteinn who commissioned the poem from his friend, the skald Einarr Skúlason (see *Mork*: II, 221–222). This illustrates that it was not only Archbishop Eysteinn who was invested in using texts actively and consciously.⁸ In this light, it is also important to remember that the Latin texts discussed above, unlike *Geisli*, were not commissioned by Eystein as original pieces, but reflect existing texts and text-types in use throughout the Christian world, and that they were written in the most common language for such texts.

Geisli is the oldest evidence of literary activity directly connected to the archbishopric. It was composed in the vernacular and in the most prominent indigenous literate form, the skaldic poem. The use of this literary art-form for this occasion must be seen as a rhetorical strategy of reaching out in the vernacular to those who did not understand Latin, but who would have constituted the immediate body of the archbishopric and the congregation for

7 The oldest manuscript evidence is Copenhagen, AM 619 4to from c. 1200, but this is a copy of an older, now-lost exemplar.

8 By 'text', we are not referring here exclusively to written texts, as some scholars use the term, but in a broader sense also to similar works of art in oral tradition, such as skaldic poems. We find the term 'text' to be especially useful for oral works composed in forms that allow them to be transmitted more or less unchanged; the demanding form of skaldic poetry, which makes a text difficult to alter significantly, is a prime example.

which the newly established institution should function. The choice of the traditional and well-esteemed skaldic form – in its most prominent iteration, the *drápa*, at that – may be seen as a means to elevate the text without having to revert to the prestigious and learned language of Latin.

Geisli focuses almost solely on Ólafr as a holy man; the image of Ólafr as a warrior – frequent in the poems composed in Ólafr's own lifetime and still in use, albeit with an emphasis on the warrior as protector, in the poems composed shortly after his death – is not present in Einarr's poem (see Jørgensen 2016: 382–383). *Geisli* also mentions seven miracles connected to Ólafr in the same order as the first miracles in the *Passio*, which suggests that the *Passio* leans on *Geisli*, but also that the different versions of the *Passio* had accumulated further accounts of miracles not found in *Geisli*.

Even in legislation, St Ólafr is present in the vernacular. In the 1163 law of succession, introduced by Archbishop Eysteinn and Erlingr Skakki, father of the boy-king Magnús Erlingsson, it is stated that if the deceased king has no sons to succeed him, all bishops, abbots, and the nobility should travel north “til hins helga Olafs konongs til umræðes við ærkibiscop” (Eithun/Rindal/Ulset 1994: 33; “to King Ólafr the Saint to discuss with the archbishop”). The emphasis on St Ólafr's presence in the text of the law may be understood in both a physical and metaphorical way: physical, because the shrine of St Ólafr, containing his full body, was kept in the cathedral of Niðaróss, and metaphorical, meaning the church of St Ólafr. The reference to both St Ólafr and the archbishop is thus a means of legitimising and strengthening the authority of the archbishop of Niðaróss, and underlines the continuity of the king's duty to protect the church.

The use of the vernacular was parallel to the use of Latin; however, the choice of language seems to have been made according to the intended function of the texts and their audience. A good example of written attestation of the importance of the cult of Ólafr and of the Niðaróss Cathedral as the centre for this cult, as well as the centre for the archbishopric, is one of the many inscriptions on the cathedral walls, incised on the outer wall of the octagon of the cathedral.⁹ It is written in Old Norse in runic script, and relates that Jón and Ívarr kept vigil there at “Ólafsvökunátt” (“on the eve of Ólafr's vigil”). The inscription is a visual reminder that Ólafr's shrine was an important goal for pilgrims. The language, the choice of script, and the names indicate that the two men were Norse pilgrims and had come to the Niðaróss cathedral to celebrate St Ólafr. By the end of the twelfth century, texts were also being written in the vernacular in other parts of Norway, such as the *Homily Book* (AM 619 4to), written in Bergen ca. 1200 – included in which is a translation of the *Passio* into Old Norse.

Texts during crisis

Already in 1161, in the inscription in St John's chapel in Niðaróss cathedral (see Syrett 2002: I, 142–148 and II, 7–9), Archbishop Eysteinn made a political statement in dedicating the altar to St Silvester in addition to St Vincent and St John (see Ekroll 2021: 291). St Silvester was associated with the concept of *sacerdotum* above *regnum*, an important concept for the

⁹ The inscription is now kept in the cathedral museum and is catalogued as N 473. The *terminus post quem* for the inscription is ca. 1200–1215 (see Holmqvist 2018: 137).

