

“Prepared with great craftiness”:
St. Magnus Cathedral, Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, and
Orkney’s Autonomy in the Medieval North Sea World

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Art and Architectural History

University of Virginia
April, 2016

ABSTRACT

This project reevaluates the political position of the Earldom of Orkney within the medieval North Sea world by tracing aesthetic and cultural links between St. Magnus Cathedral and churches in England, Scotland, and Norway. The cathedral does not represent national subjugation and cultural dependency as previously assumed; rather, the cathedral and its iconography in *Orkneyinga saga* embed the Norse earls within patronage and narrative trends of foreign and Biblical kings to make a final, if ultimately unsuccessful, claim for Orcadian autonomy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Leifur Eiríksson Foundation, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Lindner Center, the Scholars' Lab, and the Society of Fellows for their financial assistance for this project, as well as faculty and staff of the University of Virginia Graduate Program in Art and Architectural History, the University of Iceland Medieval Icelandic Studies program, and the University of Virginia Scholars' Lab for their academic and technological assistance. I would also like to thank my advisor, Lisa Reilly, for her guidance and advice, without which this project would not be possible, and my dissertation committee members, John Casteen III, Lawrence Goedde, and Tyler Jo Smith, for their support and suggestions.

Additionally, I would like to thank Torfi Tulinius and Haraldur Bernharðsson for introducing me to the vibrant literary world of the sagas and the beautiful language the sagas are written in. Thank you also to Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, whose invaluable archaeological guidance and collaboration both enhanced this project and led to exciting new research opportunities. This project would also not have been possible without the helpful staff at the Scholars' Lab, especially Jeremy Boggs, Chris Gist, Purdom Lindblad, and Eric Rochester.

The outcome of this project would not have been possible without support of my colleagues, Edward Triplett, Catherine Hundley, and Veronica Ikeshoji-Orlati. Our conversations about disciplinary methods and medieval architecture helped me to refine this project and offered new avenues of inquiry. Thank you also to Øystein Ekroll and Fran Hollinrake, who provided me with unparalleled access to Nidaros Cathedral and St. Magnus Cathedral.

Finally, thank you to my parents, Kevin and Debbie Grayburn, for their support and patience during this project, and to Nick Genau, for his unwavering commitment to my success.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From the northern coast of Scotland on clear day, the Orkney Islands appear as a small gray band against the horizon. The archipelago is surprisingly close to mainland Scotland (Figure 1.1), just ten miles across the Pentland Firth, but its southern highlands present a distant and inaccessible façade even in the sunshine. The coastal climate, however, is typically more tempestuous than tranquil. As rain and fog roll in from the ocean and partially shroud the islands from view, Orkney seems all the more removed (Figure 1.2). For modern travelers to the islands, the ferry or plane ride required to reach Orkney does little to alleviate this sense of isolation. While both journeys depart from only a limited number of locations, the ferry navigates through a notoriously unpredictable stretch of the Firth and the short flight can be exceedingly expensive. Once they arrive on one of the approximately 70 islands, though, visitors quickly discover that Orkney's initial rocky view belies its fertile fields and hospitable harbors. Still rural and remote compared to the urban and industrial development of southern Britain, the islands are rich in both agriculture and history. Extant monuments throughout Orkney attest to millennia of cultivation by Neolithic, Pictish, Viking, and modern-age populations. Within this unique and tangible historical landscape, residents and an increasing number of tourists continually encounter rich visual evidence of Orkney's dynamic history. Orkney's "landscape of ancient treasures" and its relative distance from the urban and industrial centers of London and Edinburgh reinforce the islands' recurrent reputation as a traditional and peripheral land, one that is "romantic, scenically attractive yet somehow

unconnected with the greater life of Scotland—the soft, outer edge.”¹

Yet, the islands were not always isolated or marginalized, not always the ‘soft, outer edge’ to the aforementioned cultural and political capitals of Britain. Although Orkney was always a land on the ‘fringe’ of civilized society from southern-oriented Roman and Christian perspectives, the strategic location of the islands made it a nexus of sea-travel and trade in the North Atlantic Ocean, Norwegian Sea, and North Sea (Figure 1.3), especially during the medieval era. The seas around Orkney, rather than isolating the islands, provided venues for fluid and direct contact with the coasts of Great Britain, Scandinavia, Iceland, and Frisia. While some medieval sagas and annals supply textual evidence of these cross-sea encounters and relationships from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, St. Magnus Cathedral (c. 1137), the island’s greatest medieval monument (Figure 1.4), offers visual evidence of Orkney’s interactions and aspirations within the larger context of the medieval North Sea world.

Towering over the city of Kirkwall (Figure 1.5), the twelfth-century cathedral is actually quite small and perhaps easily overlooked when compared to larger and better-known English and Scottish examples. Due to its removed location and unique ownership by the people of Kirkwall, however, St. Magnus is singular in that it survived the

¹ In 2015, Orkney was named by romance publisher Mills and Boon the “UK’s most romantic destination” by public vote and a panel of romance fiction representatives. Generally, Orkney has embraced this reputation, promoting its diverse historical sites and unspoiled landscape to distinguish itself within a growing tourist market. Whereas only 30 years ago, Frederic William Johnson discussed the unregulated historical ruins and virtually nonexistent conservation efforts in Orkney, visitors today will encounter gift shops, small learning centers, bus/taxi tours, and gated historical sites throughout the islands. In recent years, cruise ships have increased the number of tourists to Orkney significantly. “Orkney ‘the most romantic place in the UK,’” BBC News, 30 April 2015, accessed October 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-32530345>. Frederic William Johnson, “Understanding Orkney” (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1982). W. Towrie, “Orkney—A Landscape of Ancient Treasures,” *The Islander*, 2010, 8. Jim Hewitson, *Clinging to the Edge: Journals from an Orkney Island* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1996), 29.

destruction of the Reformation relatively intact.² It is also one of the most stylistically unified of the British cathedrals (Figure 1.6), which typically display an eclectic assortment of styles as builders adopted the newest trends for additions and reconstructions. The red sandstone drum columns (Figure 1.7) and moulded semi-circular arches (Figure 1.8) of the bays reveal the cathedral's Romanesque foundation in the twelfth century, yet obscure its eventual completion centuries later. For many visitors, the cathedral's true charm is its unexpected remote location and the surprise of its architectural sophistication; it feels far larger than its actual dimensions, the alternating red and yellow stonework (Figure 1.9) lighten the heaviness of its features. While the church might not be as large and opulent as its contemporary counterparts, it is by no means provincial or naïve. St. Magnus Cathedral is an embodiment of Orkney, standing as a symbolic and functional center for Orcadian identity as much today just as it did when constructed in the twelfth century.³

St. Magnus Cathedral—whose original Old Icelandic name is *Magnúskirkja*—testifies to Orkney's medieval golden age of power and influence under its Norse earls. Yet, Orkney's geographical and political position between the two larger, more powerful,

² Although the walls were whitewashed during the Reformation, St. Magnus Cathedral and the relics of St. Magnús were protected by the community of Orkney and survived relatively undamaged. Many alterations occurred, however, during a restoration in the early twentieth century when gargoyles and a large spire were added to the exterior structure. The interior medieval wall paintings had also been preserved under the whitewash, but they were stripped off during the restoration in order to reveal the red sandstone beneath. In the 1970s, another restoration was undertaken in order to preserve the weakening structure of St. Magnus through the patching of multiple vaulting cracks and the reinforcement of westward leaning nave columns. Harold L. Mooney, "Monument to a Viking Saint: St. Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, Orkney," *Country Life* (March 1, 1973), 506-508. Royal Commission on the Ancient Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Orkney*, vol. 2, Twelfth Report with an Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Orkney & Shetland (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), 125. *St. Magnus Cathedral* (Norwich: Jarrold Publishing, 2007), 24-27.

³ St. Magnus Cathedral is one of the foremost-advertised tourist sites on the islands and is often represented in local publications as a symbol of the islands. It is still an active Church of Scotland parish church and the central gathering site for Kirkwall and Orkney communities. Recently, a new community and education center was constructed behind St. Magnus to add to the resources already available at the cathedral. *St. Magnus Cathedral*, 28.

and ultimately longer-lasting kingdoms of Scotland and Norway has long obscured its medieval significance, and a lasting dichotomy between British and Scandinavian influences in Orkney has stagnated scholarship. Concerning its formal sophistication and style, St. Magnus is linked architecturally to larger and earlier examples in England and Scotland and therefore viewed as a marginal manifestation of southern building trends. Similarly, through references in Old Icelandic medieval texts, St. Magnus is associated ecclesiastically and politically with Norway as a peripheral western earldom and *skattland* (“tributary land”). *Orkneyinga saga*, written in Iceland in the thirteenth century and describing the ninth-century conquest of the islands by powerful Norse lords, called *jarls* (“earls”), provides the most comprehensive view of these Norwegian claims. In recent decades, however, historians have argued for a more complicated political arena in what is typically described as “Scandinavian Scotland.”⁴ The medieval relationship between Orkney and the Norwegian kings was far more dynamic than merely feudal dependence. While *Orkneyinga saga* states that the early Orcadian earls owed their position and allegiance to Norwegian kings, the text recounts moments when the earls openly opposed the Norwegian interests. Moreover, this powerful dynasty of earls expanded their regional alliances beyond Norse settlements to Scotland and England through trade, kinship, diplomacy, and religion. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Orkney was powerful enough to intervene in regional conflicts and its court became a noteworthy destination itself, especially for Icelanders traveling east. William P. L. Thomson and Barbara E. Crawford, two of the foremost experts on Orkney, agree that the islands were at least semi-autonomous if not fully so; Norwegian and Scottish kings

⁴ Barbara E. Crawford’s seminal book, *Scandinavian Scotland*, highlights the Norse settlements in Scotland and reinforces the importance of medieval cross-sea links for cultural exchange in the Northern and Western Isles. Barbara E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987).

claimed control of various portions, but actually exerted only indirect influence until they gained direct control in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁵

Despite scholars' recognition of Orkney's early autonomy, St. Magnus Cathedral is often contextualized as a foreign cultural influence during the twelfth century, a period of increased political subjugation. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, the cathedral's patron, Earl Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson (c. 1137-1158), was a Norwegian nobleman who gained control of the islands through royal Norwegian support. Rognvaldr, Crawford emphasizes, maintained diplomatic ties to the Norwegian kings, while his cathedral represents a twelfth-century cultural renaissance, "the most startling result of the twelfth-century earls' links with a more southern culture."⁶ This thesis proposes a bolder interpretation: that during the twelfth century, St. Magnus Cathedral's patron, Earl Rognvaldr, took active steps to control the islands and confront the encroaching foreign influence through his patronage. The development of the cult of Earl Magnús Erlendsson (c. 1106-1117),⁷ Rognvaldr's maternal uncle, and the construction of St. Magnus Cathedral represent more than cultural dissemination from the south or east; both contributed to a strategic, if ultimately unsuccessful claim to reestablish Orkney's original political autonomy when most threatened. While some scholars recognize that Rognvaldr's actions helped him secure the title of earl, the lack of a royal Orcadian title and the eventual loss of autonomy in the thirteenth century have prevented any critical

⁵ The Scots claimed Caithness, while the Norwegians claimed the Northern Isles. Political control by both kingdoms became more pronounced in the thirteenth century, though the earldom itself was never divided. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*. Barbara Crawford, *The Northern Earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from AD 870 to 1470* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013). William P. L. Thomson, *History of Orkney* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1987).

⁶ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 214.

⁷ Magnús Erlendsson is a historical and literary figure, and his name will be spelled with the accented (ú) to reflect the primary Icelandic source material. St. Magnus Cathedral, in contrast, is currently situated in Scotland, and this thesis will maintain its anglicized spelling without the accented (u) for clarity.

consideration of a larger claim. A close analysis of St. Magnus Cathedral along with its references in *Orkneyinga saga*, however, reveals Rognvaldr's royal pretensions through carefully curated connections with Orkney's most powerful eleventh-century earls, foreign royal models, and the Biblical King Solomon.

To consider an ultimately failed political claim, it is necessary to suspend all assumptions based on teleological political narratives and nationalistic taxonomies. It is possible to reconsider Orkney's political and aesthetic relationships only after deconstructing the premise that Orkney and St. Magnus Cathedral need to be characteristically "Norwegian," "Scottish," or both. Instead, this study employs an interdisciplinary "sea and ocean basins" methodology and focuses on the fluid North Sea relationships and audiences, rather than predetermined terrestrial states.⁸ The emphasis on waterways as connectors, rather than barriers, was first introduced by Fernand Braudel for the Mediterranean in the middle of the twentieth century and is now widely accepted as a historical context among both Mediterranean and North Sea/North Atlantic scholars of the Middle Ages and beyond.⁹ Nevertheless, it is helpful to highlight these connections again for this study, as medieval Norse culture spread almost exclusively by maritime travel and extended beyond the Norse-speaking sphere to Britain and the European continent.¹⁰ Orkney was geographically situated at the center of these North Sea and

⁸ Jerry H. Bentley, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1999): 215.

⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, reprint edition (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996). Thomas R. Lyszka and Lorna E. M. Walker, eds., *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in the Cultural History of North-Western Europe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001). David Bates and Robert Liddiard, eds., *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013). Merja-Liisa Hinkkanen and David Kirby, eds., *The Baltic and the North Seas* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰ The geography of Scandinavia and the British Isles facilitated this sea-ward orientation, for extensive mountains, bogs, and forests made land travel difficult and dangerous. Settlements that developed in these regions were often isolated within pockets of habitable land and the bordering sea often provided the

North Atlantic networks and *Orkneyinga saga* mentions these cross-sea connections explicitly. The structure and style of St. Magnus Cathedral and the saga embody these relationships.

While deconstructing national boundaries, this thesis also reevaluates the relationship between text and architecture. While many art and architectural historians take saga references literally, historians and literary scholars emphasize the literary nature of the texts. Sagas are not straightforward historical documents. The architectural references in *Orkneyinga saga*—including those about St. Magnus Cathedral—incorporate the formulas, allusions, and vocabulary of both oral and textual culture of their time. Through these intertextual relationships, the saga communicates ideology, influence, and memory beyond narrative content. Yet, the saga and the cathedral are both cultural products and employ media-specific allusions and motifs to establish Rognvaldr's legitimacy and power. While St. Magnus Cathedral communicates through visual means, its references in *Orkneyinga saga* employ vocabulary, syntax, and narrative to develop further its cultural and political significance. The text and any oral stories about the cathedral furthermore could circulate throughout the North Seas world and expand the audience of the cathedral and its significance.

This dissertation considers the architecture and text together within expanding geographical contexts. Chapter 2 outlines the established cultural dichotomy that exists in scholarship on Orkney and St. Magnus Cathedral, and consequently cautions against

quickest, safest, and most convenient way to communicate and travel to other areas. As the result of such contact, some distant coastal regions had more in common with each other than with closer, yet isolated, inland regions. For example, Adam of Bremen describes the advantage of sea travel in the eleventh century by noting that one particular journey through Denmark (modern Sweden) would take five days by sea, but a whole month by land. Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 209.

using the Icelandic sagas uncritically as factual texts. Chapter 3 considers how *Orkneyinga saga* and St. Magnus Cathedral reference local literary and architectural models in Orkney to legitimize Earl Rognvaldr. Specifically, Rognvaldr associates himself with his martyred maternal uncle, Earl Magnús, and his powerful great-grandfather, Earl Porfinnr Sigurðarson (c. 1015-1065). Chapter 4 discusses the saga and the cathedral within the context of the North Sea world, especially in relationship to the actions and depictions of English, Scottish, and Norwegian kings. Chapter 5 emphasizes the Biblical significance of Rognvaldr's patronage, especially concerning the correlation between Rognvaldr and the Biblical King Solomon. Chapter 6 concludes the study with a consideration of Rognvaldr's claim and its success.

As with all projects that focus on the medieval Northern world, it is necessary to acknowledge the differences in modern spellings and various editions. Since this study uses the standardized *Íslensk fornrit* edition of *Orkenyinga saga*, names will appear in their standardized medieval Icelandic orthography.¹¹ When medieval locations correspond with modern locations, names will be given in their modern recognized form (e.g. Kirkwall and St. Magnus Cathedral are written in their recognizable modern form rather than the Old Icelandic). Additionally, all Old Icelandic quotes are given in standard normalized orthography from the aforementioned *Íslensk fornrit* editions when possible. All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.¹²

¹¹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, ed. "Orkneyinga saga," in *Orkneyinga Saga, Legenda de Sancto Magno, Magnus saga skemmri, Magnús saga lengri, Helga þáttir ok Úlfs*, Íslensk fornrit XXXIV, 1-300 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1965).

¹² To convey original syntax and vocabulary, the Old Icelandic passages are translated as literally as possible, without English stylistic adjustment.

CHAPTER 2: NATIONAL AND DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

In plan as well as in treatment [St. Magnus Cathedral] is closely connected with English models, but by reason of its history it is looked upon as a completely Norwegian work.¹³

As a church located within the borders of modern Scotland and stylistically linked to England, St. Magnus Cathedral is not an obvious addition to a book on Norwegian architecture. Nevertheless, Guthorm Kavli boldly claims that St. Magnus Cathedral is a “completely Norwegian work” based on its history and includes it within his 1958 collection of Norwegian monuments. His emphasis on the history of the cathedral is necessary to justify his selection; while scholars had been studying the church within Scottish and English contexts for almost a century before Kavli’s publication, previous attempts to place it within a Norwegian architectural tradition had failed.¹⁴ Yet, the cathedral could be classified according to its political and episcopal links to Norway, thereby representing the extent of the Norwegian kingdom during its medieval golden age.

Kavli is not the first scholar to note the cathedral’s apparently contradictory associations. For much of the twentieth century, St. Magnus Cathedral straddled two seemingly disparate worlds: the first derives from the medieval textual record in *Orkneyinga saga*, preserved in Old Icelandic and oriented northward to what is now

¹³ Guthorm Kavli, *Norwegian Architecture: Past and Present* (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1958), 38.

¹⁴ L. Dietrichson and Johan Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadica: The Norsemen in the Orkneys and the Monuments they have left* (Kristiania: A. Cammermeyers Forlag, 1906).

Norway and Iceland; the second derives from its architectural style, constructed of ashlar masonry in the Romanesque style and oriented southward to what is now Scotland and England. By separating political and architectural characteristics, scholars can isolate the most relevant aspects for their own national interests or disciplinary focus.

Orkney's flexibility to represent both British and Scandinavian narratives stems from its medieval and early modern situation within two larger kingdoms. In the thirteenth century, the Norwegian and Scottish crowns were able to exert direct control over the Orkney Islands and continued to do so through (often absentee) earls and government representatives. Surviving medieval documents and texts, including *Orkneyinga saga*, the most extensive Icelandic account of medieval Orkney, originate mostly from this later era. In 1468, King Christian I of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway offered Orkney—which was by then a remote and insignificant component of the Scandinavian Kalmar Union¹⁵—as collateral for the dowry of his daughter, Margaret, for her marriage to King James III of Scotland. When Christian I failed to pay the dowry, Orkney was ultimately subsumed within the kingdom of Scotland and, in 1707, the kingdom of Great Britain (Figure 2.1).¹⁶ By that time, the islands had already experienced centuries of marginalization, as well as economic and industrial stagnation. When interest in the islands and the cathedral grew in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, British historians and antiquarians from the south inherited the assumptions of a peripheral Orkney and scholarship consequently focused on Orkney's marginal, if notable, context

¹⁵ Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (including Norwegian North Atlantic territories) united under the same ruler in 1397. The subsequent Kalmar Union was forged with the Treaty of Kalmar, which was signed in a castle by that name. Sweden broke from the union in 1523, though Norway and its territories were eventually subsumed within the Danish Kingdom until 1814.

¹⁶ Orkney eventually became an important base for the Royal Navy and a strategic post for Great Britain during World War I and World War II.

within the British Isles. The Anglo-Norman style of St. Magnus Cathedral seemed to reinforce its cultural ties to the south.

This dichotomy, based on anachronistic national, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries, is not necessarily unique; Norway, too, straddles the architectural influence of England and the Continent, but exists within the Northern saga world. Unlike Orkney, though, Norway evolved as a medieval kingdom, ruled by its own dynasty of kings. While Norway was eventually subsumed into the Danish Kingdom following the Kalmar Union, it reemerged as an independent state in the early twentieth century and developed its own localized historiography aimed at explaining its autonomy and unifying its people. Orkney's history, conversely, was long written by scholars from the very countries that claimed control of it in the later Middle Ages.

The neat national classifications that originated out of the later existence of Scotland and Norway did not exist in the Middle Ages.¹⁷ Such taxonomies rarely reflect the messy realities of the medieval world and are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the cultural and social concerns of current scholarship. Trends in globalization and post-colonial interests, including concepts like hybridity and diaspora, have contributed to new worldviews and shifted areas of academic interest. Studies on cultural intersection and exchange have now largely replaced those of distinction and classification. It is increasingly common for scholars to trace cultural contact, recognize the material manifestation of exchange, and consider how such interaction shaped a multitude of

¹⁷ Lisa Reilly, "Beating their Swords into Set Squares," in *Perspectives for an Architecture of Solitude*, ed. Terry Kinder, 269-375 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 370-372. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 31 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing: 2005).

medieval mentalities and identities.¹⁸ For Orkney, however, the cultural distinctions seem to align so closely with national and disciplinary boundaries that such taxonomies are difficult to bridge. As a result, the legacy of nineteenth- and twentieth-century dichotomies often lingers throughout scholarship. It should be noted that transnational and interdisciplinary discussions are becoming more common, especially with the highly influential recognition of a Scandinavia-oriented northern Scotland, primarily through the work of Barbara Crawford;¹⁹ yet, this dichotomy still prevails for St. Magnus Cathedral. As a result, scholarship on the cathedral has largely stalled.²⁰

The irreconcilable tension between St. Magnus Cathedral's dual northern and southern personas suggests that the taxonomical approach is not adequate to describe accurately the complex Orcadian situation during the twelfth century. Even if the text and architecture seem to fit clearly into these disciplinary and national frameworks, recent studies focusing on expanded sea-based networks undermine the rigidity of these classifications and prompt a reevaluation of St. Magnus Cathedral according to more flexible, nuanced, and integrated methods. This study, then, argues that a critical analysis of the text that describes St. Magnus Cathedral is just as important as its architectural fabric in establishing and communicating meaning to diverse medieval audiences across

¹⁸ The emphasis on cultural exchange in recent years has been especially valuable for scholarship on the mobile northern populations of the Viking and Medieval eras. Lesley Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity in the Viking Age," *Early Medieval Europe* 20, no. 1 (Feb. 2012): 17-38. Jane Harrison, "Building Mounds. Longhouses, Coastal Mounds and Cultural Connections: Norway and the Northern Isles, c. ad 800-1200," *Medieval Archaeology* 57 (2013): 35-60. M. Naum, "Ambiguous Pots: Everyday Practice, Migration, and Materiality. The Case of Medieval Baltic Ware on the Island of Bornholm (Denmark)," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 12, no. 1 (2012): 92-119. Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, "Crossing the Borders: Skriðuklaustur monastery on the frontiers of Medieval Iceland," in *Monasteries on the Borders of Medieval Europe: Conflict and Interaction*, ed. Emilia Jamrozak and Karen Stöber, 149-172 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

¹⁹ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*.

²⁰ A notable exception is the analysis of Malcom Thurlby, who first introduces the possibility that St. Magnus Cathedral has broader North Sea stylistic connections. Malcolm Thurlby, "Aspects of the Architectural History of Kirkwall Cathedral," *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 127 (1997): 885.

the North Sea.²¹ For most medieval audiences, the church existed only in their imagination; without the photographs and 3-D models of today, medieval people who never traveled to Orkney would have experienced it only through oral and written accounts, or perhaps more infrequently, through physical depictions in manuscripts or on seals. Even so, such architectural depictions were often subject to artistic conventions that rarely reflected the physical forms of a building. The only medieval depiction of St. Magnus Cathedral, for example, appears on a seal dated c. 1400 (Figure 2.2). The seal shows a crowned St. Magnús flanked by two kneeling worshipers; three bays of cusped arches surmounted by tracery-filled gables frame them. None of these forms is present in the extant fabric of St Magnus Cathedral, suggesting the idea of the cathedral could be communicated through allegorical rather than physical means. For those who did visit Orkney and the cathedral, the saga narratives would have colored their own expectations or influenced their own experiences. This relationship was reciprocal, as the form of the building would have both recalled and established meaning to supplement the accompanying narrative. It is true that the literary construction and the extant building are separate media and therefore limited to their own models, allusions, and standards; however, both contributed to the development of a powerful and lasting *memory* of St. Magnus Cathedral that started in the late twelfth century and continues today.

As a foundation for this study, this chapter describes St. Magnus Cathedral's cultural dichotomy in detail and introduces the theory of cultural memory as it pertains to the subsequent chapters. The first section outlines the established scholarship on St. Magnus Cathedral, highlighting how saga scholars, historians, archaeologists, and

²¹ While other structures are referenced in the sagas, St. Magnus Cathedral is particularly apt for a discussion on the relationship between text and architecture due to its largely preserved and unmodified survival.

architectural historians have confronted the traditional Norse/text, Norman/architecture divide. The second section argues that Orkney's medieval literature and architecture should, in fact, be studied together as a way to reevaluate the significance of St. Magnus Cathedral and the forgotten political aspirations of its patron.

ST. MAGNUS CATHEDRAL AND ITS NORTHERN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Icelandic saga corpus is a collection of texts written in Iceland from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Although the sagas include a variety of textual genres, they are unique in that they were written in the vernacular Old Icelandic language when Latin still dominated religious, political, and scholastic discourse in Europe. The corpus as a whole incorporates a variety of original and translated quasi-historical, hagiographical, legendary, and encyclopedic accounts written and copied by secular and religious leaders. Most sagas take place roughly between the fifth and thirteenth centuries and encompass numerous geographical regions from modern Russia to North America, including Scandinavia proper, the British Isles, Iceland, Greenland, and even the more distant, yet significant sites of Rome, Jerusalem, and Constantinople. The most famous sagas, in fact, take place in Iceland during its ninth-century *landnám* ("land settlement"). While the sagas derive at least in part from earlier oral tradition, scholars generally agree that the sagas cannot be treated as historical documents, especially when the narratives were recorded centuries after the events took place.²² Still, the sagas can provide

²² During the first half of the twentieth century, the uncritical assumption that the sagas were historical was challenged by scholars belonging to the Icelandic School led by Sigurður Nordal. As part of this nationalist debate, scholars championed the sagas not as history, but rather as carefully crafted literature on par with any other forms in Europe. Such an emphasis supported the cultural and political legitimacy of an increasingly autonomous Iceland through its historical literary and cultural merits. Yet, in the process of establishing the sagas as purely literary constructions, Nordal's argument left historians "with little option

invaluable insight into the concerns and worldview of the culture that recorded and circulated them, including twelfth- and thirteenth-century Orkney.

Orkney does not just feature in this literary world; it is central geographically for travel between Scandinavia, the British Isles, and the North Atlantic settlements. In many sagas, travelers stop in Orkney to visit the Orcadian earls' courts during their travels across the northern seas.²³ The Norwegian kings also appear in many accounts as they attempt to expand their power overseas to Orkney through direct and indirect intervention. Orkney and its earls, however, are most extensively described in *Orkneyinga saga*, which chronicles the dynasty of the Orcadian earls from Orkney's Viking-age conquest to the death of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson (c. 1139-1206)—a period spanning the late ninth century to the early thirteenth century.²⁴ Written in the thirteenth century in at least two different phases, the saga compiles poems, oral accounts, and previous saga stories to create a seemingly comprehensive account of the islands and their leaders. Like other Icelandic sagas, *Orkneyinga saga* is rich in narrative details and creates a historical 'reality affect' that belies its literary construction.²⁵ Historians often

but to ignore the sagas; it...successfully discouraged analysis of the social substance in the sagas and of indigenously derived creative elements in Icelandic society." The second half of the twentieth century, however, saw a reaction to this dichotomy of views as scholars attempted to be critical of the sources, yet not disregard them completely. Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 149-158.

²³ Icelanders looking to raid and increase their status traveled to the courts of famous kings and earls of England, Norway, Sweden, and Orkney. The court of the Orcadian Earl Sigurðr Hloðvisson appears more frequently than those of other Orcadian earls. In *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*, for example, Sigurðr follows the practice of kings by making Icelanders retainers of his court. Some travelers would become the followers of many leaders during their travels, suggesting a personal relationship based on temporary service and lavish gift giving, rather than any permanent and formal subjugation.

²⁴ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 53-54.

²⁵ Scholars have recognized the power of distinct and realistic details to create a sense of immediacy and factuality in both literature and art. Torfi Tulinius applies this term to the Icelandic sagas, while R. von den Hoff uses it to describe the portraits of rulers in Hellenistic Greece. Torfi Tulinius, "Grettir and Bjartur: Realism and the Supernatural in medieval and modern Icelandic Literature," *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 20 (2011): 16. R. von den Hoff, "Naturalism and Classicism: Style and Perception of Early Hellenistic Portraits," in *Early Hellenistic Portraiture: Image, Style, Context*, eds. Peter Schultz and Ralf von den Hoff, 49-62 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56.

compare its content to other medieval documents and archaeological evidence to determine what in the narrative most likely reflects actual events.²⁶ Accordingly, when two independent sources overlap or share commonalities, their accounts are corroborated and accepted as accurate. For St. Magnus Cathedral, the corresponding content in *Orkneyinga saga* has shaped the way scholars have described and interpreted the physical structure's Norse origin and identity.

From the first to last reference, *Orkneyinga saga* links St. Magnus Cathedral directly to the sanctity of Earl Magnús and the actions of his nephew Earl Rognvaldr. According to the saga, Rognvaldr was the son of Kolr Kalason and St. Magnús' sister, Gunnhildr (Figure 2.3). Although Gunnhildr owned an estate in Orkney, Kolr was a prominent follower of the Norwegian King Magnús Haraldsson (c. 1048-1069) and raised his son on his estate in Agder, Norway. After Rognvaldr proved his acumen during a family feud, the Norwegian King Sigurðr Jórsalafari Magnússon (c. 1090-1130) granted Rognvaldr the territories in the Orkney Islands that had belonged to his holy uncle and bestowed on him the title of earl. With his new title and the support of the king, Rognvaldr set off to claim his portion of the island realm from the reigning earl and his own cousin, Earl Páll Hákonarson (d. 1137) (see Figure 2.3). Páll, however, was very popular in Orkney, and Rognvaldr was quickly rebuffed. Before his second campaign, Rognvaldr's father bade him to make a vow to his martyred uncle, the holy Earl Magnús, that he would build him a grand church in Kirkwall if Magnús would grant his divine support to his attempt to secure the islands:

Nú er þat mitt ráð at leita þangat trausts, er nógt er til, at sá unni yðr ríkis,
er á at réttu, en þat er inn helgi Magnús jarl, móðurbróðir yðvarr. Vil ek, at

²⁶ William P. L. Thomson, *History of Orkney*. Crawford, *Scandinavia Scotland*.

þú heitir á hann, at hann unni yðr frændleifðar þinnar ok sinnar erfðar, at þú látir gera steinmusteri í Orkneyjum í Kirkjuvági, ef þú fær þat ríki, þat er ekki sé annat dýrliga í því landi, ok látir Magnúsi jarli helga, frænda þínum, ok leggir þar fé til, svá at sá staðr mætti eflask, ok yrði þangat komit hans helgum dómi ok byskupsstólinum með.²⁷

Now it is my advice to find support there, which is abundant, with he who by rights should grant the realm to you and it is the holy Earl Magnús, your mother's brother. I desire that you call to him, that should he grant you your inheritance and his familial inheritance and if you obtain that domain, that you make a stone minster in Orkney in Kirkwall so that no one sees another as fair in that land. Grant it to Earl Magnús the Holy, your kinsman, and arrange there such wealth that the foundation grows strong and the holy relics [of St. Magnús] should come there and with them the Episcopal See.

After making this vow, Rognvaldr successfully defeated his cousin and succeeded him as the sole ruler of Orkney.²⁸ While Rognvaldr's vow is only the first of multiple references to St. Magnus Cathedral, it is nevertheless a powerful scene that binds Rognvaldr in both kinship and holy oath to St. Magnús and Orkney.

As there are no other textual accounts of these events, scholars have combed the saga extensively to explain Rognvaldr's actions and motivation for the patronage of his church. Stewart Cruden, for example, cites this passage uncritically as the very *raison d'être* for the cathedral. Cruden presumes the authenticity of this account, arguing that the cathedral was "much more than a pious gesture of remembrance. It was the fulfillment of a contract."²⁹ For Cruden, Rognvaldr's vow is a factual historical event revealing the power of religious belief and the prevalence of the cult of St. Magnús in medieval Orkney. The vow furthermore explains the cathedral as a specifically religious obligation.

²⁷ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 158-159.

²⁸ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 72.

²⁹ Stewart Cruden, "The Founding and Building of the Twelfth-Century Cathedral to St. Magnus," in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara Crawford, 78-87 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 78.

L. Dietrichson, on the other hand, extrapolates a different series of events in *Orkneyinga saga* to suggest a political objective for Rognvaldr's public proclamation and the cathedral's subsequent construction. According to the saga, Vilhjálmr (d. 1168), Orkney's bishop during much of the twelfth century, was originally allied to Magnús' rival earl and murderer, Earl Hákon Pálsson (c. 1105-1123), and his son Páll Hákonarson. Both Hákon and Páll, for good reasons, greatly opposed the sanctity and cult of their former enemy. The saga notes that for some 20 years after Magnús' death, Vilhjálmr shared a similar aversion to the cult, denying any saintly occurrences and declaring anyone who spread accounts of his miracles a heretic.³⁰ Yet, Vilhjálmr is ultimately the first and most influential saga figure to embrace Magnús' sanctity. Immediately before Rognvaldr's first appearance in the saga, Vilhjálmr traveled to Norway and, on the way back to Orkney, encountered a terrible storm. He reportedly prayed to St. Magnús, promising to support Magnús' sanctity if he survived the journey. Earl Páll was not pleased with such accounts, however, and Vilhjálmr did not support Magnús as promised when he returned. Shortly after, Vilhjálmr went blind while praying in the church where Magnús was buried. Fearful, Vilhjálmr again prayed to Magnús and his sight was restored. Vilhjálmr announced Magnús a saint, translated his relics to a shrine on the church's altar, and opened the worship of his cult. Despite the anger of Earl Páll, Vilhjálmr eventually moved Magnús' relics to Kirkwall after Magnús miraculously expressed this wish to a farmer.³¹

Dietrichson argues that this religious translation from Birsay to Kirkwall veils the transition of Vilhjálmr's political allegiance from Earl Páll to Rognvaldr. Vilhjálmr's trip

³⁰ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 52, 56.

³¹ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 57.

to Norway was likely the catalyst for this change of alliance, as he presumably met with either Kolr or Rognvaldr —both of whom resided in Norway during this time—in order to negotiate his support during or following Rognvaldr’s conquest.³² The translation of relics, then, from Birsay to Kirkwall is a preemptive power play. By elevating Rognvaldr’s kinsman to saintly status, Vilhjálmr legitimized the cult and, consequently, Rognvaldr’s religious and political standing as earl.³³ Dietrichson’s argument, however, rests on the presumption that the saga events and their order are accurate and that the passing reference to the journey in an otherwise hagiographical account is true. Nevertheless, Dietrichson’s hypothesis is enticing, for it acknowledges the active political agency of Rognvaldr and Vilhjálmr, as well as provides a concrete reason for Rognvaldr’s construction of St. Magnus Cathedral and appropriation of Magnús’ cult. It also does not preclude any of the genuine piety Cruden argues Rognvaldr likely felt toward his uncle.

Since Dietrichson’s early analysis, many scholars have confirmed his conclusion that the construction of the cathedral and development of St. Magnús’s cult were politically motivated.³⁴ Eric Cambridge, for example, mentions in passing that St. Magnus Cathedral is comparable to the greatest contemporary churches built by

³² Dietrichson and Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadica*, 27-28.

³³ Dietrichson and Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadica*, 27-28. Phelpstead embraces this interpretation, arguing that Vilhjálmr played a key role in the establishment of Magnús’ cult and Rognvaldr’s reign. Carl Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings: Saints’ Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings’ Sagas* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007) 96-100.

³⁴ In addition to the publications described here, two M.A. theses from 2011 focus on the political nature of Rognvaldr’s patronage. The first is the author’s own M.A. thesis, which forms the foundation of the current study. Jennifer Nicole Grayburn, “St. Magnus Cathedral: The Construction of Power in Twelfth-Century Orkney” (master’s thesis, University of Virginia, 2011). The second is by Sindre Vik and similarly integrates a textual, historical, and art historical analysis. Sindre Vik “Written in Stone? A Reading of St. Magnus Cathedral at Kirkwall as a Historical Document” (master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2011).

neighboring dynasties.³⁵ While he does not expand this comparison, he notes the significance of indigenous cults as status markers and ponders, “Is it too rash to speculate that that development of [St. Magnús’] cult, together with its material presentation, is tantamount to a claim on the part of the Orkney earls to quasi-royal status?”³⁶ Cambridge does not argue that the earls were claiming to be royalty, yet he does propose that these actions fit within a larger pattern of kingdom consolidation during the twelfth century. Joshua Prescott also argues that the development of St. Magnús’ cult, which was centered around the cathedral, was only one way Rognvaldr legitimized his Orcadian rule as a foreign-born Norwegian and brought Orkney into larger Christian and European networks.³⁷ He is similarly hesitant to apply royal status to the earls, but does argue that the powerful position of *jarl* is not reflected accurately in the English feudal translation of “earl.”³⁸ Prescott, however, retains Dietrichson’s literal approach to the text, seeking motivation for the exclusion of certain information and arguing that many parts were still “living memory” when they were recorded. He states that St. Magnus Cathedral is a “lynch-pin” of political ideology and the “tangible relic” of administrative developments, yet never addresses the cathedral directly beyond its existence.³⁹ The cathedral, for his argument, is synonymous with Magnús’ cult.

³⁵ The relationship between St. Magnus Cathedral and neighboring architectural models will be covered in chapter 4.

³⁶ Eric Cambridge, “The Architectural Context of the Romanesque Cathedral at Kirkwall,” in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney’s Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford, 111-125 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 124.

³⁷ Joshua Prescott, “Earl Rögnvaldr Kali: Crisis and Development in Twelfth Century Orkney” (M.Phil. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/741>.

³⁸ The differentiation between the titles of *jarl*, earl, and king will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

³⁹ Prescott, “Earl Rögnvaldr Kali,” chapter 5, paragraph 1; conclusion, paragraph 2.

Regardless of the motivation for the vow, the saga continues the narrative by detailing Rognvaldr's successful campaign and the suspicious disappearance of Páll.⁴⁰ When Páll's absence becomes known, the saga records that “gengu allir menn í Orkneyjum til handa Rognvaldi jarli, ok gerðisk hann nú einn höfðingi yfir þessu ríki, er átt hafði Páll jarl” (“all men in Orkney submitted to Earl Rognvaldr, and now he became sole chieftain over this realm, which Earl Páll had possessed”).⁴¹ Immediately following this declaration, the saga details the early construction of St. Magnus Cathedral:

Ok eigi miklu síðarr var markaðr grundvöllr til Magnúskirkju ok aflat smíða til, ok fór svá mikit fram verkinu á þeim misserum, at minna gekk á fjórum eða fimm þaðan í frá. Kolr var þar mestr tilannaðarmaðr smíðarinnar ok hafði mest forsögn á. En er fram tók at líða smíðinni, varð jarli kostnaðarsamt, ok eyddusk mjök féin. Þá leitaði jarl ráða við fòður sinn, en Kolr lagði þat til, at jarl skyldi færa lög á því, at jarlar höfðu tekit óðul öll í erfð eptir menn, en erfingjar leysti til sín, ok þótti þat heldr hart. Þá lét Rognvaldr jarl kveðja þings ok bauð bændum at kaupa óðulin, svá at eigi þurfti at leysa, ok kom þat ásamt með þeim, svá at öllum líkar vel. En gjalda skyldi jarli mörk af hverju plógslandi um allar Eyjar. En þaðan í frá skorti eigi fé til kirkjusmíðar, ok er þat smíði allmjök vandat.⁴²

And not long after, the ground-plan of St. Magnus Cathedral was drawn and builders hired, and the work progressed so greatly in this season that less progressed during the four or five seasons after that. Kolr was the supervisor of the construction and had the most say in it. As the building progressed, the earl began to use up his assets, so very heavy were the costs, and he asked for his father's advice. Kolr suggested that Rognvaldr should make it law that the earl had inherited all the estates, yet allow the heirs to pay a fee for them, but this was thought rather severe. Then earl Rognvaldr called the farmers to an assembly and offered them the chance to buy their estates, so that there would be no need to pay any fee, and to

⁴⁰ Páll reportedly fell pray not to Rognvaldr, but rather his own sister. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, his sister Margrét Hákonardóttir married a Scottish nobleman and captured Páll so that she could rise her own son, Haraldr Maddaðarson, to be joint-ruler of Orkney with Rognvaldr. Sveinn Ásleifarsson reports that Páll then removed himself from power and joined a monastery in order to avoid any more conflict. During one of the few narrator interjections in the saga, however, the narrator admits that some people believe that Margrét actually hired Sveinn to blind, imprison, and eventually kill Páll. The narrator does not preference one account over the other; he only notes that Páll never came back to Orkney or rose to power in Scotland. Haraldr Maddaðarson does eventually become co-ruler with Rognvaldr. *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 75.

⁴¹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 174.

⁴² Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 174. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Orkneyinga saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 142.

this they all agreed, so both sides were content. The earl was to be paid one mark for every piece of ploughland in Orkney, after which there was no shortage of money for the church and the building was carried out with the greatest care.

While Rognvaldr's vow provides the patron and apparent motivation for the cathedral, this passage also gives an approximate date for the beginning of its construction (c. 1137, when Rognvaldr gained control of Orkney), the identity of the head architect or supervisor (Kolr), and even how such a monumental project was funded (from both Rognvaldr's own private funds and the sale of the Orcadian estates). Scholars usually accept this information uncritically; for example, Alexander Burt Taylor, in a footnote in his saga translation, states, "Although Kolr directed operations, the artistic impulse appears to have come from Scotland or more probably the north of England."⁴³ With this brief reference, Taylor implies that the cathedral looks like English models despite Kolr's participation and his Norwegian origins. Per Sveaas Anderson, too, takes the account literally, using Rognvaldr's sale of *plógsland* ("ploughland") to discount assumptions of early territorial divisions based on *eyrsland* ("urisland") or *penningsland* ("pennyland") systems. Anderson presumes the authenticity of the account based on the author's speculative familiarity of Orkney. He argues, "it is remarkable that the author should be completely ignorant of the Orkney territorial divisions of urislands and pennylands at Earl [Rognvaldr's] time...It is tempting to infer that no such territorial organization existed at that time."⁴⁴ By attributing such intimate knowledge to the saga author, he further reinforces the factuality of the account and Rognvaldr's transactions.

⁴³ A.B. Taylor, trans. and ed., *The Orkneyinga saga: A New Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1938), 387.

⁴⁴ Per Sveaas Anderson, "The Orkney Church of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries—a Stepdaughter of the Norwegian Church?" in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara Crawford, 56-68 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 65.

Following these early passages, the next three references to St. Magnus Cathedral are anecdotal, revealing St. Magnus to be a significant location for Rognvaldr to meet his political rivals and for his opponents to seek refuge. For example, in chapters 92 and 94, Árni Hrafnsson and unnamed men of Rognvaldr's later political rival, Earl Erlendr Haraldsson (d. 1154), flee from battle and find refuge in the cathedral, presumably to beg for pardon. Although it is not clear what happened to them after this event, the saga records that Árni ran so quickly and without concern that he "fann eigi fyrr, er hann hafði skjöldinn á baki sér, en hann stóð fast í kirkjudurum" ("did not discover earlier that he had his shield on his back until he stood fast in the church doors").⁴⁵ In chapters 98 and 99, when Erlendr was eventually killed, the church became the principal site of reconciliation between Rognvaldr and Erlendr's most powerful supporter, Sveinn Ásleifarson (d. 1171). Both men entered St. Magnus Cathedral armed for their meeting and Rognvaldr offered peace by returning goods that he had confiscated from Sveinn. Although he gave Sveinn's ship to his acknowledged co-earl, Haraldr Maddaðarson (d. 1206), Rognvaldr returned many precious items to Sveinn. The saga records, however, that Sveinn became upset when his confiscated ship's sails were carried out of the cathedral, where they had been stored.⁴⁶ Finally, in a similar political conflict, Rognvaldr's follower and friend, Þorarrinn kyllinef, killed a supporter of Þorbjörn klerk. In an attempt to escape Þorbjörn's wrath:

Þorarrinn hljóp í kirkju, en þeir Þorbjörn hljópu eftir honum ok sveitungar hans. Þá var sagt Rognvaldi jarli, ok gekk hann til fjölmennr ok spurði, hvárt Þorbjörn vildi brjóta upp kirkjuna. Þorbjörn sagði, at kirkjan ætti þeim ekki at halda, er inni var. Rognvaldr jarl kvað kirkjuna mundu óbrotna at sinni, ok var Þorbirni þröngt frá kirkjunni.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 245.

⁴⁶ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 270-271.

⁴⁷ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 272-273.

Porarinn leapt into the church, but Þorbjörn and his men leapt after him and his comrades. This was said to Earl Rognvaldr and he went with many people and asked whether Þorbjörn would break up the church. Þorbjörn said that the church was not meant to protect those who were inside. Earl Rognvaldr said they would preserve the church at present and Þorbjörn was forced away from the church.

These three passages are rarely mentioned in secondary literature on St. Magnus Cathedral, perhaps because they incorporate characters mentioned nowhere else, thereby making it difficult to gauge their veracity. Nevertheless, they reinforce the centrality of St. Magnus Cathedral in Orkney's regional conflicts and Rognvaldr's clear investment to maintain the sanctity and structure of his cathedral.⁴⁸

The last direct reference to St. Magnus Cathedral in *Orkneyinga saga* appears in chapter 104. After Rognvaldr is killed by Þorbjörn in Caithness, his co-earl, Haraldr Maddaðarson, carries his body to Kirkwall. Haraldr “veittu grøpt at Magnúskirkju, ok hvíldi hann þar, til þess er guð birti hans verðleika með mǫrgum ok stórum jarteinum, en Bjarni byskup lét upp taka helgan dóm hans at leyfi páfans” (“prepared a tomb at St. Magnus Cathedral and he lay buried there until God revealed his merit with many and great miracles, when Bishop Bjarni had his relics taken up at leave of the Pope”).⁴⁹ Rumors spread quickly that his dripping blood stained a rock and continued to look as fresh as it did on the day he died. Buried and eventually venerated with his uncle, St. Magnús. While St. Magnus Cathedral is not mentioned again, the saga continues to reinforce the sanctity of both earls and their unique status in Orkney. In chapter 109, one of Rognvaldr's grandsons, Haraldr Eiríksson (d. c. 1195), attempted to gain Rognvaldr's half of the islands. After Haraldr's death in Caithness, rumors arose that there was a great

⁴⁸ The church is not referenced by name, but its location in Kirkwall and the immediate response from Rognvaldr suggests that it is St. Magnus Cathedral.

⁴⁹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 282.

light where his body had fallen. Rumors spread that Haraldr was a saint and that he demonstrated his ongoing desire to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen Earl Magnús and Rognvaldr in burial by performing countless miracles. While there is no other record of Haraldr or any subsequent cult, this passage reaffirms the importance of Magnús and Rognvaldr's shrines in St. Magnus Cathedral during this time.⁵⁰

As the above discussion indicates, the saga provides a surprisingly thorough narrative featuring numerous Norse characters and their conflicts centered on St. Magnus Cathedral. Rognvaldr built the cathedral after vowing to do so in exchange for divine help during his campaign to gain control of the Orkney Islands. Rognvaldr initiated construction quickly after Páll's disappearance, appointed his father as supervisor, and paid for it through his own funds and the sale of land rights. Moreover, the site became the Episcopal See, the site of Magnús' new (and presumably enlarged) shrine, and was used as a place of refuge and political meetings for Rognvaldr's conflicts. Finally, Rognvaldr was eventually interred with his uncle and both men were worshipped there together. Stewart Cruden succinctly summarizes this definitively Northern context by stating that the cathedral was "founded by a Norseman, named after a Norseman, for the veneration of Norsemen."⁵¹

The documentary value of *Orkneyinga saga* is more ambiguous when scholars attempt to associate historical details with physical evidence. Stylistically, St. Magnus Cathedral resembles Anglo-Norman structures from the early to mid-twelfth century and corresponds to the c. 1137 construction date implied by the narrative chronology.⁵² It is clear, however, from different craftsmanship and materials that construction was not

⁵⁰ Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 112.

⁵¹ Stewart Cruden, *Scottish Medieval Churches* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers LTD, 1986), 18.

⁵² Generally accepted dates for saga episodes were established by Taylor, *The Orkneyinga saga*.

continuous, but rather occurred in phases. A break in construction between the eastern half of the cathedral and the nave, for instance, separates the more recent forms in the nave from the older work of the choir and indicates that the church was constructed east to west, with a small pause perhaps in the mid- to late twelfth century (Figure 2.4). Dietrichson supplements the saga narrative with the architectural evidence to date these construction phases. The saga records that Rognvaldr and Bishop Vilhjálmr eventually went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land c. 1150. Dietrichson is the first to argue that it is unlikely that they would have left when the church was not yet functional, therefore, the first phase of construction (including the choir, where mass was performed) would have been completed before their trip.⁵³ While this logic has its flaws, many subsequent scholars have adopted this convenient chronology.⁵⁴ Scholars have similarly attributed the more elaborate eastern end (Figure 2.5) to Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson (1188-1223) based on the saga account that he helped with Rognvaldr's canonization in 1192.⁵⁵ Bishop Bjarni appears in other Icelandic sagas, yet no source connects him to the cathedral or its construction.

The fact that both Magnús and Rognvaldr were buried and venerated at St. Magnus Cathedral is also significant for archaeologists, for two unmarked groups of bones were discovered within columns of the cathedral's choir.⁵⁶ In 1848, a skeleton with

⁵³ Dietrichson and Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadica*, 58.

⁵⁴ Thurlby cites Stewart Cruden for this chronology, though the argument mirrors Dietrichson's earlier analysis. Thurlby, "Aspects of the Architectural History," 855.

⁵⁵ According to the *Icelandic Annals*, his canonization occurred in 1192. Taylor, *The Orkneyinga saga*, 406. According to the documented chronology, Thurlby believes Bjarni to be a the motivating patron of the expanded eastern end. Thurlby, "Aspects of the Architectural History," 868-879.

Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 110-112. Barbara E. Crawford, "Literary, Artistic and Musical Achievements of the Age," in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford, 163-164 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 163.

⁵⁶ Judith Jesch and Theya Molleson, "The Death of Magnus Erlendsson and the Relics of St. Magnus," in *The World of "Orkneyinga saga": A Broad-cloth Viking Trip*, ed. by Olwyn Owen (Kirkwall: Orkney

another skeleton's jawbone was discovered in a pillar on the north side. While these bones were long thought to be the remains of Magnús, it has been argued that they are more likely the relics of Rognvaldr, who, the *Orkneyinga saga* states, was struck on the chin during his final battle. This identification rests on the assumption that Rognvaldr's jawbone may have been missing or damaged in battle and therefore replaced.⁵⁷ Later, in 1919, a skull was discovered in the corresponding southern pillar (Figure 2.6).⁵⁸ As with Rognvaldr, the description of Magnús' death in the saga was used to identify the remains; in this case, the saga records that Magnús was struck on the head, which corresponds to the skull displaying a large hole from a severe blow.⁵⁹ Recently, however, Don Brothwell has pointed out that the account of Magnús' cause of death does not in fact reflect the injury to the skull, which "calls into question either the authenticity of the skull or the [recorded] position of the executioner."⁶⁰ Significantly, it is not the identification of the bones that Brothwell calls into question, but rather the story of his execution as it survives in the saga.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

While the above conclusions employ the saga as a historical resource, Brothwell's argument that the osteological evidence conflicts with the recorded narrative indicates that uncritical correlation between text, material remains, and historical 'reality' can be

Islands Council, 2006), 127. R.W. Reid, "Remains of Saint Magnus and Saint Rognvaldr, entombed in Saint Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, Orkney," *Biometrika* 18 (1926): 118-150.

⁵⁷ J. Mooney, "Discovery of Relics in St. Magnus Cathedral," *Proceedings of Antiquarians of Orkney* III (Session 1924-1925): 73-78.

⁵⁸ Jesch and Molleson, "The Death of Magnus Erlendsson," 127.

⁵⁹ Jesch and Molleson, "The Death of Magnus Erlendsson," 141.

⁶⁰ Don Brothwell, "One Hundred and Fifty Years of Human Skeletal Studies in Orkney," *Papers and Pictures in Honour of Daphne Home Lorimer MBR*, Orkney Archaeological Trust, 2004, <http://www.orkneyjar.com/archaeology/dhl/papers/db/index.html>.

problematic. Various media, including historical texts, documents, and photography, have always supplemented and enhanced archaeological and architectural inquiry. Yet, the dependence of scholars on literary and historical narratives as factual portrayals of the past limits the types of questions scholars ask and the answers they discern. There has been increasing awareness of archaeology's early subordinate role as "the handmaid of history" and growing skepticism of historical texts as unbiased fact.⁶¹ As a result, many archaeologists have rejected historical interpretation entirely in favor of more scientific methodologies. For classical archaeology, which encompasses an even larger literary corpus than the medieval North, Jonathan Hall calls for a more nuanced case-by-case consideration of all available evidence, rather than a rejection textual evidence. Specifically, he cautions against "positivist fallacy" and what he terms "unidimensionality."⁶² By positivist fallacy, Hall emphasizes that what is archaeologically prominent does not always equal what is historically (i.e. documented textually) significant. The flawed logic that presumes that there is a correlation does not consider the fragmentary survival of both documents and artifacts. Modern scholars have only a small number of what was originally written and produced, and much of it survives only by chance. In Orkney, this direct relationship has resulted in attempts to link key saga figures and events to the buildings discovered in the landscape. Churches in Birsay, Orphir, and Egilsay are frequently described and identified by saga passages, while otherwise unrecorded sites like a hall at Tuquoy and the monastery of Eynhallow are associated with significant saga characters based on often ambiguous place-name

⁶¹ Interestingly, it was not a historian who first coined this early term, but rather a president of the Archaeological Institute of America. Jonathan M. Hall, *Artifact & Artifice: Classical Archaeology and the Ancient Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2, 7-13.

⁶² Hall, *Artifact & Artifice*, 1, 10-11.

identifications.⁶³ Additionally, the characters in *Orkneyinga saga* are almost exclusively aristocratic men. To map only these characters onto the landscape disregards the majority of the population, such as women, children, and farmers. Similarly, more architectural ruins clearly exist in the landscape than are described in the text. In many cases, this singular search for correlating evidence begs research questions and inhibits further exploration into more nuanced architectural and political relationships.

Unidimensionality, on the other hand, refers to the presumed causal relationship between text and artifact. Depending on a scholar's research question and disciplinary perspective, evidence from another discipline can corroborate or challenge the other. For example, saga scholars point to material remains and their corresponding *Orkneyinga saga* references to underscore the factuality of the saga, yet many of the initial identifications were based on saga evidence in the first place. Within such a cycle, scholars using evidence from other disciplines can be unaware of the scholarly debate around that evidence and presume related conclusions are more established and uncomplicated than they actually are. Hall argues especially against this unidimensionality when "traditions" are evoked, as such arguments do not take into account the way traditions develop and circulate or the possibility of competing or contradictory perspectives.⁶⁴ Within literary scholarship today, for example, Icelandic sagas like *Orkneyinga saga* are no longer considered historical. Rather, they are creative literary products that embrace established narratives and actively construct new ones based on contemporary need. These ideas are highly mediated (i.e. transmitted through

⁶³ Olwyn Owenm, "History, Archaeology and *Orkneyinga saga*: The Case of Tuquoy, Westray," in *The World of "Orkneyinga saga": The Broad-cloth Viking Trip*, ed. Olwyn Owen, 193-212 (Kirkwall: Orkney Islands Council, 2006).

⁶⁴ Hall, *Artifact & Artifice*, 207-210. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

media created by people) and can develop or shift with the interpreting culture. Scholars who attempt to use the content of *Orkneyinga saga* literally and uncritically, therefore, do not take into account the complexity of the resources and the larger Icelandic saga corpus. In order to avoid these overly simplified relationships between text and monument, a more nuanced approach including both textual and architectural theory is necessary.

While it is easy to consider *Orkneyinga saga* as a monolithic and distinct text, it is in fact a complex and obtuse creative product developed over multiple decades using numerous written and oral sources. Through careful analysis of different manuscript fragments of *Orkneyinga saga* and other Icelandic accounts, Alexander Burt Taylor determined that *Orkneyinga saga* was compiled in Iceland (likely in the north) from multiple sources in at least two phases.⁶⁵ The first stage has been dated c. 1210-1225 based on references to and quotations of *Orkneyinga saga* in other sagas. Early chapters of *Orkneyinga saga* are actually cited in *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson's (1179-1241) compilation on the kings of Norway written c. 1220-1230. This dating suggests that Snorri likely had an early compilation of chapters 4 through 32, which were known as *Jarla sqgur* ("Earls' sagas") by that time.⁶⁶ This early section was composed of multiple sagas and *þættir* ("short stories") of individual earls, many of which do not survive independently.⁶⁷ These sagas were likely written down before their inclusion in a compiled twelfth-century *Jarla sqgur*, yet they were themselves composed of skaldic

⁶⁵ Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 13-16.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 24-25, 32.

⁶⁷ Sources include a saga of Earl Torf-Einarr Rognvaldsson, as well as *þættir* of the sons of Þorfinnr hausakljúfr Torf-Einarsson, Sigurðr digri Hlǫðvisson, and the sons of Sigurðr digri Hlǫðvisson (including three *þættir* related to Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, which Taylor described as the "Saga of Earl Thorfinn" when compiled). Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 17, 33-34.

poetry and older oral accounts. To weave together a coherent narrative, the early saga compiler also included excerpts from the sagas of Norwegian kings that often exist independently in expanded compilations.⁶⁸ The second part of *Orkneyinga saga*, then, references *Heimskringla* and was presumably completed after the compiler had the opportunity to read Snorri's completed *Heimskringla* in c. 1235.⁶⁹ This second part, spanning chapters 33 through 108, features many new sources, including various genealogies, *þættir* (or perhaps a complete saga) of Hákon Pálsson, a saga of St. Magnús, and a saga of Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson. Additionally, more stories were taken from sagas of Norwegian kings.⁷⁰ There are also many poems (especially those of Earl Rognvaldr) and eyewitness accounts, as some events were recorded soon after they occurred and still existed in living memory.⁷¹ While it seems that most of *Orkneyinga saga* was compiled by one person who influenced and, in turn, was influenced by Snorri Sturluson during two writing phases, Taylor has identified interpolations and additions throughout the saga that were added after the completion of this second part. These additions include recent events, hagiography, additional *þættir*, and further content from the Norwegian kings' sagas. A different tone and narrative focus in chapters 109-112, then, suggest an unknown author with new interests and agenda for writing added these chapters at an even later date.⁷²

Therefore, despite the relative flow and continuity within *Orkneyinga saga*, it is

⁶⁸ These kings' sagas include Haraldr inn hárfagri Hálfðanarson, Eiríkr blóðøx Haraldsson, Óláfr Tryggvason, and Óláfr inn helgi Haraldsson, Haraldr Sigurðarson, and Magnus inn góði Ólafsson. Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 33-64.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 25.

⁷⁰ Added chapters include sagas about Haraldr Sigurðarson, Magnús berfættir Ólafsson, Magnús Sigurðarson, and Sigurðr Jórsalafari Magnússon. Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 17, 65-88.

⁷¹ Taylor proposes that Sighvat Sturluson, Snorri's brother and rival might be the compiler of both parts. The compiler's knowledge of certain families and landscapes suggests that he may have traveled there around the turn of the thirteenth century. Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 28-31.

⁷² Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 88-97.

clear that multiple authors and a variety of sources—each with its own history and agenda—contributed to the account that exists today in published editions and translations. Previously, *Orkneyinga saga*, whose name implies a cohesive work, has been examined as one complete saga or finished project. While *Jarla sqgur* probably refers to the first part of the saga (chapters 4-32), the earliest reference to any cohesive saga about Orkney appears in a thirteenth-century manuscript heading in a saga about Norwegian King Óláfr Haraldsson (c. 1015-1028, d. 1030). This heading, *Upphaf Orkneyinga sagna* (“Beginning of tales of the Orkneymen”), suggests that there was some type of compilation of Orkney sagas and accounts by that time. However, Taylor believes that this was a short *þáttir* rather than a complete saga. Only in the fourteenth century does a *Saga Orkneyinga Jarla* appear in a narrative about Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason (d. 995-1000). The name *Orkneyinga saga* itself, in fact, only appeared in the seventeenth century.⁷³ To complicate matters further, the saga under discussion only survives as fragments in a limited number of manuscripts, many of which are far younger than the total project’s presumed compilation date. The two most complete accounts are an Old Danish translation of the original Old Icelandic text and a compilation of other political sagas that introduce selectively the Orkney content according to its own chronology.⁷⁴

With such considerations in mind, it is clear that the saga is a far more complex construction than implied by its traditional and simplified use in architectural literature. As a result, it is necessary to use the saga and its content cautiously, negotiating between fact and fabrication on a case-by-case basis. William P. L. Thomson and Barbara

⁷³ Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 21-22.

⁷⁴ The Danish translation is AM 103 fol., while the Icelandic compilation is *Flateyjarbók*, GKS 1005 fol. Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 9-10.

Crawford, for example, rely heavily on *Orkneyinga saga* in their histories of medieval Scotland and Orkney, while simultaneously comparing its textual evidence with that of archaeology, linguistics, and other foreign annals or chronicles.⁷⁵ If the information in the saga is not supported by or openly contradicts other evidence, both scholars assume that the particular saga account, not the whole saga, is inaccurate. During such an inconsistency in the account of the initial Norse conquest of Orkney, Crawford recognizes the mediation of the saga authors by hypothesizing that the thirteenth century writers were, in fact, framing the narrative and interpreting past material, such as skaldic poetry, in terms of thirteenth-century, rather than ninth-century politics.⁷⁶ Rather than just using archeological or architectural evidence to support the text, as occasionally occurs when such historical records are available, these historians approach the text cautiously, looking for dialogue, instead of conflict, between different disciplines.

Still, it is important to exercise caution when making any direct correlations. In some cases, separate passages in the same saga can contradict seemingly straightforward facts. Such contradictions within the saga suggest possible copy errors, contrasting traditions, or different source material that derive from its compilation. For example, in chapter 76, Rognvaldr sells the *óðul* (“land rights”) to the Orcadian farmers to fund the cathedral. Yet, in chapter 8, the saga records that these rights originally belonged to the farmers and that they were only transferred to the earls so they could fully pay fees extracted by the Norwegian king. According to the saga, though, the earls had already given these rights back to the farmers more than a century before when “Sigurðr jarl gaf upp Orkneyingum óðul sín” (“Earl Sigurðr gave up to the Orkneymen their land

⁷⁵ Thomson, *History of Orkney*.

⁷⁶ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 53-54.

rights”).⁷⁷ This episode is described in more detail in chapter 11, when Earl Sigurðr Hlǫðvisson (d. 1014) returned the land rights to the farmers in exchange for military support. There exist no external sources to verify which passage is ‘correct’ (or even if either is correct); yet, these conflicting accounts, regardless of their accuracy, provide an opportunity to consider potential ideological and political significance for including the sale of land rights in both contexts of the saga. For Rognvaldr, the sale could indicate the legitimate source of funding for his construction, or perhaps reflect the real or apparent investment of all landowning Orcadians in such a novel and massive architectural undertaking. Regardless of the possible explanation, Per Sveaas Anderson’s literal use of the passage and its terminology as a historical account written by someone familiar with the Orcadian culture and terrain weakens considerably when confronted with such inconsistencies. It suggests that scholars need to be critical not only of the concept of a singular, knowledgeable author, but also of the idea that the saga records facts akin to modern history.

ST. MAGNUS CATHEDRAL AS CULTURAL PERIPHERY TO THE SOUTH

While the sagas depict a Golden Age of Norse control in medieval Orkney, later authors from England and Scotland describe the islands’ increasing marginalization and, at times, unfavorable view of St. Magnus Cathedral. In the thirteenth century, the Orkney Islands became increasingly impoverished as foreign control from the south became more pronounced. After the death of Haraldr Maddaðarson’s sons in the thirteenth century, the earldom was taken over by a number of absentee Scottish lords. After Orkney’s political

⁷⁷ Finnboði Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 16.

reorientation from Denmark to Scotland in 1468,⁷⁸ a number of English and Scottish travelers visited Orkney and published descriptions of these newly acquired, yet clearly peripheral islands. Their observations record not only their early evaluation of Orkney and its people, but also the aesthetic merits (or lack thereof) of St. Magnus Cathedral. In 1529, Joseph Ben wrote the earliest extant account, *Description of the Orkney Islands*, in Latin. Ben's descriptions and selected stories clearly articulate the marginal status of the islands compared to the south and his opinion of the Orcadians as social and religious outliers. In addition to the shipwrecks, giants, sea monsters, and unusual physiological and cultural traits typically associated with peripheral geographic areas, Ben also comments on the ignorance and vices of the islanders. For the island of North Ronaldsay, he records: "The people are wholly ignorant of the divine truths, because they are seldom instructed."⁷⁹ For the island of Stronsay, he adds, "Some of the inhabitants worship a god called Tuidas, others do not. They have great belief in fairies, and say that men dying suddenly, spend their life with them afterwards."⁸⁰ Ben continues for Shapinsay, "The people living here are very impious: they worship the fairies, and other wicked beings."⁸¹ While Ben lists some churches and other Christian practices, he questions the genuineness of the islanders' faith, commenting about one particular chapel on Deerness, "They do not worship God here in purity."⁸²

Whether or not there is any truth to Ben's account, his description indicates that the memory of St. Magnús Erlendsson was still pervasive in Orkney in the sixteenth

⁷⁸ See the introduction to chapter 2.

⁷⁹ Joseph Ben, "Description of the Orkney Islands, written in Latin by Joseph Ben, a native, in the year 1529," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, edited by William Drennan 2, no. 9 (1809): 266.

⁸⁰ Ben, "Description of the Orkney Islands," 267.

⁸¹ Ben, "Description of the Orkney Islands," 267.

⁸² Ben, "Description of the Orkney Islands," 269.

century. Ben records that Egilsay, the “kirk-isle,” had a church dedicated to Magnús and was the site of an otherwise unrecorded story about him: “The Saint was born and educated during his infancy here, and gave a house and a lot of ground to his nurse, where she has built a chapel, in which she made a chamber in the ground.”⁸³ Ben continues, for the island of Wyre, “Some say that this island was made of [St. Magnús’s] boat, when he was escaping to the island of Egilshay [sic].”⁸⁴ St. Magnus Cathedral, however, is only mentioned in passing. He states that Kirkwall is in a beautiful parish and, in the middle, there “is a church dedicated to [St. Magnús]...also another church, which was burned to the ground by the English, called St. Olaus’s Church [sic], where malefactors are now buried.”⁸⁵

Orkney was still marginalized in the 1780s in the writings of naturalist and eventual minister in Birsay, George Low. His account focuses largely on descriptions of the islands, yet makes many observations that reveal sustained cultural differences between Orkney and the south after the Reformation:

In their manners, their genius, and the bent of their inclinations the Orkney people differ much from their next neighbours on the Mainland of Scotland; their Dress, their Language, and every attachment is different, more resembling those of the Danes and Norwegians in whose power they were for a long time...Ignorance and its companion superstition prevail very much in many places of this country, especially among the oldest people, who believe in a great many old wives tales, of which it is scarce possible to convince them of the absurdity....The more modern superstitions are mostly continued from the times of Popery, and consist in an attachment for particular churches, chapels, and days, as those dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and several of the saints.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ben, “Description of the Orkney Islands,” 268.

⁸⁴ Ben, “Description of the Orkney Islands,” 268.

⁸⁵ Ben, “Description of the Orkney Islands,” 269.

⁸⁶ H. Marwick, “A Description of Orkney (1773): An Account of an Unpublished Manuscript of Rev. George Low, Minister of Birsay, 1774-1795,” *Proceedings of the Orkney Antiquarian Society* 2 (1924): 53-55.

The marginal status of the islands is further applied to St. Magnus Cathedral. When Principle Gordon, who was an acquaintance of Rev. George Low, visited in the 1790s, he disparages the later additions and condition of the cathedral:

The cathedral was built partly by Bishop Stuart, partly by Bishop Reid, both Roman Catholics; but the addition made by Bishop Reid, to the old building, has spoiled its proportion...As Bishop Stuart left it, it was almost in the shape of a cross; now it is a narrow stripe, damp, ill aired, and ill lighted...The want of light and air arises principally from the ill judged fancy of condemning most of the old windows.⁸⁷

This condition, Gordon says, makes “the house of God in Kirkwall such a house as no man could chuse [sic] to receive a friend in, much less take up his own habitation.” He even compares the ill up-kept cathedrals of Scotland generally to Virgil’s hellish *loca senta situ*. The additions mentioned by Gordon include the western two bays and façade, as seen on the earliest drawing of the completed church by Reverend J. Wallace in 1684 (Figure 2.7).

During the early nineteenth century, this marginalization was applied to Orkney’s economic poverty as well. While noting the natural characteristics of the islands, Patrick Neill, the secretary to the natural history society of Edinburgh, was distraught by the destitution of the islands. He records the islands’ lack of things he deems necessities, including proper roads, open markets, and a quay or pier in Kirkwall. In Shetland, moreover, he was surprised to see the vestiges of vassalage between landlords and tenants and dominant use of Dutch or Danish, rather than British, coins. Although the Northern Isles were by this time part of Britain, the distance between the government and islands was clearly an issue; the islanders were often unregulated or unaware of southern laws or news, while Neill argues that the government was also heedless to the impoverished

⁸⁷ Principal Gordon, “Remarks made in a Journey to the Orkney Islands,” *Archaeologia Scotica* 1 (1792): 259.

conditions.⁸⁸ His concern for the inhabitants is clear, yet the superiority of the southern civility is stressed when he suggests particular measures that might improve their conditions.⁸⁹

Neill borrows and enhances Gordon's observations of St. Magnus Cathedral, but also adds his own sensory experiences. The cathedral clearly dominated the landscape, for he comments on its visibility at different points in his travel: from Scapa Flow to the south, the route returning to Kirkwall from Maeshowe, and the hill-top house of a Captain Gibson in the south-west.⁹⁰ Regarding its fabric, he disparages the building's later additions and disrupted proportions, yet praises its excellent acoustics:

The Cathedral of St Magnus, though part of it was built so long ago as 1140, is still entire. An addition made to it, in the 16th century, by Bishop Reid, has destroyed its proportions: it is now much too long for its breadth. The day after that on which we reached Kirkwall being Sunday, we had an opportunity of viewing the interior. Only the eastern half of the Cathedral is at present occupied as the parish-church. The effect of the church-music was grand: the lofty and vaulted roof re-echoed the melody of the psalm, and "swell'd the note of "praise!"⁹¹

From this small selection of early accounts, it is clear that outsiders viewed Orkney as a marginal and curious land and St. Magnus Cathedral as a decaying, if once notable, monument.

In the nineteenth century, however, there was increasing interest on the part of the government to restore the cathedral and a restoration during the 1840s ultimately resulted in a high profile court case regarding the ownership of the church.⁹² A few decades after

⁸⁸ Patrick Neill, *Tour through some of the Islands of Orkney and Shetland, with a view chiefly to objects of natural history, but including also occasional remarks on the state of the inhabitants, their husbandry, and fisheries* (Edinburgh: A. Constable and Company, 1806).

⁸⁹ Neill, *Tour through some of the Islands of Orkney*, 65-66.

⁹⁰ Neill, *Tour through some of the Islands of Orkney*, 3, 10.

⁹¹ Neill, *Tour through some of the Islands of Orkney*, 4.

⁹² In 1470, James III bought the Orkney earldom from William Sinclair and became the Earl of Orkney. In 1486, then, James elevated Kirkwall's status to a royal burgh and gave St. Magnus Cathedral, which he

this increased notoriety, Sir Henry E. L. Dryden, an English baronet, traveled to Orkney and became the first antiquarian to study Orkney's monuments in detail. His analysis and sketches of St. Magnus Cathedral (Figure 2.8 and Figure 2.9) were published in 1878 as *Description of the Church Dedicated to Saint Magnus and the Bishop's Palace at Kirkwall*.⁹³ Although Dryden outlines the Norse history of the cathedral based on saga literature, he focuses almost exclusively on describing and sketching the fabric itself. He argues that the conditions of St. Magnus are too distinct from English examples to use conventional English stylistic taxonomy.⁹⁴ By examining the internal stylistic forms and varying external masonry, Dryden proposes that there are five different building phases, which he describes as "styles," numbering them one through five according to their chronological order: Style 1: c. 1137 to about 1160, represented among other things by semicircular arches, circular or rectangular pillars, flat buttresses, rolls instead of edges on mouldings, and label and billet ornament; Style 2: c. 1160-1200, represented by semicircular arches for ornament, pointed arches for construction, circular and clustered pillars, volutes on caps, and dog-tooth ornamentation; Style 3: c. 1200-1250, represented by pointed and semicircular arches, circular pillars, stiff foliage, rich mouldings, dog-tooth ornamentation, and corbels of masks; Style 4: c. 1250-1350, represented by pointed and semicircular arches, clustered pillars, free and undercut foliage, fillets on mouldings, dog-tooth ornamentation; and Style 5: c. 1450-1500, marked by plinths with many

owned through his title as earl, to the people of Kirkwall. While the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw legal disputes between the government and the people of Kirkwall over the ownership of St. Magnus Cathedral, the people of Kirkwall have won all disputes and are still the legal owners of the cathedral. The Orkney Islands Council and Friends of St. Magnus Cathedral now help to fund and administer the cathedral in their name. During John Mooney, *Cathedral and Royal Burgh of Kirkwall*. 2nd ed. (Kirkwall: W.R. Mackintosh, 1947).

⁹³ Sir Henry E. L. Dryden, *Description of the Church Dedicated to Saint Magnus and the Bishop's Palace at Kirkwall* (Kirkwall: William Peace & Son, 1878).

⁹⁴ Dryden, *Description of the Church*, 23.

mouldings, buttresses of large projection, and cusps.⁹⁵ Dryden's careful chronology established the basis for many subsequent analyses of St. Magnus Cathedral. Nevertheless, he removes the architectural forms from their larger political, cultural, and architectural contexts in order to describe the forms and discuss the chronology specific to St. Magnus itself. Dryden's numbered stylistic phrases are so specific to St. Magnus that it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons to other structures or contexts. Consequently, when later scholars attempted to reinsert St. Magnus within its larger framework in the early twentieth century, Dryden's stylistic phrases were abandoned in favor of more traditional terms that encouraged both stylistic and national comparisons with the south.

The connection between St. Magnus Cathedral and Durham Cathedral (1093-1133) (Figure 2.10 and Figure 2.11) became firmly entrenched during the twentieth century.⁹⁶ The accord of these structures often emphasizes the importance of St. Magnus Cathedral through its evocation of Durham, one of the most influential and technologically advanced structures of the Middle Ages.⁹⁷ Many scholars assume this relationship to be direct, as formal elements of St. Magnus Cathedral have been ascribed to English masons of the "Durham School."⁹⁸ Out of the 114 found masons' marks that Albert Thomson discovered in St. Magnus Cathedral, sixteen match those found at Durham Cathedral. Although Thomson finds this interesting, especially when combined

⁹⁵ Dryden, *Description of the Church*, 33-49.

⁹⁶ Cambridge, "The Architectural Context of the Romanesque Cathedral at Kirkwall," 113; Cruden, "The Founding and Building of the Twelfth-Century Cathedral of St. Magnus," 82; Dietrichson and Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadica*, 69; Fernie, "The Architectural Influence of Durham Cathedral," 272; Thomson, *History of Orkney*, 63; *St. Magnus Cathedral* (2007), 1.

⁹⁷ Norman architecture is typically classified as Romanesque, yet architectural historians also describe it as a forerunner of Gothic architecture. Durham, in particular, is often exalted as the earliest example of rib vaulting. Reilly, "Beating their Swords into Set Squares," 372-373.

⁹⁸ Royal Commission on the Ancient Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Orkney*, 113.

with the stylistic comparisons between the two structures, he nevertheless argues, “In having dealt with this vast subject to the best of my ability, I now leave the matter open for discussion, as the final word cannot be given on any particular point until more comparisons and further extensive research are carried out.”⁹⁹ William Thomson, however, interprets Albert Thomson’s research as proof of the use of Durham masons at St. Magnus Cathedral and argues, “From the style of the building and an examination of masons’ marks, it is apparent that workmen were either recruited directly from Durham, or were Durham men who had previously been working on Norwegian churches.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the official guide to St. Magnus Cathedral explicitly states, “much of the original external stonework was fashioned by medieval master masons who, it is generally believed, were trained at Durham Cathedral.”¹⁰¹ Eric Cambridge, while discussing the similarities between St. Magnus Cathedral and Durham Cathedral in greater depth, also stresses the physical presence of at least a master builder from Durham:

Several smaller details at Kirkwall betray the unmistakable fingerprints of the Durham designer: the remarkably prominent transept stair turrets for example, protruding uncomfortably inwards into the church; the enrichment of the outer order of the choir arcades with billet, clearly derived from a similar moulding in this position on the Durham nave arcades; or the use of intersecting wall arcading, both divided into bays in the east parts of the nave, and in longer runs on the west walls of the transepts.¹⁰²

Cambridge’s use of the term “fingerprints” with regard to the Durham designer underscores his belief that the physical style of St. Magnus Cathedral testifies to the

⁹⁹ Albert Thomson. “Masons’ Marks in St. Magnus Cathedral,” *Orkney Miscellany* 2 (1954), 68-71. Thomson, *History of Orkney*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Thomson. *History of Orkney*, 63.

¹⁰¹ *St. Magnus Cathedral* (2007), 1.

¹⁰² Cambridge, “The Architectural Context of the Romanesque Cathedral at Kirkwall,” 113.

Durham designer's direct intervention, just as a fingerprint would establish an individual's identity.

Even while Dietrichson searches for a Norwegian architectural model to corroborate the St. Magnus Cathedral's supposed Norwegian history, he ultimately concedes to English and Scottish scholars who argue that the architecture most likely derives from Durham Cathedral or the closely associated Dunfermline Abbey (c. 1128-1150) (Figure 2.12 and Figure 2.13).¹⁰³ Some scholars argue that Dunfermline Abbey, which similarly resembles Durham Cathedral and is geographically closer to Orkney, may have actually influenced St. Magnus Cathedral. Steward Cruden, still emphasizing the role of Durham stonemasons as the purveyors of Durham style in the north, attributes the work of both smaller churches to a Durham workforce:

The architecture suggests that [St. Magnus Cathedral] was designed and built by masters and masons from Durham Cathedral whose main walling was up to the wall-heads about 1130. They came it seems by way of Dunfermline Abbey which has even more persuasive Durham indications. The dates are right for an exodus of the Durham workforce to the north, in the years following 1130.¹⁰⁴

Whether the influence came directly from England or filtered through Scotland, these arguments present specific stylistic comparisons as evidence of Durham Cathedral's pervasive reach. Described as "The Light in the North," St. Magnus Cathedral is distinguished as the farthest outpost of monumental ecclesiastical architecture in the British Islands, highlighting the extensive prevalence of Norman, as well as Christian, cultural influence at what was, and still is, often considered the fringe of centralized

¹⁰³ Dietrichson and Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadica*, 3-4, 67-69.

¹⁰⁴ Cruden, "The Founding and Building of the Twelfth-Century Cathedral of St. Magnus," 82.

European civilization.¹⁰⁵ Eric Fernie, for example, states, “[Rognvaldr’s] choice of Durham as the model for his cathedral therefore indicates that, within only four or five years of its completion, the fame and importance of Durham had reached as far as the Scandinavian world.”¹⁰⁶ Although Fernie gives stylistic agency to the patron of the cathedral, he nevertheless discusses St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney as an outer edge, the furthest point in the radius of Durham’s cultural reach. Similarly, Barbara Crawford, while discussing Orkney as the center of Norse control on the British Isles, only briefly mentions St. Magnus Cathedral as evidence of southern influences on Orkney, suggesting it was a “northern reflection of southern brilliance.”¹⁰⁷ These comparisons say more about the influence of the south than how or why it was chosen for a model in Orkney.

NATIONAL AND CROSS-SEA FRAMEWORKS

The terms “Scottish,” “Norman,” “English,” and “Norwegian” are often used to describe St. Magnus Cathedral, its history, and the architectural language that it reflects. These classifications are problematic, however, for they are anachronistic and presuppose the sort of fixed political borders appropriate to the modern nation states of the United Kingdom (including England and Scotland) and Norway.¹⁰⁸ By grouping art and

¹⁰⁵ Orkney Islands Council, *Welcome to St. Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, Orkney* (Kirkwall: The Orcadian, obtained August 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Fernie, “The Architectural Influence of Durham Cathedral,” 272.

¹⁰⁷ Crawford, *The Northern Earldoms*, 237.

¹⁰⁸ “The modern observer can hardly avoid approaching the past with a scheme of four lands—England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland—and their associated peoples already imprinted on his mind; and he will quickly find evidence that contemporaries too could think in such terms, and were sometimes eager to arrange history and myth around these national entities... Yet, if the observer allows his eye to dwell a little longer upon the British Isles, he may well conclude that the four-nations framework can obscure as much as it illuminates. This was an age when local and trans-national political associations were often paramount, the national hesitant and fragile. The shape into which political structures would ultimately settle was less certain than it may appear in retrospect.” Robin Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isle 1100-1400* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

architecture together along national lines, complex historic realities are often overlooked. These stylistic taxonomies and their periodization would not have been recognized in the medieval era and can result in predetermined assumptions about architectural and cultural relationships.¹⁰⁹ Although the Orkney Islands eventually did succumb to the external pressures of the larger kingdoms of Norway, Scotland, and the United Kingdom in turn, Orkney's subjugation was not firmly established until the thirteenth century.¹¹⁰ By attempting to search for stylistic models for St. Magnus Cathedral and apply labels for its architectural language, scholars focus so intently on source-hunting that it is easy to miss the institutional and cultural framework that selected those forms.

Even though scholars refer to St. Magnus Cathedral, rather than Orkney, as Anglo-Norman, this national description is misleading. While it is true that the style was pervasive throughout Anglo-Norman England, appearing in churches like Southwell Minster (Figure 2.14), the style was also immensely popular throughout the North Sea world, appearing in Scotland and Norway by at least the second quarter of the twelfth century. Eric Cambridge, like Dietrichson, also looks for a Norwegian context for St. Magnus Cathedral and points to potential Anglo-Norman models from Norway, such as Nidaros Cathedral (Figure 2.15),¹¹¹ Hamar Cathedral (Figure 2.16), and Stavanger Cathedral (Figure 2.17). Like St. Magnus Cathedral, these churches display clear if varying Anglo-Norman characteristics, including cylindrical drum columns, basilica plan, and chevron mouldings, developed at Durham. It is not clear, though, if St. Magnus or a Norwegian example came first.

¹⁰⁹ Reilly, "Beating their Swords into Set Squares," 370, 372.

¹¹⁰ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 11.

¹¹¹ Before it was elevated to Nidaros Cathedral, this church was called Christ Church. Nidaros Cathedral is located in the modern city of Trondheim, Norway. The medieval city and archdiocese, however, were originally called Niðarós and this name has been retained for the cathedral in Norwegian.

With similar stylistic characteristics found throughout the North Sea region, all of these seemingly contradictory categorizations—Scottish, Norman, Norwegian—appear at odds with each other. The polarization of identities based upon territorial borders would not have been as clearly defined as they are today, for medieval alliances were typically based on personal relationships. In Orkney, these ties would have been to the earls, not a distant and often absent king. Yet, an independent nation of Orkney does not exist today and modern boundaries often form the basis of art and architectural studies.¹¹² Hubert Fenwick attempts to subvert these national distinctions by seeking architectural influence beyond England and Norway:

What does go without saying is that this splendid little cathedral is a European church, as opposed to a Scots or English one, an amalgam of styles which merge so well that unity is produced in diversity to a degree not often found anywhere so complete, and remarkable in so relatively remote an area.¹¹³

In order to sustain this assertion that St. Magnus Cathedral is a “European church,” however, Fenwick ultimately falls back upon modern nationalist classifications, asserting that the Romanesque elements of the cathedral are “predominantly Norman in character...what Gothic features it has more closely follows French precedent.”¹¹⁴ Fenwick is correct for searching beyond Great Britain for architectural connections within Europe and the greater North Sea region, yet not in his assumption that Orkney was a remote area. The stylistic similarities of so many structures throughout this region suggest that St. Magnus Cathedral was, in fact, very much in style for its time and audience.

¹¹² Jonathan J.G. Alexander, “Medieval Art and Modern Nationalism,” in *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives: A Memorial Tribute to C. R. Dodwell*, eds. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham, 206-223 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 218.

¹¹³ Hubert Fenwick, *Scotland's Abbeys and Cathedrals* (London: Hale, 1978), 83.

¹¹⁴ Fenwick, *Scotland's Abbeys and Cathedrals*, 83.

Over the past few decades, more emphasis has been placed on international (rather than national) and cross-sea (rather than terrestrial) links. The North Sea and North Atlantic Ocean were key arenas for art and architectural exchange. Eric Fernie was one of the earliest scholars to adopt this approach for Orkney during his argument that St. Magnus Church (mid-twelfth century) (Figure 2.18), a round-towered church on the Orkney island of Egilsay, was not derived from the geographically closer Irish models, but rather from models in East Anglia and Germany.¹¹⁵ Candice Bogdanski has recently expanded this application to Durham-styled churches around the North Sea. In a way to emphasize the cross-sea influences of the Anglo-Norman style, she describes the style popular in England (especially North Anglia), Scotland, Orkney, and Norway as the “North Sea School of Architecture.” Durham Cathedral, Dunfermline Abbey, Nidaros Cathedral, and others display similar architectural forms and suggest more fluid, polyvalent transmission and influence. She is careful to note that, despite her use of the term ‘school,’ the same masons did not necessary build *all* of these structures; instead, there were cultural currents in each of these coastal regions that made this style particularly apt for the needs of patrons. By drawing attention away from the national or masonic implications, she underscores the fluidity of architectural ideas during the twelfth century and the importance of well-travelled patrons.¹¹⁶ Although St. Magnus Cathedral is referenced as part of this group only in passing, the refocus on maritime, rather than national centers allows for a consideration of similarities unhindered by political classifications.

¹¹⁵ Eric Fernie, “The Church of St Magnus, Egilsay,” in *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney’s Twelfth Century Renaissance*, edited by Barbara E Crawford, 140-162 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 158-159.

¹¹⁶ Candice Bogdanski, “North Sea School of Architecture,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 4 (2013): 77-106.

In order to understand the political, religious, and social significance of St. Magnus within its own context, rather than within the context of the modern Scottish or British experience, it is necessary to seek another methodology that emphasizes the locality of Orkney, placing it at a key node in a maritime web of cultural exchange, rather than at the periphery of a foreign kingdom. It was referenced independently as *Orcades* in Latin and *Orkneyjar* in Old Icelandic; its people, moreover, were distinguished from other Norse populations as *orkneyskur* or Orcadian in Old Icelandic texts. Orkney, an autonomous thalassocracy in all but name, was at a pivotal location for travel in the Irish Sea, the North Atlantic Ocean, and the North Sea.¹¹⁷ By acknowledging the North Sea as a site of cultural exchange rather than as a geographic barrier, it is possible to discern both the intricate web of exchange that occurred in the medieval era and to consider fully how and why the earls made specific architectural and textual choices for St. Magnus Cathedral.

ST. MAGNUS WITHIN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY NORTH SEA FRAMEWORK

The first part of this chapter outlined the two opposing perspectives on St. Magnus Cathedral; the first is based on *Orkneyinga saga* and set within the context of Norse literature and history, while the second is based on its formal characteristics and set within the context of Scottish or Norman churches. This tidy dichotomy attempts to distinguish between the cultural influences converging on Orkney from the north and south during the twelfth century. Yet, such cultural or geographical dichotomies never existed in such unadulterated forms, and the above discussion aims to complicate the

¹¹⁷ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 11.

taxonomy by introducing only a few conflicting examples and methodologies. *Orkneyinga saga* and St. Magnus Cathedral were produced during the same period, in the same temporal, geographical, political, and social contexts, and they should not be isolated based on modern concepts of national culture or disciplinary interests. Although scholars tend to view St. Magnus Cathedral as a powerful expression of culture and *Orkneyinga saga* as a document, *both* church and saga made complementary claims for Rognvaldr's earldom and political autonomy.

Spoken and visual content clearly overlapped in medieval Orkney, and this can be seen in the saga itself when Rognvaldr charges the poet Oddi inn litli Glúmsson to create a heavily stylized skaldic poem about a tapestry his guests were studying in his hall. Rognvaldr, as a poet himself, studies and interprets the tapestry first, reciting: “Lætr of ǫxl, sás útar./ aldrœnn, stendr á tjaldi./ sig-Freyr, Svǫlnis Vára/ slíðrvönd ofan ríða./ Eigi mun, þótt ægis/ ǫrbeiðanda reiðisk./ blikruðr, þoðvar jøkla./ beinrangr framar ganga” (“Age-worn, the warrior/ waits in the wall-drape./ from his old shoulder down/ he lets the sword slide./ bow-bent, his legs won’t/ bear him again to battle./ never again will he go./ gold-rich, to glory”).¹¹⁸ Oddi sings of the tapestry in response, “Stendr ok hyggr at höggva/ herðilútr með sverði/ bandalfr beiði-Rindi/ Baldrs við dyrr á tjaldi./ Firum mun hann með hjörvi/ hætr; nú ’s mál, at sættisk/ hlœðendr hleypiskíða/ hlunns, áðr geigr sé unninn” (“See how the swordman/ squares himself to strike/ from the wall-hanging/ weapon raised in warning:/ make your settlement soon./ seamen—the back/ bends for the

¹¹⁸ Old Icelandic from Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 202; poetic translation from Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Orkneyinga saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 160-161.

blow—/ quick, boys, make peace”).¹¹⁹ Both poets use the tapestry as their inspiration, yet see different things in its forms: Rognvaldr a warrior too old to battle, Oddi a warrior about to strike. The tapestry itself did not change, but the words carefully selected by the poets convey different interpretations. *Orkneyinga saga* and the oral accounts from which it derives similarly give voice and, therefore, legitimacy to the history of Orkney and the earls. Similarly, the saga passages and corresponding oral accounts related to St. Magnus Cathedral only further complement and expand upon the cathedral’s physical presence and forms.

Ultimately, it is unimportant whether *Orkneyinga saga* was factual or not, for it perpetuated selective accounts to audiences who believed they were true. The perceived validity of the account is sustained by citations in the text itself that credited skaldic poems, eyewitness accounts, oral stories, and written texts as sources. According to cultural memory theory, the memory of a society is constructed and reinforced externally through expressed rituals or symbols like *Orkneyinga saga* and St. Magnus Cathedral. While most individuals’ experiences remain internal, unconscious, and unprocessed, memories that are consciously contextualized and communicated can develop cultural meaning and, consequently, enter social discourse of the collective.¹²⁰ While individual memories can contribute to cultural memory, cultural memory can influence individual memory in turn.¹²¹ Rognvaldr’s reported patronage and his cathedral, whether or not the events really unfolded as depicted, could directly shape how people personally

¹¹⁹ Old Icelandic from Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 203; poetic translation from Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, *Orkneyinga saga*, 161.

¹²⁰ Aleida Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 125.

¹²¹ Astrid Erll, “Cultural Memory Studies,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sara B. Young, 1-18 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 5.

interpreted this new leader, his landscape, and his claim throughout different regions and over subsequent generations.

Just as iconography, form, and function communicate meaning within architecture, lexicon, metaphors, and allusions express meaning through word. Textual references to architecture, then, are just as important to understanding a building's context, associations, and reception as its physical forms, especially for audiences who never see the cathedral itself. It is not clear whether or not Rognvaldr himself initiated the compilation of *Orkneyinga saga*, but the basis of his story undoubtedly stems from oral accounts and poems—including his own—during his rule. When the saga was written down, however, it represented an 'official account' or 'hegemonic memory' that could then be read aloud in an easily controlled performance. For governments and other leaders, the patronage of media that promotes these shared memories becomes a powerful social and political tool, especially when historical memory also shapes cultural meaning and individual identity. Just as Viking-Age kings and chieftains patronized skalds, twelfth- and thirteenth-century leaders actively commissioned sagas to be written about themselves and their ancestors. These sagas had the power to shape new hegemonic memories to legitimize the rule of a particular leader. For example, King Sverrir Sigurðarson of Norway (1184-1202), who also had a very tenuous claim to the throne, dictated his own *Sverris saga* directly to the recording monk. Bjørn Bandlien describes this process for the late twelfth-century king, making a point to distinguish between the historical Sverrir and heavily hagiographical Sverrir in the saga, for the latter was constructed in order to legitimize the former's real-world power and ideology. Both figures, however, are equally important for shaping the trajectory of Norway's history

and society, for the saga produced and circulated its own account of the past that was retained by cultural and personal memory.¹²² Bandlien emphasizes Sverrir's appropriation and recontextualization of the past as a mode to establish a singular history that discredited his rivals and simultaneously legitimized himself.¹²³ Within this context, the sagas reveal not only how Norse medieval communities remembered their own pasts, but also how that conception of the past could shape the present and future.¹²⁴

Ármann Jakobsson, similarly, expands this discussion to include other *konungasögur* or king's sagas, such as *Heimskringla*, highlighting their propagandistic, rather than historical, qualities. The idealized kingship in *konungasögur* does not necessarily reflect historical kingship at that time, but rather the growing and consolidating political ideology during the late twelfth and thirteen centuries.¹²⁵ For Rognvaldr, such an expression of legitimacy was necessary to overcome his own weak claim through his mother and secure his rule as a foreigner. Aleida Assman notes that shared memories are critical for regulating group cohesion, and Rognvaldr is able to enter the Orcadian narrative by associating himself to multiple preceding earls through name, kinship, and actions, the most important being the construction of St. Magnus Cathedral.¹²⁶

In order to push past the dichotomy of North and South, text and architecture, this study rejects its presumed marginality and reframes the discussion on Orkney itself and its sea-based relationships with all of its neighbors. Linguistic, archaeological, and

¹²² Björn Bandlien, "Hegemonic Memory, Counter-Memory, and Struggles for Royal Power: The Rhetoric of the Past in the Age of King Sverrir Sigurðsson of Norway," *Scandinavian Studies*, 85, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 355-377.

¹²³ Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 128-129. The architectural and biblical literary tropes *Sverris saga* will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

¹²⁴ Bandlien, "Hegemonic Memory, Counter-Memory, and Struggle for Royal Power," 355-377.

¹²⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, "Royal Biography," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, 388-402 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 388.

¹²⁶ Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 121.

historical analysis of the medieval sea-faring cultures around the North Sea have successfully revealed interactions, common cultural traits, and shared institutions around its coasts. Barbara Crawford, in *Scandinavian Scotland*, highlights the central importance of the sea and cross-sea relationships in the history and cultures around the North Sea in the medieval era, particularly in the Norse-settled areas of Orkney and northern Scotland. Crawford, consequently, has been instrumental in reconstructing a medieval ‘North Sea World’ based primarily upon connections and mutual exchange, rather than hegemonic domination, between Scandinavia and the British Isles before the twelfth century.¹²⁷ This sea-based orientation does not mean that Orkney shared a monolithic culture with other regions around the North Sea;¹²⁸ rather it suggests that relationships are flexible, polyvalent, and unpredictable using modern concepts of national identity, cultural transmission, and political boundaries. Within this sea-system, architectural forms and sagas were exchanged fluidly as multiple rulers worked to consolidate and expand their influence. With multiple avenues to encounter architectural styles and literary conventions, distinct cultural areas in the north or south break down. This system even reveals that Orkney’s own orientation was not definitively pointed toward the North Sea. Changes in architecture and saga narrative suggest that Orkney was also oriented to the Irish Sea, where Norse invaders settled, raided, and established the Kingdom of Dublin and Isle of Man, for much of its early Norse history. It is only as foreign powers vied for power in Orkney in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the North Sea became a

¹²⁷ Crawford has been instrumental to a number of important recent projects pertaining to the North Sea World, including co-editing the Brill series *The Northern World: North Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700. Peoples, Economies, and Culture* and contributing to Steinar Imsen, *The Norwegian Domination and the Norse World c. 1100-c. 1400* (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2010).

¹²⁸ Fernand Braudel, the first to apply this methodology to the Mediterranean Sea, argues this same point. The Mediterranean regions did not share one monolithic culture, but rather shared a Roman history and maintained fluid mercantile and diplomatic networks. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*, 17.

necessary venue to express Orkney's political autonomy to its increasingly powerful Scottish and Norwegian neighbors.

In the subsequent chapters, the St. Magnus Cathedral described in *Orkneyinga saga* will be described in conjunction with its formal qualities. The saga does not merely tell the story of Orkney and St. Magnus Cathedral; it supplements and circulates that story. The construction of St. Magnus Cathedral occurred in the background of daily life in Orkney over the span of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with an influx of craftsman, the sounds of construction, and visible progress testifying to its existence. At the same time, the sagas of the earls circulated orally throughout Orkney and were eventually codified in written form in the thirteenth century. Both oral and written forms would have been performed and read to an audience in public or household performances, helping to spread Rognvaldr's deeds through the land even after his death.

CHAPTER 3: A CLAIM FOR THE ORKNEY EARLDOM

[Þorfinnr] sat jafnan í Byrgisheraði ok lét þar gera Kristskirkju, dýrligt musteri.¹²⁹

[Þorfinnr] resided permanently in Birsay and built there Christ Church, a glorious minster.

Though the largest and most elaborate of Orkney's medieval buildings, St. Magnus Cathedral is not Orkney's earliest church; its architectural patron, Rognvaldr, neither was the first. St. Magnus Cathedral's style and scale were both novel in Orkney, but the Orcadian landscape and *Orkneyinga saga* testify to a rich local tradition of pagan and Christian stone monuments well before Rognvaldr's arrival in mid-twelfth century. According to the saga, the first church constructed in Norse-controlled Orkney can be attributed to Rognvaldr's maternal grandfather, Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson. Built at Þorfinnr's center of power in Birsay, Christ Church (c. 1150) was established as Orkney's first cathedral and became Þorfinnr's burial place following his return from pilgrimage to Rome.¹³⁰ The location of Christ Church is still contested, but its frequent reference in the saga and its early association with the shrine of St. Magnús affirm its significance before and during Rognvaldr's reign almost a century later. Archaeological evidence, moreover, suggests that Christ Church and St. Magnus Cathedral may have shared formal characteristics in the twelfth century. Due to the ambiguous nature of the

¹²⁹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 80.

¹³⁰ Christ Church is the first church referenced in the saga, but not necessarily the first constructed in Orkney. There were likely earlier Pictish churches and private chapels of early Norse converts.

remaining evidence and a lack of critical literary analysis, however, the connection between these two structures and their patrons has never been considered.

The previous chapter highlighted how the historical and architectural study of St. Magnus Cathedral differ, with scholars seeking the former from primarily northern texts and the latter from southern architectural trends. The introduction of a more sophisticated and grander style through St. Magnus Cathedral has, to this point, prevented any consideration of local architectural precedence or Orcadian models. Many graduate theses and a few scholars have acknowledged the political significance of Rognvaldr's support of the Magnús cult to gain control of the Orcadian earldom, but there has been little consideration of how this was done on a local scale using architecture. Rognvaldr, as a Norwegian foreigner, was only able to secure his power and legacy by embedding himself within the Orcadian narrative and landscape through his patronage, using his predecessors as guides. Looking at both *Orkneyinga saga* and archaeological evidence, it is possible to contextualize St. Magnus Cathedral within a centuries-long tradition of elaborate funerary monuments for the earls, even as the cathedral absorbed new social and political functions traditionally relegated to the earls' residences. As Rognvaldr embedded himself in local narratives and traditions more specifically, it was to Christ Church and Porfinnr that Rognvaldr looked for his immediate influence.

CONSTRUCTION IN ORKNEY BEFORE THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

Even before the twelfth century, Norse settlers in Orkney looked to their predecessors to legitimize their status within a new domain. When these Norse invaders arrived in Orkney at the turn of the ninth century, they encountered a sophisticated

Pictish society that had inhabited the island for hundreds of years. The landscape they found was complex, comprised of not only the immediate Pictish monuments, but also the Neolithic and Iron-Age remains constructed centuries before them.¹³¹ While erosion and modern archaeology have uncovered a number of unknown prehistoric sites in recent years, the Ring of Brodgar (Figure 3.1), Odin's Stone (Figure 3.2), Maeshowe (Figure 3.3), Roman-era brochs (Figure 3.4), and Pictish dwellings (Figure 3.5), all built of stone, were visible when the Norse settlers arrived. It is not always clear how the Norsemen understood these older constructions or who had built them, but it is evident that they often reused existing sites and materials for their own settlements. Many Norse graves, houses, and—eventually—churches were built on established sites that were recontextualized within a Norse world-view.

While there is still some debate about the nature of the transition between Norse and Pictish Orkney, when Norse artifacts appear on the islands, Pictish artifacts notably disappear.¹³² This sudden change in the archaeological record suggests to many scholars that the transition was violent and abrupt. In the landscape, too, Norse dwellings literally supplanted the Pictish dwellings. Excavations in the Birsay Bay region (Figure 3.6), including Beachview and Buckquoy, revealed recognizably Scandinavian longhouses constructed directly on top of Pictish figure-eight houses. Norse burials also appear in

¹³¹ Alison Leonard, "Vikings in the Prehistoric Landscape, Studies on Mainland Orkney," *Landscapes* 12, no. 1 (2011): 42-68.

¹³² In recent years, some archaeologists have questioned this genocidal account and challenged the dominance of the textual account for interpreting the material record. Anne Ritchie points to the presence of Pictish artifacts like combs within Norse domestic contexts in order to argue there was likely some, if not much, Pictish continuity. Yet, place-name studies corroborate the historical and archaeological evidence. While there seems to be memories of Pictish and *papar* place names, the origin of modern-day places is largely Norse. Any survivors were likely absorbed into the dominant Norse culture rather quickly. Lloyd Laing, *The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland, c. 400-1200 AD* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1975), 79-84. Anna Ritchie, "Birsay around AD 800," in *Orkney Heritage, vol. 2: Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, 46-66 (Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 1983), 46-66.

layers over Pictish sites at Brough Road, Upper Twatt, and Buckquoy (Figure 3.7).¹³³ Neolithic standing stones, too, were appropriated and cast in a Norse context. Locals referred to a certain Neolithic standing stone, now destroyed, as Odin's Stone for centuries, and rituals involving the lithic survived until the early modern period.

Although the visibility of these appropriated sites from the coastline may account for some of their later importance, it is the reuse of these established sites that held ideological significance for the incoming settlers. *Historia Norwegiae*, a late twelfth-century Latin text from Norway, records the importance of these appropriation acts for later Orcadians. In the text, the inhabitant Picts and Irish monks called *papar* were remembered as Pents, a miniature race of people, and the Papes, Jewish settlers from Africa who dressed like priests and left behind books.¹³⁴ *Historia Norwegiae* credits the Pents in particular with architectural acumen, stating they “accomplished miraculous achievements by building towns, morning and evening, but at midday every ounce of strength deserted them and they hid for fear in underground chambers.”¹³⁵ When describing the Norse invasion, the text explicitly conflates the conquest with the Pents' monuments: “[Earl Rognvaldr], crossing the Solund Sea with a large fleet, totally

¹³³ Leonard, “Vikings in the Prehistorical Landscape,” 45.

¹³⁴ Centuries after the conquest, the Norse still retained a memory of these early populations, corrupted as it was. The diminutive size and building prowess of the Pents and the unusual origin of the Papes clearly distinguish them as different from both Norse invaders and later Christian writers. Still, the account retains some historical truth. Pent (Penti) was the Norwegian term used for the pre-Norse population in Orkney speaking a Celtic language. The more recognizable term, Pict or “painted people” derives from the Latin descriptions in Roman sources. Pape, on the other hand, is the term *papar* used by Arí hinn fróði Þorgilsson (1067 – 148) in the early twelfth-century *Íslengingabók* to describe the Irish-Christian hermits in Iceland. Although *Historia Norwegiae* records that the Papes were a unified group of Jews from Africa, the reference to religious clothes suggests that the term has a similar religious connotation as the Icelandic account. Papar place-names in Orkney further testify to their presence on the islands. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds., *Historia Norwegiae*, trans. Peter Fisher (København: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2003), 65, 125. Ian A. Simpson, Barbara Crawford, and Beverley Ballin-Smith, “Papar place-names in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland: a preliminary assessment of their association with agricultural land potential.” *The Papar Project*, 2005, <http://www.paparproject.org.uk/agricassessment.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegiae*, 65.

destroyed these peoples after stripping them of their long established dwellings and made the islands subject to themselves.”¹³⁶ Written some three centuries after the Norse settlement, the pre-Norse sites and monuments still embodied the conquest and Norse legitimacy on the islands through militaristic might. The right of the Norse to inhabit the islands was especially important in Orkney, where the new settlers supplanted the original population and culture. This model of conquest can be contrasted with the contemporary Norse settlements in Iceland, where there was no established population, and in Dublin, the Isle of Man, the Scottish Hebrides, and the Danelaw, where Norse newcomers interacted with and assimilated into local cultures and populations. If similar markers of conquest were established in these regions initially, their significance was not preserved over subsequent generations.

While she does not reference *Historia Norwegiae*, Alison Leonard cites memory theory to argue that the Norse settlers in Orkney largely imported their own Scandinavian culture, but negotiated some of their transported traditions to embrace these local prehistoric landscapes.¹³⁷ In southern Scandinavia, burial reuse in family cemeteries and mounds paid tribute to the dead and displayed visually the “time-depth” that a family occupied a site. These physical cues were mnemonic landmarks, significant for oral societies to transmit and reinforce claims to subsequent generations.¹³⁸ In Orkney, however, Norse settlers did not have these established familial claims. By appropriating established monuments of the conquered Picts, they expanded their “time-depth” beyond family claims and the conquest to the earliest inhabitants to legitimize their new control. They were only the most recent inheritors of the islands.

¹³⁶ Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegiae*, 67.

¹³⁷ Leonard, “Vikings in the Prehistorical Landscape,” 45.

¹³⁸ Leonard, “Vikings in the Prehistorical Landscape,” 60-61.

From the earliest stages, the Orcadian landscape was a vital component of Norse-Orcadian memory and identity formation, especially for the burgeoning island rulers and landholders.¹³⁹ Yet, site appropriation was not limited to the conquest. Over generations, the Norse Orcadians continued to build on these established sites, covering Pictish and early Norse layers with midden piles over which structures could be reconstructed and expanded. With each level, subsequent farms were constructed on higher and higher mounds, their prominence in the landscape growing at sites such as the Bay of Skail (Figure 3.8) and Pool (Figure 3.9). Jane Harrison argues that these ever-higher farm mounds, like the burials Leonard discusses, display through their height the longevity of a family's presence at a site and, consequently, legitimize its control.¹⁴⁰ Like burial mounds in Scandinavia, Orcadian farm mounds were highly visible, incorporated earlier monuments, and functioned as central places for Norse society. The farm mounds, however, were unique to the conditions of Orkney, for the settlers did not have generations of ancestral graves; rather, they built upon the halls of their predecessors in a way not found in other Scandinavian territories. By appropriating these sites, the settlers continued an older tradition of landscape modification, but adapted it to their situation in a new territory.¹⁴¹

Before the eleventh century, then, the Norse established a tradition of commemorative architecture first for the settlers to legitimize their conquest of the islands and then for the leaders to establish and retain power within Norse society. These mnemonic landmarks, both longhouse and burials, were supported through oral accounts, eventually recorded in later Icelandic and Latin texts. By the eleventh century, though,

¹³⁹ Leonard, "Vikings in the Prehistorical Landscape," 43.

¹⁴⁰ Harrison, "Building Mounds, Longhouses, Coastal Mounds and Cultural Connections," 35-60.

¹⁴¹ Harrison, "Building Mounds, Longhouses, Coastal Mounds and Cultural Connections," 55.

the earls' adoption of Christianity transitioned spiritual and political power from the cheftain's house and burials to churches. Under this new system, churches became the dominant structure in the landscape, absorbed political functions, and housed the earls' graves.

POWER AND CHURCH CONSTRUCTION UNDER ÞORFINNR SIGURÐARSON

When the Orcadian earls adopted Christianity, the mortuary function and political implications of longhouses and burials were transferred to the church. Such a pattern is not unusual, as converted kings throughout Scandinavia often shifted both their patronage and rituals from traditional gods to those of Rome. *Orkneyinga saga* credits the Christianization of Orkney to the Norwegian King Óláfr Trygvasson.¹⁴² The saga records that he crossed the North Sea to raid the British Isles, stopped at the Orcadian court of Earl Sigurðr Hloðvisson, and forced him to convert. Scholars, generally, believe that this story was invented later and that King Óláfr did not have the political control or economical resources to travel to Orkney and force its conversion. When the sagas were written in the thirteenth century, however, Norway was in direct control of Orkney and such a story supported the claims of the Norwegian crown and archbishop. Sigurðr, however, is cast as an apostate in the saga, dying in battle in Ireland while carrying a magical raven banner of Oðinn. Such an outcome recalls the flexible religious attitudes and syncretism that occurred when Christianity appeared in the North.

The prevalence and eventual dominance of Christianity likely occurred slowly in Norse-controlled Orkney. By the late tenth century, Christianity was tolerated enough

¹⁴² *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 11-12.

that Sigurðr married the daughter of the Scottish king Malcom II, a Christian who likely imported her own Christian beliefs and retinue to the islands. Sigurðr's Christian tolerance extended to the upbringing of his youngest son Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, the patron of Christ Church and great-grandfather of Rognvaldr, to be raised a Christian at the Scottish court. Þorfinnr's status as a Christian, however, did not prevent him from continuing the raiding traditions of his paternal ancestors, and the long record of his early career in *Orkneyinga saga* focuses on traditional Viking-style raiding and political consolidation. Þorfinnr not only inherited and consolidated the Orkney Islands, but also expanded Orkney's territory to its largest extent through conquests and grants.

King Malcolm had another daughter, Bethoc, whose son, Duncan, would ultimately succeed Malcolm to the throne. Gordon Donaldson suggests that, as a cousin to Duncan, earl Þorfinnr may have similarly considered himself entitled to the Scottish throne through his mother and may have participated in a joint attack on Duncan with his other cousin, Macbeth, *mormaer* of Moray. If these events indeed occurred, while Macbeth gained the Scottish crown, Þorfinnr gained nine earldoms or providences in Scotland, and became one of the most powerful political figures in the Northern British Isles during the eleventh century.¹⁴³ In relation to Norway, then, Þorfinnr was the first earl to encounter and successfully challenge direct Norwegian political pressure. When King Magnús góði Ólafsson of Norway (c. 1024-1047) tried to take advantage of the political strife between Þorfinnr and his co-ruling siblings, Þorfinnr relied on kinship networks and divisions within the Norwegian dynasty to retain and expand his realm.

¹⁴³ Gordon Donaldson, "The Contemporary Scene," in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford, 1-10 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 2.

With the latter part of his rule was secure, Porfinnr focused on Orkney's relationship with foreign political and religious courts. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Porfinnr distinguished himself from his predecessors by introducing new religious and political administration to the island based on established Christian models. Porfinnr was the first earl to go on a pilgrimage to Rome in the early 1050s, meeting with many other European leaders along the way:

Fór hann þá austr til Nórðes ok fann konung á Hordalandi. Tók hann við honum forkunnar vel, ok at skilnaði þeira veitti konungr honum góðar gjafar. Fór jarl þaðan suðr með landi ok svá til Danmerkr; fór hann þar um land ok fann Svein konung í Álaborg. Bauð hann jarli til sín ok veitti honum dýrliga veizlu. Þá gerði jarl þat bert, at hann ætlaði suðr til Róms. En er hann kom í Saxland, fann hann þar Heinrek keisara, ok tók hann forkunnar vel við jarli ok gaf honum margar stórgjafar. Hann fekk honum hesta marga; réð jarl þá til suðrfarar. Fór hann þá til Róms ok fann þar páfann, ok tók hann þar lausn af honum allra sinna mála. Vendi jarl þaðan til heimfarar ok kom með heilu aptr í ríki sitt.¹⁴⁴

He traveled east to Norway and met the king [Haraldr harðráða of Norway]¹⁴⁵ in Hordaland. He received him well and at their parting the king gave him good gifts. The earl traveled from there south along the coast to Denmark. There, he traveled over land and met King Sveinn at Álaborg. The king invited the earl and gave him a worthy reception. Then the earl said he meant to travel south to Rome. And when he came to Saxony, he met the Emperor Henry [III], who received him well and gave him many fine gifts. He got many horses; he planned then for his southern journey. He traveled then to Rome and met there the pope, and received absolutions from him for all of his sins. The earl turned from there for his to his journey home and returned safe to his realm.

The opulent way Porfinnr was hosted by many of the European powers around the North Sea only reinforced his growing political status in Orkney and his expanding territories in Scotland.

¹⁴⁴ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 80.

¹⁴⁵ Also known as King Harald III Sigurðarson or Harald Hardruler (c. 1015-1066). Harald's infamous invasion of England and death at the Battle of Stamford Bridge appear in a variety of contemporary sources.

In addition to visiting royal courts, Porfinnr also visited key ecclesiastical centers. A corresponding external account from the Archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen in the Holy Roman Empire supports Porfinnr's journey, similar to the above mentioned passage from *Orkneyinga saga*. At this time, all of Scandinavia, including the Norse settlements of Greenland, Iceland, and Orkney, was under this archdiocese, and Adam of Bremen's eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* ("Deeds of the Bishops of the Hamburg-Bremen") records that legates from Gotland, Greenland, Iceland, and Orkney requested that Archbishop Adalbert send preachers to their regions. Haki Antonsson believes this appeal eventually led to the appointments of Turolf, Adalbert, and John to Orkney. Adam's account continues, saying that Orkney's bishops had previously come from England and Scotland, but that Turolf was appointed as Orkney's sole bishop notably "on the pope's order."¹⁴⁶ Haki notes that this ordination likely occurred during Porfinnr's journey to Rome or even in Rome itself.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Turolf's name indicates that he was Norse and likely Porfinnr's follower or personal selection for the position.¹⁴⁸

Considering both accounts, it appears that Porfinnr also used this trip to the Holy Roman Empire and Rome to establish the first fixed see of Orkney under Bishop Turolf. *Orkneyinga saga* records that Porfinnr established the first permanent episcopal seat at the newly constructed Christ Church upon his return.¹⁴⁹ Haki Antonsson recognizes the importance of these administrative changes, for the earl's intervention demonstrated,

¹⁴⁶ Although a date is not given, this probably would have been Pope Leo X. Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney: A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 89.

¹⁴⁷ Haki Antonsson notes that the Icelanders used a similar procedure to ordain their first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson, in 1055 or 1056. Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 87-90.

¹⁴⁸ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 216.

¹⁴⁹ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 31.

“The missionary stage had ended and the bishop of the earldom had acquired a fixed place of residence under the protective wing of the secular authority.”¹⁵⁰ Porfinnr reinforced his ties to the new bishopric and demonstrated his protection by building a new cathedral at Birsay, his own permanent residence.

Porfinnr’s choice of location for his church at Birsay was not arbitrary; like his pagan predecessors, he appropriated an existing Pictish or early Norse Christian site in what is now the Birsay Village. *Orkneyinga saga* states that Christ Church was built in Byrgisheraði, but debate surrounds the location of this church due to the ambiguity of the site name and lack of extant ruins. While this name originally described the territory covered by the Orcadian parishes of both Birsay and Harray, oral tradition places the Christ Church beneath the present parish church in the village of Birsay, St. Magnus Kirk (Figure 3.10).¹⁵¹ For the first part of the twentieth century, scholars assumed the oral accounts were true. In the 1950s, however, Stewart Cruden and C. A. Radford argued that the visible medieval church ruins on the Brough of Birsay, known as St. Peter’s Kirk, were in fact the remnants of Porfinnr’s cathedral (Figure 3.11).¹⁵² To support their new identification, Cruden and Radford noted that the excavation of the brough church, which appears in a seventeenth-century map (Figure 3.12) and eighteenth-century drawing

¹⁵⁰ Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 90.

¹⁵¹ R. G. Lamb, “The Cathedral and the Monastery,” in *Orkney Heritage, vol. 2: Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, ed. William P.L. Thomson, 36-45 (Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 1983), 38-39.

¹⁵² Stewart Cruden, “Earl Thorfinn the Mighty and the Brough of Birsay,” in *The Third Viking Congress*, ed. Kristján Eldjárn, 156-165 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornleifafélag, 1956). Stewart Cruden, “Excavations at Birsay, Orkney,” in *The Fourth Viking Congress (York, August 1961)*, ed. Alan Small, 22-31 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965). C. A. Radford, “Birsay and the Spread of Christianity to the North,” in *Orkney Heritage, vol. 2: Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, ed. William P.L. Thomson, 13-35 (Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 1983).

(Figure 3.13),¹⁵³ had revealed a singular grave in the center of the nave with traces of a wooden coffin and a disturbed skeleton. This, the scholars argued, was the original site of St. Magnús' burial before his relics were translated first to a shrine and then to St. Magnus Cathedral.¹⁵⁴ With the saga account supported by these conclusions, Cruden looks liberally to the saga in his analysis of the surrounding ruins, previously identified as a monastic cloister (Figure 3.14), as the "earl's palace" (complete with a festal hall) and a later twelfth-century "Episcopal palace."¹⁵⁵ An earlier structure that was incorporated into Þorfinnr's palace was even attributed to Þorfinnr's father, Earl Sigurðr Hlōðvisson, due to its size, quality, and proximity to Þorfinnr's complex (Figure 3.15).¹⁵⁶ Cruden argues further, "the rationalized planning and the use of masonry in the later parts [of the palace] represent innovations adopted by Þorfinnr as a result of his journey to Rome,"¹⁵⁷ thereby linking the masonry directly with saga account.

Cruden and Radford's claim was disputed, however, and Raymond Lamb rightly reasserts that the oral tradition placing Þorfinnr's church under the village parish church is more logical. Stylistically, St. Peter Kirk (Figure 3.16) on the brough is far too recent to be attributed to the eleventh century. Norwegian churches of Bø gamle kirke (Figure 3.17) and Kviteseid gamle kirke (Figure 3.18) show the same nave, chancel, and apse plan with two flanking niches, thereby helping to date the St. Peter's Kirk ruins to the first part of the twelfth century.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, excavations in the 1980s revealed

¹⁵³ Although the church was known as St. Peter's Kirk in documents, this sketch labels the church St. Come's Church, perhaps for St. Colm.