Church and which would prove especially relevant for the newly established archbishopric. Some years later, the Norwegian Church experienced repeated conflict with King Sverrir Sigurðsson. In 1177, Sverrir stepped forward to claim the throne as a usurper; in 1184, he defeated King Magnús in the Battle of Fimreite at Sognefjord and became the new King of Norway. He also opposed the organisation of the church under Eysteinn, claiming that he, as a descendant of Ólafr, was not only the legitimate king but also the head of the church. As a result of the conflict, Eysteinn was forced into exile in England from 1180 to 1183. A priest named Theodoricus wrote a chronicle around this time, probably in the 1180s (see Kraggerud 2018: xxxiv), about the history of the Norwegian Church, titled *Ecclesiastica Historia Norwagiensium*.¹⁰ The author dedicated the chronicle to Eysteinn: “Domino et Patri suo, uiro Reuerendissimo Augustino, Nidrosiensi Arciepiscopo” (Kraggerud 2018: 4–5; “To his lord and father Augustinus, most venerable archbishop of Nidaros”). The chronicle stresses the close connection between the church and the king, as well as the king’s obligation to protect the church. In chapter 23, Theodoricus writes of how Charlemagne came to rescue the pope when the latter was besieged by the Lombardian king; the parallel between the Lombardian king and Sverrir was almost certainly clear to Theodoricus when he wrote the story, as well as to Eysteinn and others when they came to read it (see Kraggerud 2018: xliv).

The archbishop and Sverrir never reconciled. Being educated as a priest himself and being a literate man, Sverrir had mastered the written word, and in the 1190s he commissioned a saga of his own life named *Sverris saga*. It was written in the vernacular, and the connection between St Ólafr and Sverrir is highlighted on several occasions in the saga (see Bandlien 2013: 362–369). Thus, the rhetoric of aligning prominent institutional roles with St Ólafr as a significant centralising figure continued with Sverrir, despite his opposition to the archbishopric itself, and Sverrir’s descendants and successors continued to invoke their relation to St Ólafr to legitimise their family’s right to the throne.

Conclusion

From being a small town at the periphery of the Christian realm, Niðaróss rapidly became a centre in its own respect. In the earliest phase of the archbishopric’s existence, the figure of the archbishop assumed an active role in the process of centralisation, with the second archbishop of Niðaróss, Eysteinn Erlendsson, being the leading character in this respect. Both the number of text-types and the number of texts produced in the archbishop’s scriptorium are remarkable: within a brief period, hagiographic prose, poetry, judicial texts, and epigraphic inscriptions were produced, addressing all levels of society. The texts seem to have been intended for situations and issues in everyday life, both for the local congregation and for the Christian world in its largest extent.

The choice of language, between Latin and Old Norse, is intriguing. Whilst the immediate literate response is in Latin – including the *Passio*, the archbishop’s correspondence in general, the *Canones Nidrosienses*, and even in epigraphic inscriptions, the latter reaching a wider and more differentiated audience than manuscripts – the early translation of the

¹⁰ The chronicle is labelled in extant manuscripts either as *Ecclesiastica Historia Norwagiensium* or as *De antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*; see Kraggerud’s (2018: xxiii–xxviii) discussion on the two names.

Legend of Blasius shows an interest in communicating across linguistic borders. Latin is the language used most in the writing, specifically as regards manuscripts, but we see the beginning of the rise of Old Norse as a ‘literate’ language in this period.

The distribution patterns of texts also seem to change after the establishment of Niðaróss. Following the movement of texts from abroad to Norway and Niðaróss in the early phases of Christianisation, texts began to move out from Niðaróss to the surrounding bishoprics and lands. After the earliest translation of legends from Latin into Old Norse, connected to Niðaróss, we see that writing in the vernacular became a part of the literate culture also at scriptoria in other parts of Norway. At the same time, an increased movement of people towards Niðaróss – not only pilgrims who long for salvation and healing by the shrine of St Ólafr, but also young men who aspire for an education at the cathedral school (see Gunnes 1996: 194) – is also seen after the establishment of the archbishopric.

Writing and rhetoric clearly played a key role in making Niðaróss a centre of importance. It is, however, no surprise that Eysteinn corresponded with his bishops or with the pope, nor that he commissioned the *Canones Nidrosienses*, given that a collection of *canones* was mandatory at any bishopric. More significant here is the diversity of texts composed and produced alongside each other during only a few decades. This programme leaves the impression of a deliberate strategy of using texts and rhetoric as a means of constituting Niðaróss as a centre, in line with the other archbishoprics in the Christian realm.

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