¹⁵⁴ Cruden, "Earl Þorfinnr the Mighty," 158.

¹⁵⁵ Cruden, "Excavations at Birsay," 22.

¹⁵⁶ Cruden, "Excavations at Birsay," 28.

¹⁵⁷ Cruden, "Excavations at Birsay," 28.

¹⁵⁸ Lamb attributes the church on the Brough of Birsay specifically to Bishop Vilhjálmr. Lamb, "The Cathedral and the Monastery," 37-44. Øystein Ekroll, Morten Stige, and Jiri Havran, eds., *Middelalder i Stein*, vol. 1, *Kirker i Norge* (ARFO: 2000). Barbara Crawford recently compared the Brough of Birsay

substantial foundations beneath St. Magnus Kirk that Lamb claims belong to Christ Church (Figure 3.19).¹⁵⁹ The identity of the church under St. Magnus Kirk was affirmed by a detailed description and discussion of the excavated foundations by Christopher Morris and the most recent Birsay Bay Project.¹⁶⁰

The foundations of St. Magnus Kirk are significant to this discussion because they represent multiple phases of occupation. Archaeologists have identified four architectural phases under the current structure, three of them churches (Figure 3.20). The first phase, perhaps as early as the sixth century, shows evidence of cooking with midden piles. The second phase consists of thick stone foundations, midden piles datable to the ninth century, and burials datable to c. 800-1030. The walls of the structure run east to west and are almost as wide as the central space. Morris identifies these ruins as a stone oratory in the Irish tradition, suggesting an early Christian presence on this site.¹⁶¹ The discovery of a Celtic bell at Saevær Howe just south of the village reinforces the site's Christian identification (Figure 3.21).¹⁶² The third phase overlaps with Þorfinnr's rule in the eleventh century and is likely Christ Church. Þorfinnr, in this case, did not construct a

complex to the complex at Selje in Norway. She uses similarities of form and history to argue that the Brough was the site for Christ Church, but that it was converted into a monastery and expanded when the cathedral moved to Kirkwall following the construction of Rǫgnvaldr's St. Magnus Cathedral. The visible ruins, then, are of the subsequent twelfth-century monastery, not Christ Church itself. Three separate excavations on the Brough of Birsay, however, have yet to produce any conclusive evidence of a preceding church on the site. Barbara Crawford, "Thorfinn, Christianity and Birsay: What the Saga Tells us and Archaeology Reveals." In *The World of "Orkneyinga saga": A Broad-cloth Viking Trip*, ed, Olwyn Owen, 88-110 (Kirkwall: Orkney Islands Council, 2006), 105.

¹⁵⁹ Lamb, "The Cathedral and the Monastery," 40-43.

¹⁶⁰ Christopher Morris realizes that it is impossible to ever be 100% certain about this identification. But, "In the end...we are dealing with a balance of probabilities which may suggest that this church is indeed the Christchurch of the *Saga*." Christopher Morris, *Birsay Bay Project: Sites in Birsay Village and on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney*, vol. 2. University of Durham Department of Archaeology Monograph Series Number 2 (Durham: University of Durham, 1996), 4, 31.

¹⁶¹ This type of expansion was common in Ireland, though typically a choir was added to the east of the oratory. John W. Barber, et. al., "Excavations at St. Magnus Kirk," in *Birsay Bay Project: Sites in Birsay Village and on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney*, vol. 2, University of Durham Department of Archaeology Monograph Series Number 2, edited by Christopher Morris (Durham: University of Durham, 1996), 25-27.

¹⁶² J. W. Hedges, "Trial Excavations on Pictish and Viking settlements at Saevær Howe, Birsay, Orkney," *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* 10 (1983): 73-124.

whole new church, but rather appropriated the site and previous structure by expanding it to the west. By adding two parallel east-west orientated walls to the oratory, Porfinnr constructed a nave and repurposed the oratory as the choir.¹⁶³ While it is not clear if the oratory was constructed by *papar* in Pictish Orkney or missionaries under the Norse rule, Porfinnr engages in the same system of appropriation as his ancestors. In this case, the “time-depth” of Christ Church links him not only to the Orcadian landscape, but also to a specifically Christian one.

While Christ Church was significant for its location and structural appropriation, it was also important as the site of Porfinnr’s tomb. Earls’ graves were important features in the landscape during the pagan period and *Orkneyinga saga* reveals that this was no less true for Porfinnr, even though the religion and form differed. While Viking-Age burial practices could vary widely even within the same period and cemetery site, mounds were widespread for prestigious leaders (most often, but not exclusively, male warriors and rulers) and often contained a wealth of grave goods. In Orkney, boat burials like Scar (Figure 3.22) and Westness (Figure 3.23) show that lavish burials with grave goods were continued in Orkney after the conquest. By the twelfth century, these pagan mounds were no longer in use; the saga indicates, however, that they were still prevalent in the cultural memory of the time as sites representing political power and wealth. The burial mounds of Orkney are mentioned in chapters 5, 8, and 11. Three of the mounds belong to pagan Orkney earls, and their descriptions follow a strict formula: “ok er Sigurðr inn ríki heygðr á Ekkjalsbakka” (“And Sigurður inn ríki is buried on Willow’s Bank”);¹⁶⁴ “ok er [Porfinnr hausakljúfr Torf-Einarsson] heygðr í Rognvaldsey á

¹⁶³ Barber, “Excavations at St. Magnus Kirk,” 28.

¹⁶⁴ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 9.

Haugaeiði” (“and [Þorfinnr hausakljúfr Torf-Einarsson] is buried on Ronaldsay at Hoxa”);¹⁶⁵ and “Hlōðvir...er heygðr í Høfn á Katanesi” (“Hlōðvir...is buried at Ham in Caithness”).¹⁶⁶ In each case, the earl is named (often with an epithet or description), the verb *heyja* specifies that he is buried under a mound, and the place of this mound is given. These literary tombs become mnemonic landmarks, reflecting real burial mounds in the landscape and perpetuating their memory through oral accounts first and written accounts second.

The only other mound mentioned in *Orkneyinga saga* is not for an earl, but rather involves an earl’s enemy. The saga records in great detail that Hálfðan, the son the King Haraldr hárfagri Hálfðanarson of Norway (c. 870-930), killed the father of Earl Einarr Rognvaldsson (d. 910), raided the islands, and was consequently killed in battle. The saga breaks from its formula and records: “Eptir þat lét [Einarr] kasta haug Hálfðanar” (“After this, [Einarr] let Hálfðan’s mound be cast”).¹⁶⁷ Háfan is named, but his character and tomb’s location are of no importance. Moreover, the grammatical subject of this description shifts from the person buried to the person initiating construction, suggesting that Earl Einarr’s action takes prominence over Hálfðan’s interment. Einarr then recites a skaldic verse about casting stones on Hálfðan’s tomb and settling his score. In this instance, the memory is not that of honoring Hálfðan, but rather of Einarr, who gained honor by killing his fathers’ killer. Many skaldic poems are preserved from earlier periods and it is possible that Einarr’s poem forms part of an original oral account. Such a skaldic poem, a genre typically written and preserved to glorify the actions of warriors and leaders, only reinforces the importance of this act for Einarr. The poem and the

¹⁶⁵ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 20.

¹⁶⁶ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 24.

¹⁶⁷ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 15.

mound are significant further, for when warriors died abroad and there was no body to return home, oral accounts and monuments were important evidence for those left behind. In Sweden, runestone monuments to (often Christian) men who died overseas served as critical social markers for families who needed to distribute inheritance, yet had no body to bury (Figure 3.24).¹⁶⁸ Regardless of how Hálfðan died and where he was buried, the poem and any corresponding physical mound forge a memory necessary to communicate and display the death of a person wielding power, owning property, and possessing heirs.¹⁶⁹ Such a mnemonic landmark, circulated in oral accounts and then recorded in the *Orkneyinga saga*, reinforces the importance of high profile, aristocratic burials in Orkney from an early pagan age.

In the twelfth century, Norse travelers notably broke into the Neolithic barrow Maeshowe (see Figure 3.3), perhaps, as the saga suggests, to wait out a storm. While there, they carved runes, thereby indicating that pagan burial mounds were still remembered (if not necessarily revered) in the Christian era as sites of burial and grave goods. In multiple hands, different writers scrawled runes in one location: “In the northwest is hidden a great treasure”; “It was long since a great treasure was hidden here”; “Happy is he who can find the great treasure of gold”; and “[Hákon] bore this treasure alone out of this mound” (Figure 3.25).¹⁷⁰ In a different location, another hand records, “It will be true, as I say, that the treasure was taken away. The treasure was

¹⁶⁸ Brigit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119.

¹⁶⁹ Although Earl Einarr is not mentioned, Hálfðan’s death at the hands of the “men of Orkney” appears in *Historia Norwegiae*, which was recorded in Norway at the end of the twelfth century. The Norwegian interest in Hálfðan’s demise was purely dynastic, and the account appears in a section recounting the fates of Haraldr hárfagri’s sons and heirs. Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegiae*, 87.

¹⁷⁰ Terje Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, trans. Betsy van der Hoek (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 148.

carried away three nights before they broke into this mound” (Figure 3.26).¹⁷¹ Not knowing that this Neolithic mound was far older than pagan Scandinavian mounds and would not have held any grave goods, these writers express the absence of treasure, or rich grave-deposits, that would have filled the mounds of similar pagan burials and were often looted during the Middle Ages. The most famous looted mound is in Oseberg, Norway (Figure 3.27), which was also broken into and robbed during the medieval era, likely as a political statement.¹⁷² Without knowing how old the Neolithic tomb was, these Maeshowe invaders likely believed that others had already looted the treasure before they arrived and, thus, aligned this burial with their own cultural framework.

Churches, like burial mounds, demarcate the site of earls’ burials both in the saga and in the landscape. All burial references are of aristocratic men, though there is a distinction between descriptions of earls’ burials and those of competing earls (as opposed to legitimate ruling earls) and of earls’ followers, which are never described by name or location.¹⁷³ In *Orkneyinga saga*, churches appear as sites of burials on seven separate occasions, with Christ Church featured for both Earl Porfinnr and Earl Magnús.¹⁷⁴ These two figures are the most important in the saga up until their deaths and their burials are the first to be recorded not only at a church, but also at the first cathedral of Orkney. In the saga, Porfinnr’s burial incorporates many aspects of the pagan formula discussed above, including name, location of burial, and poems, but broadens to include his legacy, power, and the act of his architectural patronage: “Er þat sannliga sagt, at

¹⁷¹ Terje Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, 148.

¹⁷² Jan Bill and Aoife Daly, “The Plundering of the Ship Graves from Oseberg and Gokstad: An Example of Power Politics?” *Antiquity* 86, no. 333 (Sep. 2012), 808-824.

¹⁷³ Earl Erlendr died fighting against Rognvaldr, who did not recognize his claim. Moreover, the location of the burial of Earl Haraldr ungi, the rival of established Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson, in chapter 104, is unclear.

¹⁷⁴ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 32 and 52.

hann hafi ríkastr verit allra Orkneyingajarla....Hann er jarðaðr at Kristskirkju í Byrgisheraði, þeirri er hann hafði gera látit” (“It is said that he had been the most powerful of all Orkney earls...He is buried at Christ Church in Birsay, which he had built”).¹⁷⁵ Significantly, the phrases describing these church burials are not used for similar pagan burials earlier in the saga. For Christian burials, the act of burial itself is stressed, as the saga uses the verbs *grafa* (“to dig/bury”), *jarða* (“to earth/bury”), and *ausa* (“to sprinkle earth”) to convey the actual burial at a church and *færa* (“to bring”) to convey the act of bearing a body to church.¹⁷⁶ This distinction, while subtle, reinforces the religious shift of these burials, while still recording the location of Christian earls’ burials within a recognizable framework. By continuing and expanding the tradition of earlier pagan mound burials, Christ Church becomes a monument both in the landscape and in the text, embodying Porfinnr’s support of Christianity and bolstering the site of his grave.

Like those of St. Magnus Cathedral, discussions of Christ Church focus on its textual content and the changes brought by Christianity. Yet, the physical location and textual associations of the church imply carefully crafted continuity with past earls. When comparing the pagan and Christian burial references, especially for the earls, a pattern emerges: pagan funerary monuments function in the same way as their Christian counterparts. These monuments not only serve as narrative facts in the saga, but also communicate the honor given to the deceased and respect for the religious tradition they followed. Moreover, the importance of communicating the location of the churches and burial mounds of earls indicates that these sites were important to remember and circulate among those listening to or reading the saga. For other unnamed burials of aristocratic

¹⁷⁵ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 81-82.

¹⁷⁶ Even when Earl Erlend Porfinnsson died and was buried in Bergen (with no mention of a church), the verb *grafa* was used. *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 32, 52, 82, 88, 94, and 104.

men, the reference to unspecified churches seems to emphasize at least that the deceased had, in fact, died and been given proper burial rites. As with the rune stones in Sweden, this information would have been crucial if a voyager died while away from home or if it was possible to contest a leader's death.¹⁷⁷ When Þorfinnr was buried in Church Church, he managed to introduce a new architectural and religious vocabulary to the islands, while still maintaining continuity with past traditions. He instilled continuity within the landscape by building on an established (probably Christian site) and designated the church as a key burial site for himself and at least one of his offspring. Þorfinnr's church would be chosen as the site of Earl Magnús' burial and first shrine and would set the precedent in Orkney for almost a hundred years. When Rognvaldr constructed St. Magnus Cathedral, he directly responded to and embraced this Orcadian model.

RØGNVALDR IN THE ORKNEY NARRATIVE

According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Rognvaldr's main obstacles in securing his share of the Orkney earldom were his cousin, Earl Páll, and the people of Orkney themselves. While Páll descended directly from Orkney's first earl and was loved by the people, Rognvaldr descended from a matrilineal branch and was raised as a foreigner in Norway.

¹⁷⁷ For the earls, a definitive death is necessary to ensure the smooth transition to the next generation within the narrative. In the one instance that the death of Earl Páll Hákonarson could not be confirmed, the saga author makes special note that there are diverging stories, with some speculating that he escaped alive to Scotland, while others believed he was blinded by his sister and later killed. All the author can claim for sure is that Páll never again returned to Orkney or gained power in a neighboring region. Magnús' mother's anxiety that Magnús was not given a proper burial after his murder might also reflect some of these uncertainties. In Norway, too, the lack of a body for King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway (c. 995-1000) led to speculation about his survival. Like in *Orkneyinga saga*, *Historia Norwegiae* records different perspectives, but ultimate favors neither: "When the battle was over [King Óláfr] could not be traced, dead or alive, from which some maintain that he sank in his armour beneath the waves. But certain folk also claimed to have seen him after a long lapse of time in a particular monastery. How he reached firm soil through the hazards of the seas...or whether indeed he was drowned then and there is unknown, I believe, to all our contemporaries. For this reason it would be more creditable to omit something so unsettled than give a false explanation of such a doubtful matter, and I shall pass over it." *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 52 and 75. Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegiae*, 99.

When Páll was first approached by a messenger demanding that he recognize Rognvaldr's claim, Páll decries:

Skil ek tilkall þetta, at þat er efnat með mikilli undirhyggju; hafa þeir sótt at því Nóregskonunga at hafa ríki undan mér. Vil ek nú eigi því launa þann ótrúnað, at gefa ríki mitt þeim, er eigi er nær kominn en Rognvaldr er, en varna bróðursyni mínum eða systursyni.¹⁷⁸

I understand this claim, that it is prepared with great craftiness;¹⁷⁹ they have sought the Norwegian kings to have the realm from me. I will not reward this deception and give my realm to he, who is not as near descended as Rognvaldr is, and deny my nephews.

According to this passage, Páll rejects Rognvaldr's claims to Orkney and marks them deceptive. It is not clear whether Páll rejects Rognvaldr's claim because he is foreign born and raised in Norway, descends from the matronlinial rather than patronlinial line, or depends entirely on the support of a distant king to gain control; however, it is certain that Rognvaldr lacks the popular support and legitimacy necessary to exercise any control of Orkney. To overcome his feeble claim, Rognvaldr needed to embed himself more securely first within the Orcadian line of earls, and then within the landscape itself. Using the precedent established by his ancestors, as well as his ties to St. Magnús, Rognvaldr's actions to legitimize himself and build local support become more sophisticated than the saga reveals here.

Rognvaldr's first move is telling; he changes his name from Kali Kolsson to Rognvaldr Kolsson before he ever launches his first voyage to Orkney. According to the saga, this act was done by King Sigurðr Jórsalafari Magnússon of Norway (c. 1103-1130), who “gaf honum ok nafn Rognvalds jarls Brúsasonar, því at Gunnhildr, móðir hans, sagði hann verit hafa gørviligastan allra Orkneyingajarla, ok þótti þat heillavænligt”

¹⁷⁸ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 143.

¹⁷⁹ *Undirhyggja* can also mean cunning or even deceitfulness.

(“also gave him the name of Earl Rognvaldr Brúsason, because Gunnhildr, his mother, said he had been the most skilled of all Orkney’s earls, and they thought this good luck”).¹⁸⁰ By recasting himself thus, Rognvaldr associates himself with one of his distant relatives and one of Orkney’s best earls. Significantly, Rognvaldr Brúsason (d. 1046) also spent significant time travelling abroad and living in Norway, just like Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, before returning to claim his title. By associating himself to this particular ancestor, Rognvaldr, therefore, effectively expresses his desires to do the same.

The name, however, was not enough to bolster Rognvaldr’s claim, as he also highlights his familial ties to Earl Magnús, his uncle and Orcadian martyr, to legitimize his inheritance. His relationship to Magnús is first mentioned when he takes the name Rognvaldr, for he claims only the “hlut Orkneyja hafði átt Magnús in helgi, móðurbróðir Kala” (“part of Orkney Magnús the Holy, Kali’s uncle, had controlled”).¹⁸¹ In the tradition of split-rule among male descendants, Rognvaldr made no claim to Páll’s rightful inheritance through his father Hákon Pálsson. The second time Rognvaldr invokes Magnús and his claim is during his holy vow to build St. Magnus Cathedral to gain the divine support of his uncle. As Kolr speaks to Rognvaldr, he emphasizes Rognvaldr’s relationship to Magnús’ as *móðurbróðir yðvarr* (“your uncle”) and *frænda þínum* (“your kinsman”).¹⁸² Kolr also emphasizes Rognvaldr’s rightful claim by linking “frændleifðar þinnar ok [Magnús’] erfðar” (“your patrimony and [Magnús’] inheritance”).¹⁸³ Before Rognvaldr lays any stone, he establishes a strong narrative for

¹⁸⁰ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 140.

¹⁸¹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 140.

¹⁸² Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 159.

¹⁸³ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 159.

himself based firmly on the lineage and tradition of two popular preceding Orcadian earls.

Magnús is the linchpin in Rognvaldr's legitimization; regardless of its historical accuracy, *Orkneyinga saga* carefully associates Rognvaldr with him and bolsters his claims to power through kinship, as well as through divine and popular support. The saga itself is organized chronologically, with St. Magnús' death, miracles, and cult development occurring before the introduction of Rognvaldr. With this structure, the saga contextualizes Rognvaldr's kinship to Magnús and the latter's holiness within a thriving popular cult in Orkney. The initial saga accounts regarding Magnús do not depart notably from those of other preceding earls, though the use of saga tropes cleverly foreshadow Magnús' eventual sanctity. For example, while it is common to describe the saga characters and personalities when they are first introduced to the text, Magnús is portrayed in positive terms and directly contrasted with his cousin and co-earl, Hákon Pálsson, who would ultimately kill him. Magnús is described as quiet, Hákon as arrogant.¹⁸⁴ As the story unfolds, Hákon's Christianity is questioned by his consultation with a pagan soothsayer,¹⁸⁵ while Magnús' passivity and sanctity are emphasized when he refuses to fight when pressed into battle by King Magnús Óláfsson of Norway (c. 1073-1103). Rather, Magnús reads from his psalter, unharmed, in the midst of battle.¹⁸⁶ The tone of the saga changes abruptly in chapter 45, in which Magnús is described again, though at greater length, according to Christian virtues. He was a generous, just, and wise ruler, providing charity to the poor and punishing the wicked. This chapter is also the first

¹⁸⁴ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 34.

¹⁸⁵ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 36.

¹⁸⁶ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 39.

to reference explicitly the Christian God and the first to refer to Magnús as *inn heilagi* (“the holy”).¹⁸⁷

The remainder of Magnús’ saga narrative focuses on the circumstances of his cousin’s betrayal and his own death. Urged by his supporters, Hákon reneges on an agreed peace between the two factions, captures Magnús on the island of Egilsay, and orders his cook to kill him with a blow to the head. Although Hákon’s actions are politically motivated, Magnús’ death is cast in the saga as a martyrdom, his sanctity revealed immediately after his death: “Sá staðr var áðr mosóttur ok grýttur, en litlu síðarr birtusk verðleikar Magnúss jarls við guð, svá at þar varð grænn vøllr, er hann var veginn, ok sýndi guð þat, at hann var fyrir réttlæti veginn ok hann ǫðlaðisk fegrð ok grænleik paradísar, er kallask jorð lifandi manna” (“This place was previously mossy and stony, but a little later Earl Magnús’ merit before God was revealed, so that green fields sprouted where he was killed, and God showed that he was killed for justice and he won the beauty and verdure of Paradise, which is called the land of the living man”).¹⁸⁸ Still, Hákon would not allow Magnús to be buried until Magnús’ mother, Þóra, pleaded with him that she be allowed to retrieve her son’s body from the site of murder so that she may bury him at church.¹⁸⁹ Hákon is moved by her humble request and states that she can bury her son wherever she chooses. Þóra selects the most important church in Orkney and the seat of the Orcadian bishop, Christ Church. Similar to the formula of Þorfinnr’s burial, the saga recounts, “var Magnús jarl færðr til Hrosseyjar ok grafinn at Kristkirkju þeiri, er Þorfinnr jarl lét gera” (“Earl Magnús was brought to Mainland and buried at Christ

¹⁸⁷ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 103.

¹⁸⁸ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 111.

¹⁸⁹ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 52.

Church, which Þorfinnr had built”).¹⁹⁰ The selection of Christ Church has significant implications and consequences within the narrative; while the location of his burial places Magnús at the center of earls’ and bishops’ base of power established by Earl Þorfinnr, Magnús’ presence at Christ Church raises the church’s significance as the site of Magnús’ miracles and fledgling cult.

With such a tidy narrative laid out in the saga, all before the introduction of Rognvaldr, the saga presents the cult as an established entity that developed from Magnús’ death in c. 1117 to the official recognition and translation of his relics by Bishop Vilhjálmr c. 1137. While it is likely that a localized popular cult may have developed around the grave of Magnús during the two decades following his death, the saga makes it clear that it was not endorsed by Earl Hákon, his son Earl Páll, and, at first, Bishop Vilhjálmr.¹⁹¹ While Magnús’ enemies remained in power, it is unlikely that any official endorsement or patronage occurred related to Magnús; only when Rognvaldr arrives does a leader have the incentive to cultivate any popular support into a centralized cult around the shrine of his uncle. While St. Magnus Cathedral was the physical and spiritual locus of Magnús worship and pilgrimage, hagiographical patronage was also necessary to promote Magnús’s sanctity.

RÖGNVALDR AND THE CULT OF MAGNÚS

The oldest extant record we have of St. Magnús’ cult, in fact, is the above mentioned account (c. 1200) cited in *Orkneyinga saga*. Yet, in the fourteenth-century *Magnús saga lengri* (“the longer saga of Magnús”), there are multiple references to an

¹⁹⁰ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 112.

¹⁹¹ See chapter 2 for more details about Vilhjálmr’s role in the establishment of Magnús’ cult and his possible political motivations for doing so.

earlier *Vita* by a certain Master Robert.¹⁹² According to this later saga, “Meistari Roðbert dictaði þessa sögu á látínu til virðingar ok sæmdar inum heilaga Magnúsi Eyjajarli at liðnum tuttugu vetrum frá hans písl” (“Master Robert composed this saga in Latin for the value and benefit of the holy Magnus, Earl of Orkney, after twenty winters had passed from his passion”).¹⁹³ This passage suggests that the author of *Magnús saga lengri* had before him a text written twenty years following Magnús’ death. If this dating is accurate, Master Robert’s *Vita* coincides with the rise of Rognvaldr as the sole earl of Orkney and the translation of Magnús’ relics by Vilhjálmr and may have contributed to the overtly hagiographical elements extant in *Orkneyinga saga*.¹⁹⁴ While some scholars associate Master Robert with Robert of Cricklade from England, Haki Antonsson argues that the relationship between Master Robert’s *Vita* of Magnús and Robert of Cricklade’s *Vita et miracula* of Thomas Becket have more to do with hagiographic conventions of the ‘holy sufferer’ than a shared author.¹⁹⁵ Still, the links between the fragments of St. Magnús’ *Vita* and English hagiographical traditions are strong and Magnús’ cult derives from southern examples, thus mirroring the Anglo-Norman style of St. Magnus Cathedral from this same period. It is possible that Rognvaldr patronized both—*Vita* and cathedral—in his bid to gain and consolidate power through associations with his uncle.¹⁹⁶ For Earl Rognvaldr, the patronage of his uncle, described as martyred rather than murdered, not only increased his own prestige, but also discredited Earl Hákon and his heirs, including

¹⁹² Haki Antonsson, “Two Twelfth-Century Martyrs: St Thomas of Canterbury and St Magnús of Orkney,” *Sagas, Saints, and Settlements*, ed. by Gareth Williams and Paul Bibire, 41-64 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 42.

¹⁹³ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Magnús saga lengri,” 372.

¹⁹⁴ Phelpstead argues, “The strength of hagiographic influence on the account of St. Magnús is clear from comparison with the account of St Rognvaldr’s life, which shows little such influence. On the other hand, a comparison between *Orkneyinga saga* with *Magnúss saga lengri* demonstrates that hagiographic tendencies could be taken very much further than in *Orkneyinga saga*.” Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 11-12, 114.

¹⁹⁵ Haki Antonsson, “Two Twelfth-Century Martyrs,” 64.

¹⁹⁶ The relationship between English and Orcadian hagiography will be discussed in chapter 4.

Rognvaldr's immediate rival, Earl Páll.¹⁹⁷ As the murderer of a saint, through whom God worked many miracles, Earl Hákon was not only Rognvaldr's political antagonist, but also an antagonist of Church and God.¹⁹⁸ By cultivating this account, Rognvaldr inserted his own political power struggle into the narrative and landscape of the Orcadian Church.

Rognvaldr's association in the saga with Orkney's greatest earls, however, extends beyond his support of Magnús' cult to the act of patronage itself. In Kolr's advice to appeal to St. Magnús, he bids Rognvaldr to build a *steinmusteri* ("stone minster").¹⁹⁹ *Musteri* is a rare term in the saga corpus, especially compared to the more common *kirkja*, or "church." *Kirkja* appears 28 times in *Orkneyinga saga* in specific church names (e.g. Magnúskirkja, literally "Magnus Church"), church compounds (e.g. *kirkjudurr* or "church door"), and to designate the presence of a church generally. Alternatively, *musteri* (also spelled *mustari*, *mysteri*) appears only twice in *Orkneyinga saga*, both times

¹⁹⁷ Phelpstead contextualizes the "politics of sanctity" as part of "an active propaganda industry." Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 100.

¹⁹⁸ Haki Antonsson associates the relationship between Magnús and Hákon with that of David and Saul, especially with both Hákon and Saul visiting a soothsayer/witch to learn their futures. See Haki Antonsson, "Two Twelfth-Century Martyrs," 58.

¹⁹⁹ Like the English 'church,' *kirkja* is ubiquitous and can be used indiscriminately regardless of size, material, or status of a church in question. Occasionally, the term will be used with qualifying adjectives, explaining more about the structure in question (e.g. *steinkirkja* or stone church). *Musteri*, as it appears in Old Icelandic, has been traced by scholars to the Latin term *monasterium*. Yet, there is little evidence to suggest all *musteri* were monasteries. Translations of *Orkneyinga saga* have dealt with the term *musteri* in various ways that may provide a understanding of the term within the context of Orcadian architecture. For example, in early English translations of Old Icelandic, *musteri* was translated simply as 'church.' In the most recent translation by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, however, the term has been translated as "minster." The differentiation in English between minster and church reflects the selection of words in the original Old Iceland. Minster seems orthographically similar to *musteri* and seems to be an appropriate translation; yet minsters were originally Anglo-Saxon concepts and remain heavily loaded terms in architectural studies. Minster refers specifically to an Anglo-Saxon pre-parish system of church organization. While scholars believe that minsters were monastic communities that administered to the community, Sarah Foot argues that the distinction between minsters and other monastic communities in Anglo-Saxon England is a modern construction. Nevertheless, it is a helpful distinction within the translations here. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Richard Cleasby, "Kirkja," in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1874), 339. Radford, "Birsay and the Spread of Christianity to the North," 26. Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, 248. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, *Orkneyinga Saga*, 118. Sarah Foot, "Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Review of Terminology," in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe, 212-225 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

in reference to the patronage activities of powerful earls. The first appearance of *musteri* is when Þorfinnr returns to Orkney from pilgrimage to construct Christ Church. The saga records, “Hann sat jafnan í Byrgisheraði ok lét þar gera Kristskirkju, dýrligt musterí” (“He resided permanently in Birsay and built there Christ Church, a glorious minster”).²⁰⁰ The second appearance of this term is during Rognvaldr’s vow, when his father suggests he, “látir gera steinmusteri í Orkneyjum í Kirkjuvági” (“build a stone minster in Orkney in Kirkwall”).²⁰¹ While it is tempting to focus on the buildings’ similarities as the seats of the Orcadian bishops, and therefore an equivalent to the English word ‘cathedral,’ such a conclusion does not take into account other intertextual references to *kirkja* and *musteri* in both *Orkneyinga saga* and other medieval Icelandic texts.²⁰² Through vocabulary, the saga links Christ Church and St. Magnus Cathedral, as well as their patrons. This literary connection is only reinforced by the latter’s appropriation of the former’s status as the cathedral of Orkney and the shrine of St. Magnús.

These two passages are also significant in that they both record explicit references to construction—the act of patronage itself—of a church. The role of the patron is stressed through the periphrastic verb used in each case, *láta gera* (literally “let make” or “have built”), which is otherwise only applied in chapter 5 of *Orkneyinga saga*, when Earl Sigurðr Eysteinnsson (d. 892) builds a fortification in northern Scotland.²⁰³ The role of each earl as patron is reinforced when the saga reports their burials in their respective churches. As noted above, the saga uses an established burial formula for

²⁰⁰ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 80.

²⁰¹ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 159.

²⁰² The use of *musteri* in other Old Icelandic texts will be discussed in chapter 4 and chapter 5.

²⁰³ “Þar lét hann gera borg... [There he built a fortification...].” Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 8.

Porfinnr.²⁰⁴ His burial, which also evoked earlier examples of Orcadian mnemonic landscapes, continues to do so within the church that he built. For Rognvaldr, the saga records that he was buried in St. Magnus Cathedral shortly before recounting his canonization.

It is not clear whether the textual relationships that associate Rognvaldr with Porfinnr and St. Magnus Cathedral with Christ Church were included in oral and written accounts contemporary to Rognvaldr's life or were applied when *Orkneyinga saga* was compiled in c. 1200. Yet, a mid-twelfth-century manuscript fragment featuring the term *musteri* in another patronage context reveals that the term was in use during Rognvaldr's lifetime.²⁰⁵ The composition of St. Magnús' *Vita* by Master Robert in c. 1137, similarly, indicates that Rognvaldr or someone in his circle was aware of the strategic importance of texts to reinforce and circulate political legitimacy. While it may be impossible to prove that Rognvaldr fabricated these literary links between himself and his great-grandfather, this text would have shaped the way subsequent readers and listeners understood the earls and the landscape they built.

The very landscape that Rognvaldr constructed, however, provides key evidence to support that he did indeed fabricate this architectural link intentionally. The discussion above supports the location of Christ Church under St. Magnus Kirk in Birsay village. Specifically, Christ Church is phase three on that site and incorporated elements of the earlier stone oratory as its choir. There is no indication that Rognvaldr constructed St. Magnus Cathedral to look like the Christ Church of the mid-eleventh century; yet, in the twelfth century, Porfinnr's church was deconstructed to its foundation and a new church

²⁰⁴ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 82.

²⁰⁵ This manuscript and passage will be discussed in chapter 5.

was constructed on its footprint (see Figure 3.20). This fourth phase was undoubtedly the most ornate on the site. Unfortunately, the church was replaced and its ruins pulled down in 1773, so it is not possible to reconstruct it in its entirety. However, archaeologists discovered stone fragments that point to skillfully carved Romanesque details, including a chamfered base course and pilasters still in situ (Figure 3.28) and other sculptural details (Figure 3.29).²⁰⁶ The existence and quality of these carvings distinguish Christ Church from the approximately 40 known church ruins in Orkney from this period, including the unadorned masonry of St. Nicholas Kirk in Ophir (Figure 3.30) and St. Mary's Kirk on Wyre (Figure 3.31), and testify to the site's continued importance after the transition of the bishop's seat and translation of Magnús' relics to Kirkwall.²⁰⁷ Moreover, this ornamentation, carved in red sandstone, closely resembles the work at St. Magnus Cathedral; one trapezoidal stone is an arch voussoir, indicating the presence of moulded semi-circular arches like those at St. Magnus Cathedral. A fragment of a corbel table, incised with a concentric groove, too, has a direct parallel with the corbel tables at St. Magnus Cathedral (Figure 3.32 and Figure 3.33). Currently on display in St. Magnus Kirk, a stone from an architectural moulding (Figure 3.34) shows similar affiliation with mouldings St. Magnus Cathedral (Figure 3.35). A weathered stone with a compass-drawn cross (Figure 3.36) and a lancet window (now set into the south wall of the eighteenth-century church) (Figure 3.37) are more difficult to date stylistically, though indicate continued interest and construction on the site sometime between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Barber, "Excavations at St. Magnus Kirk," 23-25.

²⁰⁷ Morris, *Birsay Bay Project*, 4.

²⁰⁸ Barber, "Excavations at St. Magnus Kirk," 23-25.

Architectural and stylistic relationships visually communicate key ties between different buildings and institutions. While younger buildings will often incorporate elements or styles of older, more historically significant buildings, it is not unusual for older sites to incorporate features of younger buildings. For example, Lindisfarne Priory (c. 1150) (Figure 3.38) was reconstructed in the twelfth century to resemble Durham Cathedral (Figure 3.39) to reinforce the relationship between the two cult sites related to St. Cuthbert, Lindesfarne being his original burial site and Durham being his contemporary shrine. The carved architectural details of phase four under St. Magnus Kirk required the skill of a mason and transport of red sandstone material, both of which were available in Kirkwall after 1137 for the construction of St. Magnus Cathedral. It is not inconceivable that Rognvaldr diverted some of his resources for a more ostentatious church on the site of his uncle's first grave and shrine in order to associate the two holy sites. The repeated saga references to Christ Church, "which Porfinnr built," then, may have been an important distinction for later audiences who encountered Rognvaldr's later, more elaborate construction in the landscape.

While the similarities in form may be attributed to shared materials and labor from St. Magnus Cathedral, the reconstruction of Christ Church suggests a retained significance of the site in the twelfth century and a possible connection with St. Magnus Cathedral. One likely explanation is the construction of a pilgrimage network dedicated to the worship of St. Magnús. Although it is not clear if Magnús' popular cult developed in its entirety before or after Rognvaldr's patronage of St. Magnus Cathedral and the *Magnús Vita*, by the mid- to late twelfth century, pilgrims traveled from throughout the

North Sea region to visit Orkney and its saint.²⁰⁹ A small cross mold, most likely used to produce pilgrimage souvenirs, was found at St. Magnus Cathedral during the early nineteenth century and suggests the cathedral actively catered to such pilgrims (Figure 3.40). The construction of St. Magnus Church on the island of Egilsay (see figure 2.18), where St. Magnús was martyred, and the reconstruction of Christ Church (eventually renamed St. Magnus Kirk), where St. Magnús was first buried, in the mid-twelfth century may have been an intentionally cultivated pilgrimage network around the islands culminating in a visit to the saint's shrine in St. Magnus Cathedral.²¹⁰ The intervisibility between Egilsay and Kirkwall (Figure 3.41) further suggests an intentional relationship between the two sites.

Although Rognvaldr moved the site of the cathedral and Magnús' shrine to Kirkwall, he did not disconnect himself from Porfinnr, Porfinnr's church, and the "time-depth" of that particular site. The reconstruction of Christ Church along similar stylistic lines as St. Magnus Cathedral, in fact, visually maintains the links within the landscape just as the literary vocabulary of the churches maintains their links in *Orkneyinga saga*. It is not clear why Rognvaldr moved the cathedral and his own base of power from the established Birsay to Kirkwall, but the saga and GIS viewshed analysis offer two possible suggestions.²¹¹ First, Kirkwall is associated in the saga with Rognvaldr's Orcadian namesake, Rognvaldr Brúsason. The saga mentions that "Rognvaldr [Brúsason]

²⁰⁹ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 57, Haki Antonsson, "A Norwegian in Durham: an Anatomy of a Miracle in Reginald of Durham's *Libellus de admirandis beati Cuthberti*," in *West of Sea: Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement before 1300*, ed. Beverley Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor, and Gareth Williams, 195-208 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

²¹⁰ While there was some debate in the twentieth century about the date of St. Magnus Church on Egilsay, Eric Fernie compares the shape of its tower to examples in East Anglia and northern Germany to conclude that it is a mid-twelfth century church, not the earlier church that Magnús prayed in before his martyrdom. Eric Fernie, "St. Magnus Church, Egilsay," 158-159.

²¹¹ See Appendix I for more information about the generation of viewsheds for this project.

jarl sat í Kirkjuvági ok dró þangat öll fong, þau sem hann þurfti at hafa til vetrsetu, hafði þar fjölmenni mikit ok rausn” (“Earl Rognvaldr [Brúsason] resided in Kirkwall and brought there all things which he needed to have for winter. He had there a great many people and great splendor”).²¹² By taking residence in Kirkwall, Rognvaldr Kolsson reinforces his own claim to power through the first Rognvaldr and further distinguishes himself from his rival, Páll, whose ecclesiastic and political power centered in Birsay. St. Magnús’ relics were translated before Rognvaldr gained control of the islands; such a move may have been premeditated based on the assumption that he would gain control only of the half of the islands Magnús originally controlled. After Páll’s disappearance and Rognvaldr gained complete control of Orkney, the stylistic affinity between St. Magnús Cathedral and Christ Church would reunite these two key sites.

The strategic position of Kirkwall within Orkney may have been another reason Rognvaldr resided and built his cathedral there. Churches were key visual symbols in the landscape and, throughout the north, they were often placed at key crossroads and high vantage points. Using GIS viewshed analysis, it is possible to map medieval visibility of St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall and to hypothesize the visibility of a church of that scale in Birsay. While a church in Birsay would have been visible and easily accessible to the sea, its orientation is definitively western facing toward the major route to the Irish Sea and the Norse settlements in the Scottish Hebrides, Dublin, and the Isle of Man (Figure 3.42). During Porfinnr’s reign, raiding was still frequent and Norse settlements were expanding along the Irish Sea, and this position would have been strategic to control

²¹² Finnbogi Guðmundsson, “Orkneyinga saga,” 73.

traffic and trade along Orkney's coast.²¹³ The location of Kirkwall for the cathedral and the height of the tower, however, provide strong sightlines both north and south of Orkney along the maritime routes to Norway and Scotland (Figure 3.43). Both kingdoms were expanding in the twelfth century, and, consequently, foreign pressure and interaction increased on Orkney from both directions. Kirkwall is located at the north side of an isthmus, a location accessible from landings on the north and south side of Mainland according to the saga. Such a strategic location would allow someone on the tower to monitor maritime traffic and, in turn, someone approaching the islands to see the cathedral; on a clear day, the tower of St. Magnus Cathedral can be seen from the northern coast of Scotland to the south and St. Magnus Church in Egilsay to the north. While Buckham High Hossack, in 1900, recorded that the tower of St. Magnus Cathedral is visible from the Scottish mainland on a clear day, a voyage through the Pentland Firth confirms that the visibility of the cathedral is limited to a narrow strip approaching to the south (Figure 3.44).²¹⁴ This would have been beneficial for traders and pilgrims arriving by sea, but also a way to proclaim the power of Rognvaldr to his rivals or any visiting travelers. In this new position, St. Magnus Cathedral's tower would have articulated St. Magnús's domain and Rognvaldr's control to both Scottish and Norwegian visitors.

CONCLUSION

In Orkney, the relationship between earls, their predecessors, and the landscape was tightly interwoven. The initial Norse settlers appropriated previous Pictish sites to

²¹³ Crawford, "Thorfinn, Christianity and Birsay: What the saga tells us and archaeology reveals," in *The World of the "Orkneyinga saga": The Broad-cloth Viking Trip*, ed. Olwyn Owen, 88-110 (Kirkwall: Orkney Islands Council, 2006), 93.

²¹⁴ Buckham Hugh Hossack, *Kirkwall in the Orkneys* (Kirkwall, William Peace & Son, 1900), 29.

legitimize their conquest of the islands, while subsequent Norse chieftains reinforced their claim to power and landscape by increasing the ‘time-depth’ of their farm mounds. The reuse of burials derived from imported Scandinavian traditions, but the reuse of unrelated, prehistoric monuments and farms was a uniquely Orcadian development. When Þorfinnr first established Christ Church, he similarly appropriated an earlier Christian site and building. As the site of his grave, the church was also incorporated into the established mnemonic landscape of his pagan predecessors. Rǫgnvaldr, too, appropriated Orcadian traditions and the legacy of Orkney’s most influential preceding earls to legitimize his tenuous claim. His name and the location of his new base of power in Kirkwall drew from Earl Rǫgnvaldr Brúason, who shared similar circumstances as Rǫgnvaldr and remained a great earl in popular memory decades after his death. Rǫgnvaldr also invoked St. Magnús, his uncle and local cult figure, to legitimize his claim Magnús’ half of the islands. The development of Magnús’ cult and possibly additional sites of pilgrimage expanded the saint’s significance and, consequently, Rǫgnvaldr’s own notoriety.

Rǫgnvaldr also associated himself directly with Earl Þorfinnr, remembered as one of Orkney’s most powerful earls, through the patronage of his church. Both figures dominate the saga, travel on pilgrimage, display support for the islands’ bishop, and construct cathedrals at the center of their power. Yet, while these similarities invite comparison between these figures, perhaps even with earl Þorfinnr providing a saga typology for Rǫgnvaldr, the earls are by no means operating within the same societal values. As Þorfinnr displays characteristics familiar to old Viking leadership (pillaging, murder, and conquest) before building his church and administering his domain,

Rognvaldr displays characteristics of new romantic chivalry (skill in poetry, athletics, and trade) that link him more firmly with the traditions of continental Europe. Rognvaldr himself is eventually absorbed within the Christian framework when he is declared a saint. Yet, it is this action of patronage (*láta gera*) of a *musteri* that links both leaders. This connection is reinforced by the later reconstruction of Christ Church by Rognvaldr in a style recalling his own St. Magnus Cathedral.

Within Orkney, Rognvaldr's claims for the title of earl were ultimately successful. The cathedral was eventually completed, the cult of St. Magnús flourished, and the legacy of both were preserved and circulated throughout the North Atlantic and North Sea in *Orkneyinga saga* for over 850 years. Rognvaldr himself retained power, albeit eventually with his co-heir Haraldr Maddaðarson, until his death in battle in 1158. Rognvaldr was even laid to rest in his own cathedral and canonized, though the saga gives little indication that he was particularly holy.²¹⁵ Rognvaldr's claims outside of Orkney, however, are more difficult to gauge. The visibility of St. Magnus Cathedral from the northern coast of Scotland and from the northern route to Norway testify to increased emphasis on these networks. Continued pressure from both kingdoms, however, would eventually come.

²¹⁵ For a discussion of Rognvaldr's sanctity, see Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 104-109.

CHAPTER 4:
A ROYAL CLAIM WITHIN THE NORTH SEA WORLD

*Sigurðr konungr gaf Kala Kolssyni
Orkneyjar hálfar við Pál jarl
Hákonarson ok jarlsnafn með.²¹⁶*

King Sigurðr granted Kali Kolsson
half of Orkney with Earl Páll
Hákonarson and with it the title of
earl.

According to the saga, the Norwegian King Sigurðr Jorsalfar Magnússon granted Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson his uncle's half of the Orkney earldom and gave him the title of earl. This apparently feudal relationship is not rare in the saga. In fact, the direct power of the Norwegian kings over the Orkney Islands is one of *Orkneyinga saga*'s main reoccurring themes. King Harald hárfagri travels west over the North Sea, raids the British Isles, conquers Orkney Islands, and bestows the islands to supporter Earl Rognvaldr of Møre and his brother Sigurðr.²¹⁷ King Óláfr Trygvasson travels to Orkney and forces its conversion to Christianity.²¹⁸ King Magnús berfœtr Ólafsson kidnaps Earl Páll and Earl Erlendr and presses a young St. Magnús into service on his ship.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, scholars like Barbara Crawford recognize the application of later political relationships on earlier periods in the saga and argue for Orkney's autonomy or semi-autonomy until the eleventh century.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Finnbogi Guðmundsson, "Orkneyinga saga," 140.

²¹⁷ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 4-6.

²¹⁸ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 12.

²¹⁹ *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 37-39.

²²⁰ Barbara E. Crawford, *The Northern Earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from AD 870 to 1470* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2013), 238-242.

As the power of the Scottish and Norwegian kingdoms expanded, however, the earls' power became increasingly divided as Orkney was subsumed within foreign political frameworks, with the earls answering to Scotland for the Caithness territory on the Scottish mainland and to Norway for the island territories. Yet, this loss of power was not predetermined and it would be surprising if the earls gave up the autonomy they enjoyed without resistance. This chapter argues that the religious development and architectural patronage of Porfinnr and Rognvaldr, especially, were the manifestations of this resistance. By engaging in the same trends as their neighboring peers, including English, Scottish, and Norwegian kings, these earls made claims that they, too, held the legitimate right to control the Orkney territories within the expectations of North Sea rulers.

Rognvaldr's actions positioned Orkney as a separate region, with its own dynastic history, cult, and leader within a framework recognizable to royal peers and competitors. The Norman dukes, after their conquest of England, established dynastic narratives, supported the Anglo-Saxon 'kingmaker' cult of St. Cuthbert, and constructed monumental architecture, including Durham Cathedral, to legitimize their control. The Scottish kings, too, supported Cuthbert, constructed an elaborate network of churches and reformed monasteries, including Dunfermline Abbey, and developed the cult of Queen Margaret of Wessex, a member of the ancient Anglo-Saxon dynasty. Even various Norwegian royal claimants justified their right to the throne through elaborate saga narratives and geneologies, and developed the cult of King Óláfr Haraldsson at Nidaros Cathedral (late eleventh to twelfth century). Interestingly, these 'kingmaker' and dynastic cults all appropriated the same Anglo-Norman architectural language across political

divides. Within this shared North Sea context, St. Magnús takes on the kingmaker status for Rognvaldr in Orkney, while St. Magnus Cathedral appropriates the style of other kingmakers' cult sites.

The previous chapter argued that Earl Rognvaldr carefully inserted himself within the Orcadian narrative and landscape by associating himself with his martyred uncle, St. Magnús, as well as Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson and Earl Rognvaldr Brúsason. In doing so, he legitimized his claim to the earldom as the rightful heir of the realm, despite his foreign birth and patrimony. Yet, the actions of Earl Rognvaldr reached broader audiences than his Orcadian supporters and enemies. The development of an Orcadian history through the saga, the cultivation of St. Magnús' cult, and the construction of St. Magnus Cathedral reflect the broader political strategies used by the Norman, Scottish, and Norwegian kings also aiming to legitimize their power during this time. By placing Orkney within this independent framework, Rognvaldr presented himself less as an earl as the title is understood today and more as a king in his own right. Such a move would have been necessary to rebuff the encroaching political reach of the Scottish and Norwegian kings and to retain the autonomy Orkney and its earls had enjoyed for almost three centuries. Although Orkney itself was never established as a kingdom and the earls lost rather than gained power at the end of the twelfth century, Rognvaldr declared himself equal to these kings through text and landscape, rejecting the external pressure to subjugate the islands and hinting at his own royal ambitions.

EARLS AND ORKNEY'S EARLY POLITICAL AUTONOMY

Before discussing political patronage in neighboring lands, it is necessary to dispel the feudal assumptions surrounding the title of “earl.” According to *Orkneyinga saga*, King Haraldr hárfagri of Norway led the conquest of the Orkney Islands in the ninth century and appointed his supporter, Rognvaldr, the Norwegian Earl of Møre (late ninth century), as earl of the Orkney Islands. Yet, while *Orkneyinga saga*, the twelfth-century *Historia Norwegiæ*, and Duald Mac Firbis’ three *Fragments* mention Earl Rognvaldr of Møre and his family as the leaders of this conquest, King Haraldr hárfagri is only present in *Orkneyinga saga*.²²¹ His absence in other sources challenges the accuracy of the saga account and undermines any direct participation in the political rule of Orkney. Comparing *Orkneyinga saga* to external annals and sources, none of which place Haraldr near the British Islands, Barbara Crawford concludes that the account of Haraldr’s foreign raid was most likely exaggerated by the thirteenth-century saga authors.

She argues:

The thirteenth-century writers were of course well aware that the kings of their own time laid claim to supremacy over all the ‘skattlands’ (tributary colonies) in the west. It was only natural that when writing of the events of four centuries earlier they should apply the thinking of their own time and interpret the skaldic claims for [Haraldr’s] conquests in the west too widely.²²²

Crawford’s evaluation of the sources is significant for it challenges established relationships between Norway as a kingdom and Orkney as an earldom.²²³ Increased

²²¹ Crawford, *Scandinavia Scotland*, 52-53.

²²² Crawford, *Scandinavia Scotland*, 52.

²²³ Some scholars, however, do not embrace Crawford’s use of absence as evidence. William Thomson, for example, thinks that the expeditions should not be completely rejected due to external corroboration. Arguing that King Haraldr easily could have plundered the British Isles as the sagas claim, Thomson proposes that the expedition was not recorded in other annals because it was more of an “internal Norse affair of no great consequence.” Even this conclusion, however, would seem to suggest that King Haraldr’s

scrutiny of the sagas and other sources by Norwegian historians contributes to this reevaluation by reconsidering Haraldr's status as king. While the Icelandic sagas like *Heimskringla* record that Haraldr defeated local chieftains to unite Norway and become king, Sverre Bagge proposes Haraldr was a "great magnate" rather than a formally recognized or institutionalized king.²²⁴ This interpretation fits with the evaluation of chieftains as the lords of men, rather than land, during this time. Early chieftains earned retainers through kinship networks, wealth, and charisma and exercised regional authority with other chieftains at assemblies called *þings*.²²⁵ As individual chieftains gained more power, it was possible for one chieftain to become a great magnate or overlord, as it seems Haraldr was able to do.²²⁶ Overlords, moreover, were not restricted to terrestrial boundaries, and Danish dynasties were also able to proclaim themselves overlord of Norway in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Despite this status, however, the earls of Lade in Northern Norway exercised de facto control of local affairs.²²⁷ By the thirteenth century, though, the claim that Haraldr, as the first in his dynasty, conquered Orkney helped to legitimize his successors' expansionist ambitions.

conquest was more consistent with Viking raids than territorial conquest and power shifts in Orkney. Thomson, *This History of Orkney*, 16. Crawford, *Scandinavia Scotland*, 55.

²²⁴ Sverre Bagge notes that chieftains maintain an important presence in the sagas as mediators and local leaders. Early kings engaged in the same political and cultural interactions, yet on an extended scale. Kingship, however, does become increasingly centralized and ideological as the centuries progress. It is important to note that feudalism does not take hold in the Scandinavian countries as it did in England and on the continent. Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 132-133.

²²⁵ This system was retained in Iceland centuries longer than Norway and even Orkney, where a more hierarchical structure was adopted. Sawyer and Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 49-51.

²²⁶ Overlordships were not restricted to modern political boundaries and it was not uncommon for kings of Denmark to become overlords or kings of other Scandinavian countries. Alliances, rather, applied to people, not land. It is, therefore, not surprising that any unification that Haraldr was able to achieve fractured quickly after his death. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, 125. Sawyer and Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 51-54.

²²⁷ Bagge, *Society and Politics*, 124.

Regardless of Haraldr's participation (or lack thereof) in the subjugation of the Orkney Islands, there is no evidence that he ruled or influenced the islands directly during his lifetime. The power of the earls of Lade in Norway, like in Orkney, underscores the frequent independence of this position. While the title of earl now implies a hierarchical feudal system under a king, especially as it developed in the English system, Norse earls before the twelfth century exercised significant autonomy over their own regions and affairs. This inconsistency between title and power is likely due to the application of later political concepts to earlier eras by thirteenth-century writers.²²⁸ Although the Old Icelandic *jarl* is often translated to English as "earl," James H. Barnett argues that this originally Old Icelandic title more accurately describes tributary kings or "formerly independent rulers" in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. It is only after the turn of the thirteenth century that the Scottish and Norwegian kings began to exert direct control over these titles through the territories of Orkney and Caithness, respectively.²²⁹

While this discussion may seem an issue of semantics, these terms actively shape modern interpretation of the political situation presented in *Orkneyinga saga* and, consequently, inform modern expectations of Orkney's history and landscape. Hence, it is important to establish here that the Orcadian earls who descended from Rognvaldr of Møre did not hold Orkney as a royal agent, but rather as Norse chieftains or overlords

²²⁸ An interesting confrontation between the titles "earl" and "king" occurs in the late twelfth-century *Historia Norwegiae*. This account records that, after the death of King Haraldr hárfagri's sons and heirs, a man named Hákon "appropriated the crown of all Norway by his authority as jarl, but preferred that title to being known as king, in the same way as his predecessors." This title is stressed more than once during the account of Earl Hákon and his sons and suggests that *jarl* was an older designation that did not limit one's power. Ekrem and Mortensen argue that the author stressed the earl title to distinguish Hákon as an exception within an account about the legitimate kings of Norway (descendants of King Haraldr), showing how 'kingship' became increasingly important in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ekrem and Mortensen, *Historia Norwegiae*, 89, 201-202.

²²⁹ Barnett, "The Pirate Fisherman," 305.

who conquered and settled in Orkney on their own initiative. The linguistic evidence from *Orkneyinga saga* and the landscape further supports this autonomy. In the saga, the earls are sometimes referred to as chieftains, or *hǫfðingja*, and place names like Tingwall retain the traditional *þing* of an early multi-chieftain assembly site.²³⁰ Even the narrative of *Orkneyinga saga*, which comes at least in part from earlier oral accounts, supports this interpretation, for it recounts the earls' actions to expand their power in Orkney, with the Norwegian rulers only occasionally intervening when political rivals asked for monetary or militaristic resources in exchange for some type of personal alliegence.

If it is possible to eliminate the feudal presumption regarding the relationship between Norway and Orkney, that Orkney was peripheral to a greater, more centralized region, the evidence can be recontextualized without political and cultural bias. Looking at the entire North Sea region, it is clear that even by the eleventh century, there was no direct definition of the nation states that would come to exist today. At different points in this era, earls controlled large swaths of Norway, Danish kings proclaimed themselves overlords of Norway, and one Danish king, Knútr inn ríki (1016- 1035), even gained control of both kingdoms and England, converting the North Sea into a 'Norse Lake.' Orkney did not develop as a territory destined for inevitable suppression by larger kingdoms as an earldom. Similar to the *rí* who ruled over the subdivided *tuatha* of Ireland, the *mormaers* and *reges* in the outer provinces of Scotland, the *brenin* in Wales, and the kings of the Isle of Mann and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the establishment of

²³⁰ Earl Hlǫðvir, for example, “hann varð hǫfðingi mikill ok víðlendr” [was another great chieftain]. Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 24. Even St. Magnús describes himself as a chieftain before his murder when asking to die by a blow on the dead rather than beheading, saying it is “eigi samir at hoggva hǫfðingja sem þjófa” (“not fitting to strike a chieftain as a thief”). Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Orkneyinga saga*, 111.

the earls of Orkney as local autonomous rulers reflects larger political patterns in the British Isles and North Sea in the ninth through eleventh centuries.²³¹

In the eleventh century, a new mode of kingship developed as the Normans sought to legitimize and consolidate their conquest of Anglo-Saxon England. To resist the consolidation and expansion of the Norman kings' power in their own territories, neighboring rulers adopted Norman patronage trends to present themselves as the Normans' equals. Scottish and Norwegian kings both embraced a new scale of religious, architectural, and literary patronage to consolidate control in their own lands and express power to competitors. The Orkney earls, including Porfinnr and Rognvaldr, did the same. The Norman, Scottish, and Norwegian kings are remembered as kings, their territories as kingdoms, because their efforts were more successful and long-lasting than the earls'. The modern nations of England, Scotland, and Norway look back to these royal figures as foundational to their own identity. While Porfinnr initiated the steps of this consolidation process in Orkney by establishing a bishopric, cathedral, and international rapport, the rising Norwegian King Magnús Ólafsson smothered these efforts in his own attempt to establish Norwegian control on the British Isles. Rognvaldr, then, picked up this claim and embedded it within the expectations and trends of the twelfth century, including the monumental architectural patronage and the development of a royal saint's cult. Orkney did not exist in isolation and any political claims it made needed to be communicated to a

²³¹ The language of surviving texts and the identity of the author of these texts both contribute to how these titles are recorded and described. The etymologies of many of these titles most likely stem from the vernacular language of the time (such as Gaelic or Old Icelandic) and are the most accurate records of how rulers and cultures described these political and social positions. The use of the title 'king' for these early and smaller independent territories, however, in the case of the kings of the Isle of Mann or Anglo-Saxon England, appears to come from Latin traditions, such as Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* or Rushen Abbey's *Chronica Regum Manniae at Insularum*. Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles*, 91, 99.

larger audience, especially to other rulers aiming to expand and consolidate their power at the expense of established, yet smaller rulers.

POLITICAL CLAIMS AND CULTS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

During the early Middle Ages, Anglo-Saxon England—like Scotland and Norway—was fractured into different territories, each ruled by a royal dynasty of kings. In the tenth century, the kings of Wessex, who had grown in power since the reign of King Alfred the Great (871-899), began to consolidate control of the other kingdoms and style themselves as the overlords or kings of the English. Documents of King Athelstan (924-939) and Aethelred II (978-1013/1014-1016) from the tenth and eleventh centuries, for example, describe the West Saxon kings as the “king of the English,” the “ruler of the English and governor of the other adjoining nations round them,” and “emperor by providence of God of all Albion.”²³² While such statements appear straightforward, Robin Frame argues that they were really political propaganda reflecting the ambitions of the Wessex kings rather than historical truth.²³³ William E. Kapelle similarly challenges this illusion of unity, particularly with the Northern and Scandinavian-based territories of England that developed during the ninth century. The Anglo-Saxon kings were often symbolic overlords with little or no direct power. Even in more directly controlled areas, there was still “cherished memories of independence” that would occasionally surface to threaten central royal control.²³⁴ Allegiances and identity were not fixed during this era, and political unity was based on an individual personality, including personal

²³² Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles*, 16.

²³³ Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles*, 16.

²³⁴ Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North*, 13-14.

relationships, cultural similarities, and fluctuating alliances.²³⁵ These expressions of centralized rule and control were especially important for rulers attempting to create a political mythology that united an amalgamation of different cultures or previously independent political groups.²³⁶ These narratives created a cultural memory that unified different peoples through shared history and ruling figures.²³⁷

For the House of Wessex, the lack of support and ineffective control north of the Humber River was a reoccurring problem. To quell this “Northumbrian problem” and legitimize their claims to local populations, the Wessex kings patronized St. Cuthbert, a key cult figure in Northumbria in the seventh century.²³⁸ St. Cuthbert spent his life living and teaching in Northumbria, the northernmost Anglo-Saxon kingdom, as a monk at Melrose and as a prior and bishop at Lindisfarne Priory. During his lifetime, St. Cuthbert gained a holy reputation throughout the region for his simple piety and ability to perform miracles.²³⁹ Even when he retreated as a hermit to a small island off of the coast of

²³⁵ Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles*, 13. Although there are instances within *Orkneyinga Saga* that present the Orcadian earls as subjugated to the Norwegian king from an early age, these allegiances were personal and did not indicate a permanent feudal hierarchy. In many cases, these allegiances only lasted only as long as both parties lived, allowing rulers to be flexible with how they interpreted past oaths made by themselves or their predecessors. During this time such allegiances were often diplomatic and symbolic, reflecting earlier practices of overlordship, rather than a sign of feudalism. For example, the saga records that when Earl Porfinnr Sigurðarson was in Norway, King Óláfr forced Porfinnr to submit to him. Because he was in foreign land without support, Porfinnr was forced to do so. Porfinnr later argues that this submission was not a legitimate way for the king to claim to his Orcadian inheritance. *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 19, 26. This flexible and temporary form of allegiance can be found in Scotland during the same period. King Edgar of Scotland (1074-1107), for example, subordinated himself to King William I (1056-1100) of England in order to gain his inheritance, for he did not have the resources to do so on his own. Yet, when King William I died in 1100, this immediately freed Edgar from the personal homage to William that had been extracted from him in 1095 as the price of his restoration. He no longer held his kingdom by the ‘gift’ of William I but as an independent ruler. Ian W. Walker, *Lords of Alba: The Making of Scotland* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006), 188.

²³⁶ Frame points out that, while there was some reality to the unified concepts of England and, later, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, these areas were largely subdivided into smaller political sub-kingdoms and regional groups despite common cultural heritage. Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles*, 9-10.

²³⁷ Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 122-128.

²³⁸ Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 84, 94.

²³⁹ S. Baring-Gould, *Lives of the Northumbrian Saints* (Lampeter: Llanerch Enterprises, 1990), 52-53.

Lindisfarne, St. Cuthbert welcomed many visitors who wished to visit with the pious saint, including his brethren at Lindisfarne, Northumbrian pilgrims, and even King Egfrid of Northumbria.²⁴⁰

After his death in 687, St. Cuthbert's body was buried at Lindisfarne. When his uncorrupted body was exhumed eleven years later, his sanctity was confirmed, his reputation as a saint greatly increased, and Lindisfarne developed as prominent cult and pilgrimage site.²⁴¹ St. Cuthbert was initially revered locally throughout the territories that would eventually become northern England and southern Scotland. Many of his most famous miracles were intimately connected to the Northumbrian royal family and St. Cuthbert's early cult and *Vitae* were promoted in order to legitimize the political unification of the two provinces of Northumbria, Bernicia and Deira, under one ruler.²⁴² St. Cuthbert's popularity, however, spread during the eighth and ninth centuries throughout the British Isles and the European continent. Mechthild Gretsch credits this growth of popularity to St. Cuthbert's early hagiography, for Bede was well-known and his works, particularly *Historia ecclesiastica* with a description of Cuthbert, circulated widely.²⁴³

By the late ninth century, the House of Wessex embraced Cuthbert as its rulers sought to expand and legitimize their power in the north. According to Byrhtferth of Ramsey (c. 970-1020), for example, Cuthbert appeared to King Alfred the Great in a vision, revealing the time and place the king should meet his Norse enemies. After his

²⁴⁰ Baring-Gould, *Lives of the Northumbrian Saints*, 59-61.

²⁴¹ Hagiographic writings were a key part of the development and circulation of Cuthbert's cult. St. Cuthbert's first *Vita* was composed shortly after this exhumation by an anonymous monk at Lindisfarne between 699 and 705. Additionally, Bede expanded upon St. Cuthbert's hagiography by crafting a metrical *Vita* c. 705, a prose *Vita* c. 721, and an extensive description of St. Cuthbert in his *Historia ecclesiastica* in 731. Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 67-68.

²⁴² Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 69. Baring-Gould, *Lives of the Northumbrian Saints*, 61, 65-66.

²⁴³ Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 73.

success in battle, Alfred “forever thereafter was terrible and invincible to his enemies and held St. Cuthbert in especial veneration.”²⁴⁴ This account expands in the succeeding centuries, surviving in the late tenth- or eleventh-century *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*. This text relates how St. Cuthbert appeared to King Alfred disguised as a pilgrim and asked for food. After King Alfred readily shared his limited food supply, St. Cuthbert appeared to him in a dream, revealed his true identity, and explained how he could defeat the Norsemen.²⁴⁵

After Alfred’s reign, his successors continued to patronize Cuthbert to exert their claims in the north. Kings Edward the Elder (899-924), Æthelstan, and Edmund (939-946) each supported the saint’s shrine. Æthelstan, for example, gave a manuscript containing Bede’s two lives of St. Cuthbert and liturgical material relevant to his cult to the monastic community caring for St. Cuthbert’s relics (Figure 4.1).²⁴⁶ This was the same King Æthelstan who first claimed to be “King of the English” and attempted to exert his influence over the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms north of the Humber River. While this gift may have been one of personal piety, it also would have helped Æthelstan gain the support of the monastic community of St. Cuthbert, which held significant political sway in the region.²⁴⁷ Similar to their attempt to unite England under their rule, the Anglo-Saxon kings called on this particular local saint to help unify Northumbrian peoples under a shared cult allegiance. Cuthbert consequently became a strategic

²⁴⁴ Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 79.

²⁴⁵ Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 78.

²⁴⁶ The manuscript given by Aethelstan to the community of St. Cuthbert is Corpus Christi College 183. Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 75.

²⁴⁷ Despite any political benefits of gifting this manuscript to the monks of St. Cuthbert, Gretsch believes that “the fact that King Aethelstan with all his expertise in the cult of the saints should have singled out Cuthbert for such special attention in a prestigious manuscript surely reveals his deep personal devotion to the saint.” Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 84, 94.

“supernatural kingmaker” for the House of Wessex as they expanded their control in the north.²⁴⁸

CONQUEST AND APPROPRIATION IN NORMAN ENGLAND

During Wessex’s attempts to consolidate the English kingdoms, the dukes of Normandy were similarly expanding control of their recently granted territory. The establishment of Normandy was initiated c. 911 when King Charles the Simple gave the Viking leader Rollo land in Frankia along the southern North Sea coast on the condition that Rollo be baptized and defend the land against other invading Norsemen.²⁴⁹ Rollo accepted and took the Christian name Robert (911-227). Dukes, like earls, held more independent power at this time. By the tenth century, Robert’s descendants started to make their own claims legitimizing their control of Normandy based on Christian ideology, commissioning historical narratives of their dynasty. One century after Robert’s baptism, Dudo of St. Quentin wrote *Historia Normannorum* at the behest of Duke Robert II (996-1026). In this account, Dudo recounts his ancestor Robert’s dream before he arrived in Frankia:

While he was still staying on top of that mountain, he saw about the base of it many thousands of birds of different kinds and various colours, but with red left wings, extending in such numbers and so far and so wide that he could no catch sight of where they ended, however hard he looked. And they went one after the other in harmonious incoming flights and sought the spring on the mountain and washed themselves, swimming together as they do when the rain is coming; and when they had all been anointed by this miraculous dipping, they all ate together in a suitable place, without

²⁴⁸ Catherine Keene, *Saint Margaret, Queen of Scots: A Life in Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), 98. Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 96.

²⁴⁹ Nick Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity, 911-1154* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 1, 19-20.

being separated into genera or species, and without any disagreement or dispute, as if they were friends sharing food.²⁵⁰

This dream acts as a sign from God that Robert would unite various peoples (the different color birds) in harmony through his rule and the Christian faith.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the Norman dukes maintained contact with their Norse cousins into the eleventh century, providing safe harbor for them to sell their raided spoils.²⁵²

The Norman dukes also established key political alliances to enhance their own position. Robert II's sister, Emma of Normandy, for example, was married to King Æthelred "the Unready," the Wessex King of England. This was a significant relationship that brought her son, the future English King Edward the Confessor (1042-1066), to his uncle's Norman court during his exile from England when Danish forces displaced his father. In 1016, the Danish prince, Knútr inn ríki, who would eventually also become king of Denmark and Norway, completed his father's conquest of England and exiled all Anglo-Saxon contenders for the English throne. Emma's sons, as heirs of Æthelred, went to Normandy, while the heirs of Edmund Ironside went to central Europe. When Edward returned to England as king in 1042, he introduced many Norman aspects to court, including the Norman architecture of Westminster.

When Edward died in 1066 with no apparent heir, Norman Duke William of Normandy (1035-1087) claimed the throne as a relative of Emma and through his relationship with King Edward. Willaims' claim was questionable, yet he succeeded in defeating King Harold Godwinsson (d. 1066), a powerful Anglo-Saxon earl with family

²⁵⁰ Dudo of St. Quentin, *History of the Normans*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 29-30.

²⁵¹ Dudo of St. Quentin, *History of the Normans*, 30.

²⁵² Lauren Wood Breese, "The Persistence of Scandinavian Connections in Normandy in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries," *Viator* 8 (1977): 47-61.

relations with Knútr and Edward, who supposedly accepted the crown on Edward's deathbed.²⁵³ Duke William incorporated the historical and Christian narratives of Dudo of St. Quentin, in which Rollo/Robert and his heirs were destined to unify multiple peoples as anointed Christian rulers, to reinforce his comparatively weak claim for the English crown. The English Conquest itself was presented in text and image as one sanctioned by God. In the hegemonic history perpetuated by the Norman kings, William attempts to reclaim the English throne, which had been promised to him by King Edward.

The legitimacy of William's conquest and Norman rule featured in various ways in subsequent Norman histories, including William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi II ducis Normannorum* and Wace's twelfth-century *Roman de Rou*. Wace, for example, explains that Harold Godwinsson swore an oath to William over relics. When he claimed the throne for himself, he broke a holy vow. William sent messengers to the pope in Rome in order to explain Harold's deceit and gain support to "punish the perjurer in accordance with the judgment of the Holy Church. If it happened that God wanted [William] to conquer England, he would receive it from Saint Peter and serve no one other than God as a result."²⁵⁴ The pope, supporting William's claim, consequently gave William parting treasures and a relic of St. Peter's tooth.²⁵⁵ This religious legitimization, while not foolproof for the elimination of other royal contenders, nevertheless framed the conquest as one sanctioned by the Church in order to punish a perjurer.

The account of Harald's broken oath derives from an earlier Norman-sanctioned tradition, as evinced by its inclusion in the late eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry. In

²⁵³ Rushforth, *St. Margaret's Gospel-book*, 21-22.

²⁵⁴ Wace, *The History of the Norman People: Wace's "Roman de Rou,"* trans. Glyn S. Burgess (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 161.

²⁵⁵ Wace, *The History of the Norman People*, 161.

actuality a complex and sophisticated embroidery, the Bayeux Tapestry depicts a pro-Norman account of the conquest with Harold's oath upon relics to serve William as king and his later betrayal by claiming the kingdom himself. In this embroidered narrative, the hand of God appears blessing a church after the death of King Edward (Figure 4.2) and Halley's Comet appears in the sky, signaling the ascendance of a new king (Figure 4.3).²⁵⁶ The physical presence of God in these images suggests a strong religious legitimization not only of the Conquest, but also of subsequent Norman rule in England. These examples demonstrate the Christian model used to legitimize centralized kingship and how strategic interplay of text and art reinforced it.

The Norman Conquest did not immediately yield a unified kingdom, however. Just as the Anglo-Saxons proclaimed themselves overlords and kings of a highly divided English landscape, William encountered pockets of resistance, especially the lingering "Northumbrian problem" in the north. Since St. Cuthbert was already deeply entrenched within the Anglo-Saxon political and religious framework in this region as a "kingmaker," William strategically used the same patronage to legitimize his own rule while subduing the rebellious northern region. Like the Wessex kings before him, he visited Durham while in the North to pay homage to Cuthbert personally.²⁵⁷ The deference William and his supporters displayed to established Anglo-Saxon saints

²⁵⁶ Although R. Howard Bloch discusses the hand of God and Halley's Comet together, he suggests that they function differently within the Tapestry, for "the hand of God appears over Westminster Abbey in the scene of Edward's burial, yet Christian providence is balanced by Halley's Comet." Bloch, however, provides a twelfth-century quote that suggests that the presence of the comet was actually believed by medieval audiences to show God's support for William's rule. In 1133, Henry of Huntington makes a direct link between the comet and the legitimacy of William the Conqueror, for William was "crowned at Westminster by Ealdred, archbishop of York. Thus occurred a change in the right hand of God, which a huge comet had presaged at the beginning of the same year." R. Howard Bloch, *A Needle in the Right Hand of God: The Norman Conquest of 1066 and the Making and Meaning of the Bayeux Tapestry* (New York: Random House, 2006), vii, 38, 170.

²⁵⁷ Reilly, "Durham Cathedral: The Emergence of Anglo-Norman Architecture," 347.

indicates that these new leaders sought to fit themselves within the Anglo-Saxon royal and religious context, rather than supplant it.

In addition to using narrative and ritual to legitimize their power, after 1066 the new Norman aristocracy dramatically transformed the physical landscape in England, especially by importing their own architectural traditions to better meet their needs. In order to secure their new position in England, visually and militarily, Norman nobles quickly constructed castles and fortifications (including earthworks), throughout the landscape. Since Norman political power relied on religious institutions, dioceses were particularly important to the Norman administrative framework. Alongside many of these new castles and fortifications, the Normans also began to rebuild all significant Anglo-Saxon cathedrals and churches with a “thoroughness and speed unmatched at any other time in the middle ages.”²⁵⁸ These structures introduced novel architectural forms, dominated the English landscape, and represented the new Norman order. Although the first generation of churches and cathedrals constructed (from 1066-mid 1080s) represented a continuation of Norman architectural design in Normandy, epitomized by structures like St. Étienne in Caen, Normandy (1064) (Figure 4.4), the second generation of construction (from the late 1080s to the 1130s) introduced more innovative designs that integrated Norman and Anglo-Saxon elements.²⁵⁹

The construction of Durham Cathedral (see Figure 2.10 and Figure 2.11) continued the Norman religious patronage in the north established by William’s visit. Durham Cathedral, the first second-generation cathedral, is in one of the northernmost English dioceses and contains Cuthbert’s shrine. Although St. Cuthbert lived, died, and

²⁵⁸ Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England*, 24.

²⁵⁹ Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England*, 26, 34.

was buried at Lindisfarne, continuous Viking-Age raids along the Northumbrian coast eventually forced the community to flee with the relics of St. Cuthbert in 875.²⁶⁰ For seven years, the Lindisfarne community traveled around Northumbria with these relics, establishing symbolic boundaries and sanctifying the saint's spiritual domain before settling in Chester-le-Street, near Durham, from 883-995.²⁶¹ In 995, the monks moved St. Cuthbert to his present location at Durham.²⁶² In 1093, after the Norman Conquest, William's trusted appointee, Bishop William of St. Calais, began to construct a larger and grander church to reflect the importance of the saint's relics and to house newly established Benedictine monastic community.²⁶³

Durham Cathedral was designed as a physically massive and visually stunning structure; the walls are over ten feet thick and, before the expansion, the overall length of the original cathedral was 123 meters.²⁶⁴ A monumental visual landmark within the English landscape, Durham Cathedral exuded the power and wealth of St. Cuthbert and his Norman patrons.²⁶⁵ The massive scale, monumental west work, and three apses in echelon east end (Figure 4.5) are all features found at St. Étienne in Caen, an abbey built by William himself. Moreover, the double bay system of alternative piers and columns appears at the Norman Jumièges Abbey (1067) (Figure 4.6).²⁶⁶ Yet, despite these imported qualities, the church also introduces unique ornamentation, including incised pattered columns, billet and chevron mouldings (Figure 4.7), ornately carved capitals

²⁶⁰ Marner, *St. Cuthbert*, 15.

²⁶¹ Marner, *St. Cuthbert*, 16.

²⁶² Marner, *St. Cuthbert*, 17.

²⁶³ M. G. Snape, "Documentary Evidence for the Building of Durham Cathedral and its Monastic Buildings," in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral* (Leeds, British Archaeological Association, 1980), 21.

²⁶⁴ Fawcett, "Kirkwall Cathedral: An Architectural Analysis," 88. Lisa Reilly, "Durham Cathedral: The Emergence of Anglo-Norman Architecture," *Anglo Norman Studies* 19 (July 1997), 341.

²⁶⁵ Reilly, "Durham Cathedral: The Emergence of Anglo-Norman Architecture," 341.

²⁶⁶ Lisa Reilly, "The Invention of Norman Visual Culture" (unpublished manuscript, 2015), 43.

(Figure 4.8), and interlaced dado arcades (Figure 4.9). These sculptural ornamental characteristics are not found in Norman architecture; rather these linear forms appear in Anglo-Saxon art and architecture. Although there are few extant examples of Anglo-Saxon architecture, the linear ornamentation can still be seen on the towers of Earls Barton (Figure 4.10) and Barton-on-Humber (Figure 4.11). The interlacing arcade too has Anglo-Saxon precedent and appears in manuscript illuminations (Figure 4.12). The sculptural qualities at Durham, moreover, would have been enhanced by paint.²⁶⁷ With such structural and ornamental features, Lisa Reilly concludes, “Durham can be regarded as having the scale, plan and elevation of a Norman church combined with the decorative sensibility of Anglo-Saxon culture.”²⁶⁸

The innovative incorporation of both Norman and Anglo-Saxon forms present at Durham Cathedral has prompted discussions of the potential Anglo-Saxon or Norman identity of Durham’s master masons. Reilly, however, avoids this unproductive nationalist framework and argues that the visual language of Durham Cathedral was not a product of a mason’s nationality, but rather the result of a conscious attempt to manipulate “the historical past to make [the Normans’] presence part of an ongoing tradition and to gloss over the rupture their conquest presents.”²⁶⁹ The narrative expressed through the architecture, then, is one of continuity with the Anglo-Saxon past, connecting the Normans to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria and its most popular and powerful saint, St. Cuthbert.

When William took the English crown in 1066, he had a tenuous claim to the throne. Nevertheless, he used narrative and architecture to insert himself within the

²⁶⁷ Reilly, “The Invention of Norman Visual Culture,” 52-53.

²⁶⁸ Reilly, “Durham Cathedral: The Emergence of Anglo-Norman Architecture,” 341.

²⁶⁹ Reilly, “Durham Cathedral: The Emergence of Anglo-Norman Architecture,” 345.

established Anglo-Saxon narrative and to secure support in the rebellious northern territories. By promoting his conquest as divinely sanctioned and embracing Cuthbert as “kingmaker,” William rejected his conquest as an abrupt rupture with the Anglo-Saxon past; rather, he argued he was the legitimate heir to the English kingdom. While William encountered resistance, these efforts were ultimately successful in that he was able to consolidate a kingdom for his heirs to inherit. The Norman and Anglo-Saxon architectural program of Durham Cathedral, moreover, was so successful that it influenced a generation of English and foreign churches over the next half century. An intentional synthesis of Norman and Anglo-Saxon architectural forms, however, cannot account for the similar style of all churches resembling Durham Cathedral, for many of these ‘Durham derivatives’ were constructed in areas with little to no Norman and Anglo-Saxon populations. Rather, the style became synonymous with kingmaking cults throughout the North Sea, not only for Cuthbert, but also for Margaret of Scotland, Óláfr of Norway, and even Magnús of Orkney.

ROYAL LINEAGE AND DYNASTIC CULTS IN SCOTLAND

As the Normans expanded their reach and control in the north, they came into direct contact and competition with the Scottish kingdom. The Scottish king during this time, Malcolm III (d. 1093), who was related to Earl Þorfinnr by marriage, had recently claimed control from his rival MacBeth.²⁷⁰ After the Norman Conquest, Malcolm accepted the exiled heir of Edmund Ironside, Edgar the Ætheling, who had the strongest

²⁷⁰ While *Orkneyinga saga* says that Malcolm married Þorfinnr’s widow, scholars argue that this is unlikely based on the chronology. Gordon Donaldson argues that it is more likely that a daughter of Þorfinnr would have been the right age to marry Malcolm with enough time to have children. Donaldson, “The Contemporary Scene,” 3-4.

claim to the English throne as the House of Wessex. Malcolm then married Edgar's sister, Margaret of Wessex (c. 1093). This alliance, with the Wessex bloodline now passed down through Malcolm's heirs, legitimized his kingdom in face of encroaching Norman pressure. Just as William embraced many Anglo-Saxon saints and dynastic rituals to claim the throne, Malcolm adopted for his own kingdom many of the religious and courtly reforms Margaret introduced. By aligning religious practices with those of the Roman Church and presenting his dynasty as heirs of Wessex, Malcolm declared Scotland a distinct and legitimate kingdom within the recognizable framework embraced by their Norman neighbors. In addition to aligning the Scottish Lent calendar with that of the rest of Europe, Margaret called for annual communion, rest from labor on Sundays, and marriage based on canon law.²⁷¹ She also called upon monasteries in England to help establish new reformed communities in Scotland. Dunfermline Abbey, as the site of her marriage to Malcolm, would benefit from her patronage as a new Benedictine daughter house of Canterbury. Building a new church for this community, Margaret selected this site for her tomb.²⁷²

Margaret's family, descended from Alfred the Great, had patronized Cuthbert for generations and it is likely that Margaret herself initiated Scotland's growing concern for Cuthbert during this time. Malcolm records an agreement with the monks, outlining that the monks were to feed the poor in the name of the king and queen as long as they lived. Furthermore, the royal couple and their children during life and after death were to partake in all services –masses, psalms, alms, prayers—in the monastery. After their deaths, the monks would also perform prayers, and their “anniversary shall be celebrated

²⁷¹ Robert Bartlett, ed. and trans., *Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham and Saint Margaret of Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), xxx.

²⁷² Bartlett, *Miracles of Saint Æbbe*, xxx.

as an annual festival like that of King [Æthelstan].”²⁷³ It is interesting that the monks mention King Æthelstan, Margaret’s Anglo-Saxon ancestor, by name. Margaret’s royal Anglo-Saxon lineage was an advantage for the legitimacy of Malcolm and his offspring, and this patronage, like that of William, directly associated the Scottish dynasty with the glory of Æthelstan and the House of Wessex. Whether Malcolm’s agreement with the monks at Durham included payment or protection in return is not specified, but Malcolm’s privileged patronage of the Cuthbert’s community in Durham was significant enough that he was present when Durham Cathedral’s foundation was laid in 1093.²⁷⁴

In addition to Margaret’s influence, the kings of Scotland likely had an additional interest in St. Cuthbert to secure support in Lothian, their southern territory, which was culturally associated with Northumbria and had been occupied at one point by William’s troops. After Malcolm’s death, his sons similarly supported the church at Durham and, in 1094, his son by his first wife, King Duncan II (1094), issued a charter (Figure 4.13) granting Durham Cathedral lands in East Lothian, an area south of the Firth of Forth in which the cult of St. Cuthbert was still popular. Ian Walker argues that this charter would have secured the divine support of Cuthbert for Duncan’s campaigns and likely fostered support within the region.²⁷⁵ Continuing this tradition, Malcolm and Margaret’s sons also supported Durham and Cuthbert’s cult; King Edgar (1097-1107) issued a charter granting land to Durham in 1104 (Figure 4.14), while King Alexander (1107-1124) was the only layman invited to witness the opening of St. Cuthbert’s coffin.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 99.

²⁷⁴ Walker, *Lords of Alba*, 195. Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 99.

²⁷⁵ Walker, *Lords of Alba*, 183.

²⁷⁶ Walker, *Lords of Alba*, 196.

With so much support for St. Cuthbert and Durham Cathedral, it should not be surprising that Malcolm and Margaret's youngest King David I (1134-1153) appropriated Durham architectural forms for a new church at Dunfermline (see Figure 2.12 and Figure 2.13), which then housed the burials of his parents, Malcolm III and Queen Margaret, and older brothers Edgar and Alexander. The church, as a mausoleum for the family, incorporated the same billet and chevron moulding (Figure 4.15), incised drum columns (Figure 4.16), and ornately carved capitals (Figure 4.17). Neil Cameron argues that the church itself employed masons used at Dunfermline,²⁷⁷ yet such a relationship does not explain the architectural similarities completely, for there are many differences as well. Unlike Durham Cathedral, Dunfermline uses a single-bay system of columns and its piers terminate below the gallery and clerestory levels; moreover, the scale is markedly smaller, reflecting its monastic and mausoleum functions. The upper tiers and western doorway are also notably simpler than the ornamented nave arcade, perhaps reflecting the construction of tiers in different phases or the reduction of funds following David's death.²⁷⁸ The aim here was not to copy Durham exactly, but rather to recall its forms to express the royal family's intimate spiritual relationship with Cuthbert and Durham. The visible and permanent nature of this media, furthermore, expressed Cuthbert's support of the dynasty's successors. Such architectural links were commonly used in medieval architecture, especially for Durham Cathedral, which inspired imitation throughout England. For example, Lindisfarne Priory, which was the original site of Cuthbert's

²⁷⁷ Neil Cameron, "The Romanesque Sculpture of Dunfermline Abbey," in *Royal Dunfermline*, ed. Richard Fawcett, 65-78 (Edinburgh: Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland, 2005), 67.

²⁷⁸ Cameron, "The Romanesque Sculpture," 76.

shrine, incorporated Durham's new Anglo-Norman style to express its holy affinity with the saint's present shrine.²⁷⁹

While Cuthbert remained a key saint for the Scottish dynasty and perhaps explains the style of David's new Dunfermline Abbey, the church itself nevertheless developed as a cult site centered on his mother, Queen Margaret of Wessex, and became principally associated with her and her decedents. During her lifetime and shortly after her death, records and letters indicate that Queen Margaret was revered both for her royal lineage and for her saintly demeanor.²⁸⁰ From 1100-1107, Turgot wrote Margaret's *Vita* for her daughter, who was then married to King Henry II of England.²⁸¹ He recorded her prophecies, personal ascetic practices, and a miracle story on the survival of her gospel-book after it fell in a river, all while casting her royal duties as those of a monastic leader.²⁸² At the same time this account was written, Edgar, then the king of Scotland, added embellishments to her church and grave. When Margaret first founded the church, it consisted of a tower and narrow eastern room in common Anglo-Saxon tradition.²⁸³ An eastern extension was added to this church either late in her life or in the reign of her son, Edgar. Richard Fawcett argues that Edgar also added the embellished eastern piers and apse in this extension to adorn Margaret's gravesite. Such additions would have expressed visually Margaret's holy reputation and memory (Figure 4.18).²⁸⁴

Margaret's youngest son, David I, then increased the wealth and prestige of Dunfermline by providing grants for its benefit between 1124 and 1128 and raising it

²⁷⁹ Lynda Rollason, "The Priory's Outreach: Durham's Cells," in *Durham Cathedral: History, Fabric and Culture*, ed. David Brown, 71-80 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 73.

²⁸⁰ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 82.

²⁸¹ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 81.

²⁸² Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 82-84, 88.

²⁸³ Richard Fawcett, "Dunfermline Abbey Church," in *Royal Dunfermline*, ed. Richard Fawcett, 27-63 (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2005), 27-30.

²⁸⁴ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 97. Fawcett, "Dunfermline Abbey Church," 31.

from priory to abbey status in 1126.²⁸⁵ In 1128, construction to extend Dunfermline church began, carefully positioning Margaret's grave in the center and incorporating Margaret's Well, a key pilgrimage site, within its walls (Figure 4.19).²⁸⁶ The new abbey church was consecrated in 1150 and, after 1153, incorporated David's grave as well. Within this context, Dunfermline Abbey's formal qualities, particularly the incised columns, would have communicated more than just an affiliation with Durham Cathedral and St. Cuthbert. As mentioned above, Durham Cathedral appropriated the ornamental qualities of Anglo-Saxon architecture and merged it with Norman structure and scale. Among the most established motifs were the spiral piers, which repeated the column forms of Old St. Peter's shrine in Rome, which in turn evoked the columns of King Solomon's Temple (Figure 4.20). In mid-ninth- or early tenth-century Anglo-Saxon architecture, spiral columns appear in the crypt of Repton (Figure 4.21) to mark the grave of St. Wystan and in the eleventh-century crypts of St. Lebuinus, Deventer (Figure 4.22), and Canterbury (Figure 4.23) to mark significant sites and altars.²⁸⁷ By incorporating this iconography for the site of his mother's grave, David was embracing Cuthbert's relationship with the family and simultaneously marking the holy site of his mother's growing cult. Such a sophisticated statement communicated the support of the very saint the Norman kings relied on for support in the North, the ancient Anglo-Saxon lineage of Margaret and her descendants as the House of Wessex, and the sanctity of Margaret herself within the Roman Church.

²⁸⁵ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 98.

²⁸⁶ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 97-98.

²⁸⁷ Stephen Heywood, "The Romanesque Building," in *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City and Diocese, 1096-1996*, edited by Ian Atherton, 73-115 (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 113.

The significance of these statements, especially to English audiences, would not have been lost on David. David himself had spent significant time in the Anglo-Norman court. He retained substantial lands in England and his sister, Edith-Matilda, was Queen of England. He also introduced coinage based on the Anglo-Norman models and raided Northumbria to help put his niece Matilda on the throne.²⁸⁸ The Scottish relationship with England was one of both influence and competition. Catherine Keene notes Margaret's children's own personal piety to argue that her cult was originally supported out of "filial devotion" rather than political strategy.²⁸⁹ Yet, in the case of David's Dunfermline Abbey, the site quickly surpassed Iona as the royal Scottish mausoleum and offered visual expression to divine support of her family members already interred and those still living.²⁹⁰ By the 1160s, Margaret was "St. Margaret" and "the Blessed Queen;" by 1180, her relics were translated to a new prominent location within the abbey. The success of her cult and the prominence of the site is testified by a book of miracles written in the early thirteenth century including accounts from people throughout Eastern Scotland and England, her papal canonization in 1249, and the continued emphasis on her dynastic protection.²⁹¹

The collection of miracles, *Miracula S. Margaritem*, is especially helpful for gauging how Margaret's cult at Dunfermline grew and how she replaced Cuthbert as protective saint for the Scottish dynasty. In one miracle story, Margaret appears to a knight before the Norwegian invasion of 1263, leading her husband and three sons to join the defense of the kingdom. She links herself in this vision to the kingdom by saying,

²⁸⁸ Rushforth, *St. Margaret's Gospel-book*, 96.

²⁸⁹ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 95

²⁹⁰ Keene, *Saint Margaret*, 97.

²⁹¹ Rushforth, *St. Margaret's Gospel-book*, 98. Bartlett, *Miracles of Saint Æbbe*, xxxvi.

“For I have accepted this kingdom from God, and it is entrusted to me and my heirs for ever.”²⁹² This statement both links her to the ruling dynasty and pits her against enemies of the kingdom; the Scots consequently drove the Norwegians away at the Battle of Largs, protecting both king and kingdom.²⁹³ Eventually, Margaret became the patron saint not only for her dynasty, but for any leader aiming to rule Scotland. Both Scottish and English kings hoping to rule Scotland patronized her cult, especially during the conflict of Scottish Independence. When King Edward I of England (1272-1307) gained control of Scotland, he, with his wife Marguerite of France, made donations to Margaret’s shrine. In 1315, King Robert the Bruce (1306-1329), who regained Scottish control from the English, patronized her cult and was ultimately buried in Dunfermline with Margaret and her sons, linking Scotland’s new and preceding dynasties in perpetuity.²⁹⁴

King Malcolm, using his wife’s ancient Wessex lineage and the patronage of the kingmaker cult of Cuthbert, embraced similar political strategies as the Normans to legitimize his rule and consolidate his power. Malcolm’s heirs continued their support for Cuthbert and patronage of Durham, culminating in King David I’s appropriation of Durham as an architectural model for his family mausoleum at Dunfermline Abbey. Yet, Margaret, the dynastic protector, eventually surpassed Cuthbert the kingmaker, as Dunfermline’s distinctive patterned columns framed her grave and growing cult. Although Scotland briefly lost its independence to England at the end of the thirteenth century, the Scottish cult of Margaret was so successful that English and subsequent

²⁹² Bartlett, *Miracles of Saint Æbbe*, 89. Rushforth, *St. Margaret’s Gospel-book*, 98.

²⁹³ Matthew H. Hammond, “Royal and Aristocratic Attitudes to Saints,” *The Cult of Saints and the Virgin Mary in Medieval Scotland*, ed. Steve Boardman and Eila Williamson, 61-85 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 195.

²⁹⁴ Rushforth, *St. Margaret’s Gospel-book*, 98.

Scottish dynasty's looked to her to protect and legitimize Scottish power throughout the Middle Ages.

SANCTITY AND KINGSHIP IN NORWAY

In the late eleventh century, as the Norman and Scottish dynasties were embracing Cuthbert and engaging in new architectural patronage in their kingdoms, the kings of Norway were doing the same with a royal saint of their own, namely St. Óláfr. Óláfr Haraldsson was a political martyr, murdered for political reasons like Orkney's Magnús, and upheld by his family successors to be divine. Óláfr, according to his saga in *Heimskringla*, was a descendent of Haraldr hárfagri and aimed to unite all of Norway from the Danish overlords. Early in his life, Óláfr visits Rouen, the captial of Normandy, stays with Duke Richard, and converts to Christianity. His highly hagiographical saga, written long after the development of his cult, describes him as the rightful king of Norway who would unify the Norwegian territories under a common Christian God. During his life, however, many of the pagan chieftains rejected his conversion attempts and drove him out of the country, thereby accepting Danish overlords—now, Knútr and his son. When Óláfr returned in 1030 to reclaim his territory, he was defeated and killed in the Battle of Stiklestad. His body, however, was retrieved, hidden away, and buried by his supporters.

When Knútr's regents were proven to be more unpopular to the local chieftains, they sought Óláfr's illegitimate son, Magnús Ólafsson (1035-1047), to be king in 1035. Due to an agreement with one of Knútr's son, Magnús also became the king of Denmark in 1042. He and his co-ruler/successor, Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson (1046-1066) (his

uncle and Óláfr's brother), simultaneously consolidated power within an increasingly centralized Norwegian kingdom while attempting to conquer the English kingdom they felt they had inherited with the Danish crown. Rather than emphasize the links to Haraldr hárfagri (a common strategy before St. Óláfr's reign), Magnús and Haraldr emphasized their relationship with the holy Óláfr. Magnús, for example, was known to fight in battle with his father's battle-ax. With both popular and official support in Norway, Óláfr was declared a saint by the bishop, his grave marked, and his relics venerated in St. Clement Church in Trondheim, Norway.²⁹⁵

The kingdom then passed to Haraldr's son and St. Óláfr's nephew, Óláfr kyrre Haraldsson (1067-1093), after Haraldr's death at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Known as "the peaceful," Óláfr kyrre established fixed dioceses for the first time in Norway and initiated the construction of churches. Although accounts of his rule are short, his saga in *Heimskringla* records that he constructed Christ Church (later Nidaros Cathedral) in Trondheim over his uncle's grave to house his relics. Archaeological evidence suggests that this initial church was modest, featuring a small western tower (Figure 4.24). Interestingly, *Heimskringla* describes this construction as a *musteri*, similar to St. Magnus Cathedral: "Óláfr konungr lét gera steinmusteri í Niðarósi ok setti í þeim stað, sem fyrst hafði verit jarðat lík Óláfs konungs, ok var þar yfir sett altárit, sem grœptr konungs hafði verit. Þar var vígð Kristskirkja" ("Óláfr built a stone minster in Trondheim and set in this place, where the corpse of King Óláfr had first been, and the high altar was set over there,

²⁹⁵ Trondheim was called Niðarós during the Middle Ages.

where the king's grave had been. It was consecrated Christ Church").²⁹⁶ After this point, there were many great miracles in this church and the church attracted many pilgrims.

Some sculptural fragments from this time period were used as rubble in latter architectural phases, but it is not clear if they came from Óláfr's original church for his uncle or other structures in the region. When the church was raised to the status of cathedral in 1153, however, Óláfr's Christ Church was deemed insufficient for the grandeur of its new title. Before the official appointment, likely in the 1130s or 1140s, the church was extended with new transepts and parts of a nave were added to the west in the Anglo-Norman style seen, by this time, at Durham, Dunfermline, and St. Magnus Cathedral, as well as other English, Durham-inspired churches. Still extant, the transepts include chevron mouldings (see Figure 2.15) and a chevron-incised column in the south transept chapel (Figure 4.25). Although the design of the nave changed shortly after construction began, original Anglo-Norman pier, capital, and decorated voussoir fragments were used as rubble in later construction phases (Figure 4.26). In Stuart Harrison's reconstruction, the nave is stylistically similar to the transepts, including moulded semi-circular arches resting on cylindrical drums like Norman, Scottish, and Orcadian models (Figure 4.27). Moreover, scoring on the transept walls suggest that Christ Church would have had similar aisle vaults and a three-story elevation.²⁹⁷ It is not clear who led the development of this architectural project, as this period teemed with multiple men claiming to be the illegitimate sons of previous Norwegian kings; the clear

²⁹⁶ Chapter 6 of Snorri Sturluson, "Óláfs saga kyrra," in *Heimskringla*, vol. 3. Íslensk fornrit XXVIII, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 203-209 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1951), 208.

²⁹⁷ Stuart Harrison, "The Cathedral of Archbishop Eystein: Sequences, Style, Dating, and Influences," in *Eystein Erlendsson – Erkebiskop, politiker of kirkebygger*, ed. Kristin Bjølykke et. al, 97-112 (Trondheim: Nidaros Domkirkes restaureringsarbeiter), 97.

focus given to St. Óláfr, however, would have been critical to bolster both royal claimants and the rising Norwegian archbishops.

The Anglo-Norman transept triforium passages are substantially lower in height to the east in this new addition, suggesting that Óláfr's kyrre's church was originally preserved as the choir, while the structure was enlarged and enriched to the west.²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Óláfr's original church and many of the Anglo-Norman additions were torn down and replaced with new Early English-style elements. These changes are attributed to Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson (1161-1188), who claimed increased church independence from the Norwegian king and spent time in England in exile. During a civil war between King Magnús Erlingsson (1161-1184) and King Sverrir Sigurðarson for the throne, Archbishop Eystein supported King Magnús Erlingsson, who did not descend directly from a previous Norwegian monarch. To help Magnús Erlingsson gain power, Eysteinn established new succession laws and crowned him as the first anointed Norwegian king. Yet, when Sverrir claimed the throne, he exiled Eysteinn, who in turn traveled to England. When Eysteinn returned, he introduced extraordinary changes in the architecture, with features similar to those he saw in later twelfth-century English models like Lincoln. While the architectural developments of the cathedral are beyond the scope of this study, it is interesting to note that the vocabulary used to describe the site stays the same. In this case, the church is still called *musteri*:

Pat var mikit musteri ok gort sterkliga at líminu, svá at varla fekk brotit,
þá er Eysteinn erkibyskup lét ofan taka.²⁹⁹

There was a great minster and made strong that with mortar, so that it
could hardly be demolished when Archbishop Eysteinn had it taken down.

²⁹⁸ Harrison, "The Cathedral of Archbishop Eystein," 97.

²⁹⁹ Chapter 38 of "Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar" in Snorri Sturlusson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 3. Íslenzk fornrit XXVIII, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 68-202 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1951), 121.

Lét Eysteinn erkibyskup þar setja háaltárit í þeim sama stað sem leiðit hafði verit konungsins, þá er hann reisti þetta it mikla musteri, er nú stendr.³⁰⁰

Archbishop Eysteinn had established the high altar there, in this same place which had been the king's tomb, when he raised the great minster which now stands there.

Although these references occur in different kings' sagas within *Heimskringla*, it is notable that they reinforce Óláfr's Christ Church as *musteri* before and after reconstruction.

There is only one other use of the term *musteri* in *Heimskringla*, with both similarities and differences to the above passages. Unrelated to Christ Church (later Nidaros Cathedral) or its site, this *musteri* was constructed by King Eysteinn Magnússon (1103-1123): “Þar lét hann gera Mikjálskirkju, it vegligsta steinmusteri” (“There he had built Michael's Church, the most magnificent stone minster”).³⁰¹ As the same chapter outlines many of Eysteinn's architectural projects, it is not clear why this church is singled out by this term alone. The saga does note that it is a stone construction, while the others are notably wooden.³⁰² It is possible that the form or ornamentation of Eysteinn's church made deliberate stylistic associations with Nidaros Cathedral. Nonetheless, with only four *musteri* references in *Heimskringla*, one can consider the similarities between these passages and churches. While these passages do not all use the term in exactly the same way, the term *musteri* is closely aligned with the act of founding or building some type of exceptional church related to a king as patron and/or saint.

³⁰⁰ Chapter 245 of “Óláfs saga helga” in *Heimskringla*, vol. 2. Íslenzk fornrit XXVII, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3-451 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1945), 405.

³⁰¹ Chapter 14 of “Magnússona saga” in Snorri Sturlusson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 3. Íslenzk fornrit XXVIII, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 238-277 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1951), 254.

³⁰² The term is applied to wooden structures in external sources, so its application to specifically stone churches can be discounted. See discussion of *Laxdæla saga* below.

External saga references to *musteri* help to clarify the royal application of this term. *Laxdæla saga*, written in the thirteenth century about the Norse settlement of a region in Iceland by that name, makes a clear distinction between the architectural expectation for a king versus that of his followers. In chapter 74, Icelandic chieftain Porkell Eyjólfsson travels to Norway to acquire building timber from King Óláfr Haraldsson to construct a church on his land. At this time, Óláfr was building a wooden church and “var þat stofnat allmikit mustari ok vandat allt til” (“it was planned as a very great minster and all was carefully prepared”).³⁰³ Obviously inspired by this construction, Porkell starts to measure its dimensions so he can copy it for himself. Óláfr, however, sees Porkell and advises,

“Hogg þú af tvær alnar hverju stótré, ok mun sú kirkja þó gora mest á Íslandi.” Porkell svarar: “Tak sjálfr við þinn, ef þú þykkisk ofgefit hafa, eða þér leiki aþrúmund at, en ek mun ekki alnarkefli af honum hoggva; mun ek bæði til hafa atferð ok eljun at afla mér annan við.” Þá segir konungr, ok allstilliliga: “Bæði er, Porkell, at þú ert mikils verðr, enda gerisk þú nú allstórr, því at víst er þat ofsi einum bóndasyni, at keppask við oss; en eigi er þat satt, at ek fyrirmuna þér viðarins, ef þér verðr auðit at gera þar kirkju af, því at hon verðr eigi svá mikil, at þar muni of þitt allt inni liggja. En nær er þat mínu hugboði, at menn hafi litla nytsemð viðar þessa, ok fari því firr, at þú getir gort neitt mannvirki ór viðinum.”³⁰⁴

Chop two ells off the length of each beam and your church will still be the greatest in Iceland.” Porkell answered, “Keep your timber then, if you fear you have given of it too generously, or regret making the offer but I will not chop so much as an ells length off it. I lack neither the energy nor the means to obtain my timber elsewhere.” The king then said, “you are a man of great worth, and of not small ambition. Of course it’s absurd for a farmer’s son to compete with us. But it is not true that I begrudge you the timber. If you should manage to build a church with it, it will never be so large as to contain your own conceit. But unless I am mistaken, people will have little use of this timber, and even less so will you be able to build any structure with it.

³⁰³ Einar Ól, *Laxdæla saga*, Íslensk fornrit V (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1934), 216.

³⁰⁴ Einar Ól, *Laxdæla saga*, 216-217. Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir, ed., *The Saga of the People of Laxardal and Bolli Bollason’s Tale*, trans. Keneva Kunz (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 165.

In this passage, Óláfr recommends that Porkell, who cannot think to compete with Óláfr and his church, reduce his measurements, presumably so the church would not be as large and grand as the king's. When Porkell refuses and returns home with his timber, Óláfr's prophecy proves true, and Porkel's ship flounders off the Icelandic coast, killing him and scattering his timber. Regardless of whether or not this account is true, or merely a way to explain the name of the Icelandic island Stafey ("Pillar Island"), Óláfr's words indicate that there was a recognizable social protocol that Porkell disregarded by trying to match the king's church. Moreover, Porkell's unrealized church and corresponding death seem to indicate that this protocol was stringent, with potentially serious—in this case, divine—consequences for those seeking to break the social order to exceed their status.

While the other kingdoms were jockeying for power on the British Isles, the Norwegian claimants were fighting amongst themselves to gain control of Norway's increasingly unified political structure. St. Óláfr consequently became a key figure not only for the official Christian conversion of the Norwegian population, but also for the kings aiming to claim supremacy. For Óláfr's family, this relationship allowed them to maintain support and continue to develop their rule within a growing Christian framework. Óláfr kyrre, for example, used a similar strategy as Porfinnr in Orkney, establishing set sees in his kingdom to align it with the Roman Church and building his own Christ Church. Yet, as the cult grew and the site became more important, the later kings and bishops looked to the architectural centers of other holy saints in the region, not least Durham, Dunfermline, and even the early stages of St. Magnus Cathedral. Even though the Anglo-Norman construction was interrupted and only the transepts remain, Christ Church was successful in that the same architectural style was adopted for

Norway's recently added bishoprics, including Hamar Cathedral (see Figure 2.16) and Stavanger Cathedral (see Figure 2.17), which integrated Anglo-Norman ornamentation with a unique two-story elevation with clerestory set over the arch spandrel, rather than arch opening as in England.

The sagas themselves became sophisticated narratives through which claimants for the throne could embed themselves within the dynasties of King Haraldr and King Óláfr. In the late twelfth century, a tradition of recording these kings' sagas in large compilations developed, with *Heimskringla* as only one example. *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* also record the kings' narratives, developing from both established oral tradition and the historical English texts written and copied by Anglo-Norman religious and courtly figures. Paul A. White recognizes traces of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the Norman *Genealogia regum Anglie*, William of Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum ducum*, and Wace's *Roman de Brut* in the kings' sagas, suggesting not only that these texts were circulating in the Norse-speaking world during this time, but also that they shaped the content and presentation of kingship for Norwegian kings.³⁰⁵

Although civil war among Norwegian claimants erupted during the next century, a clear dynasty was established for the successors of Óláfr. Óláfr's cult in turn was widely successful as well, spreading through the Norse world into Germany, the British Isles, and the North Atlantic settlements. Civil wars ensued for the next century due to Norse traditions of succession; yet these fights indicate how significant and desirable the king's position had become as a result of these early efforts. King Sverrir in the late

³⁰⁵ Paul A. White, *Non-Native Sources for the Scandinavian Kings' Sagas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 93-109.

twelfth century would continue to develop the associations between king, patronage, and Christian figure and will be covered in the next chapter.

NARRATIVE, CULT, AND ARCHITECTURE IN RÖGNVALDR'S ORKNEY

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, kings around the North Sea were consolidating their power and expanding their kingdoms. Both Norman and Scottish kings appropriated St. Cuthbert and Anglo-Saxon architectural forms, embedding themselves within an established narrative of kingship started by the House of Wessex. The Normans reinforced this patronage with their own Latin histories, while the Scots developed the cult of Margaret as a dynastic protector. At the same time, the Norwegian contenders, using their own dynastic cult, kings' saga narratives, and architectural patronage, developed the position of king as superior to that of chieftain or earl. Meanwhile, in Orkney, Earl Rögnvaldr embedded himself within the Orcadian dynastic narrative, developed his own dynastic cult through St. Magnús, and constructed St. Magnus Cathedral using established North Sea architectural forms. While Rögnvaldr's actions helped him secure the earldom despite his tenuous claim, they also presented him as an equal to rulers engaging in the same sophisticated literary and architectural statements.

Although many scholars point to the northern culture and history of medieval Orkney, the earls retained clear relationships with the kings of England and Scotland, as well as Norway, and were undoubtedly aware of the political developments in each region. These relationships were forged not only in competition, but also through kinship. Oral tradition preserved in the *Orkneyinga saga* states that the Orkney earls were related

to the Norman dukes/English kings though Rognvald of Møre, who “átti Ragnhildi, dóttur Hrólfs nefju; þeira sonr var Hrólfr, er vann Norðmandí...frá honum eru komnir Rúðugarlar ok Englakonungar” (“married Ragnhildr, the daughter of Hrólfr nefja. Their son was Hrólfr who conquered Normandy...from him are descended the earls of Rouen and the kings of England”).³⁰⁶ By the next century, the reigning Earl Þorfinnr was the son of a Scottish king, allied to Scottish aristocrats, and controlled territory on the Scottish mainland. If King Malcolm of Scotland indeed married Þorfinnr’s daughter, Þorfinnr also would have been the grandfather of King Duncan II of Scotland. Rognvaldr, on the other hand, was raised in Norway by a Norwegian father, yet was also in contact with King David I of Scotland.³⁰⁷ Orkney did not exist in isolation; while the earls needed to maintain local control, they also needed to communicate this control externally in recognizable ways.

In a twelfth-century account of a miracle healing at Durham, a Norwegian travels to multiple northern pilgrimage shrines in search of a cure for his affliction, yet is only healed when he reaches Durham. While the story is intended to underscore the dominant sanctity of Cuthbert, the list of other places the Norwegian supposedly travels—Denmark, Iceland, Frisia, Norway, Scotland, Greenland, and even Orkney—reveals the northern audience and context of these shrines.³⁰⁸ The shared architectural language

³⁰⁶ Hrólfr, or Rollo.

³⁰⁷ G. W. S. Barrow, ed., *The Charters of King David I: the Written Acts of David I King of Scots, 1124-53, and of his son Henry, Earl of Northumberland, 1139-1152* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 9, 153-154. Barrow considers the address in his *brev* to indicate that David looked at the Men of Caithness as his own. “As you love me, I command and order you to love the *manaig* [monks or monastic dependants [sic]] dwelling at Dornoch and their tenants and maintain them wherever they may journey through your domain.”

³⁰⁸ Haki Antonsson, Sally Crumplin, and Aidan Conti. “A Norwegian in Durham: An anatomy of a Miracle in Reginald of Durham’s *Libellus de admirandis beati Cuthbert*,” in *West over Sea: Studies in Scandinavia Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300, The Northern World Series*, ed. Beverley Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor, and Gareth Williams, 195-226. (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

between multiple pilgrimage stops would associate the reputation of saints between each other.

Rognvaldr's development of his own kingmaker cult centered on St. Magnús. The Anglo-Norman style that Rognvaldr selected for St. Magnus Cathedral, moreover, was not only fashionable at that time—with Durham Cathedral recently completed and Dunfermline under construction—but also significant for its relationship to contemporary kingmaking cults. Over seven decades ago, Richard Krautheimer demonstrated that the iconography, or “content,” of medieval architecture created significant symbolic links between structures, religious orders, patrons, and saints.³⁰⁹ As Krautheimer explains through his comparison of architectural copies of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, medieval copies did not rely upon an exact mimicry of its source, but rather on the incorporation of shared geometric shapes, numbers, and text.³¹⁰ Dunfermline Abbey, St. Magnus Cathedral, and Nidaros Cathedral incorporated different combinations of Anglo-Norman forms in varying qualities, and the general similarities between the structures suggest the desire to embody a political or religious association to the Norman cult, rather than the employment of the same masons working for decades in the same style.³¹¹ By patronizing a cathedral within this iconographic group, Rognvaldr encouraged a positive comparison between St. Cuthbert, St. Margaret, and St. Magnús, as well as between himself, the Norman kings, and the Scottish kings. When Nidaros Cathedral introduced these forms, perhaps after construction began on St. Magnus Cathedral, St. Óláfr and the Norwegian kings joined these associations.

³⁰⁹ Richard Krautheimer, “Introduction to an ‘Iconography of Medieval Architecture,’” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1.

³¹⁰ Krautheimer, Introduction to an ‘Iconography of Medieval Architecture,’” 10.

³¹¹ Cambridge, “The Architectural Context of the Romanesque Cathedral at Kirkwall,” 119.

The architectural relationships between original grave and later shrine seen at two different structures for Cuthbert and within a single structure for Margaret also indicate how architecture could be used to frame and forge symbolic associations. For Cuthbert, the style was developed at Durham but embraced by Lindisfarne in order to emphasize the religious association between Cuthbert's shrine and his original burial site. For Margaret, the architecture was carefully selected to frame her grave, both in terms of the architectural style and the expansion of the plan to incorporate her grave and cult sites, including Margaret's Well. The importance of the physical associations between sites can be seen in a miracle story for Margaret in which a child must first pray at Dunfermline's Abbey, then Margaret's empty grave, and finally the shrine where her relics had been translated.³¹² Rognvaldr adopted a similar strategy for St. Magnús in Orkney, featuring new churches on the location of his death (St Magnus Church, Egilsay), his first burial site (renovations to Christ Church), and his shrine (St. Magnus Cathedral), with the latter two joined by a shared architectural lexicon.

While Rognvaldr associated himself with the kings of England and Scotland through religious and architectural patronage, his association with Norwegian kings through the construction of a *musteri* is perhaps the most revealing of his royal ambitions. Although she acknowledges the relationship of the Magnús cult to other royal cults, Barbara Crawford ultimately dismisses the *Orkneyinga saga* as a one-sided, filtered account controlled by the earls. It is exactly this filter, however, that makes it so valuable in the reconstruction of political aims and hegemonic memories. The twelfth century was a pivotal moment for Orkney. It is during this century that Orkney's relationship with

³¹² Bartlett, *Miracles of Saint Æbbe*, 105.

Norway and Scotland became more direct, with Orkney permanently losing its previous autonomy. Óláfr kyrre, the first to build a *musteri* to hold his uncle's remains, was also the first to establish fixed sees. In this way, Óláfr mimicked the earlier work of Þorfinnr and set a precedent for Rognvaldr, who similarly built his church for his holy uncle. The application of the term *musteri*, as a distinctly royal establishment, to St. Magnus Cathedral underscores the significance of Rognvaldr not as a subjugated royal agent, but rather as a ruler with distinct, if ultimately unsuccessful, royal aims.

CHAPTER 5: BIBLICAL TYPOLOGY AND ROYAL PRETENTION

*Salomon rex gørdi fyrstr musteri
goði til dýrðar.*³¹³

King Solomon built the first temple
to the glory of God.

In the Biblical tradition, there is no greater architectural patron than King Solomon. The builder of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem (tenth century BCE), Solomon erected the first house of God and set a physical and symbolic precedent for kings and popes for over two millennia. When Herod I expanded Herod's Temple in the late first century BCE,³¹⁴ he did so to the size and ornamentation of Solomon's Temple, indicating that at this early age there was an attempt to associate oneself with the grandeur of this Biblical king.³¹⁵ Justinian I of Constantinople, too, reportedly exclaimed, "Solomon, I

³¹³ There is no standardized transcription of the Icelandic Homily Book manuscript. Text has been normalized by the author from a diplomatic transcription in Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen, ed. *The Icelandic Homily Book: Perg. 14 5 in the Royal Library Stockholm* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1993), 45r.

³¹⁴ As the first house of God, Solomon's Temple (also called the First Temple) was an important religious and political symbol for various peoples, and a new temple was raised in its place after Nebucadnezer destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586 BCE. Herod's Temple (also called the Second Temple) was constructed in 516 and later enlarged by Herod I. Herod's Temple featured in the life of Jesus Christ as the center of Jewish ritual. Solomon's Temple, however, had a lasting symbolic legacy during this time. Physical remains, for example, may have survived, as the name of part of the complex suggests; the portico of Solomon is mentioned multiple times as a location within the Herod's Temple and is mentioned when Jesus walks within it in the Book of John. It is also mentioned as a gathering site for a crowd of the early supporters of Jesus. Alberta L.A. Hogeterp argues that the repeated congregation within this portico, which he identifies as a marginal east portico within the temple complex in the historical writings of Flavius Josephus, indicates an acknowledged significance of Solomon in the new Christian faith. While some New Testament references to Herod's Temple seem to refute Christianity's continuation of the Jewish Temple tradition, such as Stephen's speech against any house of God built by man, it is most likely that he associated the Temple with the corrupt Jewish establishment that centered on the Temple rather than Solomon's construction itself. Herod's Temple was then destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Hogeterp, "King Solomon," 143-151.

³¹⁵ Albert L. A. Hogeterp, "King Solomon in the New Testament and Jewish Tradition," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage, Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, 143-164 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 152.

have outdone thee!” at the completion of his Hagia Sophia in 537.³¹⁶ Later kings, including Philip II in Spain, James I in England, Frederick II in Prussia, and Louis IX, similarly evoked Solomon’s Temple in their building projects.³¹⁷ By associating their works with Solomon, or even claiming that they surpassed the Solomon’s Temple, these rulers embeded themselves within shared Christian traditions of kingship and patronage.³¹⁸ As a ‘new’ Solomon, each portrayed himself as an heir of this Biblical exempla and a legitimate ruler within a Christian kingdom.³¹⁹

Chapters 3 and 4 of this study argued that Earl Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson embraced local Orcadian traditions and broader North Sea patronage to promote himself as heir to the Orkney earldom and as a royal contender within the North Sea world. In addition to architectural evidence, the architectural passages of *Orkneyinga saga* and *Heimskringla* reveal a strong association between the patronage of earls and Norwegian kings through the use of the term *musteri* rather than the more common *kirkja*. While some scholars argue that *musteri* denotes a cathedral, derives from the Latin *monasteria* (“monastery”), or simply refers to a large church, the term is consistently linked to royal patronage or dedications in these political sagas, as well as in additional Norse sagas from Iceland to Russia. The term, however, is even more ambiguous. In many sagas, *musteri* does not

³¹⁶ Allegra Iafate notes that the dedication to this church to “Divine Wisdom” may have been in reference to the wisdom of this king of Israel. Allegra Iafate, *The Wandering Throne of Solomon: Objects and Tales of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill 2016), 37. Robert Ousterhout, “New Temples and New Solomons: The Rhetoric of Byzantine Architecture,” in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson, 223-253 (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010).

³¹⁷ Joseph Gutmann, “Preface,” in *The Temple of Solomon: Archaeological Fact and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islam, and Jewish Art*, ed. Joseph Gutmann, xi-xii (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), xii.

³¹⁸ The invocation of Biblical kings can be found in both western and eastern Christian traditions, as well as Jewish and Islamic traditions. For a consideration of Solomon in Western, Jewish, Byzantine, and Islamic traditions, see Iafate, *The Wandering Throne of Solomon*. For considerations of Solomon in Byzantine traditions, see Ousterhout, “New Temples and New Solomons,” 223-254.

³¹⁹ Daniel H. Weiss, “Architectural Symbolism and the Decoration of the Ste.-Chapelle,” *Art Bulletin* LXXVII (June 1995): 308-319.

signify a church at all, but rather a Jewish temple. Most significantly, a medieval homily recorded in Iceland and Norway draws a distinct comparison between *musteri* and *kirkja*, with *musteri* specifying not merely a temple, but specifically Solomon's Temple of Jerusalem. When Rognvaldr and the Norwegian kings proclaimed their architectural projects as *musteri*, notably to announce their roles in the construction process, they associated their churches with Solomon's Temple and themselves with King Solomon. In doing so, they embraced not only a Christian framework to legitimize their rule, but also the established milieu for medieval kingship throughout Europe.

KING SOLOMON IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TRADITION

Translated to Latin from the original Greek and Hebrew texts in part by St. Jerome (c. 345-420), the Vulgate Bible has been a foundational source of Western Christian tradition for over 1500 years, influencing art, politics, and religion through the Christian world.³²⁰ According to the Book of Kings of the Old Testament, King Solomon was the son of King David, who consolidated Israel under his rule, and patron of the first man-made temple built for God. While he and his father both held God's favor, David's rule is characterized generally by political and military struggles to establish his dynasty. Conversely, justice, peace, and wealth largely mark Solomon's reign. Solomon prays to God not for wealth or power, but rather for wisdom with which to rule his kingdom justly. Solomon's prayer pleases God, who in turn grants him wisdom, wealth, and

³²⁰ "Introduction to the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library Vulgate Bible collection. Swift Edgar, ed. *The Vulgate Bible: The Historical Books: Douay-Rheims Translation*, vol. IIa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), vii.

power.³²¹ While David conceives of a temple project first, it is Solomon who completes it, and the Book of Kings chronicles his supervision of work and construction.³²² While both David and Solomon do not adhere to God's commandments completely,³²³ they nevertheless represent successful reigns by powerful and divinely appointed rulers, providing exempla for subsequent Jewish and Christian kings.

Although architecture was frequently evoked by kings to associate themselves with King Solomon, literature and manuscript illumination were important means through which kings developed their Biblical typologies. By the ninth century, David was so frequently evoked as a "personification of earthly kingship" and a "prefiguration of Christ,"³²⁴ that Richard Abels labels Alcuin's description of Charlemagne as a "new David" during this time a "cliché of clerical sycophants."³²⁵ King Alfred of Anglo-Saxon Wessex also associated himself with David, especially through his patronage and love of the Psalms, which are attributed to David. Some hypothesize that the famed Alfred Jewel (Figure 5.1) in fact depicts David holding the rod of judgment and staff of comfort as in Psalm 22.³²⁶ Yet, a comparison to David did not preclude associations with Solomon.

Asser, a monk in Alfred's court who wrote *Vita Ælfredi regis Angul Saxonum*, associated

³²¹ In one of the most famous accounts of his wisdom, Solomon settles a disagreement between two women who both claim to be the mother of a child. To determine the identity of the true mother, Solomon orders that the child be cut in half; one woman says no and offers her child to the other woman to save its life, and Solomon knows this to be the true mother. Vulgate, III Kings 3.

³²² Vulgate, III Kings 3: 6-14.

³²³ David commits adultery with Bathsheba and kills her husband to cover the crime (Vulgate, II Kings 11-12), while Solomon builds temples to his foreign wives' gods and worships there (Vulgate, III Kings 11). Hogeterp, "King Solomon," 155-156.

³²⁴ Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great* (London: Longman, 1998), 239.

³²⁵ Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 239.

³²⁶ There are two numbering systems for the Psalms, the Masoretic (Hebrew/English translation) tradition and the Septugint (Greek/Vulgate) tradition. For consistency within this thesis, Vulgate numbering and translation are provided. For more information, see Linda Phyllis Austern, Kari Boyd McBride, and David L. Orvis, eds. "Prefatory Note," in *Psalms in the Early Modern World* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), xxi-xxii. Vulgate, Psalm 22:4: "Thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me." Gutmann, "Preface," xii. Samantha Kelly, *The New Solomon: Robert of Naples (1309-1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 260. Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 239.

Alfred's pursuit of wisdom and education with that of "the most pious and the most wise and the most rich Solomon, king of the Hebrews, who, despising all the glory and riches of this world, sought first wisdom from God, and so found both, that is, wisdom and the glory of this world."³²⁷ Alternatively, King Charles the Bald, Charlemagne's grandson, hints of his associations with Solomon through pictorial association. In one of his manuscripts, the figure of Solomon is enthroned under a domed canopy with spiral columns (Figure 5.2). In another manuscript, Charles the Bald is depicted enthroned in a similar position, under a similarly domed canopy with Solomonic spiral columns (Figure 5.3).³²⁸ King Stephen I of Hungary, too, was described as wise in judgment and justice and associated with Solomonic quotes.³²⁹ Texts related to the kings of France and England were translated and circulated throughout the Norse world by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, providing the opportunity for Norse authors and rulers to appropriate these religious connotations of kingship.³³⁰

Religious texts, including the Bible, hagiographical accounts, and contemporary writers, also circulated throughout the Norse world, furthering the expansion and extrapolation of the Solomonic tradition.³³¹ Although the first known complete Icelandic translation of the Bible only appears in the sixteenth century,³³² Old Testament material

³²⁷ L. C. Jane, trans., *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), 56. Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 239. Kelly, *The New Solomon*, 260.

³²⁸ E. H. Kantorowicz, *Late classical and Mediaeval studies in honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955). Kelly, *The New Solomon*, 260.

³²⁹ Kelly, *The New Solomon*, 260.

³³⁰ Christian kingship was especially important in early Norse literature related to the Norwegian kings of conversion, Óláfr Trygvasson and Óláfr Haraldsson (St. Óláfr). White, *Non-Native Sources*, 57-91.

³³¹ Among the texts traced within secular Norse literature: a passion of St. Edmund, lives of Charlemagne, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*, and Gregory the Great's *Libri dialogorum*. White, *Non-Native Sources*, 38-39, 43-44, 57-68.

³³² Oddur Gottskálksson translated New Testament in 1540, while Guðbrandur Þorláksson incorporated this New Testament into his complete translation in 1584. Ian Kirkby, "The Bible and biblical interpretation in medieval Iceland," in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, 287-301 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 287.

survives partially in three separate traditions combined in the nineteenth century, known collectively as *Stjórn*.³³³ According to Ian Kirkby, the earliest tradition is from the early thirteenth century and includes texts from the later Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). It is a straightforward translation that occasionally summarizes Biblical material and likely included post-Pentateuch material as well. The next tradition includes the post-Pentateuch material from the Book of Joshua to the Exile. This tradition is slightly later from the mid-thirteenth century and incorporates Biblical material traced to European authors like Peter Comestor, Richard of St. Victor, and Honorius Augustodunensis. Stylistically, this tradition also incorporates saga-like narrative to expand and dramatize Biblical stories for Norse audiences. Like the first tradition, it is likely that this text would have incorporated other Old Testament texts. The final tradition includes the first part of the Pentateuch and was supposedly translated at the instigation of King Hákon Magnússon of Norway (1299-1319). This tradition is a compilation of direct Biblical translation and commentary, including direct references to Church Fathers and the writings of Peter Comestor and Vincent de Beauvoir.³³⁴

While no other collections of Biblical books survive in their entirety, indirect evidence from a sixteenth-century Icelandic gloss of a thirteenth-century Latin Psalter suggests that the Psalms were translated into Icelandic at least by the fifteenth century and probably earlier. Moreover, Icelandic saints' lives, like a saga of John the Baptist, quote material from the Gospels and homilies of the Church Fathers. Comparing the

³³³ This title appears in the nineteenth-century edition by C. R. Unger, but does not represent one work. Rather, it is a collection of works from different periods covering different Old Testament narratives. Kirkby, "The Bible and biblical interpretation in medieval Iceland," 287.

³³⁴ Kirkby, "The Bible and biblical interpretation in medieval Iceland," 287-290.

Oddur Gottskálksson's sixteenth-century New Testament translation and Grímr Hólmsteinsson's thirteenth-century saga of John the Baptist, Kirkby concludes both used a shared Icelandic translation at least by the thirteenth century.³³⁵ While it is not possible to know exactly when individual material first appeared in Old Icelandic, these accounts likely grew from an established tradition; early manuscripts of homilies³³⁶ and other religious texts suggest this tradition developed relatively early in Icelandic literature, perhaps in the early to mid-twelfth century. Regardless, the extant texts reveal that the Icelandic authors and translators for the most part referenced and quoted the Bible accurately, indicating a broader awareness and understanding of Biblical content and medieval Christian commentaries. The authors were not isolated on the fringe of Europe as sometimes assumed; they engaged in an active network of travel, education, and translation that pulled from European models and traditions thoughtfully, while still adapting them in language and style for Norse audiences.³³⁷

By at least the mid-thirteenth century, then, there was a comprehensive tradition in Old Icelandic regarding the Old Testament kings. *Stjórn III* (covering Joshua to the Exile) emphasizes Solomon as not only wise, but also the driving force of the Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. The account records that King Solomon bade the workmen to carry stones "til grvnnvallar mvstarissins" ("to the foundation of the temple").³³⁸ The text also denotes the scale of "þat hvs er Salomon giqrði gvði" ("this house which Solomon built to God") as 60 ells long, 20 ells broad, and 30 ells high, which is accurate according to

³³⁵ Kirkby, "The Bible and biblical interpretation in medieval Iceland," 291.

³³⁶ Such as *Kirkjudagsmál* discussed below.

³³⁷ Kirkby, "The Bible and biblical interpretation in medieval Iceland," 299.

³³⁸ *Stjórn* passages have not been normalized. C. R. Unger, *Stjórn: Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie* (Christiania: Feilberg and Landmarks Forlag, 1862), 562.

the Vulgate tradition.³³⁹ It also incorporates Solomon's consecration prayer that God: "at þv lvkir vpp avgv þin oc litir bæði dag oc nott...hæyrðv drottinn minn bönir minar oc allra þinna manna er a þik kalla i þessvm stað" ("that you open your eyes and look both day and night...hear you, my Lord, my prayers and all these men on you call in this place").³⁴⁰ Thus, the Norse authors were working within a similar tradition as other European writers, with the extant Solomon and Temple accounts reflecting the Vulgate tradition closely.

Solomon's prevalence within the broader Norse world is evident by his early appearance in extant manuscripts. One of the earliest Icelandic manuscripts, in fact, records *Kirkjudagsmál* ("Church Dedication Homily"), which explicitly mentions Solomon and his Temple as the beginning of all church construction. This homily survives in its entirety in three manuscripts: two different homily books—one from Norway and one from Iceland—and an Icelandic book of devotional texts translated from Latin. It also survives partially in a single Icelandic folio. The earliest copy is the fragment, AM 237a folio, which is dated to c. 1150 and is preserved in the oldest surviving Icelandic manuscript. The *Íslensk hómilíubók* ("Icelandic Homily Book"), Stockholm Perg. 4° nr. 15, was written in Iceland c. 1200, while the *Gammel norsk homiliebog* ("The Old Norse Homily Book"), AM 619, 4°, was copied in Norway in the thirteenth century from an earlier source. The youngest manuscript, AM 624, 4°, was copied c. 1500.³⁴¹ The homily books from Norway and Iceland include some different

³³⁹ An ell, or cubit, marks the length of a man's forearm. In Iceland, it was approximately half a yard and frequently used to measure and value wool. Unger, *Stjórn*, 562.

³⁴⁰ Unger, *Stjórn*, 566.

³⁴¹ G. Turville-Petre, "The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication," *Mediaeval Studies* 11 (1949): 206. Hans Bekker-Neilsen, "The Old Norse Dedication Homily," in *Festschrift Für Konstantin Reichardt* (Bern: A. Francke AG Verlag, 1969), 127-128.

texts, but overall, they share eleven homilies in common, suggesting a shared liturgical tradition across the North Sea region. The *Kirkjudagsmál* texts in the earliest three manuscripts are very similar, with only minor differences in word order and choice, suggesting that they arose from a common source dating before c. 1150.³⁴² The original homily was likely copied in the decades preceding the first manuscript copy in the mid-twelfth century; Hans Neilsen places it within the earliest phase of Icelandic writing in the first half of the twelfth century.³⁴³

The homily begins with King Solomon and the construction of the Solomon's Temple before progressing to a description of parts of a wooden church (which would have been more common than stone in both regions) in symbolic terms. According to *Kirkjudagsmál*, the altar represents Christ, the bells represent preachers, the chancel the saints, the nave Christians on earth. These symbolic associations are not unique to this homily, but rather derive from a broader European Christian tradition. The twelfth-century works of Honorius Augustodunensis in Germany are a likely origin for these symbols, especially *Gemmae Animae, Sermones in dedicatione*, and his commentaries on the Song of Songs.³⁴⁴ While the symbols of Honorius stemmed from a longer tradition of architectural symbolism that originated from Biblical metaphors, G. Turville-Petre argues that Icelandic authors were aware of Honorius in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and that his works were the likely conduit through which Norse authors translated and wrote *Kirkjudagsmál*.³⁴⁵ Hans Bekker-Nielsen, however, points to the multiple sources

³⁴² Turville-Petre, "The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication," 211-213.

³⁴³ Bekker-Nielsen, "The Old Norse Dedication Homily," 128.

³⁴⁴ Turville-Petre, "The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication," 206-211.

³⁴⁵ In addition to the architectural symbolism in the New Testament Books of John and Peter, Turville-Petre mentions the works of Isidore, Bede, Amalarius of Metz, and Rabanus Maurus. Turville-Petre, "The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication," 207, 213-214.

referenced by G. Turville-Petre to argue that such a homily is more likely one of many similar texts in a larger Christian “context of living tradition.”³⁴⁶ Regardless, the Norse authors of *Kirkjudagsmál* adapted both language and symbols to meet local needs and architectural forms.

The church described is, of course, not a real church, but rather a fictitious one constructed in the imagination of the homily author, consisting of generalized architectural components that would have been recognizable to recently converted Norse communities. For example, while European texts reference a stone floor within their churches, with Christians as the “living stones of which the church was built,” the Old Icelandic homilies discuss wooden plank floors.³⁴⁷ There is some debate about whether or not this church was based on a wooden stave church, a mast church, or an Icelandic turf church, yet Bekker-Neilsen argues that the interior, which is the focus of the homily, would have consisted of similar wooden components regardless the exterior structural material.³⁴⁸ Even if the author had a specific church in mind when he composed the homily, the forms were general enough to apply to the various architectural contexts in which the homily was spoken in at least Iceland and Norway, as indicated by the homily’s existence in two homily books from both regions. Given the close political and ecclesiastical relationship between Norway and the North Atlantic settlements, it would be surprising if this homily or some derivation of it did not spread to the Northern Isles as well.

³⁴⁶ Bekker-Neilsen, “The Old Norse Dedication Homily,” 131.

³⁴⁷ Turville-Petre, “The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication,” 210.

³⁴⁸ In nationalistic fashion, some Norwegian scholars argue that the stave construction appearing in the homily proves a Norwegian origin for the text. Bekker-Neilsen, “The Old Norse Dedication Homily,” 130-133.

Yet, it is not this symbolic wooden church that relates to this study, but rather its contrast with the homily's opening lines about Solomon. In full, the homily begins:

Salomon rex gørði fyrstr musteri goði til dýrðar ok bauð lýð sínum at halda hátíð, þá es algort vas musterit. En es allr lýðr kom til hátíðarhaldsins, þá stóð Salomon á bön ok mælti svá: “Heyrðir þú, dróttinn, bön þræls þíns, þá es ek bað þik, at ek smíðaða þér musteri. En nú helga þú ok bleza hús þetta, es ek smíðaða í þínu nafni. Heyrðu, dróttinn, bön þá, er þræll þinn biðr þik í dag, at augu þín sé upplokin ok eyru þín heyrandi yfir hús þetta dag ok nótt. Ef lýðr þinn misgerir ok snýsk til synðaiðranar ok kómr til þessa mustervis ok biðr fyr sér, þá heyr þú bönnir þeirra í þessum stað ok leys þá ýr hǫndum óvina sinna.” En es Salomon lauk bön sinni, þá vitraðisk dróttinn með ljósi, ok sǫ allir dýrð goðs koma yfir húsit, ok lutu allir goði, þeir es í musterinu vóru.³⁴⁹

King Solomon first erected a temple to God and, when it was completed, he invited his people to hold a festival. Then Solomon stood praying and he spoke these words, “You hear, O Lord, the prayer of your servant, which I prayed to you when I fashioned the temple for you; bless and hallow this house which I did build in your name. Hear, God, the prayer which your servant prays to you this day that your eyes may be open and your ears listening above this house day and night. If your people transgress and turn to repentance and come to this temple, hear their prayers in this place and deliver them from the hands of their enemies.” And when Solomon had ended his prayer, the Lord appeared and the whole people witnessed the magnificence of the Lord coming over the temple, and all present bowed down to God and praised the Lord.

While this passage is shorter than the account in *Stjórn*, leaving out many construction details, sections relating to Solomon's consecration prayer, particularly his plea that God keep his eyes and ears open “dag ok nótt,” suggest a close translation link not only with *Stjórn III*, but also with the Vulgate.³⁵⁰

Another important similarity between the homily and *Stjórn III* is the use of the term *musteri* to describe Solomon's Temple. Despite the use of *musteri* for royal churches presented in earlier chapters,³⁵¹ the Cleasby/Vigfusson Iceland-English

³⁴⁹ de Leeuw Weenen, *The Icelandic Homily Book*, 76-77.

³⁵⁰ Vulgate, I Kings 8:29.

³⁵¹ See chapter 3 and chapter 4.

dictionary defines *musteri* as a “temple.”³⁵² The term’s relationship to *monasterium* is noted, as well as its relationship to the Anglo-Saxon term *mynster* and English *minster*. For its definition, though, they state that *musteri* is an old and modern ecclesiastic term for temple in the Jewish and Christian traditions in contrast to temples in a pagan tradition, in which case the Old Icelandic term *hof* is used. Etymologically, scholars argue that *musteri* is tied to both the English *minster* and the Latin *monasterium*, yet both translations would suggest a monastic foundation that is not always apparent in the Old Icelandic. The term is in fact most commonly used in Old Icelandic religious texts like *Stjórn*, especially as a translation for the Latin word *templum*.³⁵³ Nevertheless, the term does not seem to describe a specific function or status of a church, such as a cathedral, as another designation for these churches was used. Similarly, the limited use of *musteri* suggests that it did not designate a fixed physical or religious structure, but rather a structure with more elusive symbolic meaning.³⁵⁴

The association of *musteri* with Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem derives not only from how it is used in *Kirkjudagsmál*, but also from how it is *not* used. When the homily transitions from Solomon and Solomon’s Temple to the symbolic Christian church, the

³⁵² Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Cleasby, “Musteri,” in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1874), 439.

³⁵³ Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Cleasby, “Musteri,” 439.

³⁵⁴ In a footnote, Einar Ól defines this term for readers as a “*stór kirkja, höfuðkirkja*” (“big church, head church”), with the latter typically referring to a cathedral. When presenting this information at the 2nd International St. Magnus Conference in Lerwick, Shetland in April 2014, Morten Stige suggested in a private conversation that a less literal, but perhaps more accurate translation of *musteri* would be “great church” a term occasionally used in architectural studies to indicate architectural importance. However, the Old Icelandic use of the term incorporates a variety of structures, religions, scales, and materials not encapsulated in that phrase. The designation of *musteri* does not appear to be physical, but contextual. Einar Ól, *Laxdæla saga*, 216. Moreover, rather than deriving from *monasterium*, it is possible that *musteri* actually derives from the Greek *mystēria* (“mysteries”) or *mystēs* (“initiate”), ancient terms with secret, cultic connotations that were adopted by early Christians. Thank you to Tyler Jo Smith for pointing out this connection. Sarah Iles Johnston, “Mysteries,” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston, 98-111 (Cambridge: Harvard, 2004), 110-111.

language switches to the more traditional *kirkja*: “Af þessum røkum hófusk kirkjur ok allt kirkjudagahald. En alls vér höldum kirkjuhelgi í dag, góð systkin, þá es øss fyrst nauðsyn at vita, hversu margfalda miskunn vér tókum í kirkjunni” (“From these origins, churches and all the celebration of dedication days began. And since, dear brethren, we are holding the feast of dedication today, it is of first importance that we realize how great is the grace we receive in the church”).³⁵⁵ This is a significant change, for it seems to distinguish between the Temple of Jerusalem and medieval churches while simultaneously emphasizing the development of the latter from Solomon’s example. The rest of the homily, other than two related references, uses the term *kirkja*.

The two additional references to a *musteri* in *Kirkjudagmál* refer to the body as a temple for God. Between the descriptions of the *kirkja*, the homily continues, “En alls einu nafni kallast á bókum kirkjan og allur saman kristinn lýður... hversu kirkja merkir lýðinn eða hversu kristinn lýður kallast höll Guðs: “Ér eruð heilagt musteri Guðs, þess er byggvir í yður” (“But by all one name are the church and all together Christian people called in books...how the church means the people or how the Christians are called the hall of God, ‘You are the holy temple of God, who dwells in you’”).³⁵⁶ After this passage, the language reverts to *kirkja*, describing how the symbolic wooden church is divided into two parts: the *sqnghiús* (chancel) and the *kirkja* (nave). While the *sqnghiús* was closest to the altar, and therefore Christ, it represented the saints in heaven. The *kirkja*, with the same name as the church overall, represented the Christian people on earth. After these descriptions of the church, the homily repeats, “því að yfir þann grundvöll og undirstokk skulum vér smíða öll góð verk, að þau megu verða musteri Guðs” (“because

³⁵⁵ de Leeuw van Weenen, *The Icelandic Homily Book*, 76-77.

³⁵⁶ de Leeuw van Weenen, *The Icelandic Homily Book*, 45r.

over the foundation and underposts we will build all good work, that they become the temple of God.”). Again, the next passages switch to *kirkja* as it describes the chancel and altar as prayer and good deeds, respectively. While the differentiation might seem trivial, the change of term to *musteri* in fact marks a key shift in New Testament ideas.

The idea of the body as a temple, that God cannot be contained to a building, is first evoked by Solomon himself, who offers in his consecration prayer in the Old Testament tradition, “Is it then to be thought that God should indeed dwell upon Earth? For if heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have built?”³⁵⁷ Allan Kerr argues that the Gospel of John uses the Greek “house” (*oikia*), as a way to describe both the temple and family.³⁵⁸ In Nathan’s prophecy, David wants to build a house (temple) for God, but God will first build a house (dynasty/family) for David.³⁵⁹ The term, however, does not always clearly distinguish between temple and dynasty, leading later interpreters to presume references to the physical Temple, rather than family.³⁶⁰ In the New Testament, God’s house representing the Temple is replaced with the representation of the concept as lineage, which includes Jesus.³⁶¹ Jesus himself refers to the body as a temple, which could be rebuilt in three days after being destroyed through (a reference to his resurrection).³⁶² Paul, in first letter to the Corinthians, then expands this point by applying the house/temple to the Christians’ bodies, “Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”³⁶³ This

³⁵⁷ Vulgate, III Kings 8:27, pg 695.

³⁵⁸ Allan Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 220 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 144.

³⁵⁹ Interestingly, David does not build this Temple; the task falls to his son and successor Solomon. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body*, 294-296.

³⁶⁰ Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body*, 295.

³⁶¹ Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body*, 298.

³⁶² Vulgate, John 2:19, Hogeterp, “King Solomon in the New Testament and Jewish Tradition,” 148-151.

³⁶³ Vulgate, 1 Corinthians 3:16.

association, between temple and body, is particularly apt for the homily, which looks to explain the church in terms of the members of the broader Christian community. When the homily no longer refers to the church, but rather to the temple within the bodies of individual Christians, the temple originally compared to and conflated with Solomon's, the language itself shifts. The shift, in this case, underscores a theological difference deriving from Old Testament and New Testament debates, with *musteri* linked to Solomon's Temple and the bodily temple that replaced it.

BIBLICAL KINGS AND THEIR NORTHERN SUCCESSORS

The term *musteri* is used as a Biblical construct, distinguished from a physical church in the landscape; likewise, the use of *musteri* within other sagas takes on important symbolic connotations. As indicated by the *Kirkjudagsmál* fragment, this homily was in circulation at least by the mid-twelfth century (though probably earlier), when Rognvaldr made his vow and started his own construction of St. Magnus Cathedral. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Porfinnr and Rognvaldr, like Solomon, both *gera* ("built") a *musteri*. Both of the earls' churches are called a *kirkja* after this point, emphasizing the link between this unusual term and the act of building it or vowing to do so. The use of the term *musteri* would have linked their patronage with that of Solomon, associating not only the earls with Solomon, but also their churches with Solomon's Temple. This relationship would have matched similar royal expressions by the Norwegian kings, who applied *musteri* to their own churches, and by European kings in

the adjacent nations, further reinforcing royal ambition and display in Orkney.³⁶⁴ As a prolific poet himself, Rognvaldr may have found an alliance with King Solomon, who “spoke three thousand parables: and his poems were a thousand and five,” especially appealing.³⁶⁵

King David, too, was a poet, and it is possible that Rognvaldr may also have been associated with him. David, who composed the Psalms and played the harp for King Saul, is often represented with a harp as his attribute. As *Orkneyinga saga* records Rognvaldr’s own canonization, it is possible that at least one sculpture survives of Rognvaldr with a similar stringed instrument. This heavily weathered sculpture survived for centuries in a tower niche in the Bishops’ palace in Orkney (Figure 5.4). While it is not possible to identify many features of this sculpture due to its poor preservation, Barbara Crawford argues that this is a rare representation of St. Rognvaldr. With courtly dress and posture, “the impression is of a noble figure and a layman from the short tunic that he is wearing.”³⁶⁶ Crawford identifies the weathered object to the figures’ side as a stringed instrument, perhaps a fiddle, harp, or lyre as depicted in Norwegian illustrations of the Gunnar in the snakepit, thus associating the figure with a musician or poet.³⁶⁷ Displayed so prominently on the palace of the bishop, the figure likely has appropriate religious connotations, perhaps representing King David.³⁶⁸ The lack of a crown, however, suggests to Crawford that this is in fact a late thirteenth-century representation

³⁶⁴ While Norwegian kings also constructed *musteri*, starting with Óláf kyrre in the late eleventh century, the relationship between *Heimskringla* and *Orkneyinga saga* texts make it impossible to determine when this term was first applied and by whom.

³⁶⁵ Vulgate, I Kings 4:32.

³⁶⁶ Barbara Crawford, “An Unrecognised statue of Earl Rognvald?” in *Northern Isles Connection: Essays from Orkney and Shetland presented to Per Sveaas Anderson*, ed. Barbara Crawford, 29-46 (Kirkwall: The Orkney Press, 1995), 33.

³⁶⁷ Crawford, “An Unrecognized statue,” 36-37.

³⁶⁸ Vulgate, I Kings 16: 18-23, 391.

of Rognvaldr, who boasted of his skill at poetry and playing the harp.³⁶⁹ While speculative, such an identification might imply at least a conflation of Rognvaldr's and David's attributes and, consequently, of Rognvaldr and David himself, if not during the former's lifetime, then after his death and canonization.

The association between David and Rognvaldr seems more plausible given the active evocation of King David in the late twelfth century by the Norwegian King Sverrir Sigurðarson. Sverrir, like Rognvaldr, was a foreigner who claimed kinship with a previous ruler and overcame competition and military resistance to his claim to rule. Sverrir, born and raised in the Faroe Islands in the North Sea, claimed to be the illegitimate son of King Sigurðr Munn Haraldsson of Norway (1136-1155). Traveling to Norway, he recruited supporters called the Birkebeiners and eventually defeated King Magnús Erlingsson, whose tenuous claim to the crown through his mother was bolstered by the support of Archbishop Eysteinn. To reinforce his claim, Sverrir engaged personally in the establishment of a hegemonic memory of his conquest of Norway through saga traditions.³⁷⁰ The prologue of *Sverris saga* explains Sverrir's key role recording the story, for he sat over the author, Abbot Karl Jonsson, and “réð fyrir hvat rita skyldi” (“commanded what he should write”).³⁷¹ Sverrir's personal attention to this account underscores its importance as a propagandistic tool and the significance of modeling his undisputed reign over Norway on King David, who similarly ruled over all of Israel.

³⁶⁹ Crawford, “An Unrecognized statue,” 41-42.

³⁷⁰ Bjørn Bandlien, “Hegemonic Memory, Counter-Memory, and Struggles for Royal Power: The Rhetoric of the Past in the Age of King Sverrir Sigurðsson of Norway,” *Scandinavian Studies* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 355-377.

³⁷¹ Þorleifur Hauksson, ed. *Sverris saga*, Íslensk fornrit XXX (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2007), 3.

The saga depicts Sverrir as the legitimate ruler of Norway, with miraculous events accenting his favor within a Christian context. Early in the saga, Sverrir experiences a number of prophetic dreams. In the third dream, he is praying in Mary's Church in the Norwegian city of Borg when an old bearded man visits him. The man beckons Sverrir to come to a room on the north side of the choir, stating he was sent by God. When Sverrir asked who he was, the man replies, "Hræðsk eigi þú bróðir, friðr verði með þér, því at ek em Samúel, Guðs spámaðr" ("Fear not brother, peace be with you, because I am Samuel, God's prophet"),³⁷² and Samuel says that he has a message from God. Then:

Eftir þat tók þessi gamli maðr horn ór skreppu er hann hafði á hálsi sér, ok sýndisk honum sem krismi væri í horninu. Þá mælti sá inn gamli maðr við Sverri: "Lát mik sjá hendr þinar," segir hann. Eftir þat þóttisk hann rétta fram báðar hendr sínar til hans. Sá maðr smurði hendr hans ok mælti svá, "Helgisk ok styrkisk þessar hendr til hatrs við óvini ok mótstöðumenn sína at stjórna mǫrgum lýðum." Síðan kyssti hann Sverri ok tók í hönd hans ina hægri ok mælti við han: "Leitaðu nú austr ór þröng þinna óvina, því at þú skalt konung vera." Ok enn kyssti hann Sverri í annat sinn ok mælti: "Ver þú hraustr ok sterkr, því at Guð mun fulltngja þér."³⁷³

After this, the old man took a horn from a scrip which he had on his neck. And it seemed to him that oil was in the horn. Then this old man said to Sverrir, "Let me see your hands" said he. After this it seemed to him both of his hands reached forward to him. Then, the man anointed his hands and said this: "holy and strong are these hands." Later he kissed Sverrir and took his right hand and said to him "Be now strong and vigilant, because you will be king. And then kissed Sverrir on the other one and said, "because God will help you."

This passage, which makes explicit reference to Samuel's anointment of David,³⁷⁴ recognizes Sverrir as the next legitimate and divinely appointed king of Norway. David Bond West notes the several symbolic numbers further link this passage to the Bible; after his dream, 70 Birkebeiners persuade Sverrir to become their leader and he tells 12

³⁷² Þorleifur Hauksson, *Sverris saga*, 17.

³⁷³ Þorleifur Hauksson, *Sverris saga*, 17. Turville-Petre, "The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication," 215-218.

³⁷⁴ Vulgate, I Kings 16:13.

men his dream. The number 70 relates to the 70 Israelites with Jacob, 70 elders with Moses and Aaron, and the 70 years of the Babylonian exile.³⁷⁵ The number 12 relates to the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles of Christ.³⁷⁶ When accepting his leadership, then, Sverrir quotes Psalm 55: “Have mercy on me, O God, for man hath trodden me under foot; all the day long he hath afflicted me, fighting against me. My enemies have trodden on me all the day long, for they are many that make war against me. From the height of the day I shall fear, but I will trust in thee.”³⁷⁷ Within the context of Sverrir’s speech, West interprets Sverrir’s reference as a way to associate himself with David, who wrote the Psalms, and a prophecy that Sverrir will defeat his enemy as a “long-delayed answer to David’s prayer.”³⁷⁸ Moreover, Sverre Bagge recognizes that King Sverrir, like David, was depicted as a “‘a little and low man’ from the periphery” who was able to overcome superior forces and numbers due to skill, foresight, and God’s support.³⁷⁹ Within the “David and Goliath” dynamic used to describe Sverrir and his superior advisories, Sverrir represents a divinely appointed ruler, while Magnús represents a rebel against God.³⁸⁰ This association links Magnús not only with King Saul, but possibly also with Adam and Pharaoh.³⁸¹

Sverrir’s relationship to David is not limited to textual narrative; like Rognvaldr’s association of St. Magnus Cathedral with Solomon’s Temple, Sverrir associates his own

³⁷⁵ Genesis 46, Exodus 24, and Jeremiah 25. David Bond West, “Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga*,” (master’s thesis, University of Iceland, 2012), 13.

³⁷⁶ West, “Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga*,” 13.

³⁷⁷ West, “Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga*,” 13. Vulgate, Psalm 55: 2-4.

³⁷⁸ West, “Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga*,” 13-14.

³⁷⁹ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord’s Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), 64.

³⁸⁰ Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord’s Anointed*, 48.

³⁸¹ Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord’s Anointed*, 63-64. Haki Antonsson makes a similar association between Saul and Hákon in *Orkneyinga saga*. See chapter 3.

fortification with David's Zion.³⁸² In the Bible, Zion is a fortified mountain near Jerusalem that David conquered as his own when he took the city.³⁸³ Psalm 47, directly associates the king with this site: "With joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion founded, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king."³⁸⁴ When Sverrir finally takes Steinbjörg, a mountain outside the town of Trondheim,³⁸⁵ he constructs a strong fortification there (Figure 5.5).³⁸⁶ When Sverrir's enemies threaten the fortification in a later chapter, the saga reveals the name of Sverrir's construction, "Þorsteinn kúgaðr gætti borgarinnar Síon. Var ok lið í borginni, svá at ekki skorti til varnar" ("Þorstein kúgaðr controlled the fortification, Zion. And a host was in the fortification, so there was no shortage of defense").³⁸⁷ By constructing his own Zion, Sverrir pronounces himself as the new David, Trondheim as the new Jerusalem. His reign, like that of David's, will usher in a new sanctioned era for Norway.³⁸⁸

Referencing Old Icelandic Biblical translations, *Orkneyinga saga's* use of the term *musteri* for both Rognvaldr's St. Magnus Cathedral and Þorfinnr's Christ Church, associated these key churches with the Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. In doing so, the

³⁸² Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed*, 63, footnote 54.

³⁸³ Vulgate, II Kings 5:7.

³⁸⁴ Vulgate, Psalm 47: 3.

³⁸⁵ Modern day Trondheim in Norway.

³⁸⁶ Þorleifur Hauksson, *Sverris saga*, 113.

³⁸⁷ Interestingly, stone foundations of Sverrir's Zion can still be seen on the mountain outside of the modern city of Trondheim. The heavy stone fortifications are now called Sverresborg (Sverrir's fortification), and the location offers an unparalleled view of the city, the countryside, and the fjord. Recently, the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research announced that a skeleton discovered in an old well on the site is more than 800 years old. This dating places the middle-aged man to the late twelfth century, when Sverrir's fortification was destroyed by his enemies. This dating seems to confirm the account in the saga that his enemies "tóku allt fé þat er í var borginni, ok síðan brenndu þeir hvert hús, þat er þar var. Þeir tóku einn mann dauðan ok steypðu í brunninn, báru síðan þar á ofan grjót þar til er fullr var ("seized all the property in the castle, and then burnt every building of it. They took a dead man and cast him into the well, and then filled it up with stones"), presumably to poison it and prevent its further use. The fortification was eventually taken again by Sverrir and rebuilt. "Skjelettet i brønnen på Sverresborg er datert!" *NIKUs arkeologiblogg*, 11 May 2014, Þorleifur Hauksson, *Sverris saga*, 166, 207.

³⁸⁸ West, "Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga*," 15-16.

saga connected the earls with King Solomon. This typological association is not unusual; in fact, it was a common Christian practice in Europe throughout the medieval era to equate rulers with their Biblical predecessors. By evoking Solomon and perhaps David, Rognvaldr not only inserted himself within a Christian tradition of kingship, but also associated himself with powerful medieval rulers like Justinian I, Charlemagne, and Alfred the Great. Under Rognvaldr's leadership, then, Orkney could continue to develop into a powerful and autonomous region. Although Rognvaldr's reputation and cult did not fulfill these claims, these associations nevertheless underscore his royal ambitions, especially as the Norwegian kings successfully employed similar strategies themselves.

By the late twelfth century, King Sverrir Sigurðarson dictated his own saga, making these typological associations explicit for the increasingly powerful Norwegian crown. Whether or not Þorfinnr, Ólaf kyrre, or Rognvaldr actively applied *musteri* to their own constructions is not known, but there is evidence of this term in circulation in *Kirkjudagsmál* at least by the mid-eleventh century. Nonetheless, by the thirteenth century, the tradition was cemented in writing, linking the leaders together and to King Solomon intertextually through their patronage.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

According to the Middle English Arthurian tradition, Orkney was a distant and exotic land. In earlier literature, it was ruled by a certain King Gunfasius; later literature associated it with Lothian and Norway through the powerful King Lot, brother-in-law to the legendary King Arthur and father to Sir Gawain. The former submitted to Arthur, providing tribute, while the latter was friend and occasionally foe of the legendary king of Camelot.³⁸⁹ While the literature is detached from the cultural and geographical aspects of the historical Orkney under discussion in this study, its representation of Orkney as an autonomous kingdom within this internationally popular corpus is intriguing. Orkney's status as a North Sea power ebbed when this romantic literature developed, and there was clear confusion among the authors regarding what and where Orkney really was. Orkney, of course, was a foil and trope in this later literature, a literary kingdom to complement and distinguish from Arthur's court. Nevertheless, the memory of a legendary autonomous Orkney remained, one that—like the Norse account of Orkney's Pents and Papes³⁹⁰—integrated fantasy and history for the consumption of contemporary audiences.

The literary memory of Orkney, however, achieved the status Rognvaldr's Orkney could not. Through the patronage of St. Magnus Cathedral, Rognvaldr embedded himself within local traditions, North Sea royal patronage, and Biblical king typology; yet, as far as the evidence suggests, he never adopted a royal title, or designated his realm a kingdom. Ultimately, it cannot be determined with certainty that this was even his aim.

³⁸⁹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Aaron Thompson. (Ontario: In parentheses Publications, 1999), 156. John D. Shafer, "Where is Orkney? The Conceptual Position of Orkney in Middle English Arthurian Literature," *Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special volume 4 (2013): 194-195.

³⁹⁰ See chapter 2.

By styling himself a king within North Sea and Christian traditions, Rognvaldr was able to gain control of the islands, establish kinship networks with foreign kings, and travel in grand style on pilgrimage. Within this context, the title may not have been as important as the aspirations for autonomy and power. Rognvaldr's and Orkney's autonomy was secure during his rule, which perhaps indicates at least a short-term success, even if it was not enough to maintain Orkney's independence permanently.

With regard to helping him secure the earldom despite his weak claim, Rognvaldr's cathedral was undoubtedly successful. A measure of this long-term success must be marked in the overwhelming dissemination of the cult of St. Magnús from Iceland to Russia, the unique preservation of his cathedral and its relics, and the popularity of the earls' saga in both Icelandic and English. In the short-term, it can also be counted by his successful reign over the islands, which he maintained for some 20 years despite internal conflict and travel abroad. Moreover, Rognvaldr was canonized despite the lack of evidence for his sanctity. Rognvaldr's blood relationship to Magnús and patronage of the cathedral sufficed. Although Rognvaldr's cult did not spread beyond a few calendar references in Iceland, it nevertheless enhanced his legacy as the patron of the glorious *musteri*.

Even though scholars do not discuss King Rognvaldr or the Kingdom of Orkney, Rognvaldr likely viewed his actions within the scope of his royal peers; thus, his inclusion within the kingly milieu of architectural patronage provides a point of departure for scholars to examine his actual or constructed political personas, as well as his apparent architectural acumen. Rognvaldr's claims were indeed sophisticated, "prepared with great craftiness" as his rival earl reportedly announced when he heard of

Rognvaldr's original claim. In addition to affiliating himself with earlier earls, Rognvaldr Brúsason and his uncle, St. Magnús, Rognvaldr's patronage of a *musteri* associated him with his predecessor Porfinnr, one of the most powerful figures in northern Britain at the time. Rognvaldr, moreover, relocated the Orcadian cathedral so it was geographically in the center of the islands, strategically situated with views north and south along sea-base routes, and cultivated Kirkwall as the new cultural, commercial, and spiritual focus of the Orkney community. The church itself exhibited established architectural trends seen at Durham, Dunfermline, and Trondheim, thereby recalling the architecture of other "kingmaker" saints of competing dynasties in England, Scotland, and Norway. These Anglo-Norman forms framed the rituals not only for St. Magnús' cult, but also for Rognvaldr's political administration. The reference to the term *musteri* for the construction of St. Magnus Cathedral, moreover, offered subtle associations with the architectural patronage of Norwegian kings, most commonly as they related to Norway's own dynastic saint, St. Óláfr, as well as with King Solomon and Solomon's Temple. This paradigm of Biblical typology was common during the Middle Ages and, through its insertion in an Old Icelandic text, shows the sophistication with which Rognvaldr embraced the established Christian narrative for his own divinely sanctioned rule.

Regardless of Orkney's ultimate fate, Rognvaldr's response to encroaching foreign pressure underscores the fluid exchange across the North Sea at the time. Both text and architecture communicated to a multi-faceted audience—locals, pilgrims, foreign rulers—that cannot be divided distinctly between north and south, Norse and European. These media embraced to varying degrees the exact trends adopted by English, Scottish, and Norwegian kings who sought to communicate not only to local resistance, but also to

their aristocratic equals across the sea. Rognvaldr's narrative—whether historically true or not—reveals the socio-political framework of the medieval North Sea world and the importance of monumental undertakings for royal legitimization.

According to *Orkneyinga saga*, in c. 1137, Rognvaldr was struggling to gain control of his uncle's half of the Orkney Islands. His first expedition failed and he was looking to gain supporters and launch a second attempt. His father offered him advice: vow to his martyred uncle to build him a *musteri* as never seen on the islands to gain both local and divine support for his invasion. Rognvaldr fulfilled his vow and was ultimately successful in his bid for his portion within Orkney—or so *Orkneyinga saga* records. Whether this story is actually history or merely memory is irrelevant. As the saga—in both oral and written form—circulated, this narrative would have established and propagated the memory of the event, thereby influencing how readers interpreted Rognvaldr's rule and the landscape he constructed in the medieval era just as it does today.

APPENDIX I: GIS VIEWSHED METHODOLOGY

ArcGIS is a suite of software that allows users to work with maps and other geographic information for a variety of applications. In architectural history and archaeology, the software is especially useful to map sites, geo-reference plans, and analyze data. This dissertation uses ArcGIS to map viewshed, or the area that is visible to an agent from a plotted point. Such information allows scholars to discern and visualize what is (or would have been) visible from a given location. Visibility and inter-visibility between sites are important themes in landscape and architecture studies, especially as they pertain to spatial orientation and organization, territory and resource control, and symbolic and physical relationships. In this dissertation, viewshed analysis is used to supplement architectural and literary information, especially as it pertains to the selection of Kirkwall as the new site of St. Magnus Cathedral.

There are limits to the GIS viewshed; it depends on the quality of data provided by the digital elevation model and does not take into account possible obstacles that can inhibit views, including trees, human-built constructions, and atmospheric conditions. While Orkney's weather is rarely clear, Orkney is a great location for this type of study because it has been cultivated for millennia and lacks forest cover. Also, while coastal erosion and reclamation efforts have undoubtedly changed the islands over the past 1000 years, the many surviving ruins in the landscape from Neolithic to modern age suggest little alteration to the interior of the islands. The application and theory of viewshed have

been explored extensively elsewhere;³⁹¹ this appendix aims to outline the method used to create the viewsheds presented in this thesis should anyone want to replicate the data.

The digital elevation model (DEM) derives from ASTER (Advanced Spaceborne Emission and Reflection Radiometer) and is divided into pixels of raster data. The data for Orkney was spread across four different grids, making it necessary to download and mosaic the data together in one lay in ArcMap.³⁹² To calculate the viewshed, a layer point is selected on the map; this point can derive from coordinates, though, in this case, the location of St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall and St. Magnus Kirk in Birsay were visible on a satellite basemap. These points, however, would only provide a viewshed from ground level. To take into account the height of the person's eye and the architecture they are standing on, the Offset A attribute was set to the approximate height of the St. Magnus Cathedral tower.

According to Dryden, the height of St. Magnus Cathedral is approximately 133 feet (or roughly 40 meters) high.³⁹³ For the Kirkwall and Birsay points, Offset A was set to 40. The generated viewshed (what is visible from that point at that height) is visualized in pink: St. Magnus Kirk in Figure 3.42 and St. Magnus Cathedral in Figure 3.43. The first viewshed is hypothetical, generated to consider the strategic nature of the established cathedral site. If Rognvaldr had reconstructed or expanded Christ Church to the scale of

³⁹¹ While this approach has only recently been adopted by architectural historians, it has been used successfully in archaeology for two decades: D. Wheatley, "Cumulative viewshed analysis: a GIS-based method for investigating intervisibility, and its archaeological application," in *Archaeology and Geographic Information Systems: A European Perspective*, ed. Gary Lock and Zoran Stančić, 171-186 (London: Taylor and Francis Publishers, 1995), 171-186. Steven J. R. Ellis, "The distribution of bars at Pompeii: archaeological, spatial and viewshed analyses," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (Jan. 2004): 371-384. at Eric E. Jones, "Using Viewshed Analysis to Explore Settlement Choice: A Case Study of the Onondaga Iroquois," *American Antiquity* 71, no. 3 (July 2006): 523-538.

³⁹² Chris Gist at the University of Virginia Scholars' Lab was instrumental to this process.

³⁹³ Data varies on the height of the tower and the author's laser measurements resulted in error. This data is an approximation from Dryden's early measurements. Dryden, *Description of the Church*, 31.

St. Magnus Cathedral, rather than move the site and church, the visibility would be distinctly westward, out to the open sea. While this might not seem like a strategic vantage point today, during the eleventh century, when Christ Church was constructed, this position would allow someone in the tower to see any maritime traffic to or from the Irish Sea.

The second viewshed for St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall is still oriented to the sea, but shows a revealing shift in orientation. An agent on the tower can see both north and south along the two major foreign routes to the city from Scotland in the south and Norway through Shetland in the north. Some of the coastal areas of Orkney are visible, but not as much as may be assumed if the church was intended to communicate solely to Orcadians. This viewshed can be confirmed by modern sea travel to Orkney, as the church is only visible from a narrow strip leading into Scapa Flow from the south (Figure 3.44).

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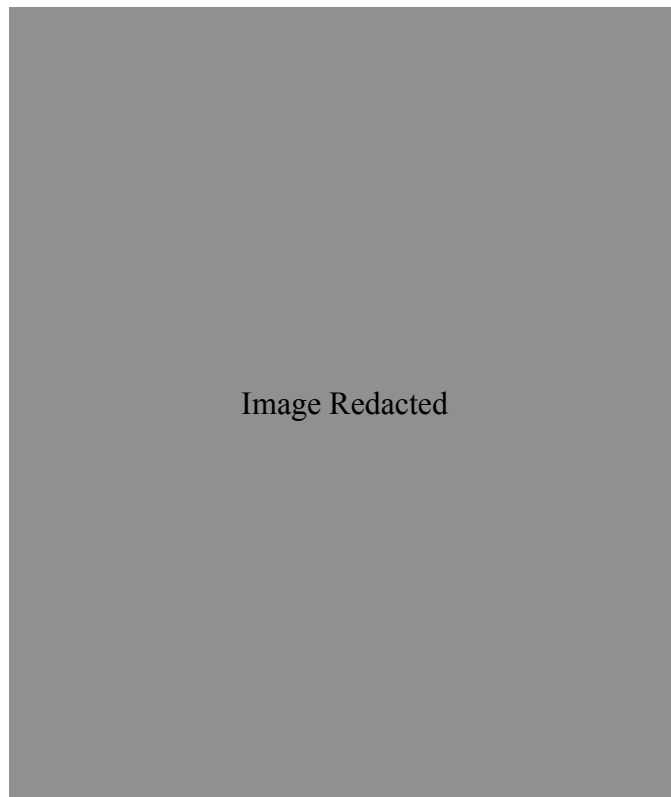
FIGURES

Figure 1.1: The Pentland Firth physically separates the Orkney archipelago from the northern coast of Scotland.

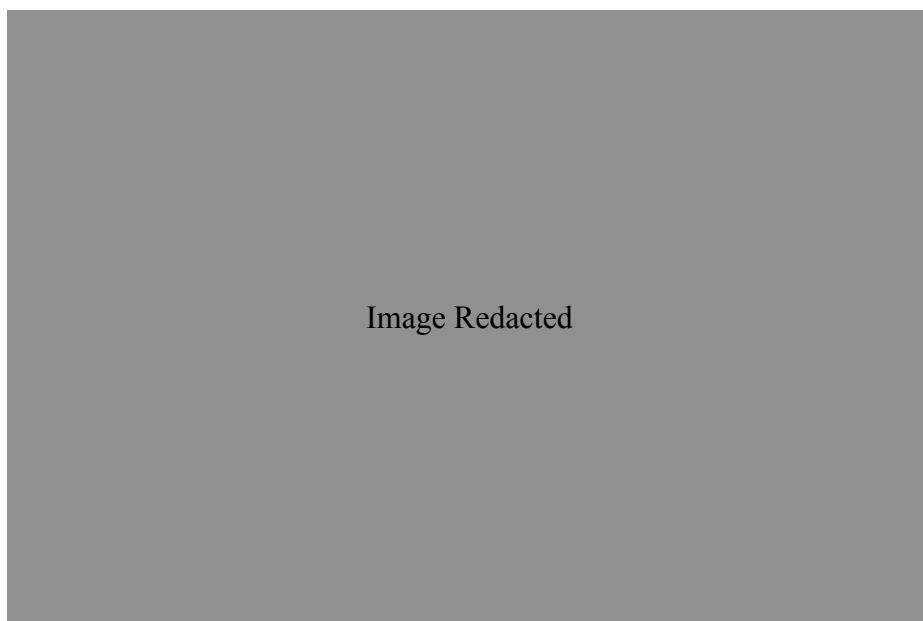


Figure 1.2: View of Orkney's coastline, partly obscured by mist, as seen from the south.

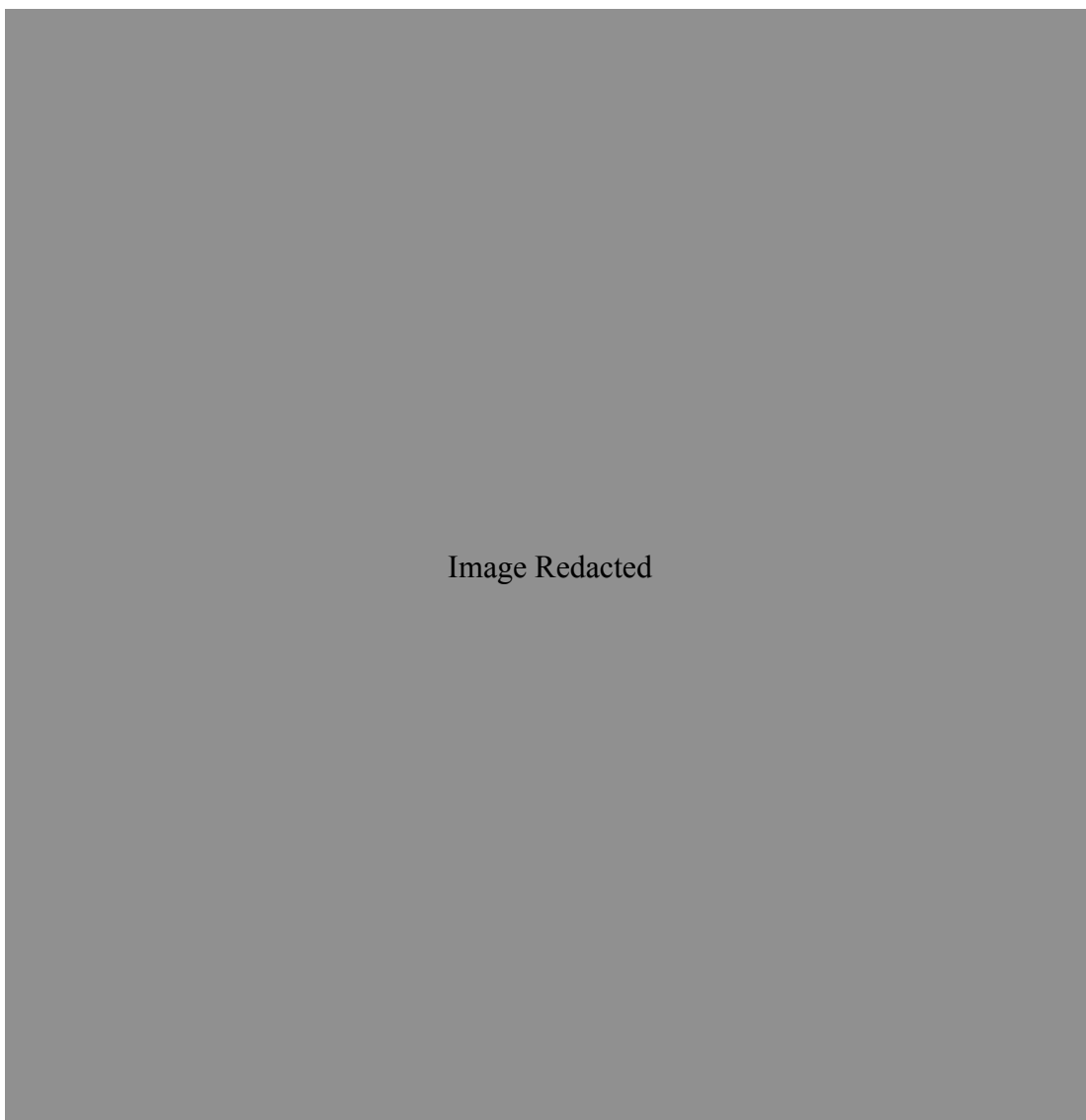


Figure 1.3: Northwest Europe, with the Orkney Islands geographically situated at the nexus of the North Atlantic Ocean, Norwegian Sea, and North Sea.

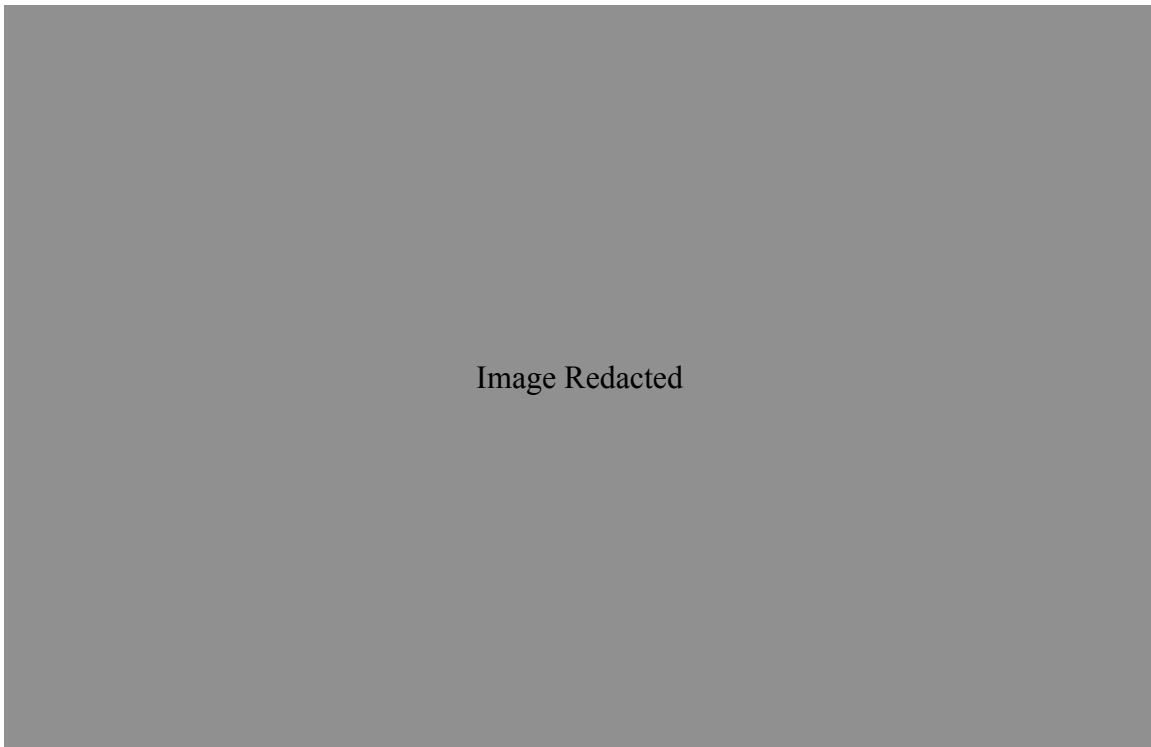


Figure 1.4: St. Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, Orkney, c. 1137.

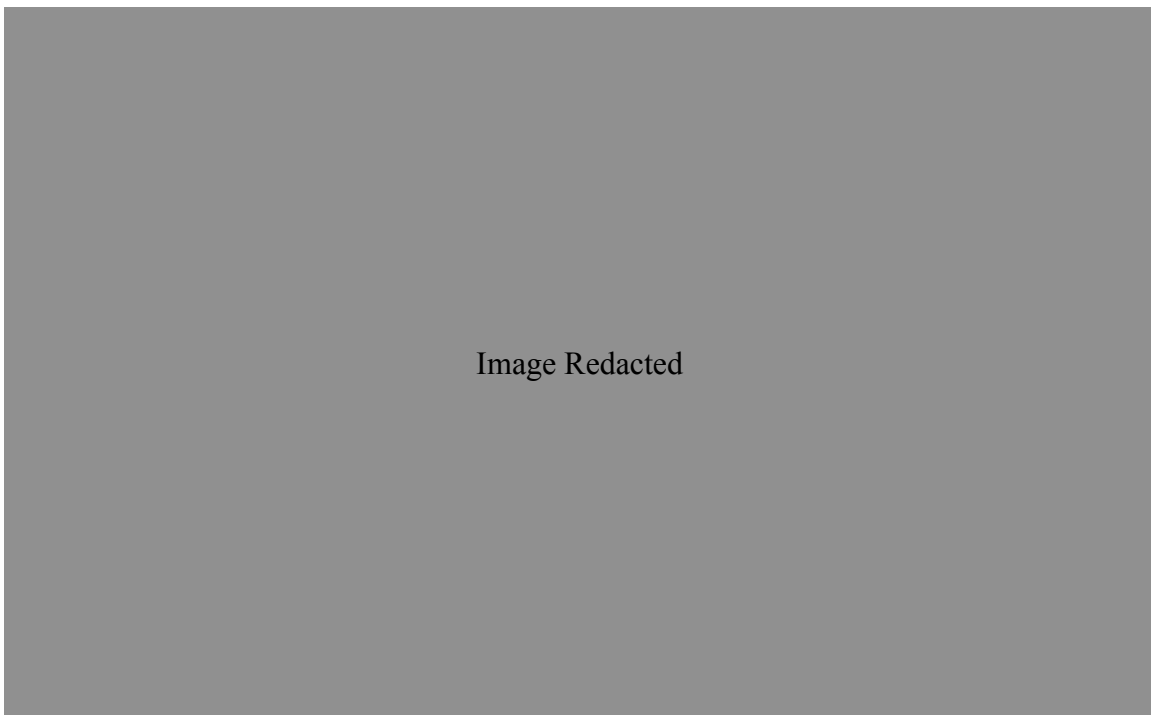


Figure 1.5: St. Magnus Cathedral within the Kirkwall cityscape. *View of Kirkwall from the Peerie Sea*, by Stanley Cursiter RSA, PRSW, 1914.

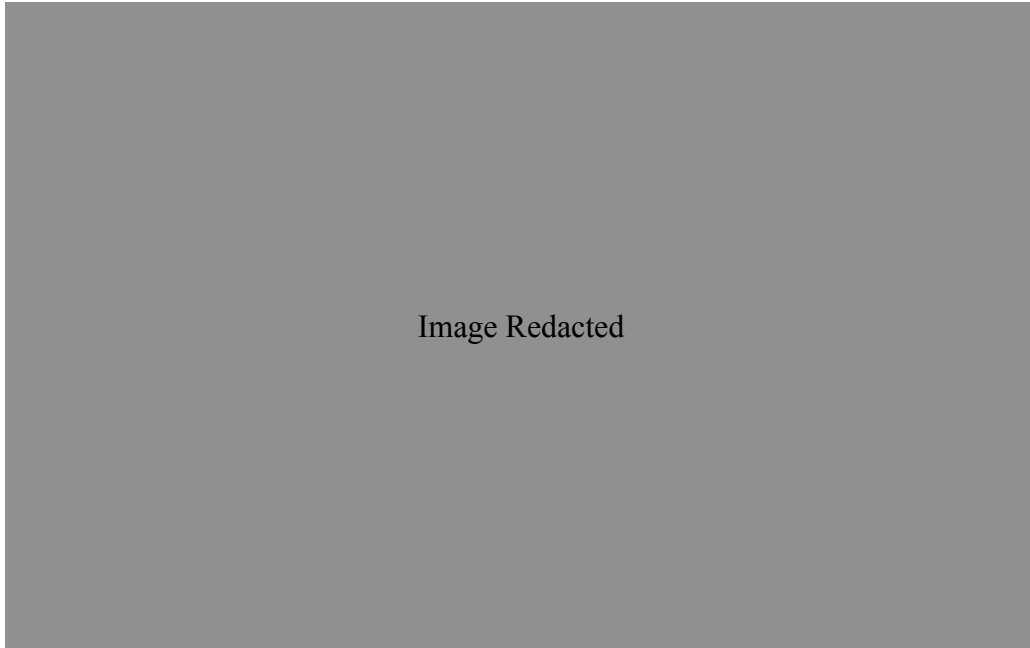


Figure 1.6: St. Magnus Cathedral, interior from the west. Note the consistent rhythm of the cylindrical drum columns and semi-circular arches.

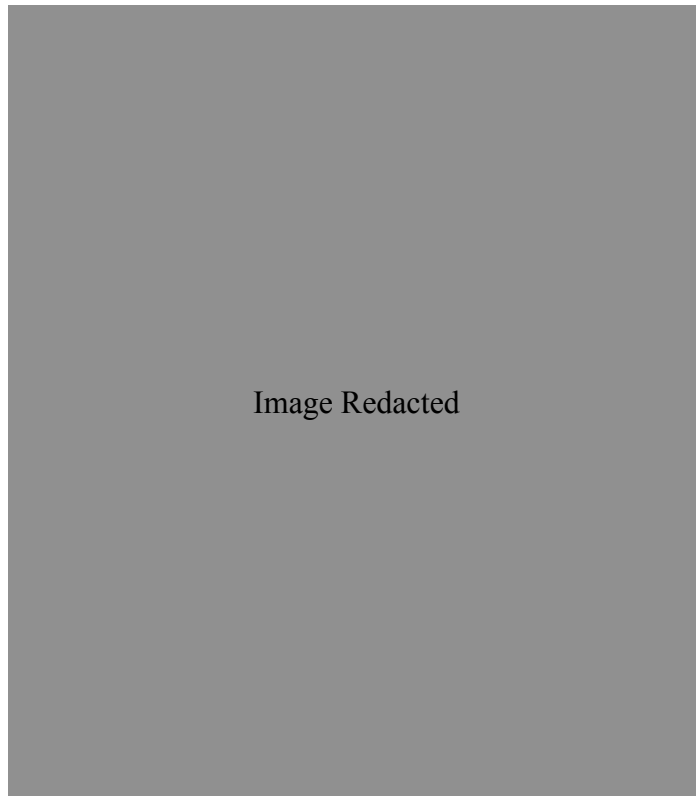


Figure 1.7: St. Magnus Cathedral, cylindrical drum column in the choir.



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Figure 1.8: St. Magnus Cathedral, semi-circular arches in in the nave.



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Figure 1.9: St. Magnus Cathedral, alternating yellow and red sandstone details in the choir, including striated pier, arcade mouldings, and gallery voussoirs.

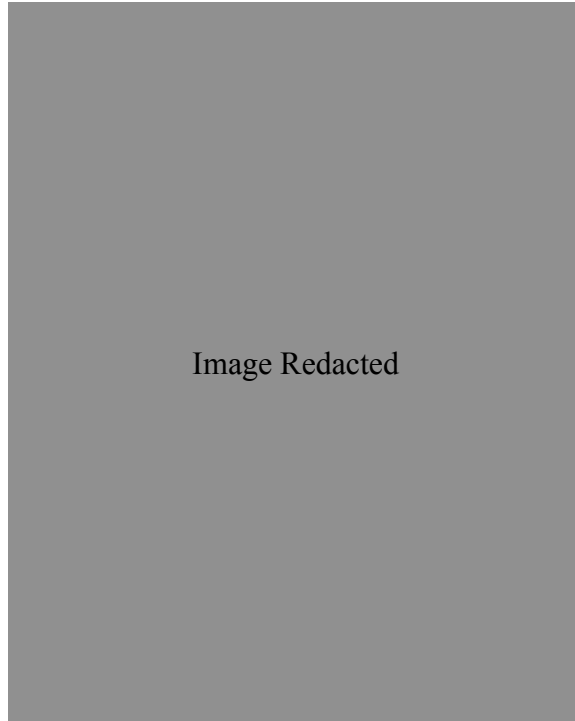


Figure 2.1: The reigning Queen Elizabeth II's first visit to Orkney, which is now part of the United Kingdom, in the 1960s.

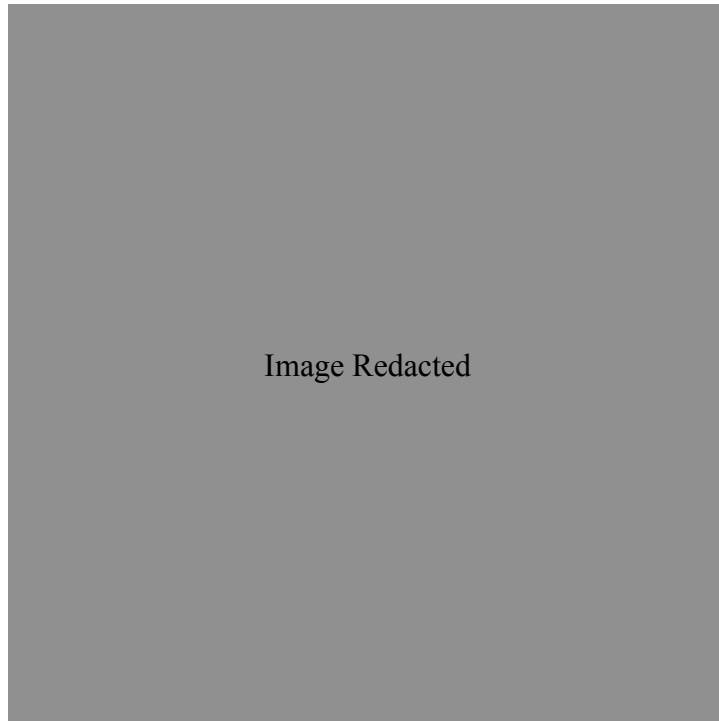


Figure 2.2: Seal of St. Magnus Cathedral with stylized architectural features, c. 1400.

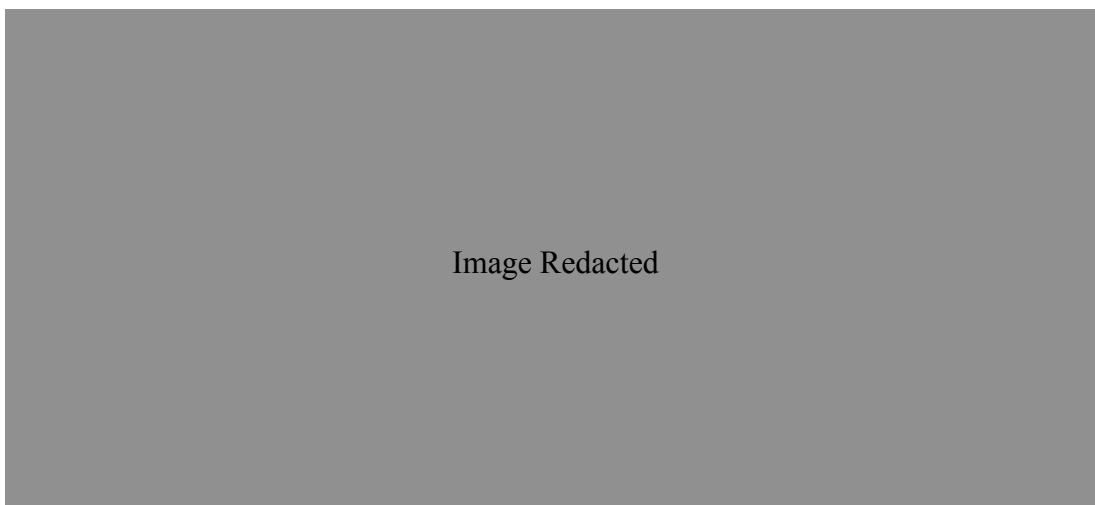


Figure 2.3: The descendants of Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson. Magnús and his sister's son, Rögnvaldr are to the right. The murderer of Magnús, Hákon Pálsson and his son Páll Hákonarson are to the left.

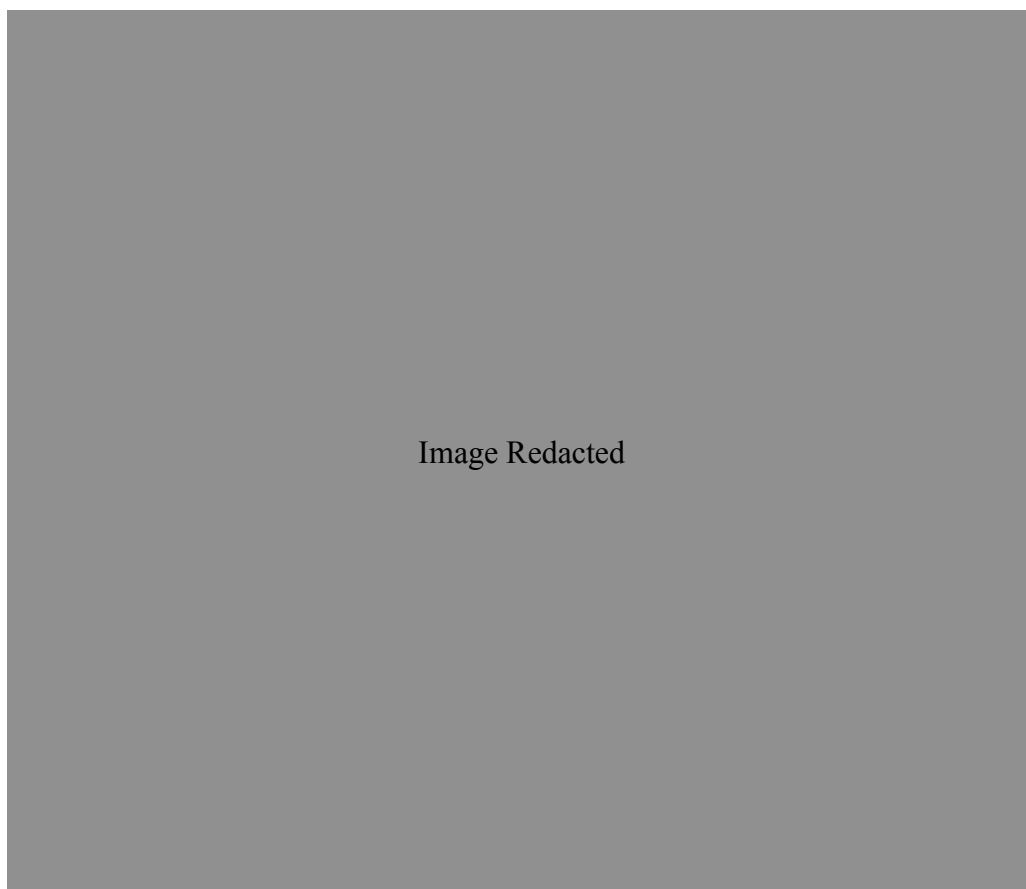


Figure 2.4: Original plan of St. Magnus Cathedral (left) and current plan of St. Magnus Cathedral (right), with green demarcating the original phases.

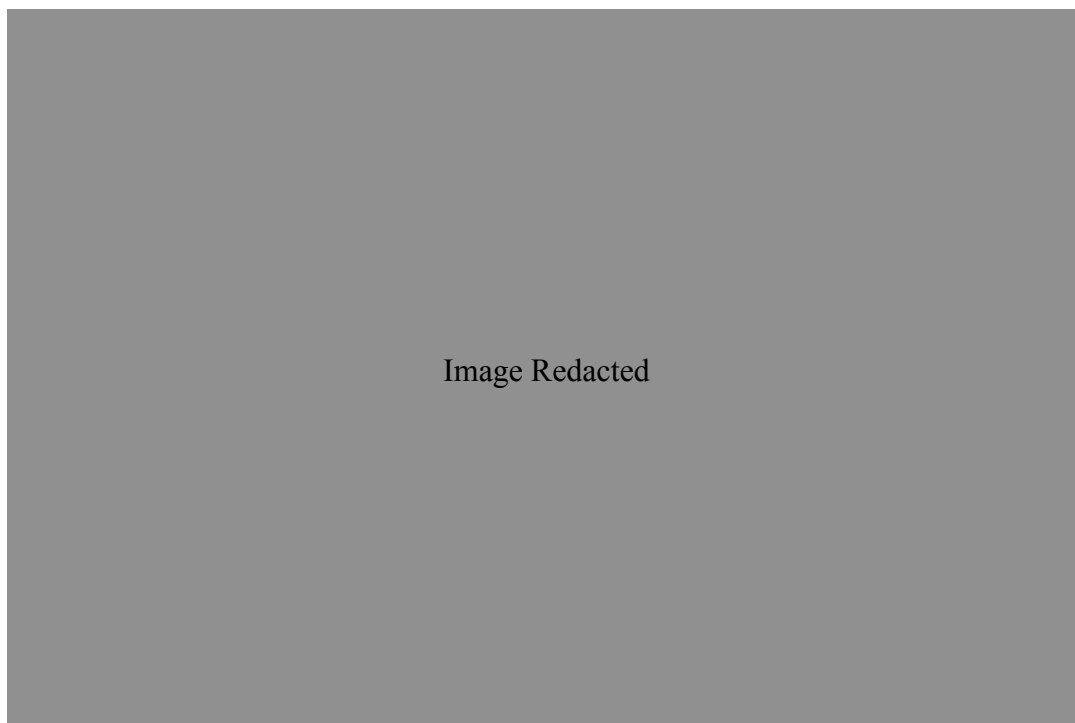


Figure 2.5: Expanded rectangular east end, late twelfth century.

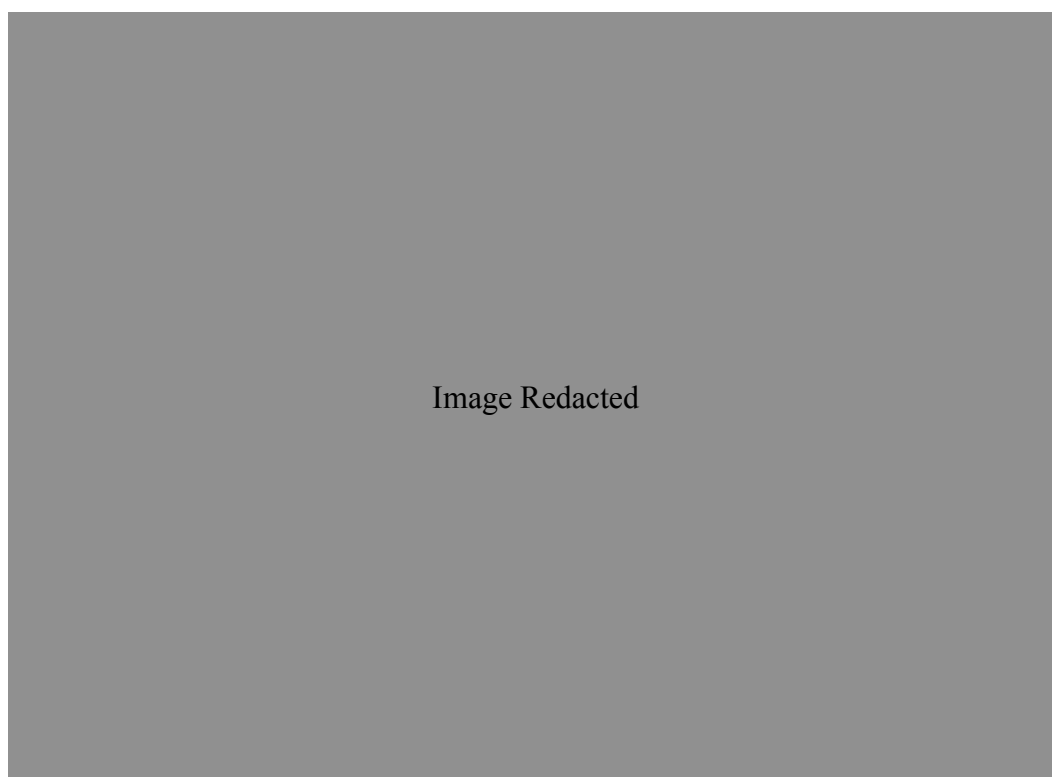


Figure 2.6: Skull discovered hidden in a choir column of St. Magnus Cathedral.

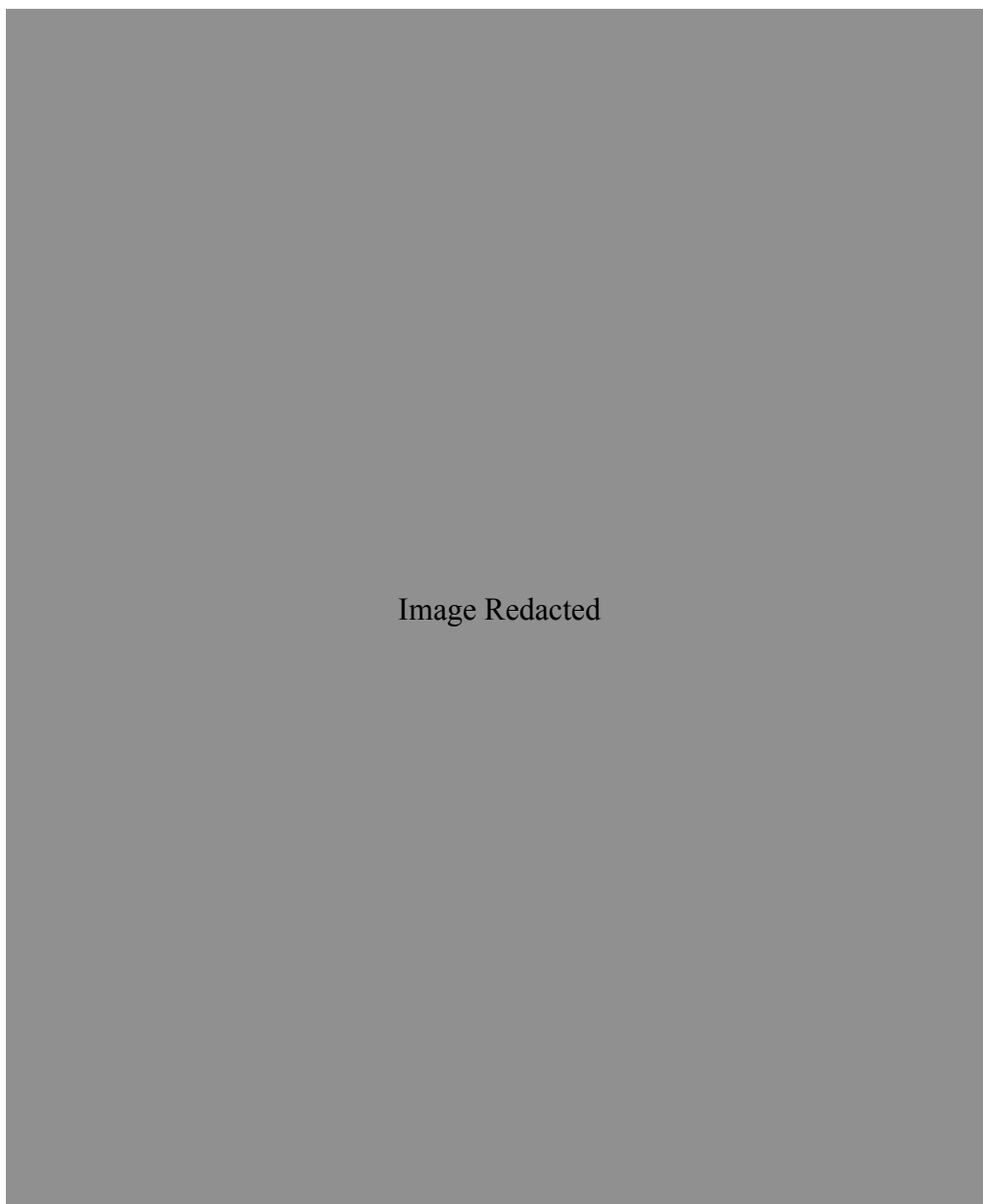


Figure 2.7: Drawing of St. Magnus Cathedral, by Reverend J. Wallace, 1684.

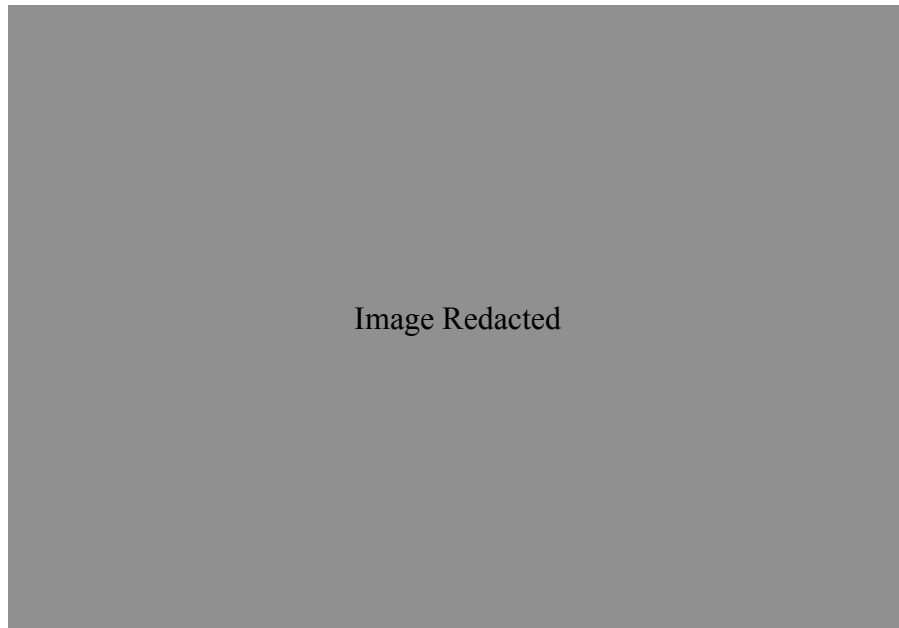


Figure 2.8: Sketch of St. Magnus Cathedral (exterior), by Sir Henry E. L. Dryden, 1878.

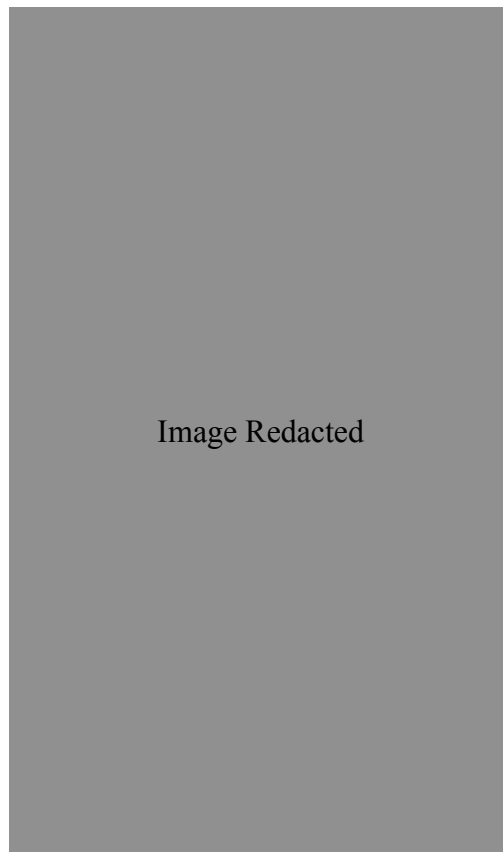


Figure 2.9: Sketch of St. Magnus Cathedral (choir elevation), by Sir Henry E. L. Dryden, 1878.

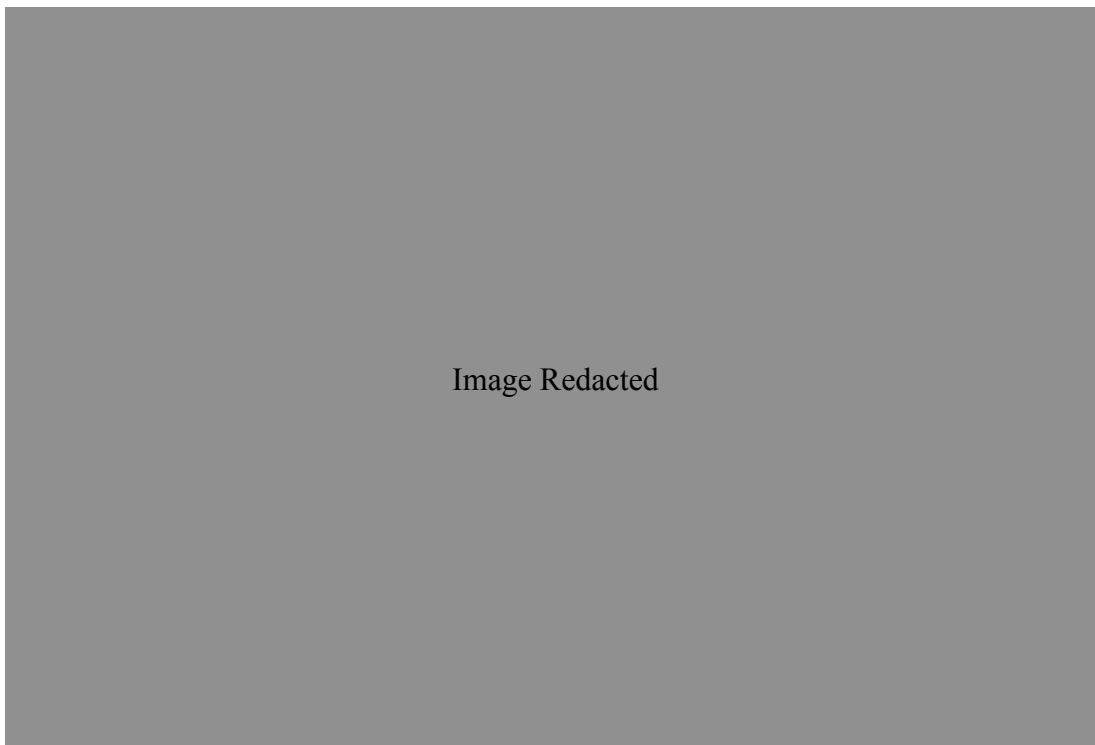


Figure 2.10: Durham Cathedral, Durham, England, 1093-1133.

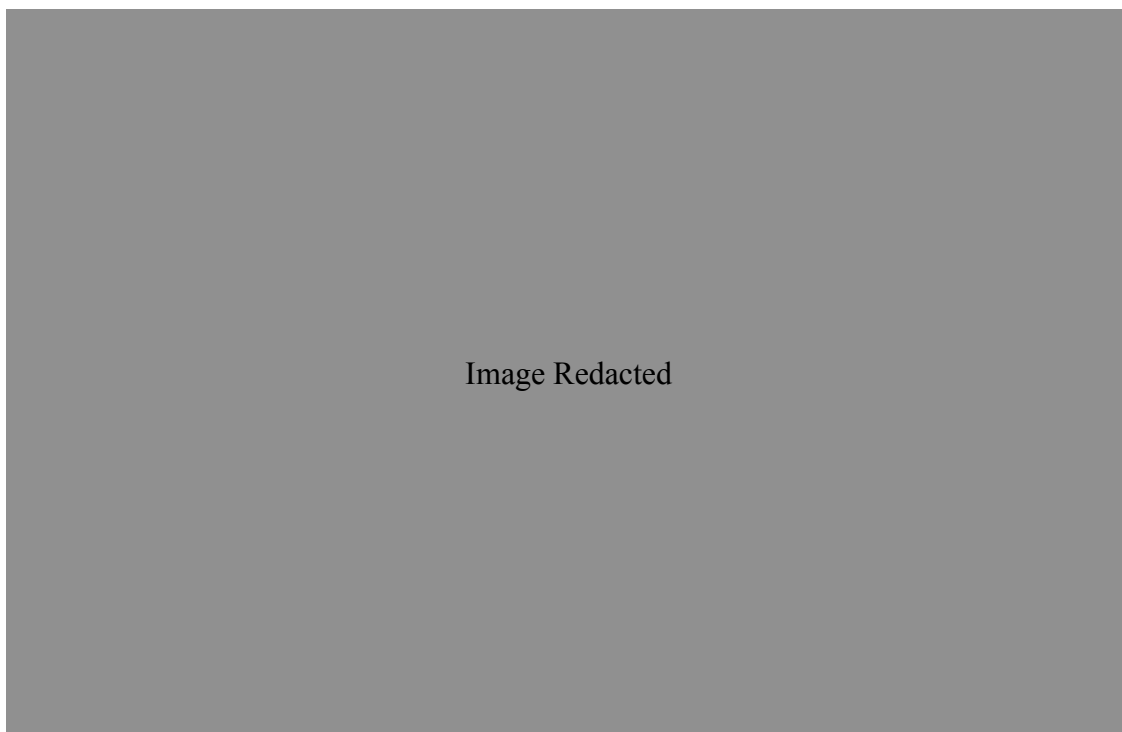


Figure 2.11: Durham Cathedral, interior from the west.

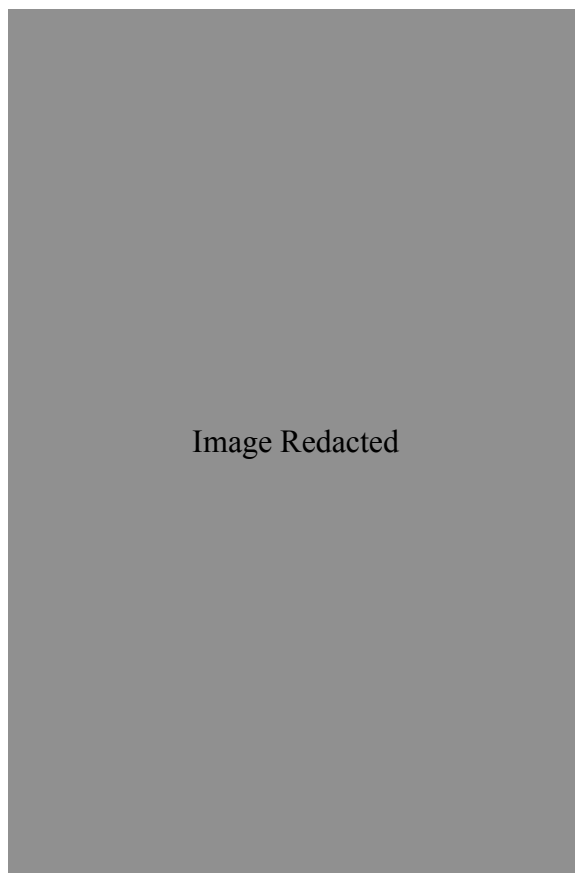


Figure 2.12: Dunfermline Abbey, Dunfermline, Scotland, 1128-1150.

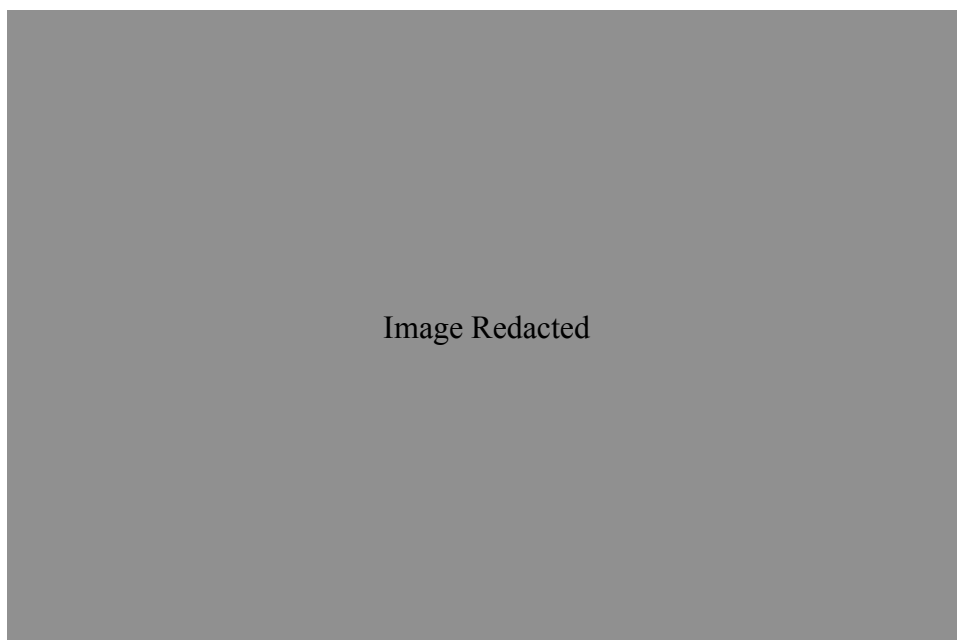


Figure 2.13: Dunfermline Abbey, interior from the west.

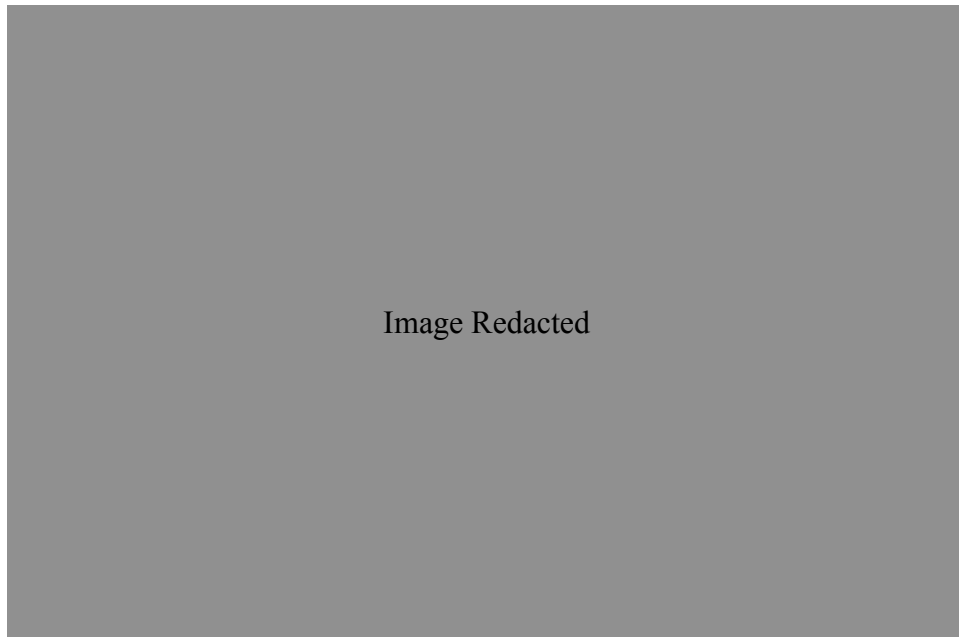


Figure 2.14: Southwell Minster, interior, Southwell, England, c. 1108-1150.

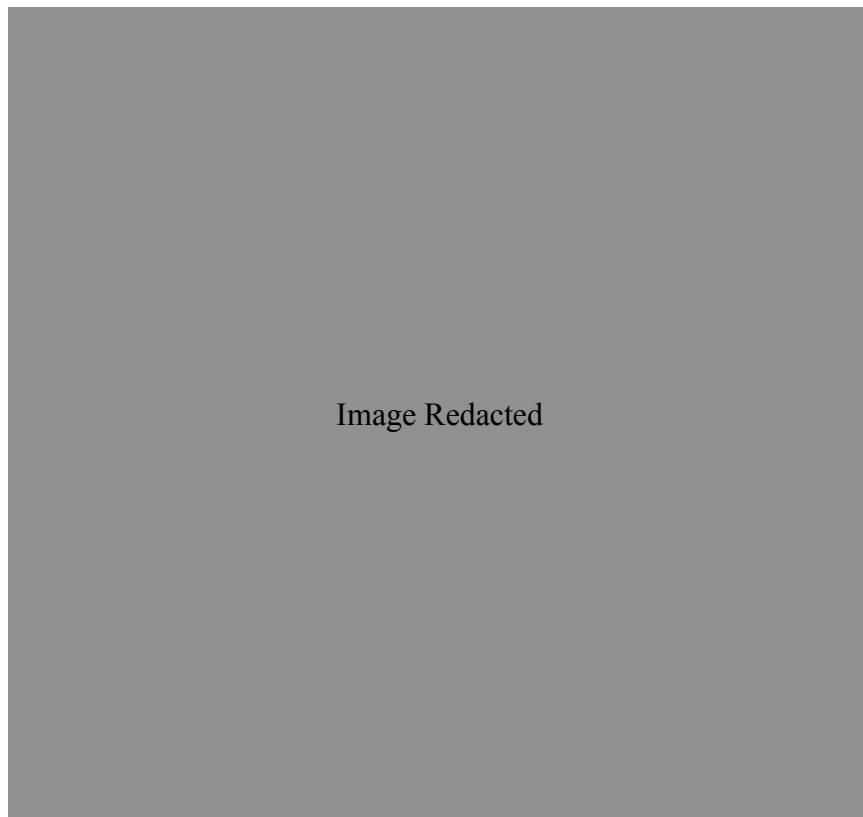


Figure 2.15: Nidaros Cathedral, south transept chapel. Other than the transepts and chapels, little remains for the Anglo-Norman phrase.

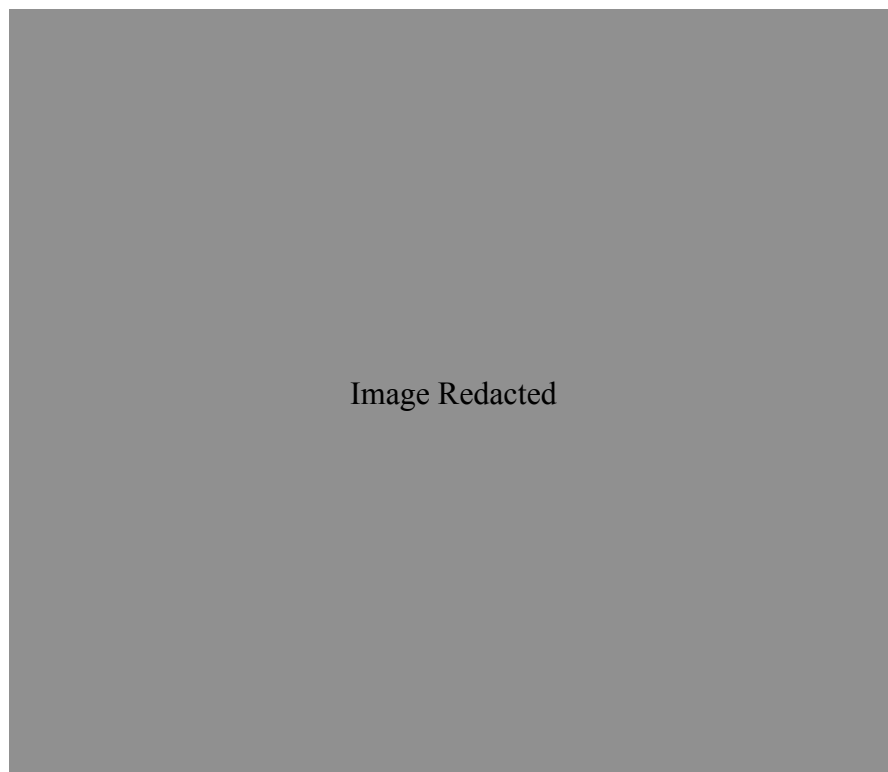


Figure 2.16: Hamar Cathedral ruins, nave from the west, Hamar, Norway, c. 1152/3-1200.

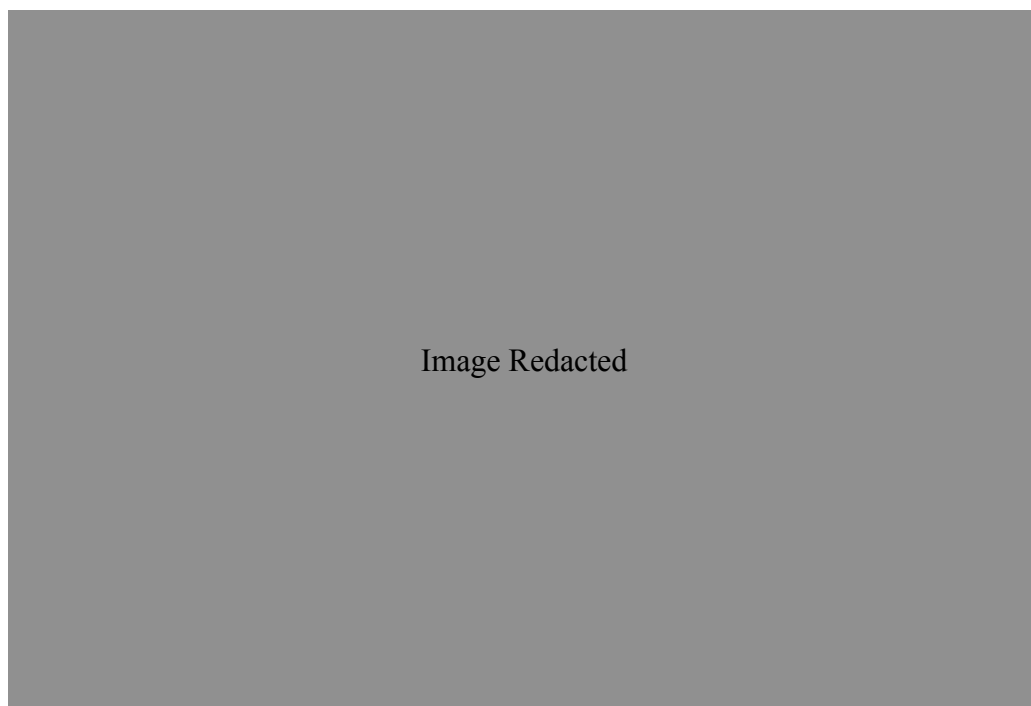


Figure 2.17: Stavanger Cathedral, interior from the west, c. 1130.



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Figure 2.18: St. Magnus Church, Egilsay, Orkney, mid-twelfth century.



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Figure 3.1: The Ring of Brodgar, a Neolithic henge still visible in the Orkney landscape.



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Figure 3.2: Late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century etching of Neolithic standing stones called the Watch Stone (left) and Odin's Stone (right) by Harriet Elizabeth Georgiana Leveson-Gower (née Howard), Duchess of Sutherland. The stone, now destroyed, was famous for the hole in it and featured in many Orkney rituals.

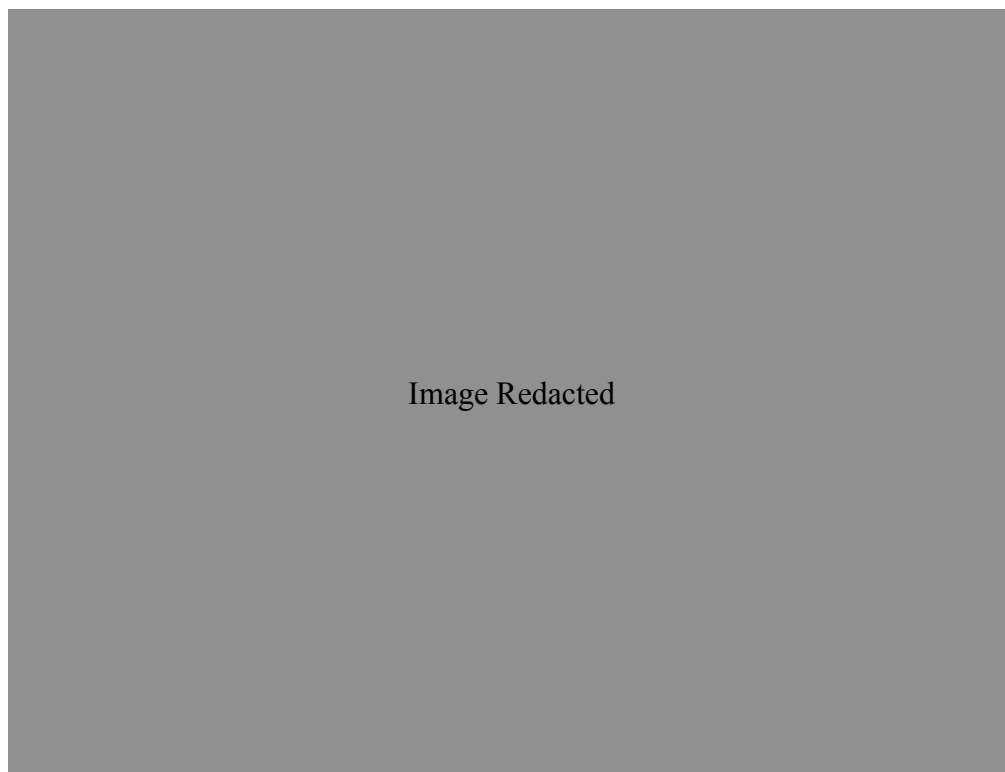


Figure 3.3: Maeshowe, a Neolithic barrow in Orkney.

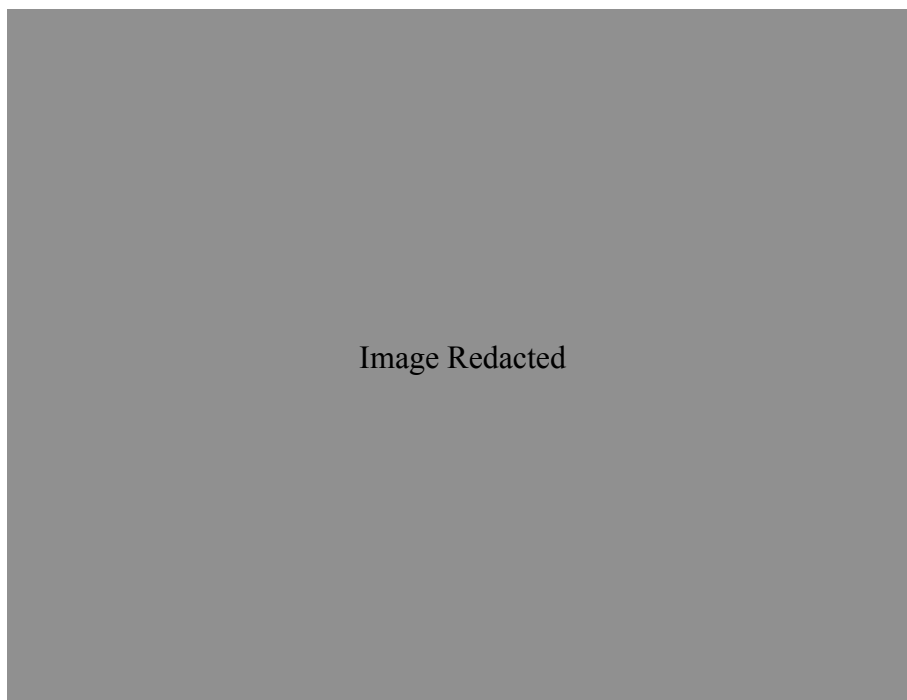


Figure 3.4: Aerial photograph of the Roman-Age Broch of Gurness, with thick centralized tower and concentric fortifications.

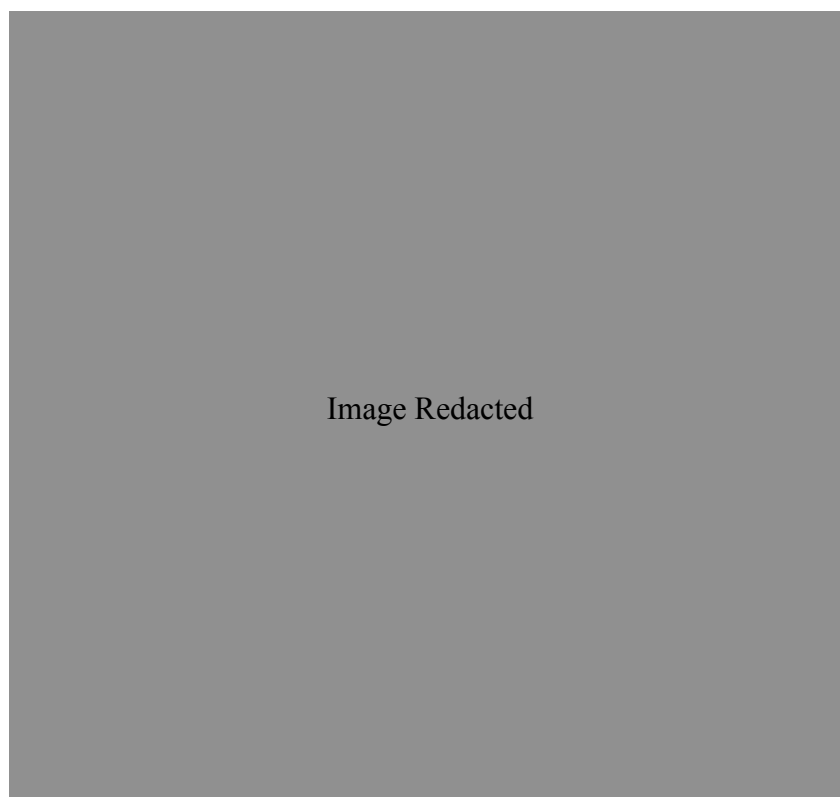


Figure 3.5: Pictish figure-of-eight building, Birsay, Orkney.

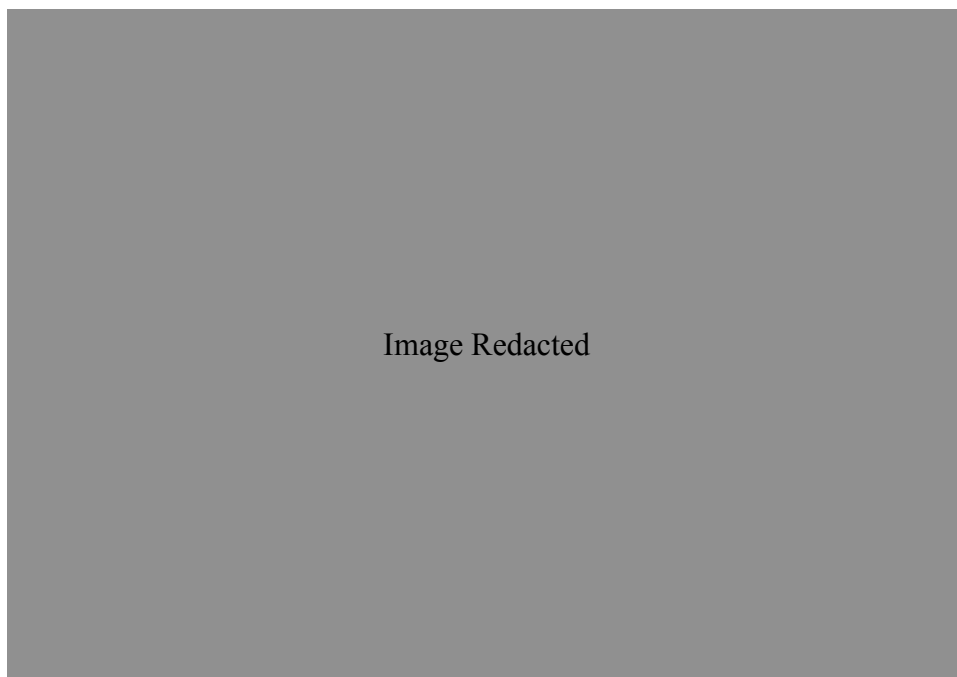


Figure 3.6: Map of the Birsay Bay region showing key archaeological sites at Beachview and Buckquoy.

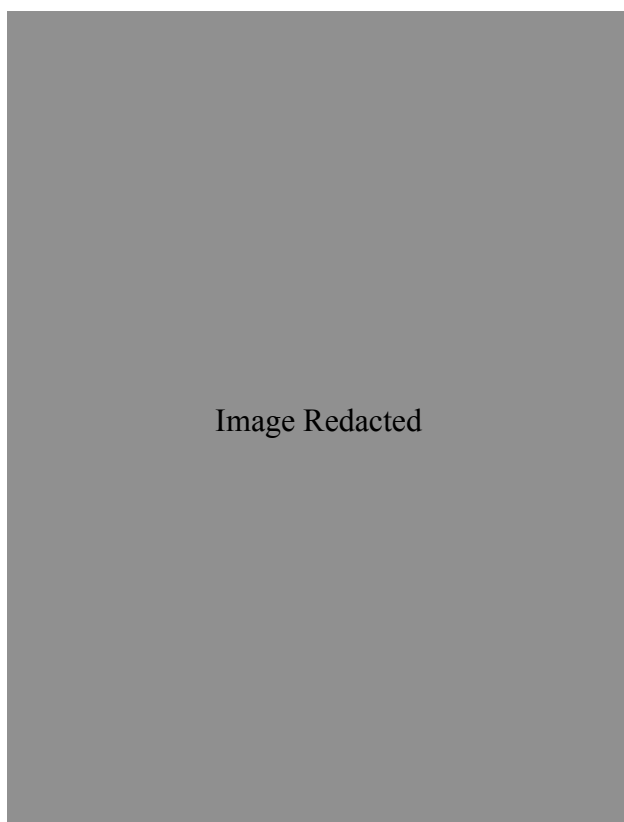


Figure 3.7: Plan of Pictish and Norse house phases at Buckquoy, Orkney. The Norse overlying graves are circled in red.

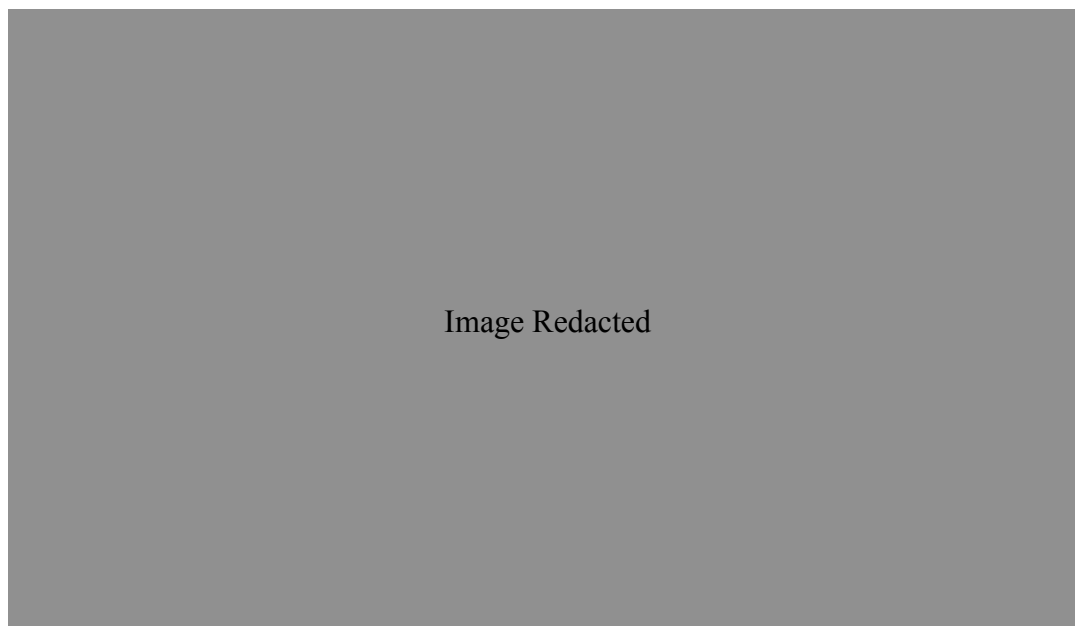


Figure 3.8: Excavation of a farm mound at the Bay of Skaill, Orkney.

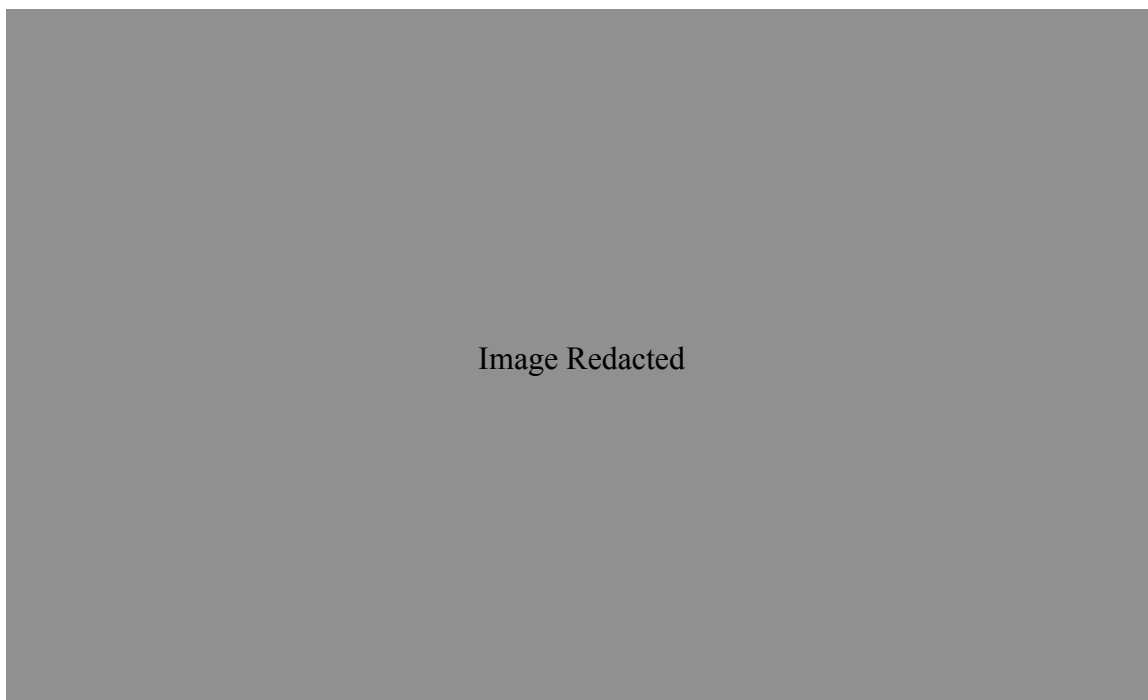


Figure 3.9: Exposed farm mound layers (right) at Pool on Sanday, Orkney.

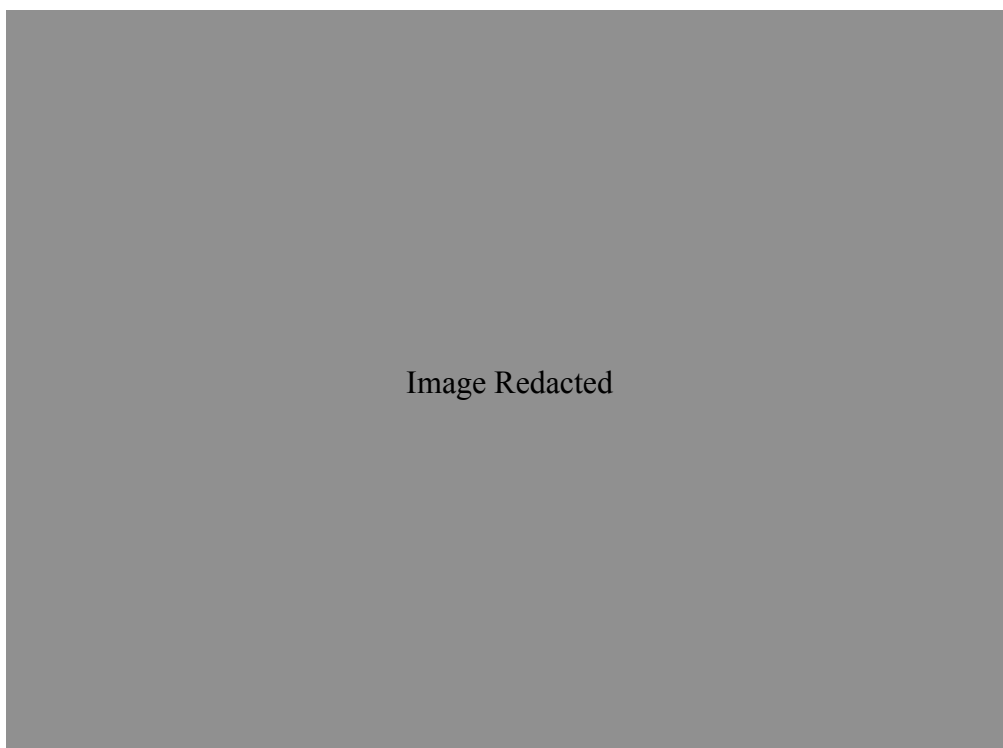


Figure 3.10: St. Magnus Kirk, Birsay Village, Orkney, 1760.

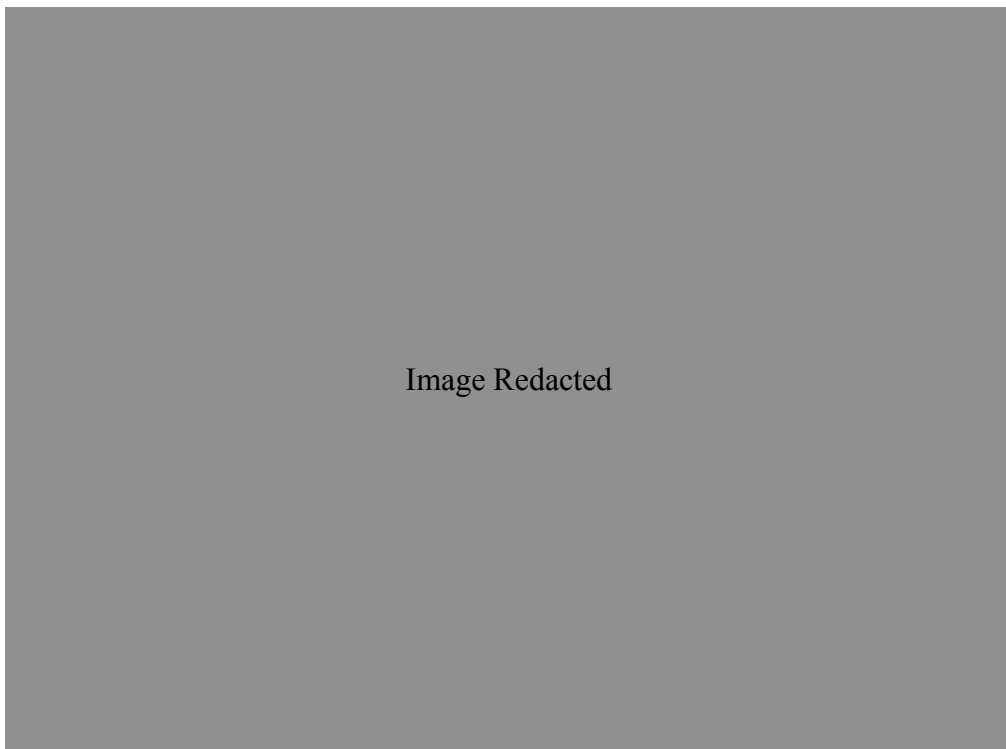


Figure 3.11: Ruins of St. Peter's Kirk on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney, twelfth century.

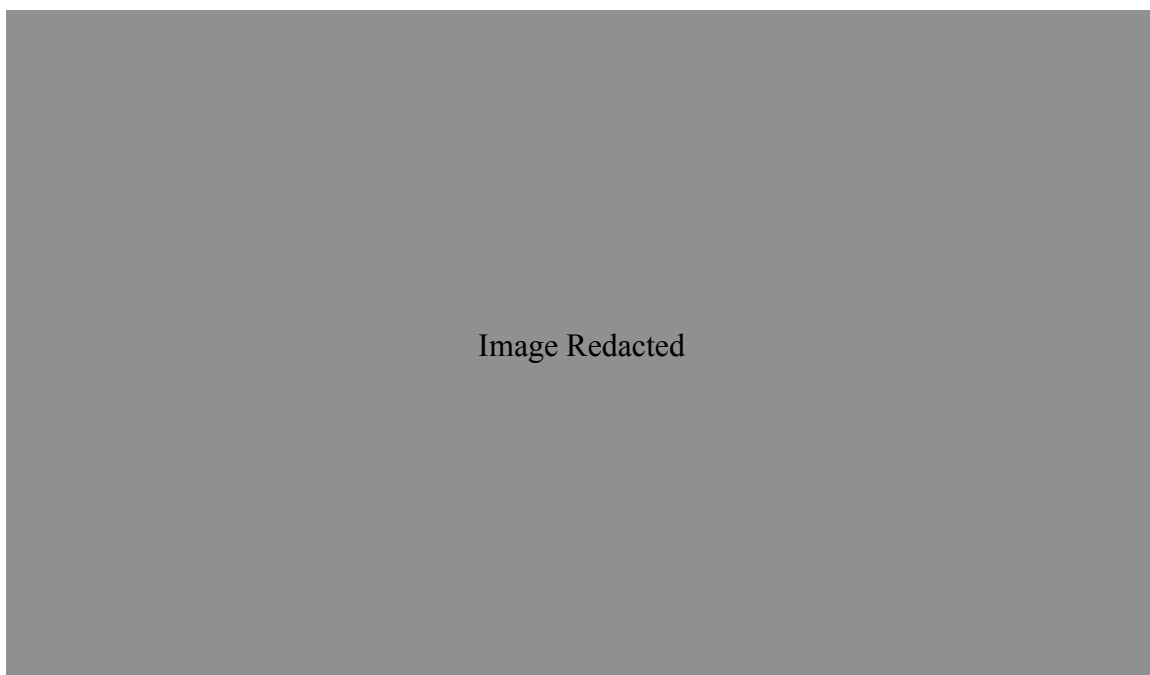


Figure 3.12: Drawing from 1680-1700 of the sixteenth-century earl's palace in Birsay (left) with a detail of the Brough of Birsay (right). The drawing of the Brough of Birsay includes faint ruins of a church with nave and chancel.

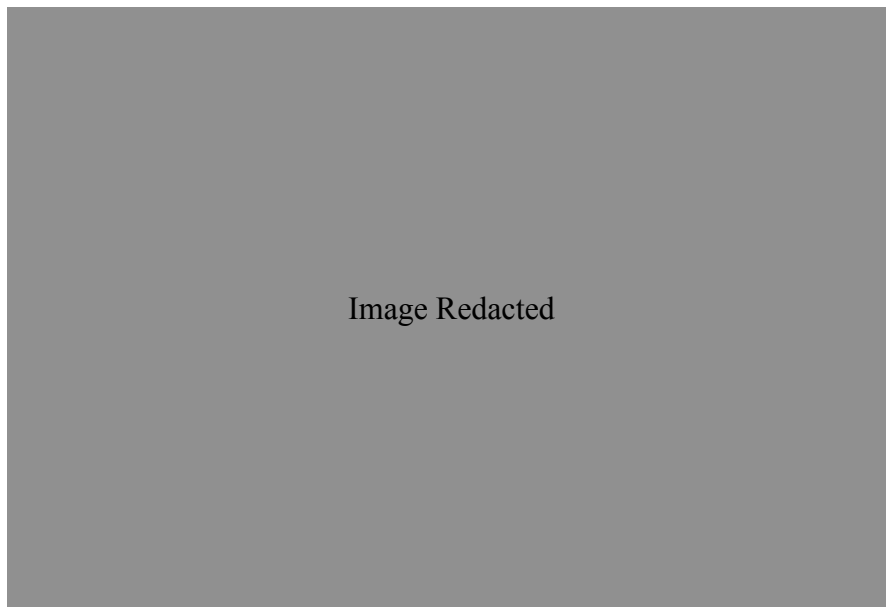


Figure 3.13: Figure 11: Eighteenth-century drawing of the earl's palace with the Brough of Birsay in the upper left corner. The church ruins are labeled 'H' and the key reads, "S. Come's [sic] Church, it is ruinous, there is in the church yard here a grave Nine feet long."

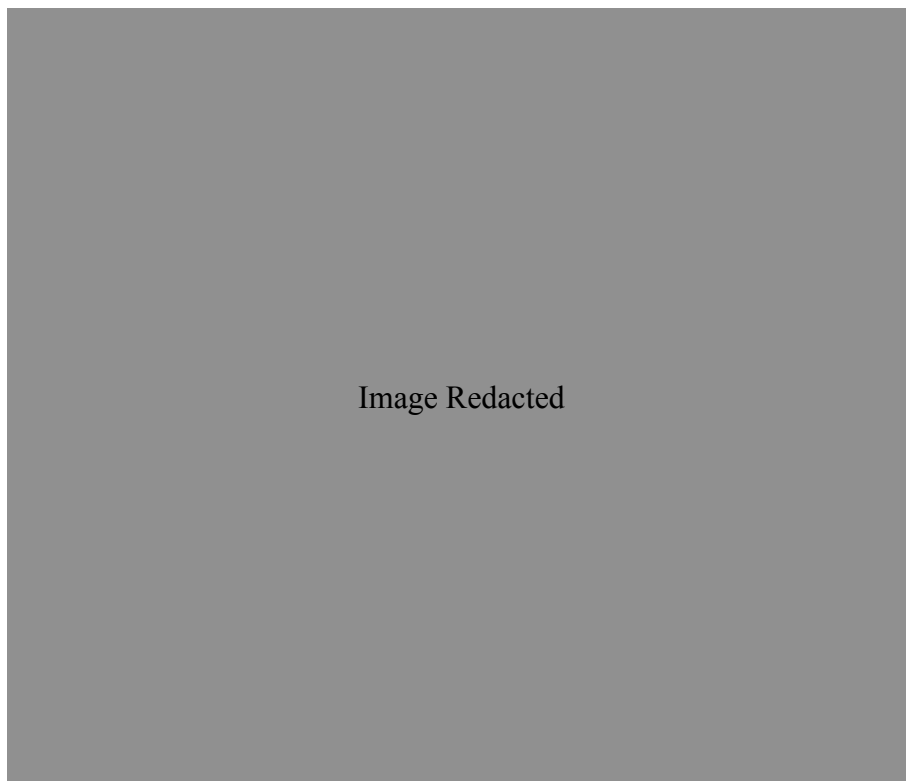


Figure 3.14: Plan of the Brough of Birsay cloister north of St. Peter's Kirk.

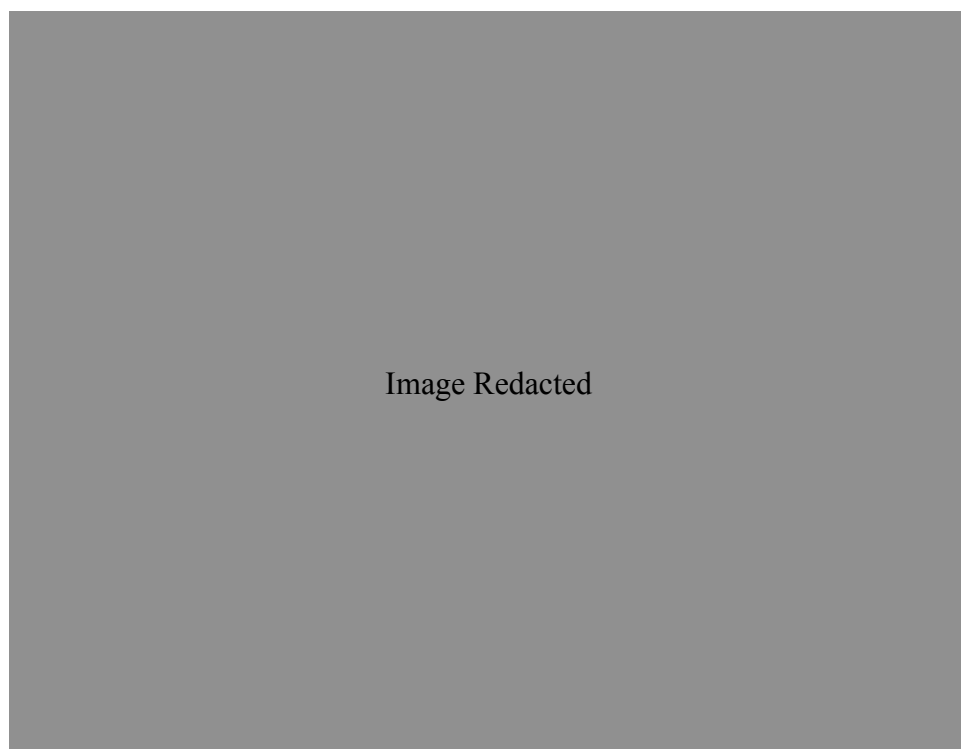


Figure 3.15: The whole Brough of Birsay complex, with monastery (middle) and adjacent buildings (bottom) that Cruden believed were Porfinnr's and Sigurðr's palaces.

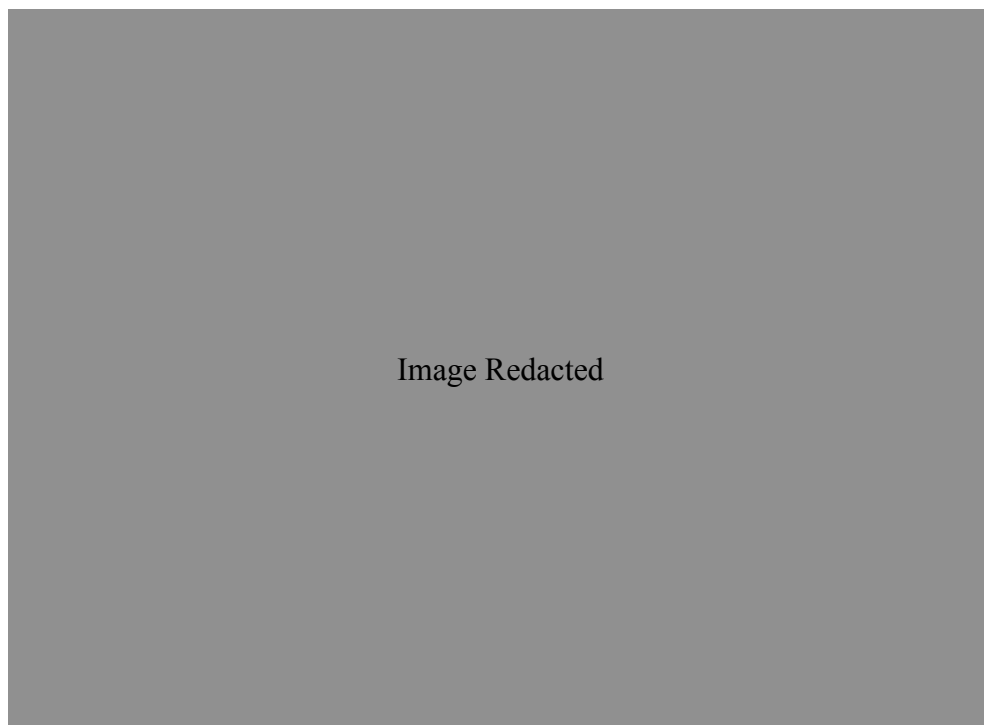


Figure 3.16: Plan of St. Peter's Kirk, Brough of Birsay, Orkney.

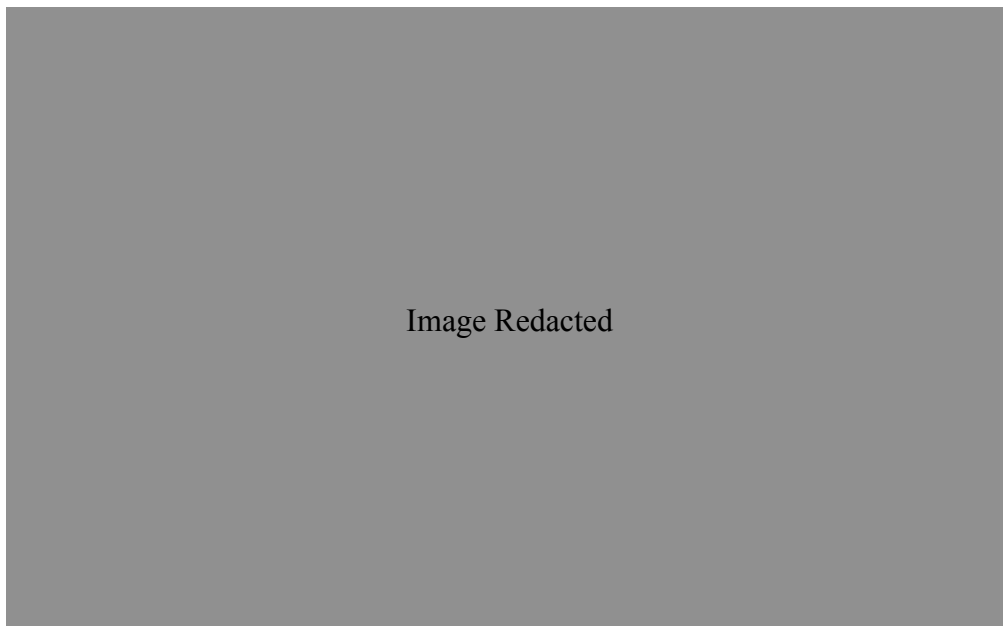


Figure 3.17: Plan of Bø gamle kirke, Norway, with nave, two niches flanking the choir, choir, and apse.

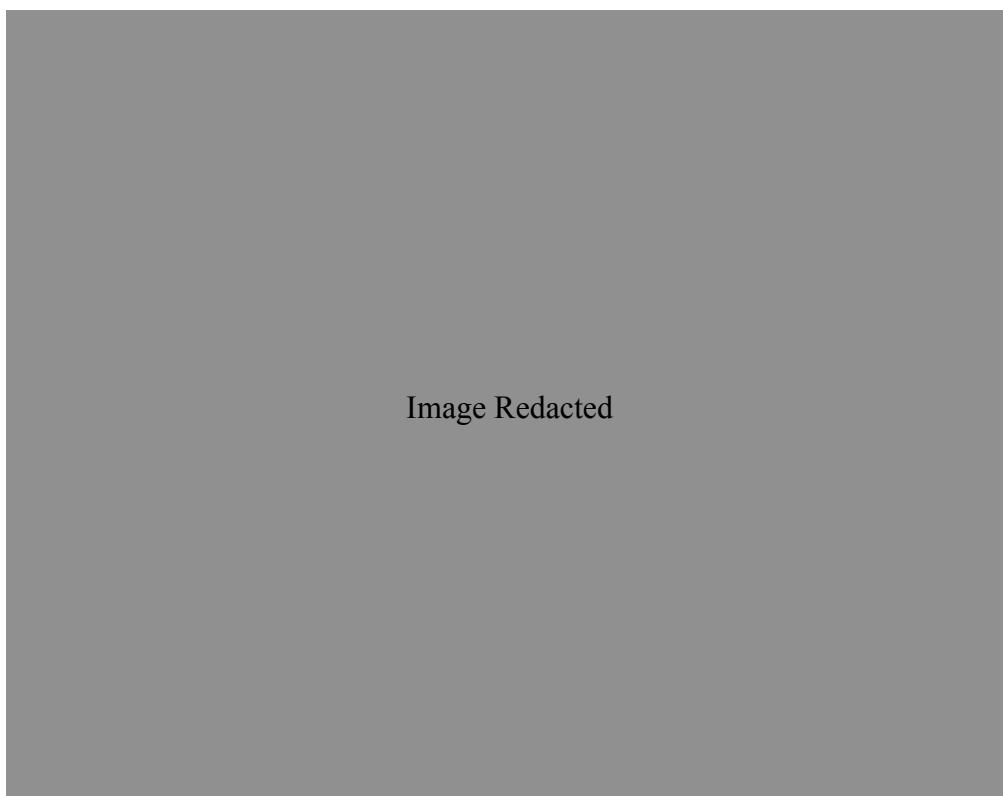


Figure 3.18: Plan of Kviteseid gamle kirke, Norway, with nave, two niches flanking the choir, choir, and apse.

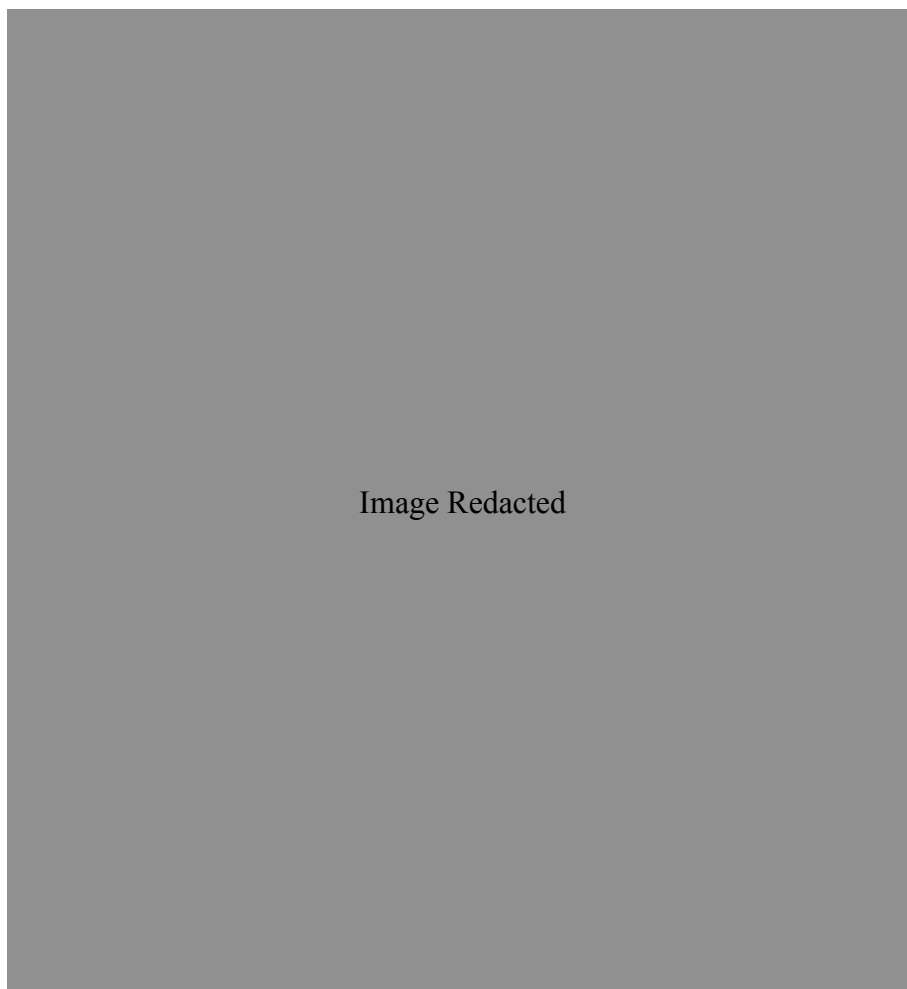


Figure 3.19: Medieval foundations discovered under St. Magnus Kirk, Birsay Village, Orkney.

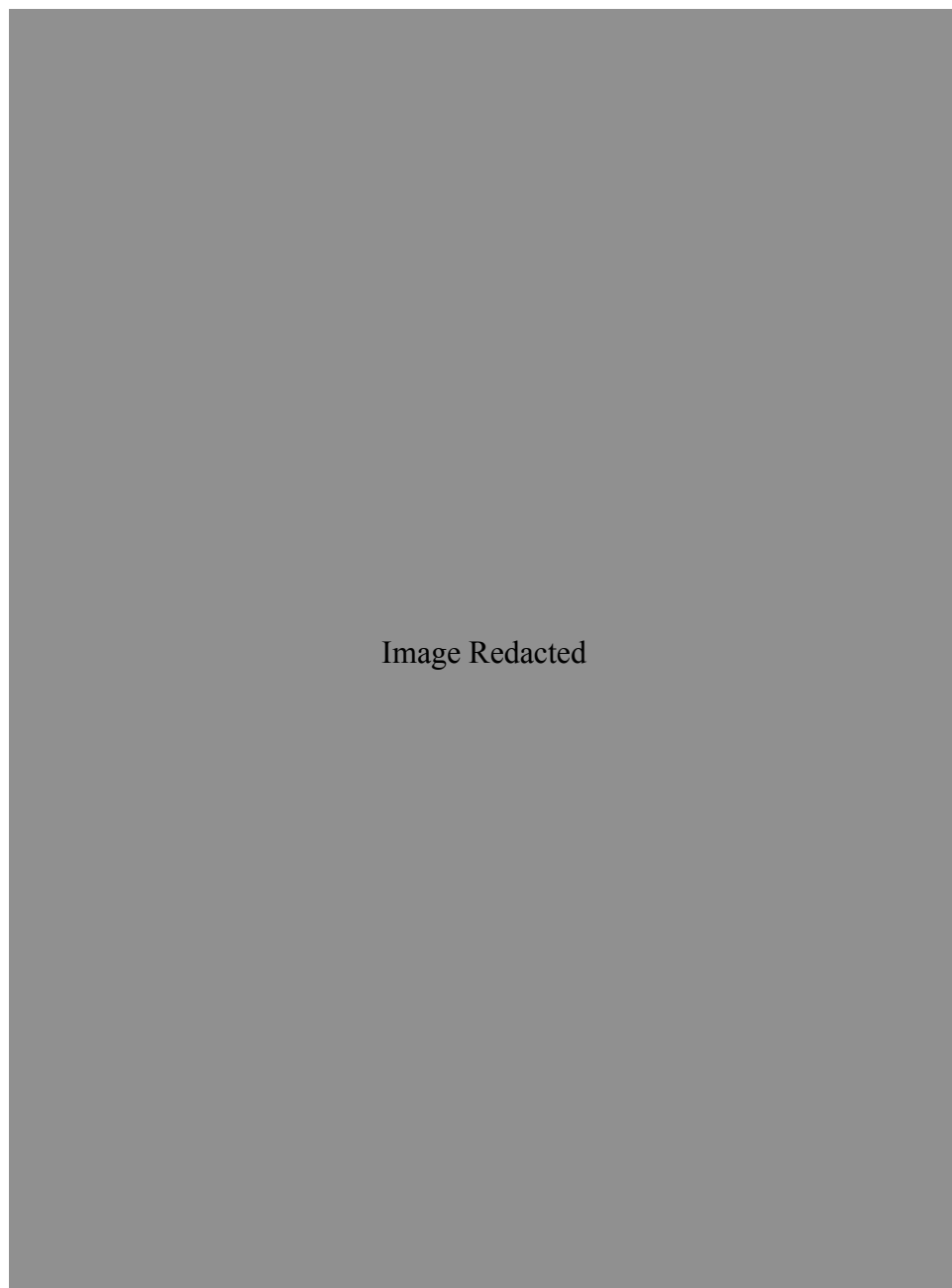


Figure 3.20: All phases of the St. Magnus Kirk site, including a non architectural phase 1 and the present church as phase 6.

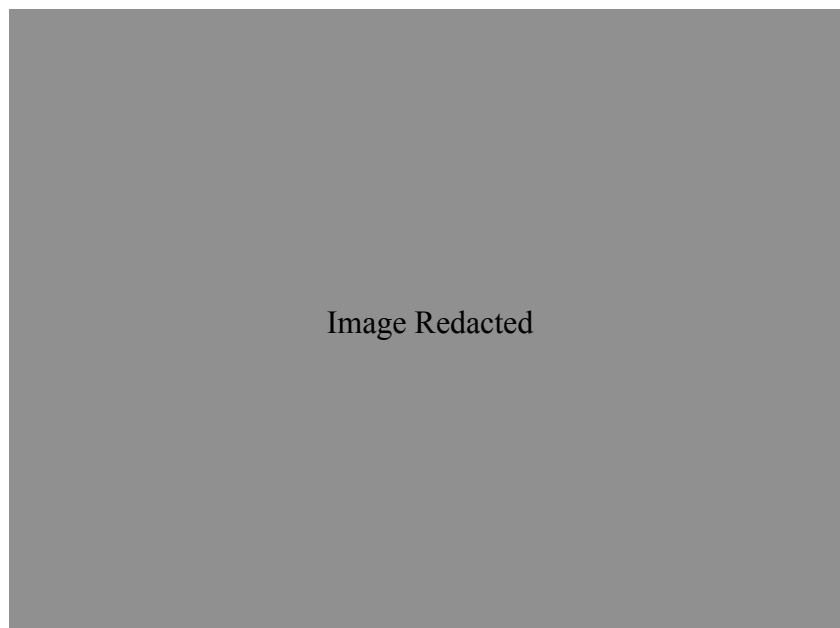


Figure 3.21: Celtic bell discovered at Saear Howe, located south of Birsay Village.

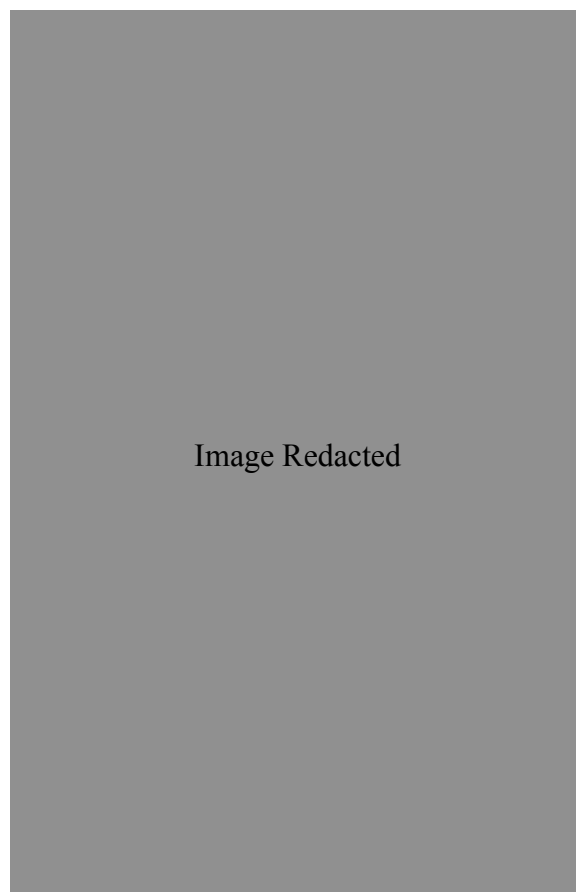


Figure 3.22: Viking-Age boat burial, Scar, Orkney.

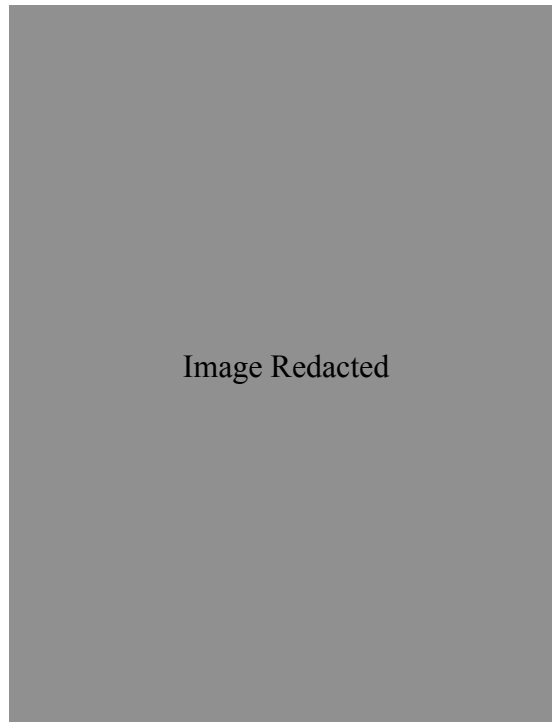


Figure 3.23: Westness Mound boat burial, Rousay, Orkney.

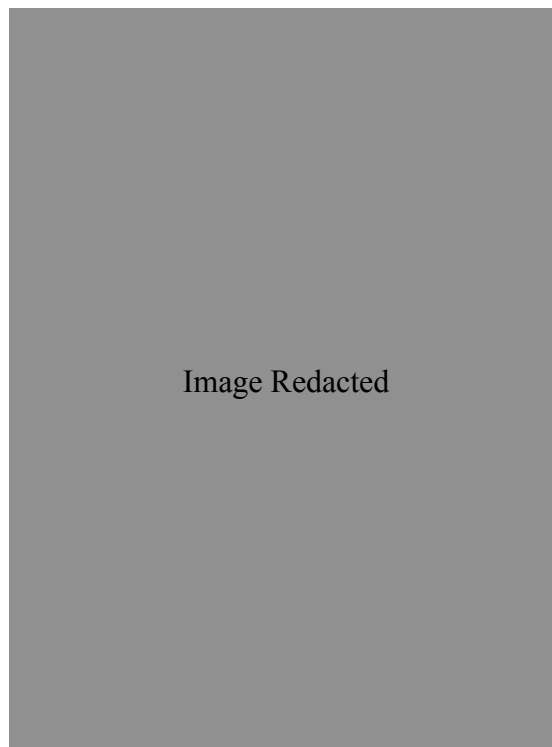


Figure 3.24: Rune stone Sm 101, Nävelsjö inscribed with “Gunnkel raised this stone in the memory of Gunnar, his father, Rode’s sone. Helge placed him, his brother, in a stone tomb in England, in Bath.”



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Figure 3.25: Series of rune inscriptions in different hands about the missing treasure in Maeshowe.



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Figure 3.26: Rune inscription in Maeshowe about the missing treasure.

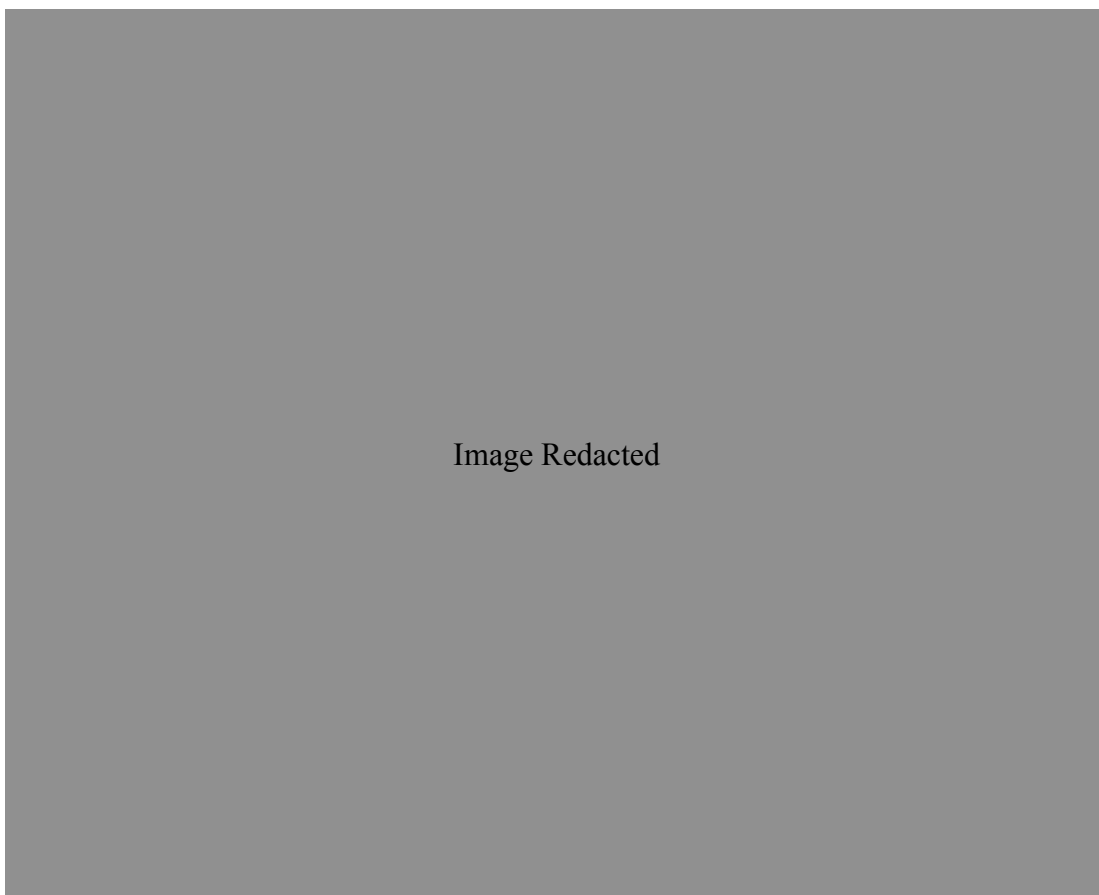


Figure 3.27: Oseberg Ship burial during excavation in 1904.

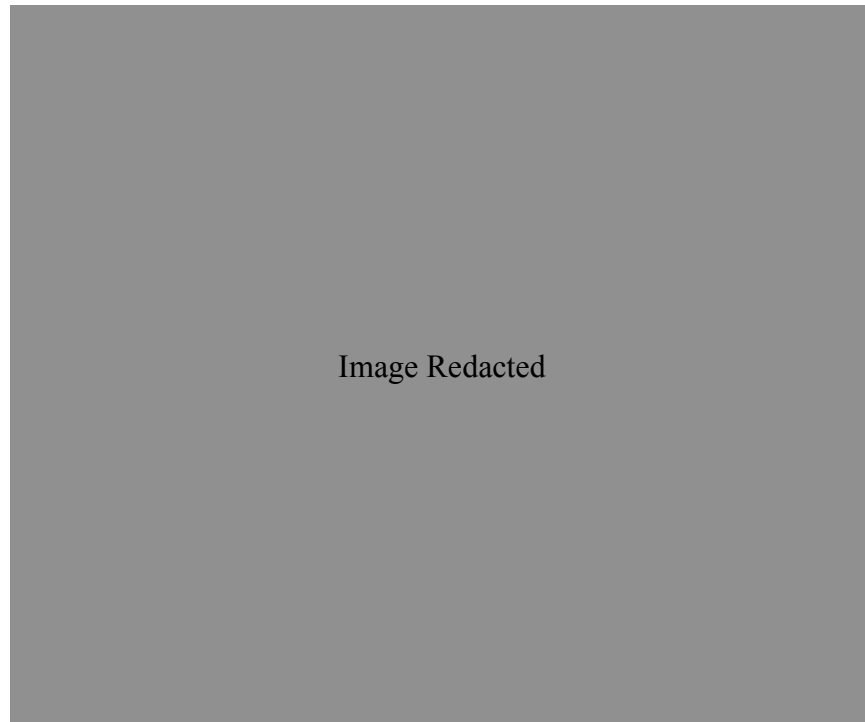


Figure 3.28: Phases of Christ Church in Birsay Village. The twelfth-century pilasters and chamfered base course are visible (middle left).

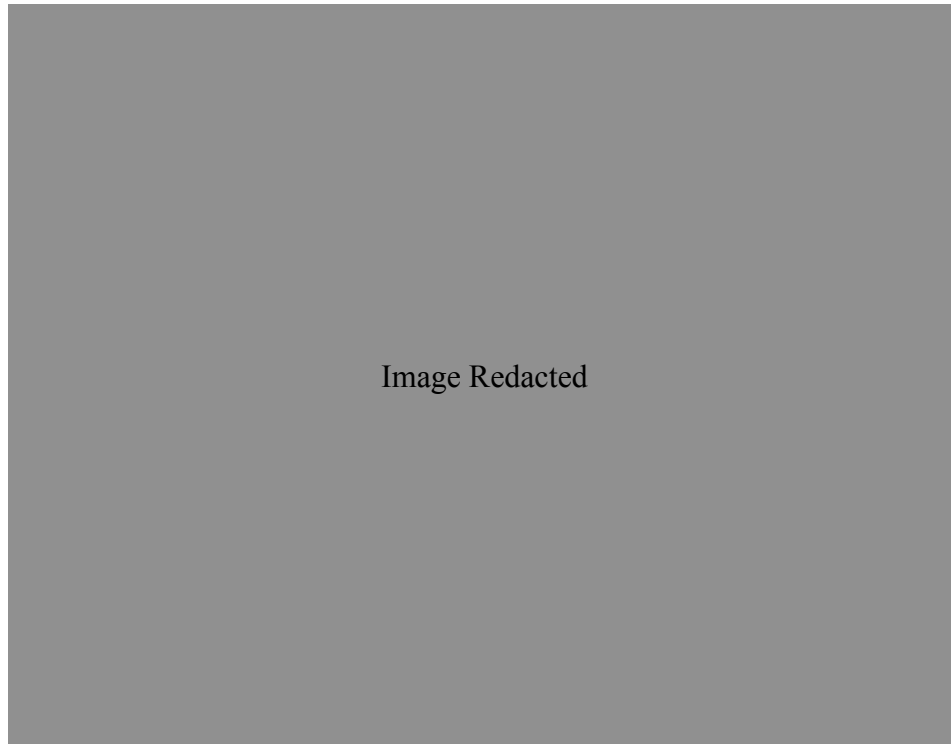


Figure 3.29: Carved twelfth-century architectural fragments discovered at St. Magnus Kirk in Birsay Village.

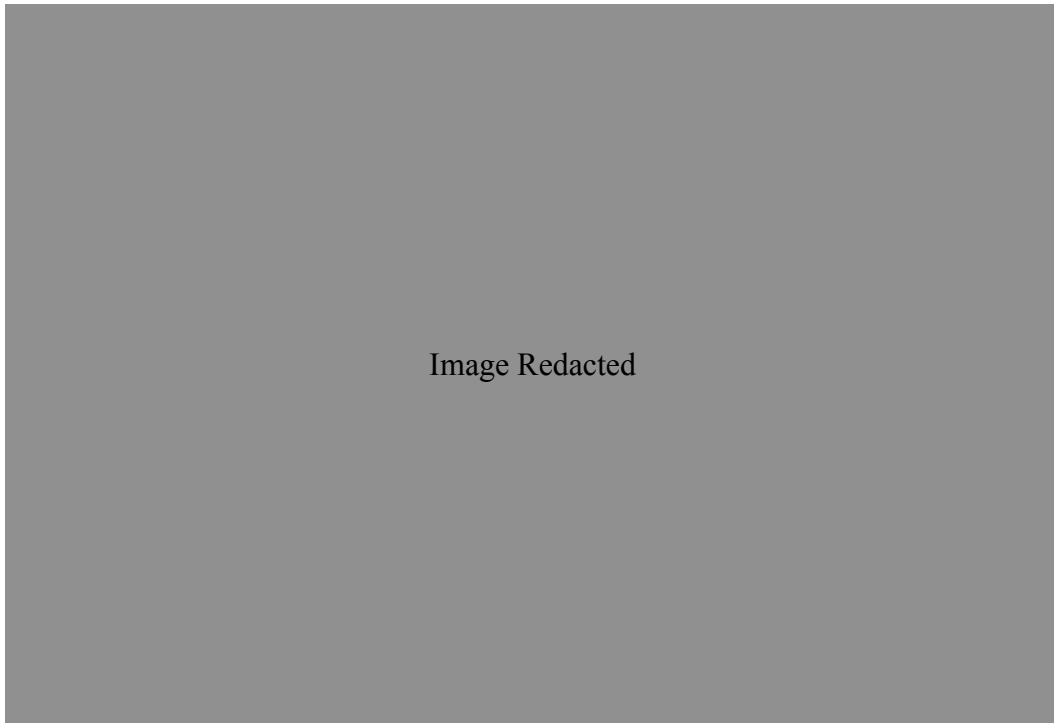


Figure 3.30: Ruins of a St. Nicholas' Kirk round church, Orphir, Orkney, twelfth century.

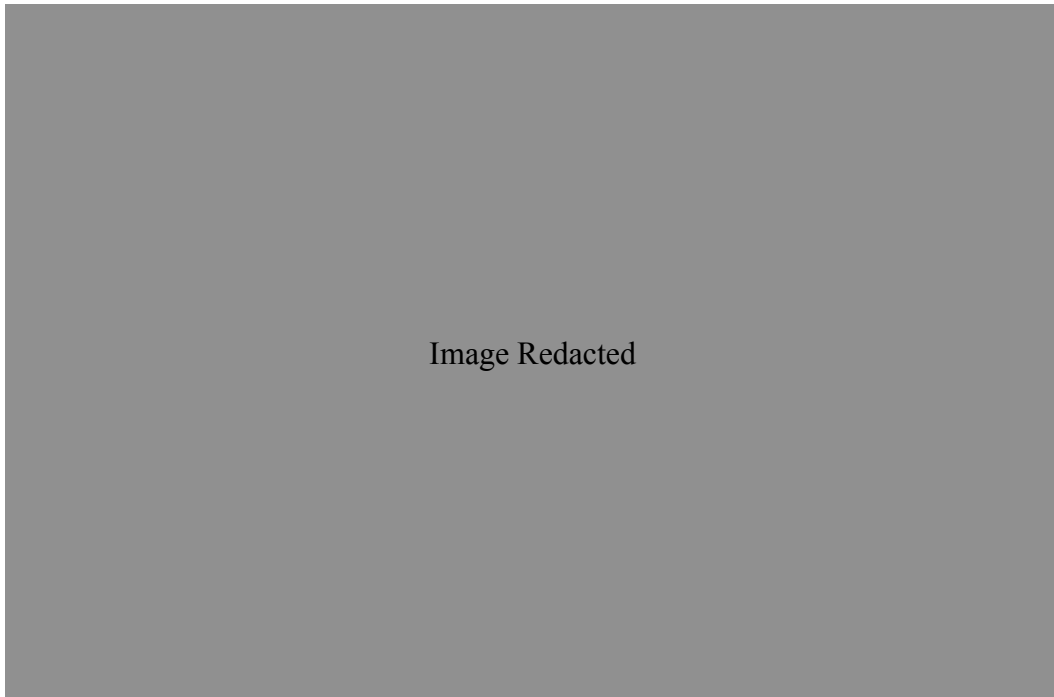


Figure 3.31: Ruins of Mary's Kirk, Wyre, Orkney, twelfth century, with the common nave and chancel plan.

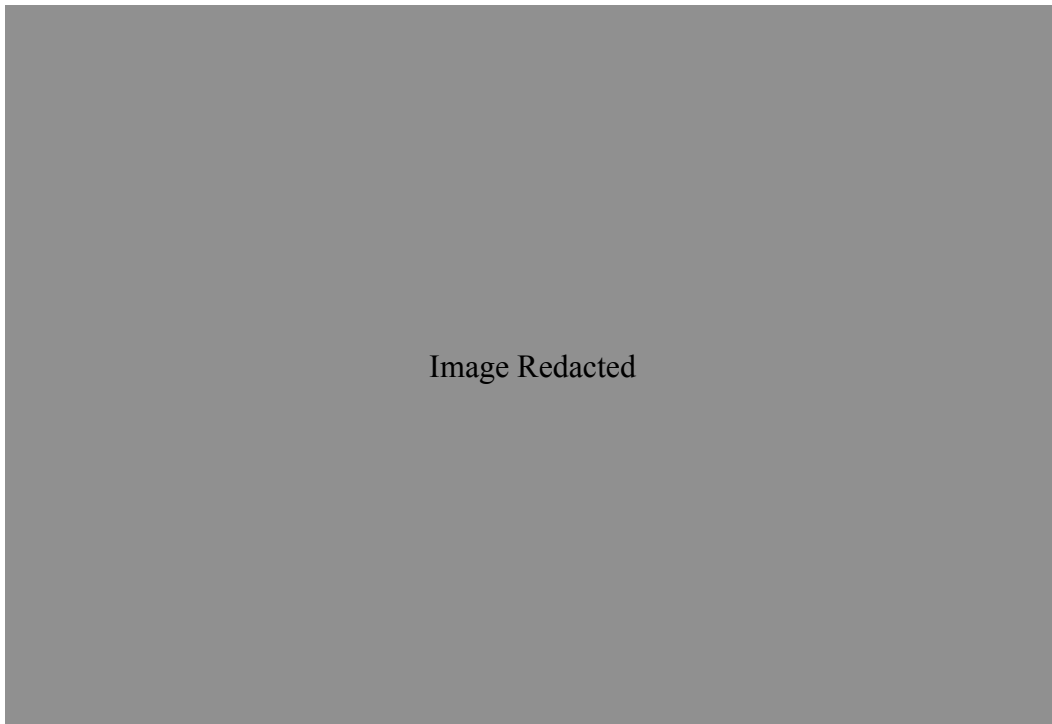


Figure 3.32: Reconstruction of the corbel table at Christ Church using fragment (f) from Figure 3.30.

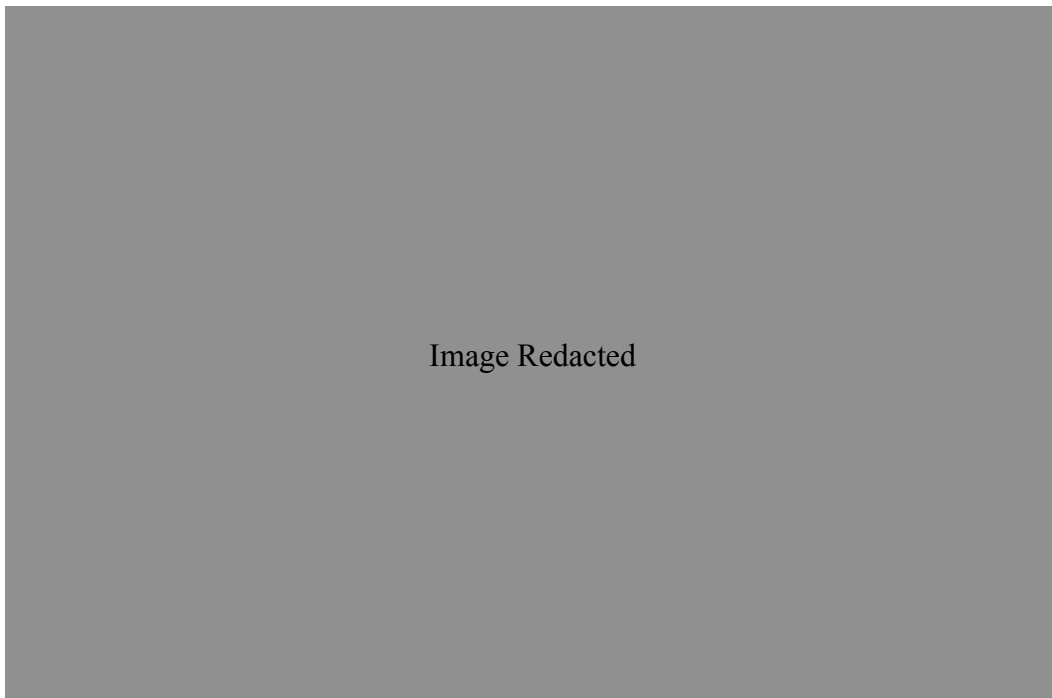


Figure 3.33: Corbel table on the exterior of St. Magnus Cathedral's north transept chapel. The incised concentric groove is still faintly visible on the left two corbels.

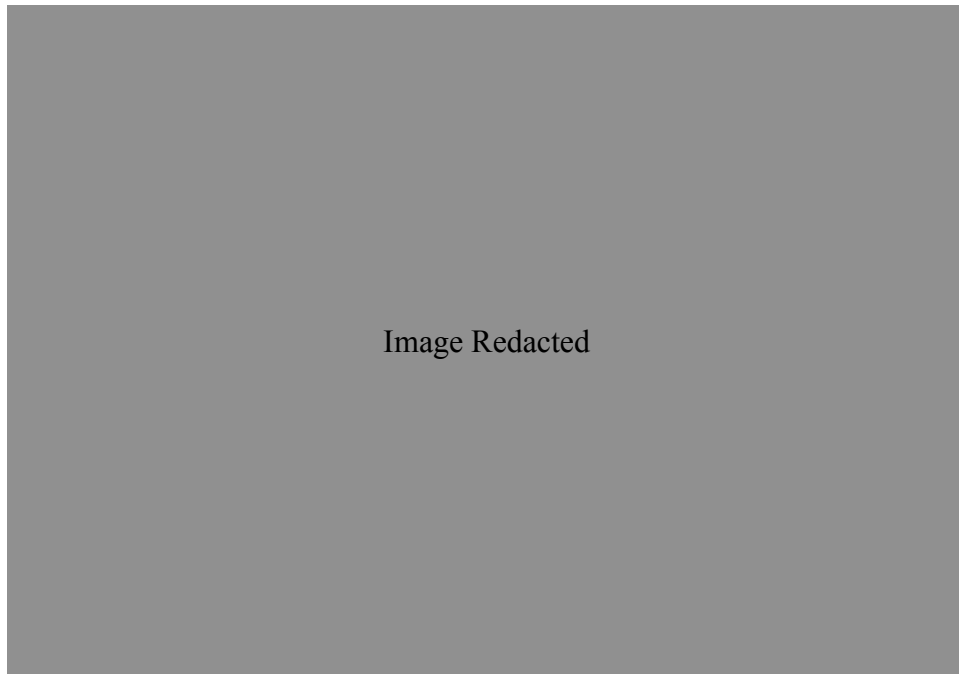


Figure 3.34: Moulded voussoir found outside of St. Magnus Kirk, Birsay Village.

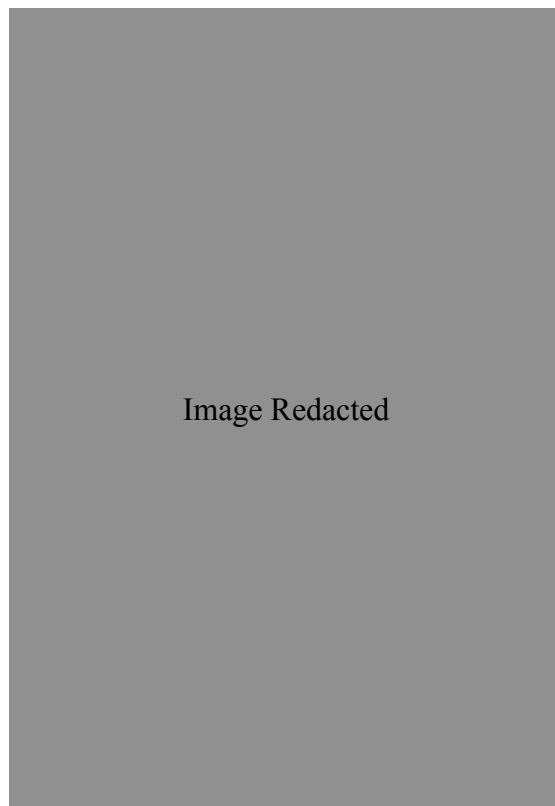


Figure 3.35: South choir door with rolled moulding.

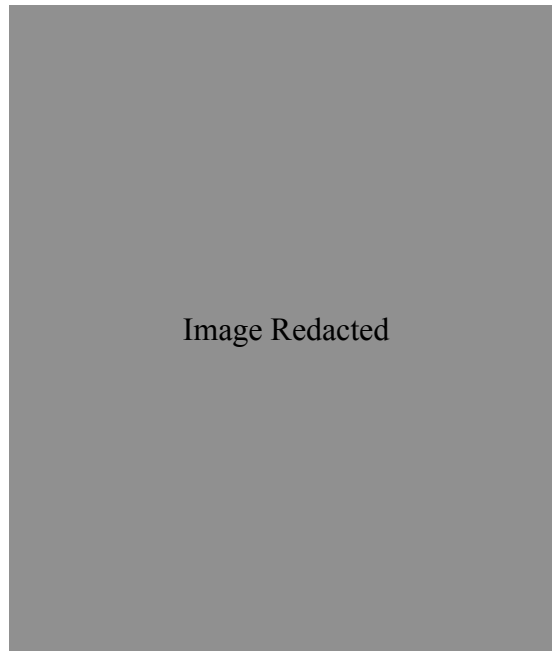


Figure 3.36: Compass-drawn cross found at the site of St. Magnus Kirk, Birsay Village, Orkney.

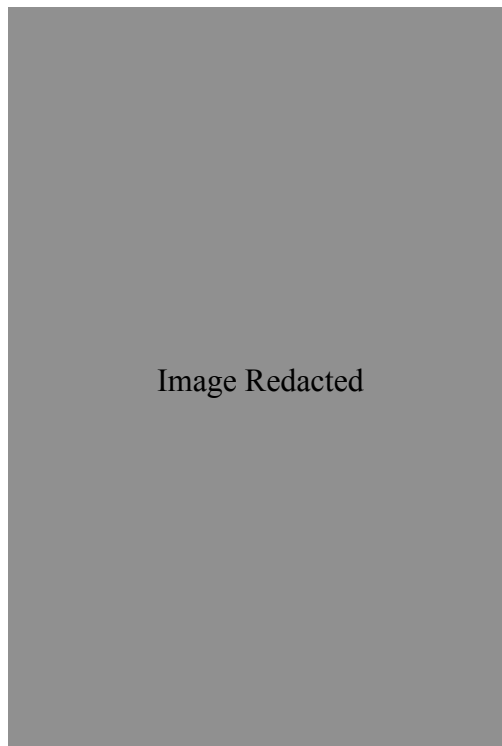


Figure 3.37: Lancet window, likely from the thirteenth century, reused with a sixteenth-century inscription in the modern fabric of St. Magnus Kirk, Birsay Village.

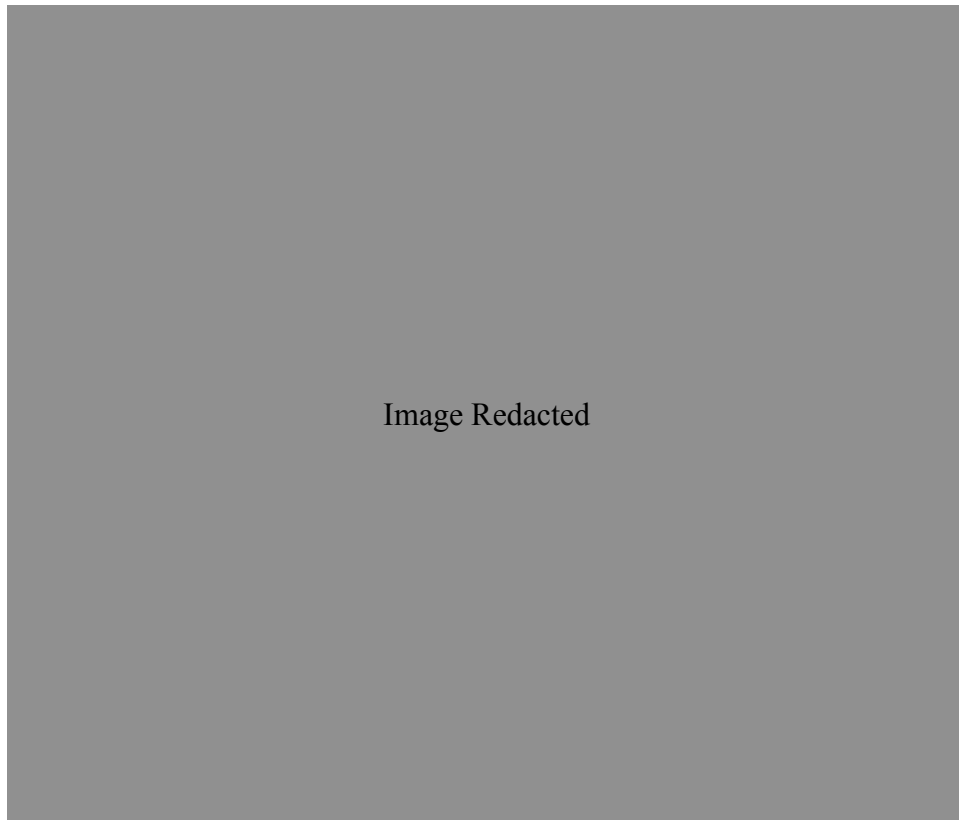


Figure 3.38: Print of Lindesfarne Priory, with similar patterning on the cylindrical drum columns as Durham Cathedral.

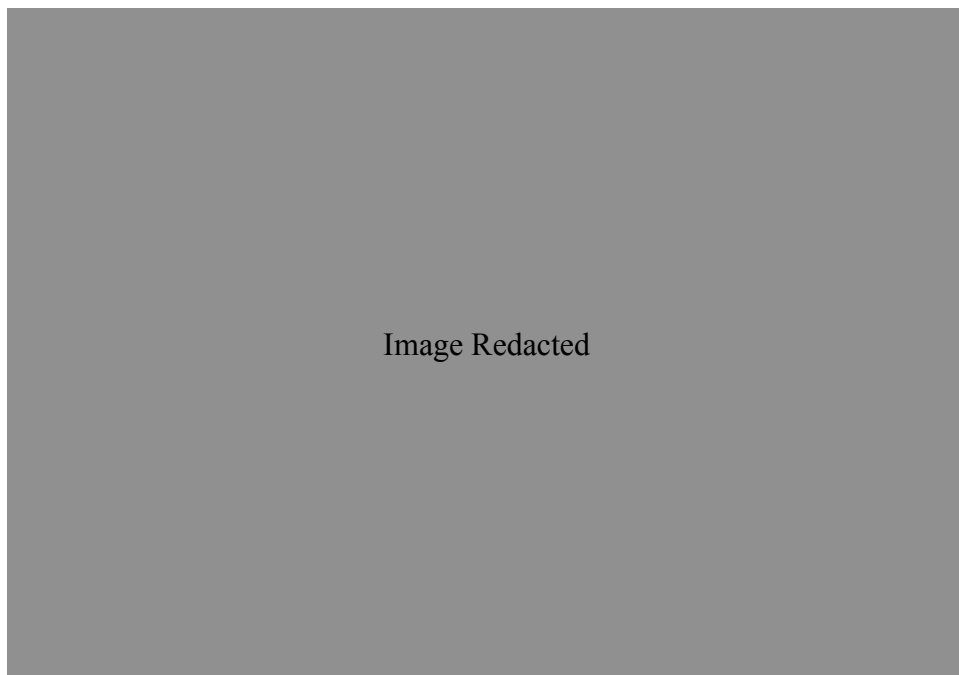


Figure 3.39: Patterned cylindrical drum columns at Durham Cathedral.



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Figure 3.40: Mold (right) found at St. Magnus Cathedral that produces small crosses (left), most likely as souvenirs for pilgrims.



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Figure 3.41: The profile of St Magnus Church, Egilsay, a towered church (see figure 2.19) from the Kirkwall harbor.

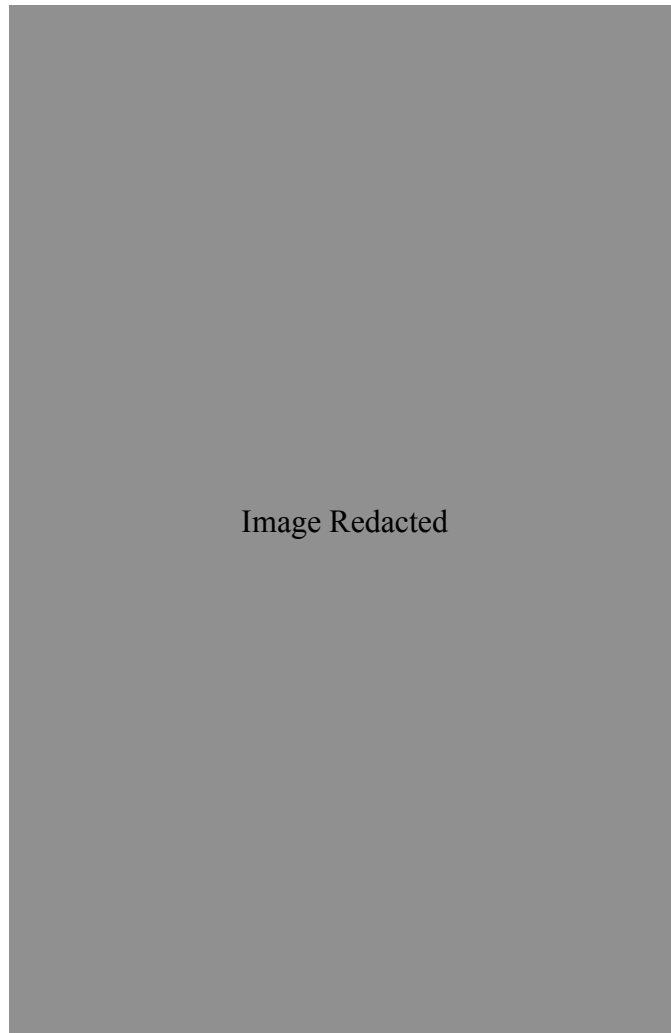


Figure 3.42: GIS viewshed analysis showing hypothetical sight lines for a structure as high as St. Magnus Cathedral in Birsay. The pink areas, projecting largely to the west into the open sea, show visible areas from 40m high.

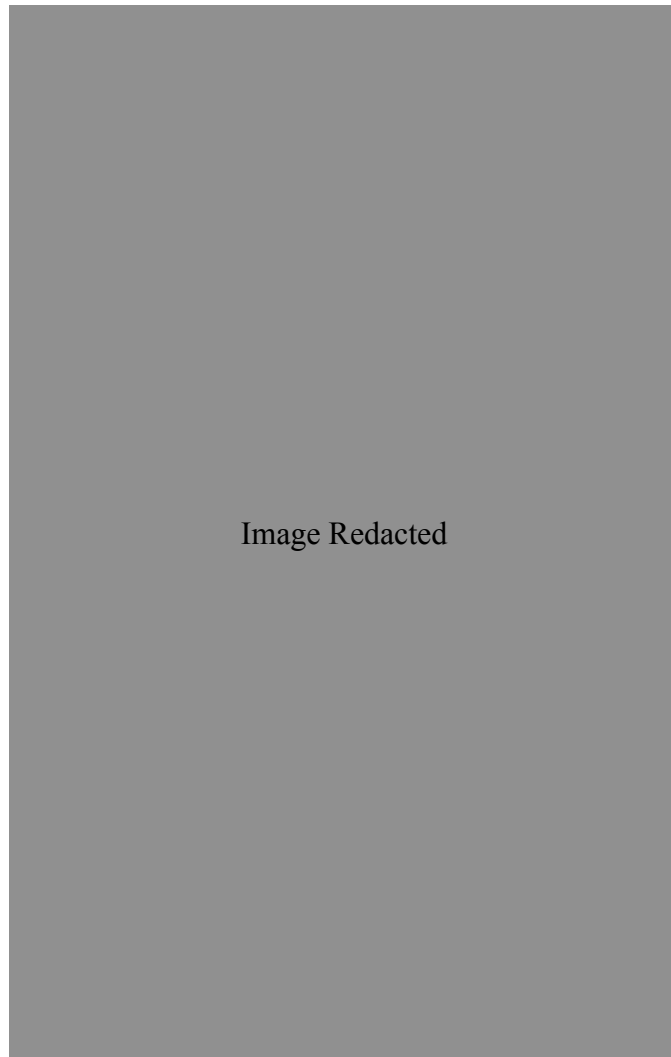


Figure 3.43: GIS viewshed mapping the sight lines from the top of St. Magnus Cathedral's tower. The pink areas, projecting largely to the north and south along major maritime routes, show visible areas from 40m high.



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Figure 3.44: View of St. Magnus Cathedral from a ship sailing south between Orkney and Scotland through the Pentland Firth. The roofline and tower are clearly visible (the tall spire is a nineteenth-century addition).



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Figure 4.1: Illumination of King Æthelstan presenting Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* to Cuthbert. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 183, fol. IV.

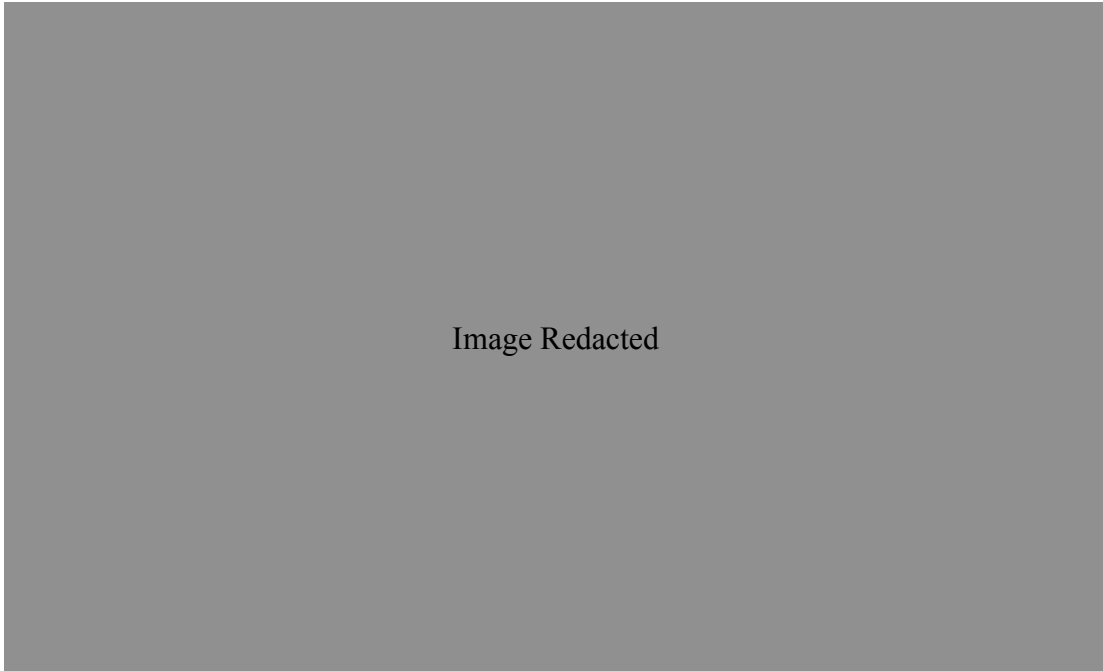


Figure 4.2: The hand of God in the Bayeux Tapestry.

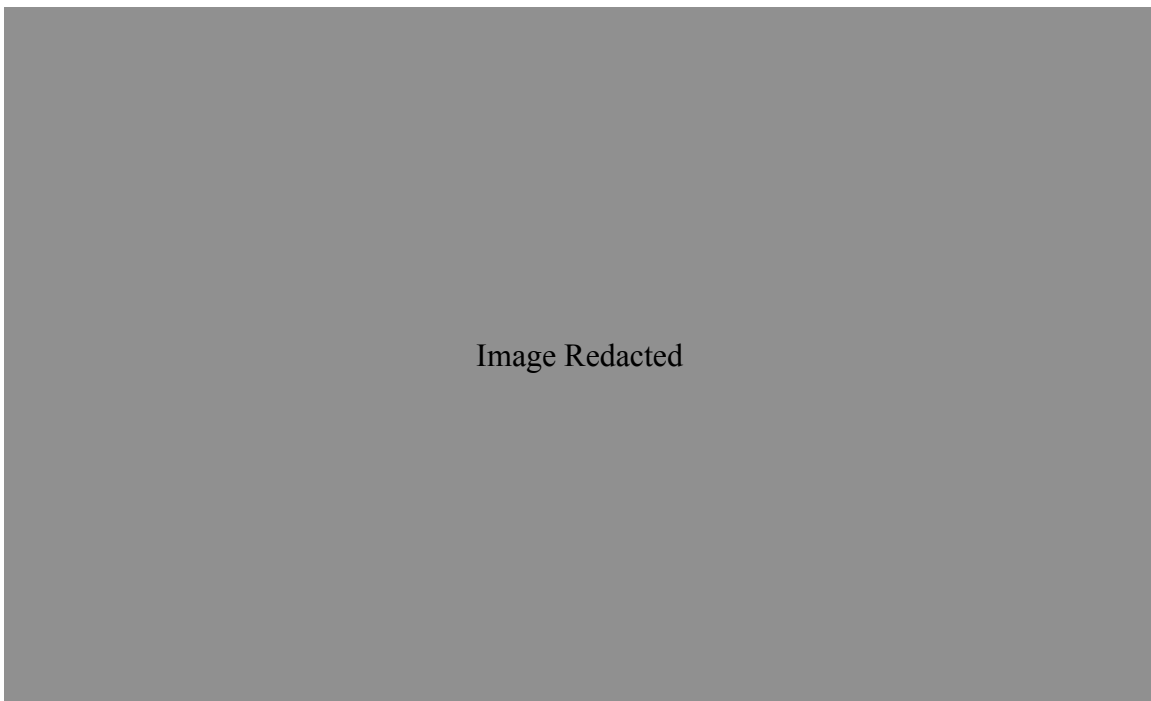


Figure 4.3: The appearance of Halley's Comet in the Bayeux Tapestry.

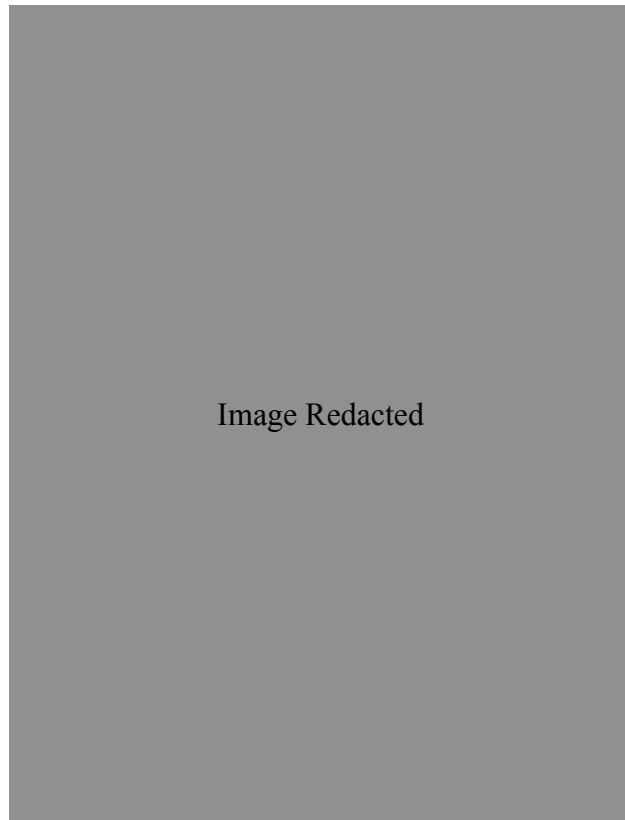


Figure 4.4: St. Étienne, Caen, Normandy, 1063.

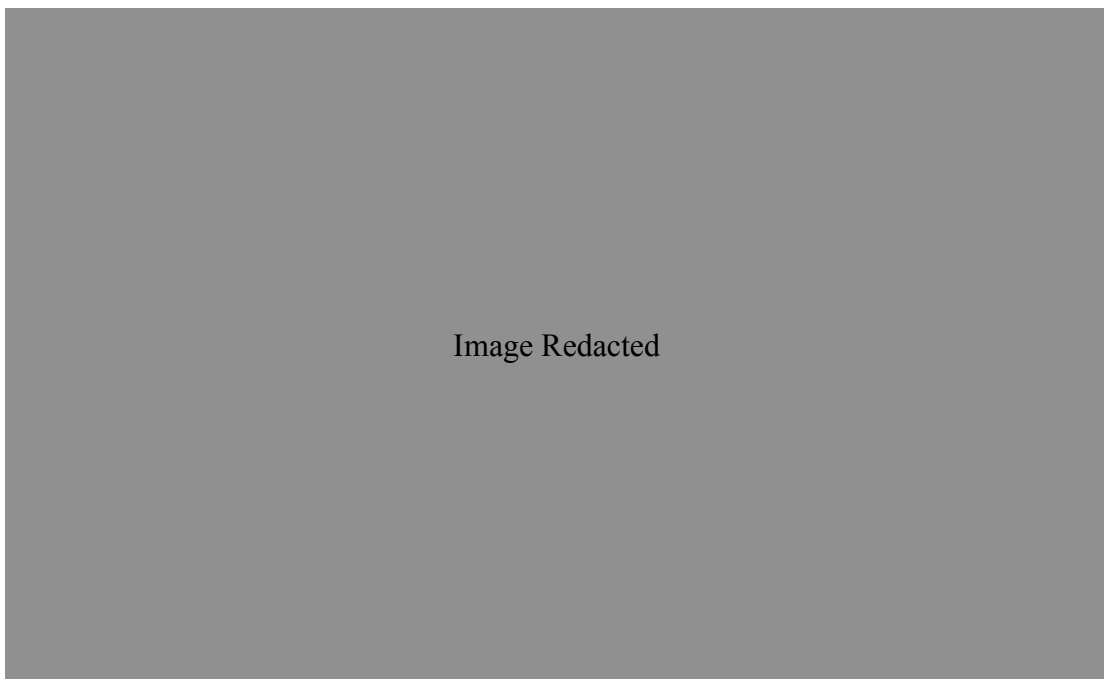


Figure 4.5: Plan of Durham Cathedral with original apsidal east end, c. 1133.

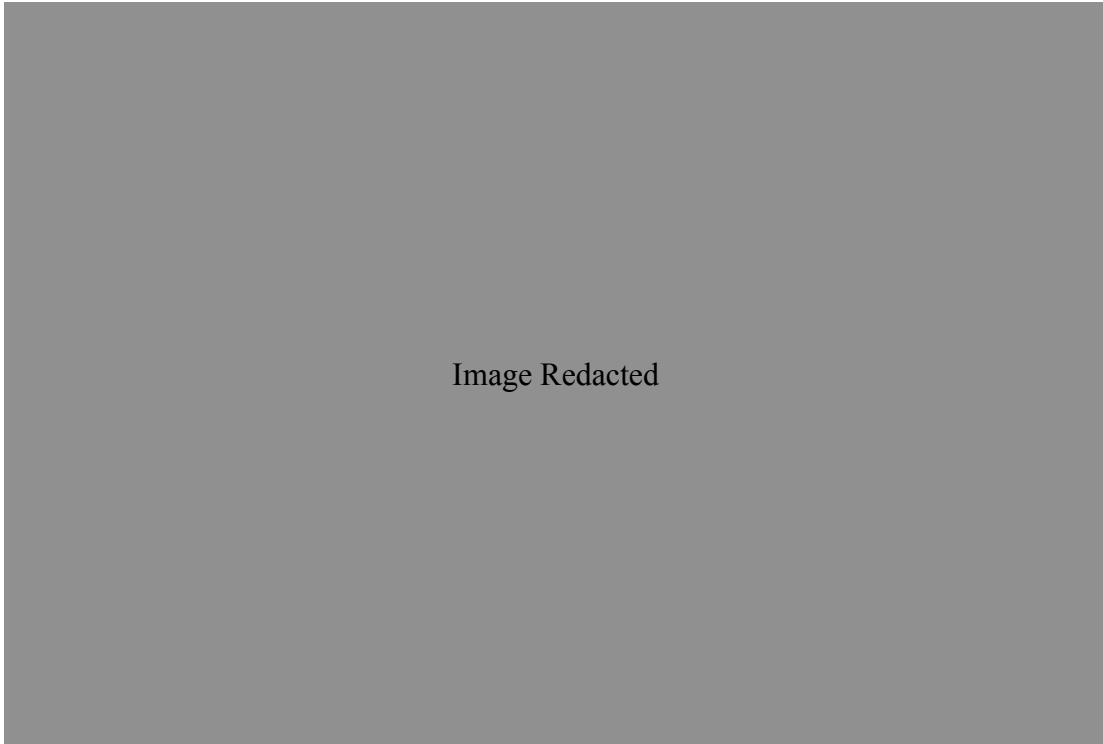


Figure 4.6: Jumiéges Abbey, Jumiéges, Normandy, 1050-1067, with double bay system of alternating columns and piers.

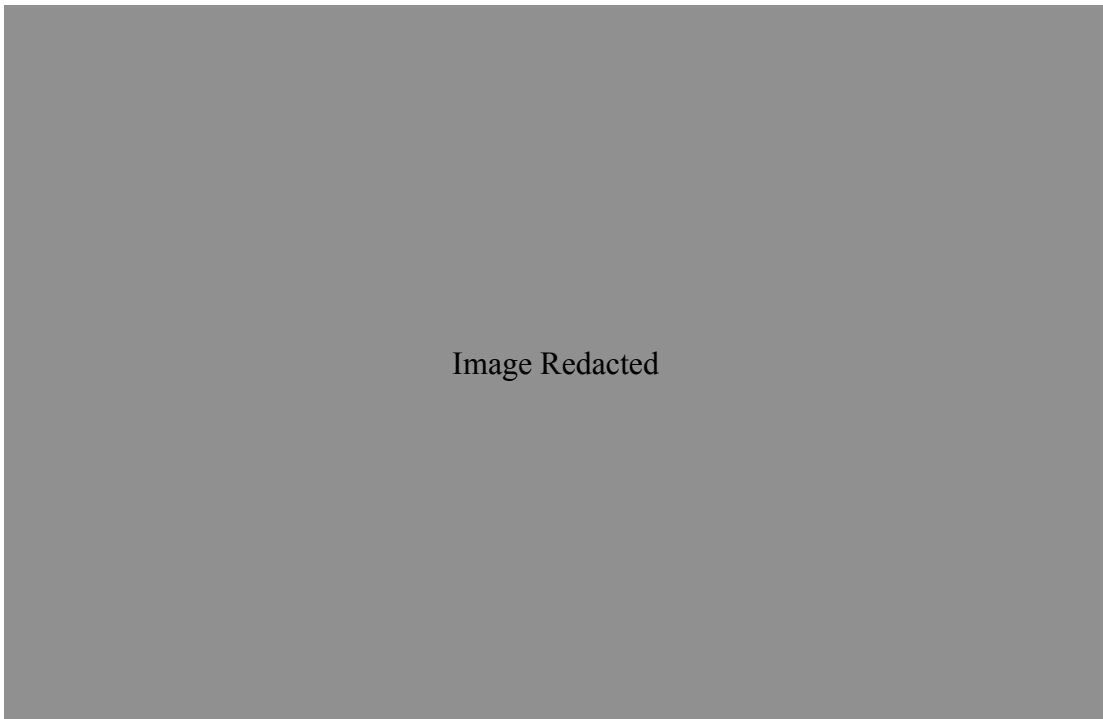


Figure 4.7: Chevron and billet mouldings in the nave arcade, Durham Cathedral.

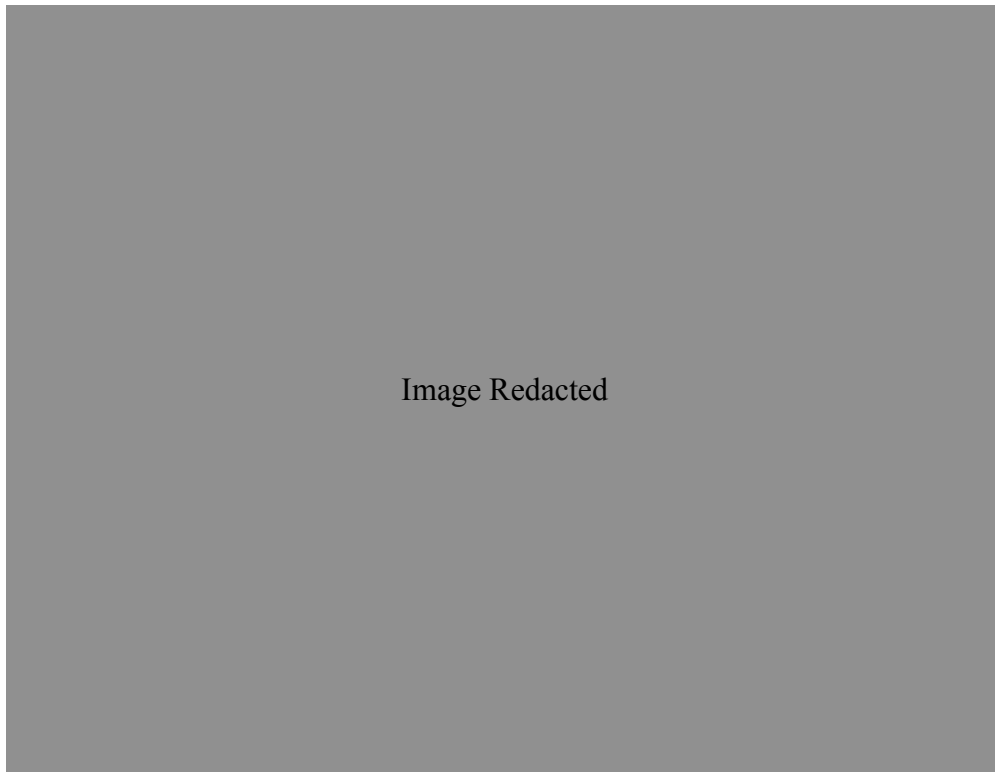


Figure 4.8: Capitals from southwest nave doorway, Durham Cathedral.

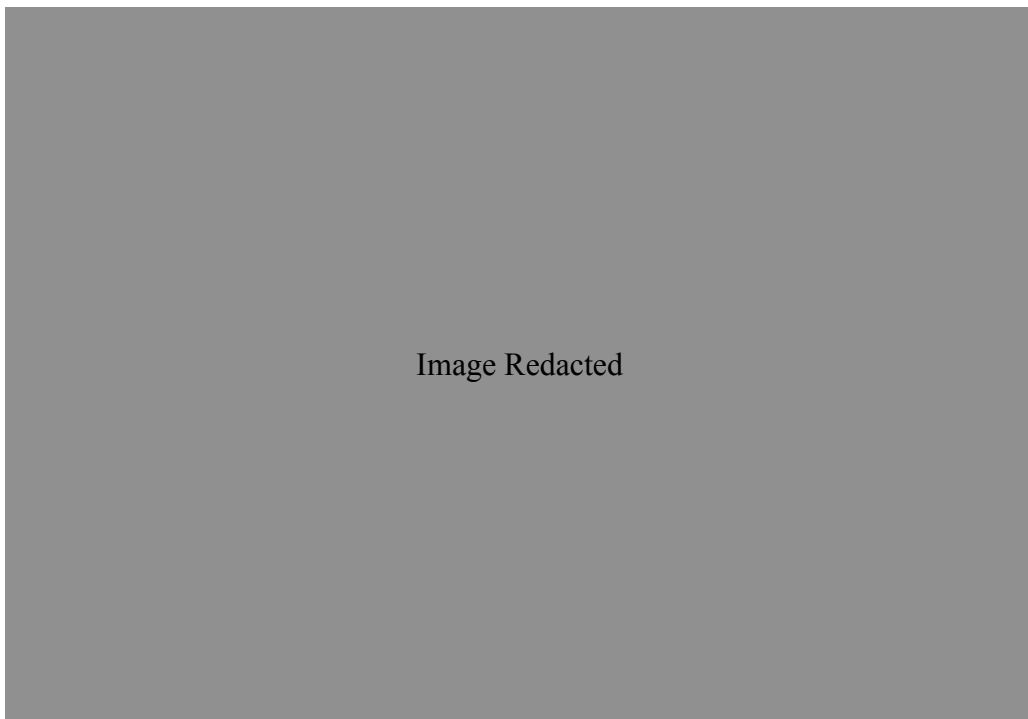


Figure 4.9: Interlaced dado arcade, Durham Cathedral aisle.

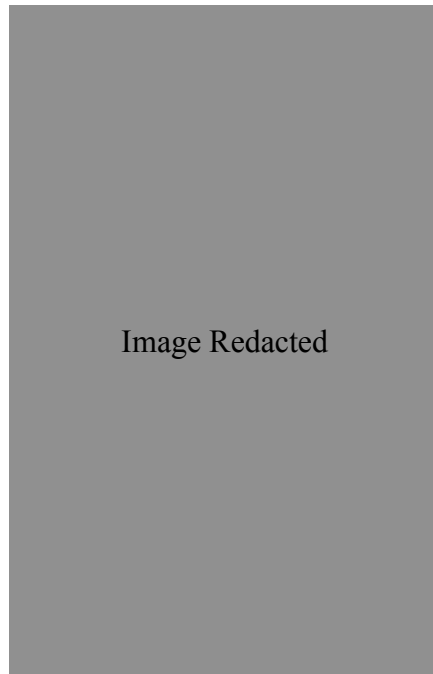


Figure 4.10: Anglo-Saxon tower, All Saints' Church, Earls Barton, England, tenth century.

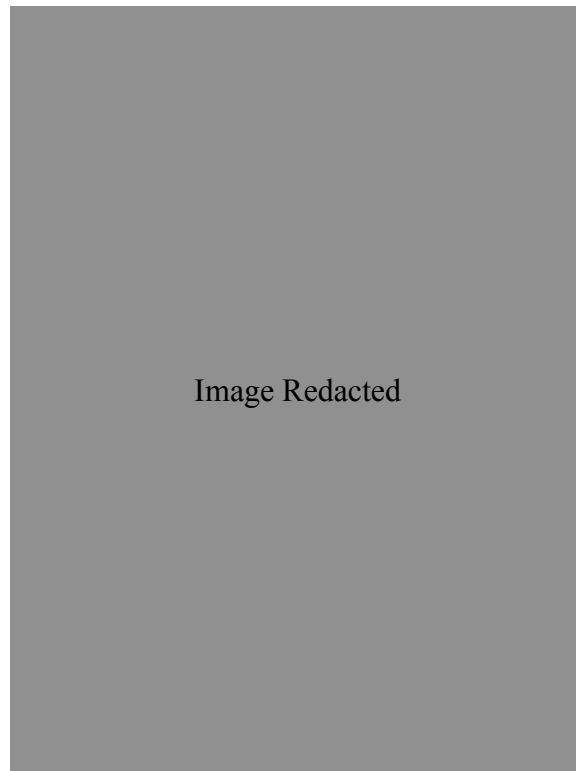


Figure 4.11: Anglo-Saxon tower, St. Peter's Church, Barton-upon-Humber, England, tenth century.

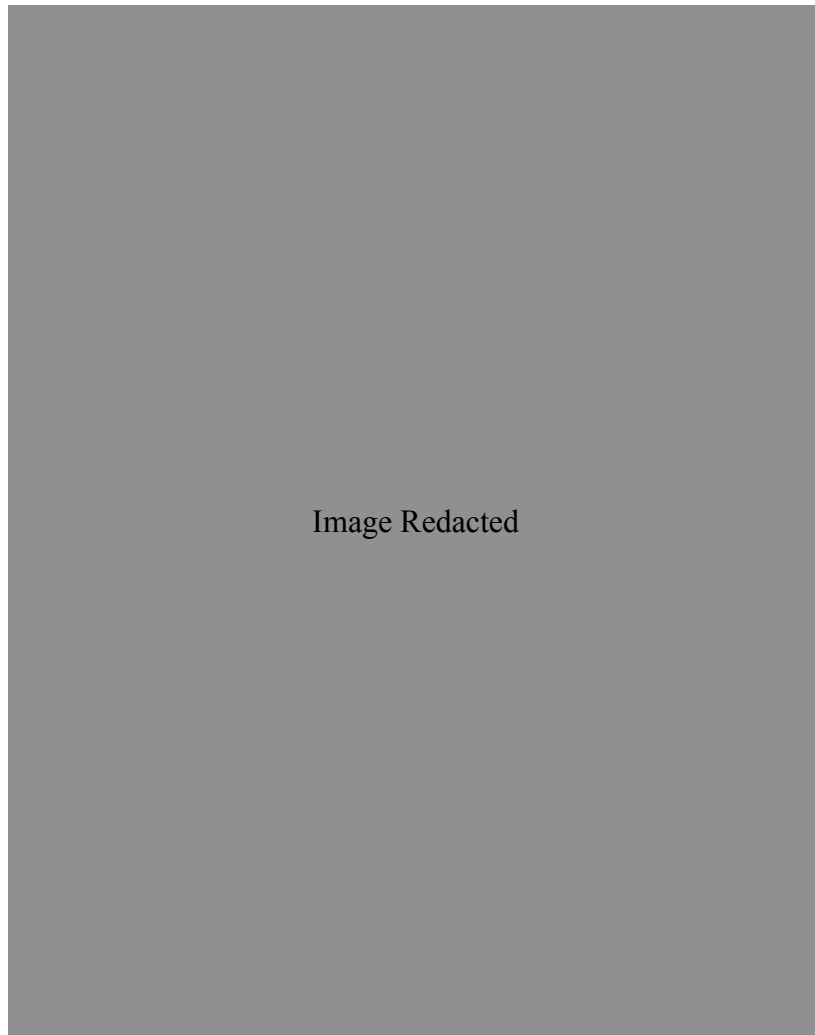


Figure 4.12: Interlaced arches in Anglo-Saxon manuscript, early ninth century to early eleventh century.

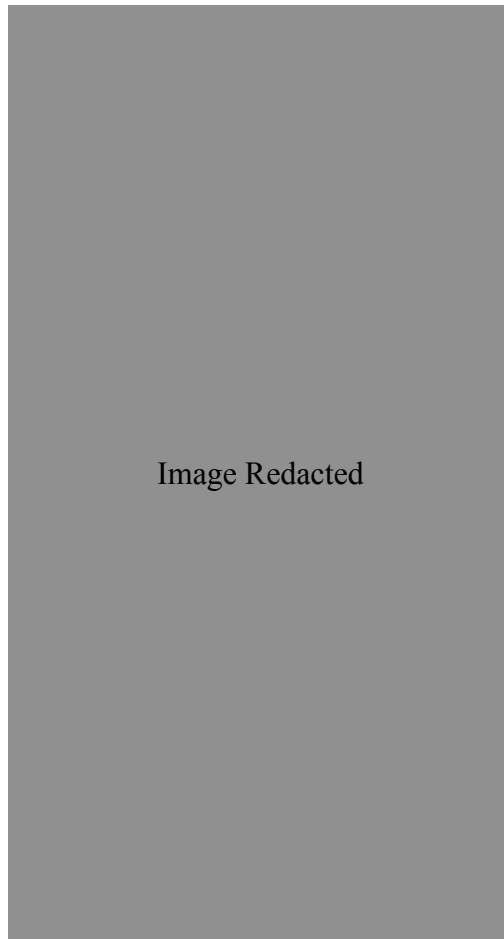


Figure 4.13: Charter of King Duncan II of Scotland granting land to “St Cuthbert and his servants.”

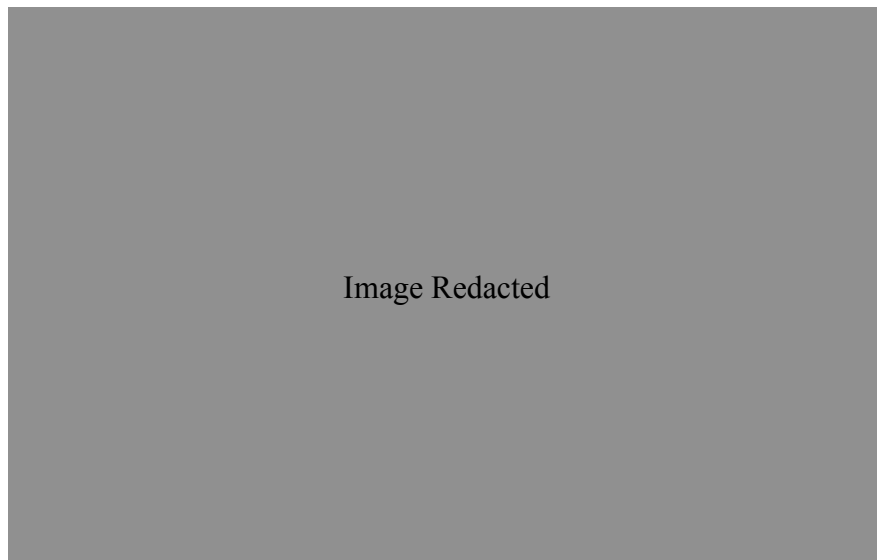


Figure 4.14: Charter of King Edgar of Scotland granting land to Durham.

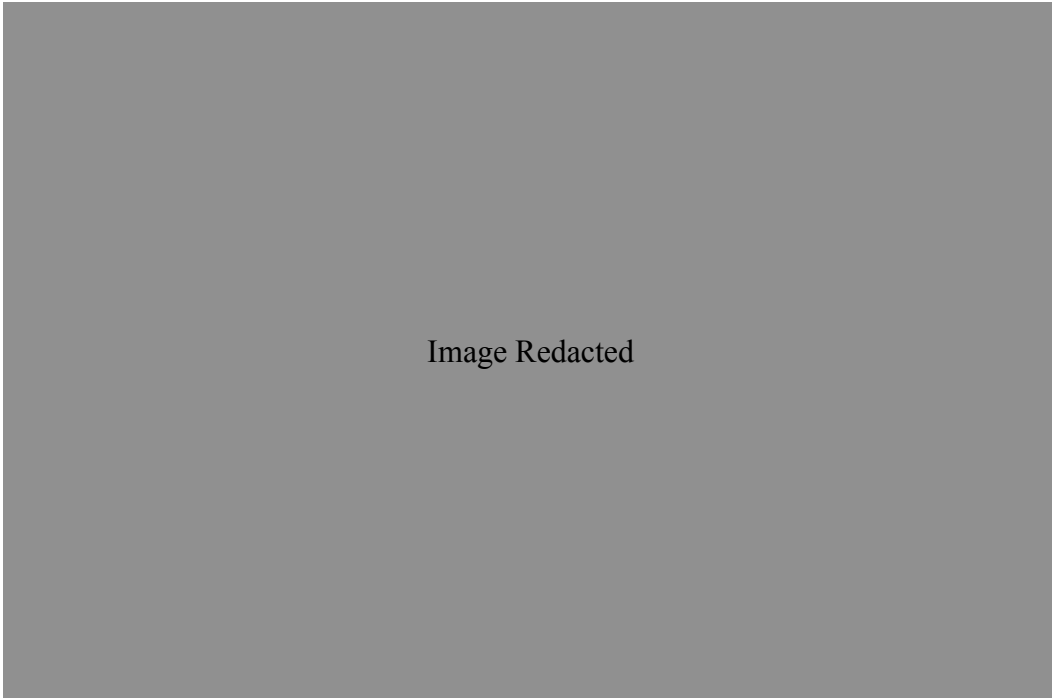


Figure 4.15: North nave arcade, Dunfermline Abbey. Billeted moulding appears on the nave arcade itself, while chevron moulding appears on the window behind.

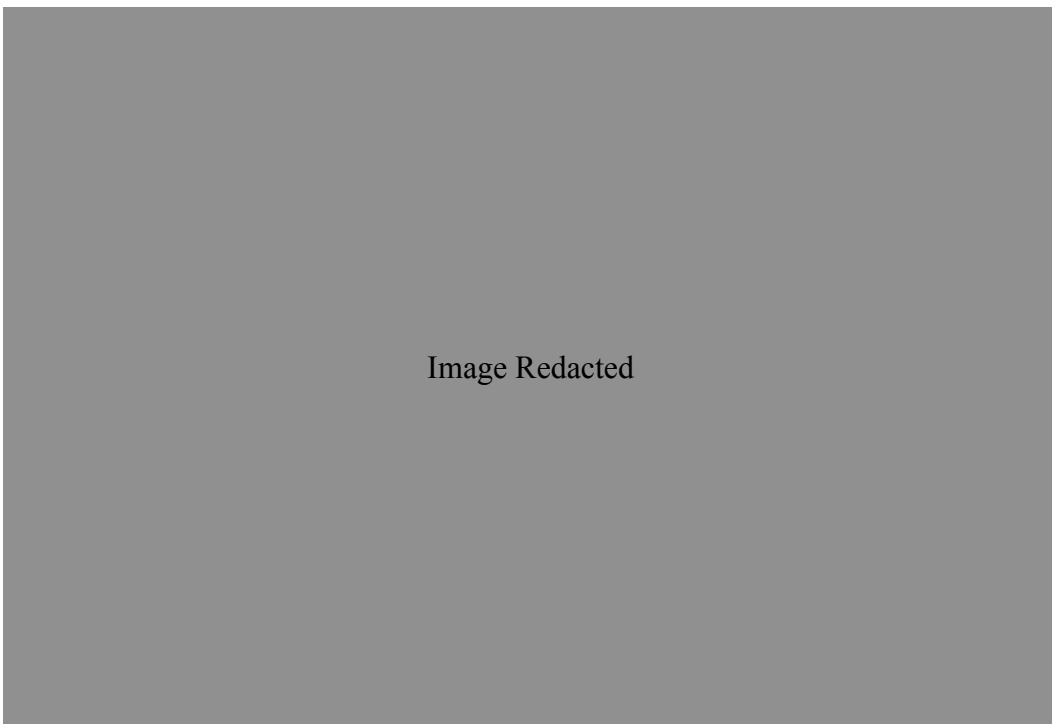


Figure 4.16: Patterned arches in Dunfermline Abbey nave.

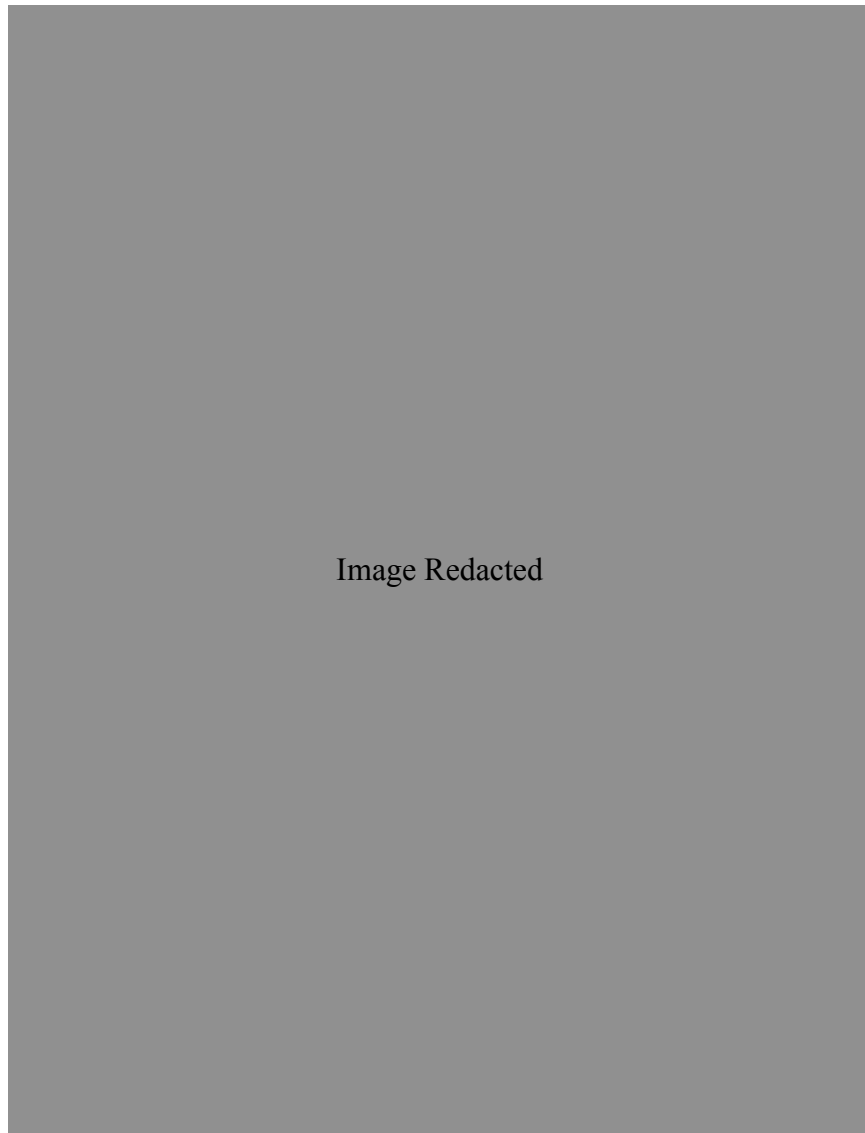


Figure 4.17: Capitals from the southeast doorway, Dunfermline Abbey.

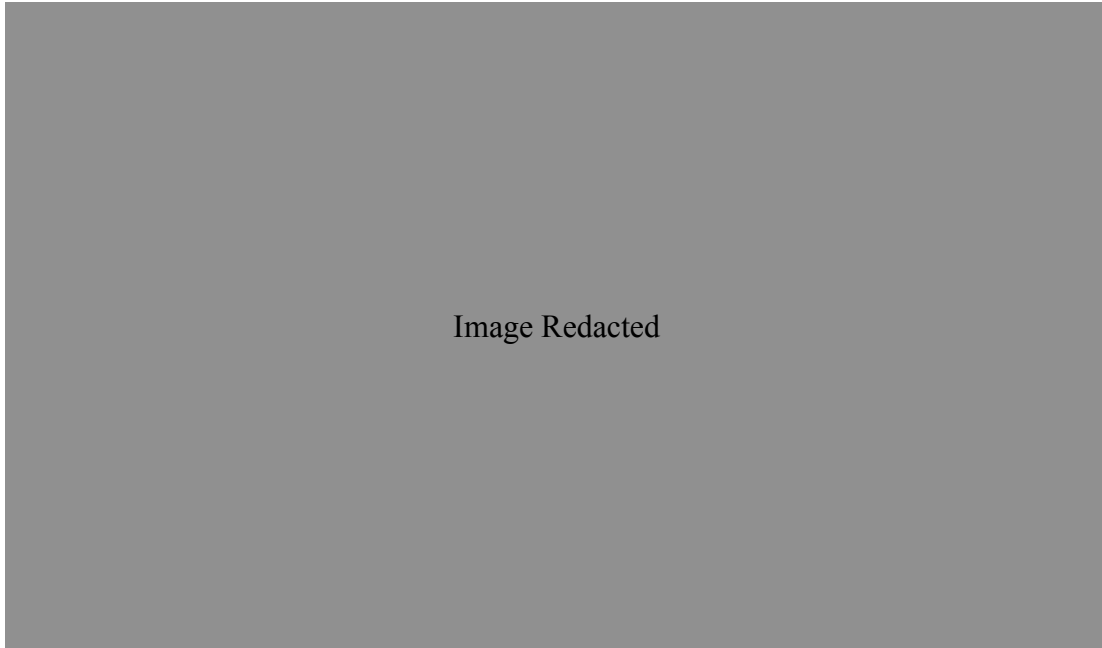


Figure 4.18: Plan of Dunfermline Abbey, with original tower nave and choir (left) and expanded choir and apse (right), late tenth and early eleventh century.

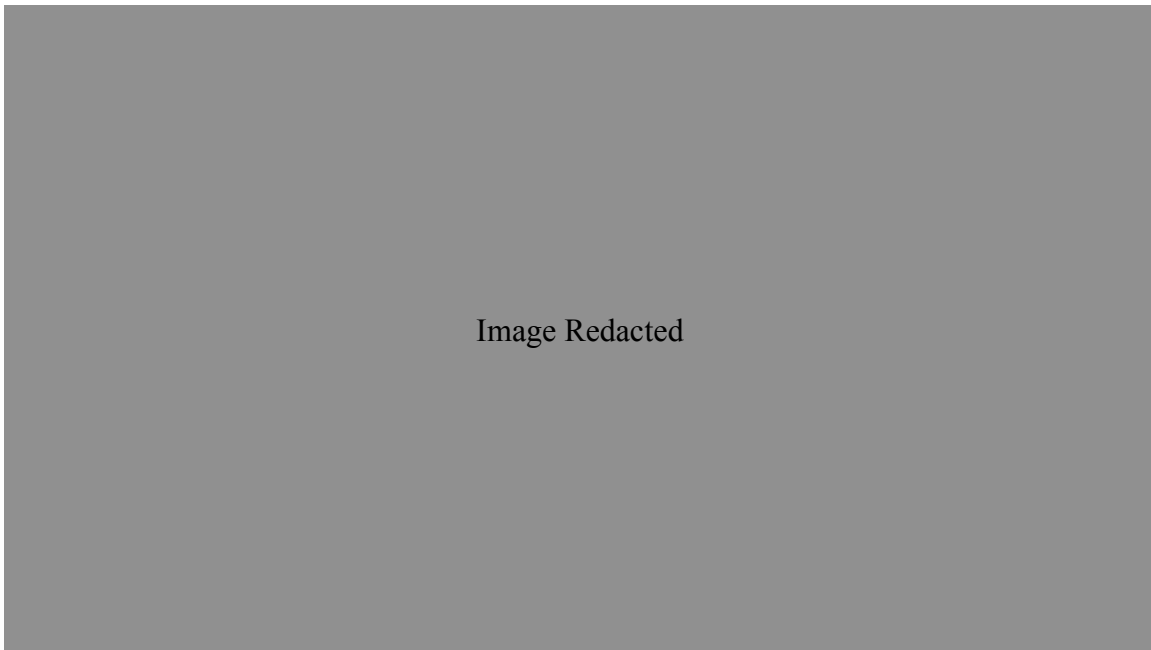


Figure 4.19: Plan of Dunfermline, with different architectural phases and cult sites related to Margaret, including 1) original burial site within pre-1928 church; 2) 1180 shrine near the high altar; 3) 1250 shrine in chapel; 4) St. Margaret's Well; 5) St. Margaret's altar; 6) high altar; 7) relic altar.

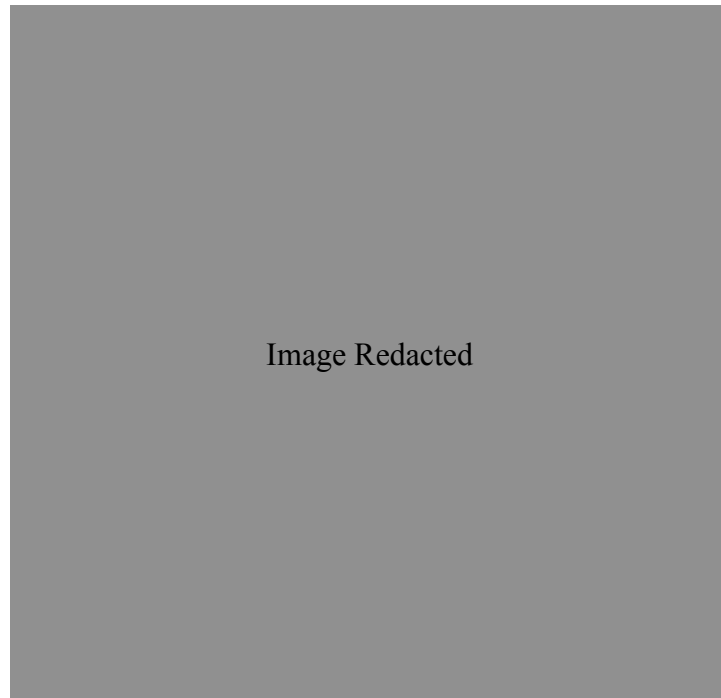


Figure 4.20: Reconstruction of St. Peter's shrine, Old St. Peter's, Rome, with spiral columns.

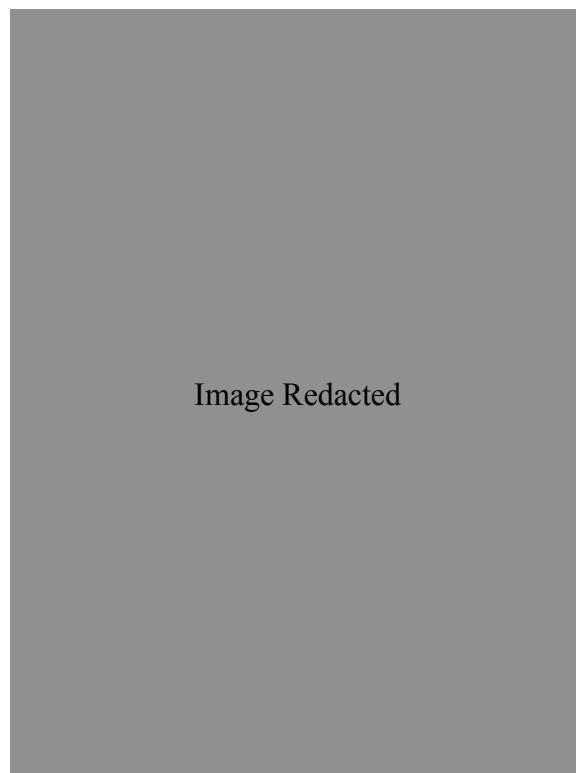


Figure 4.21: Crypt of St. Wystan's, Repton, with spiral columns.

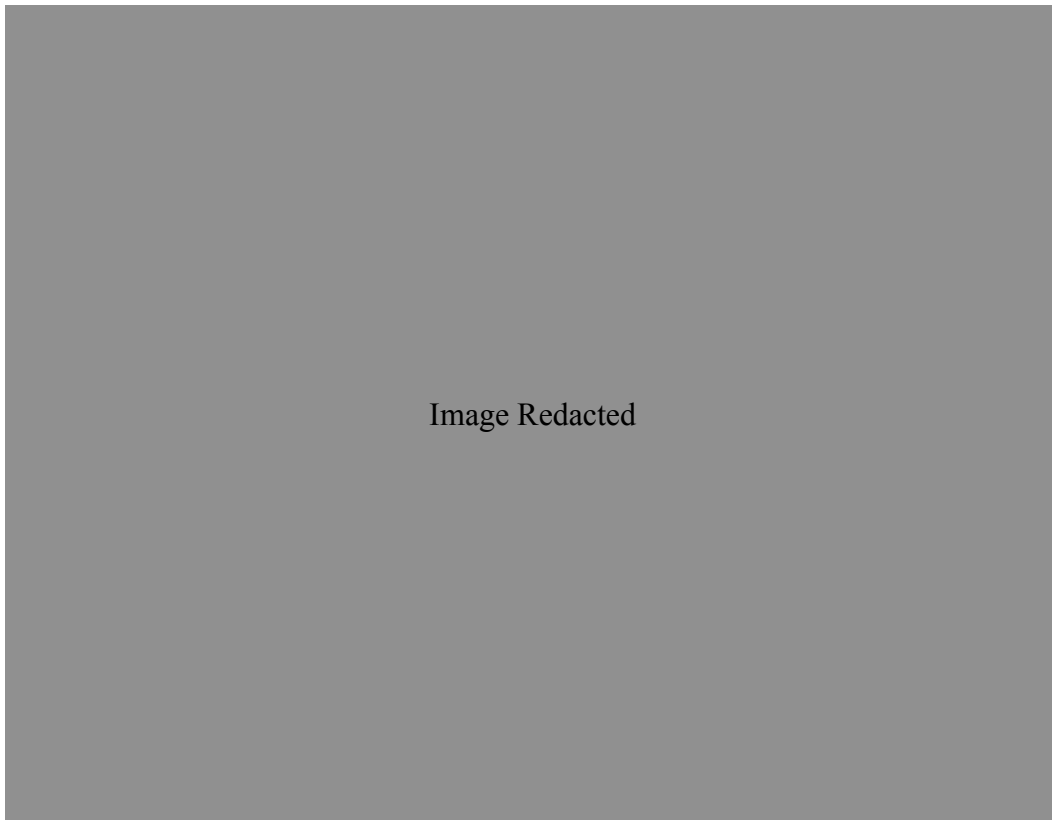


Figure 4.22: Crypt of St. Lebuinus, Deventer, Netherlands, with spiral columns.

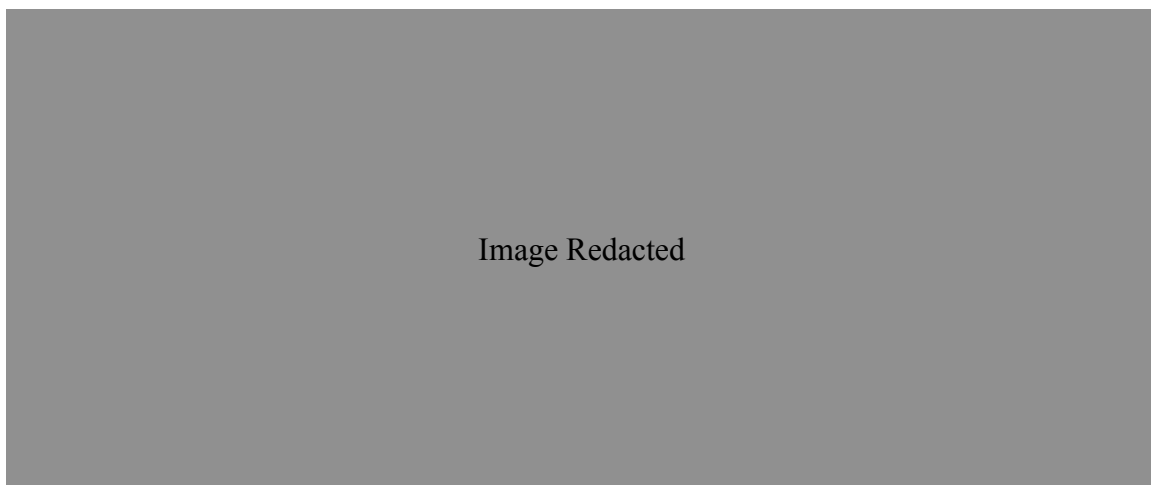


Figure 4.23: Diagram of patterned columns in Canterbury Cathedral's crypt.

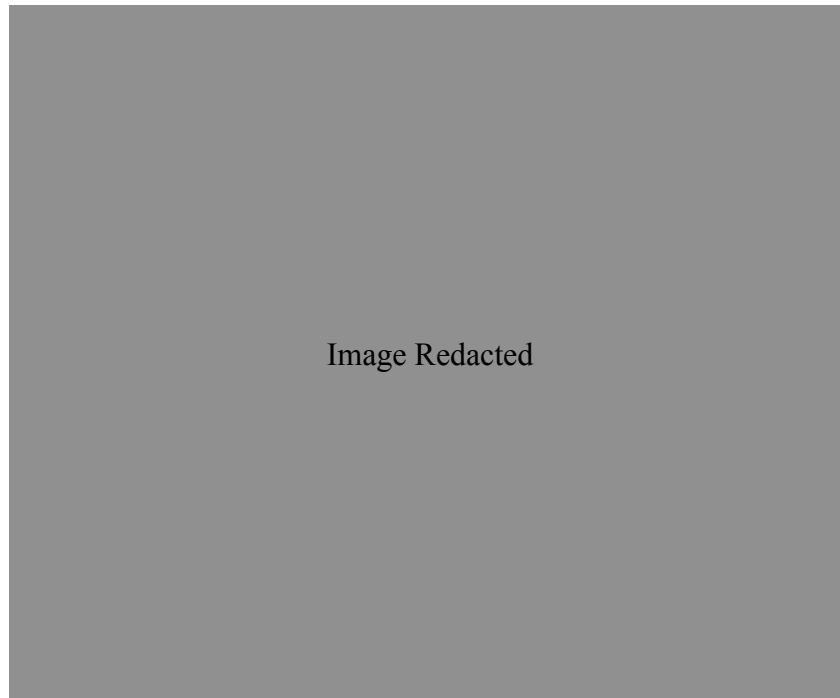


Figure 4.24: Reconstruction of King Óláfr kyrre's Christ Church, late eleventh century, situated on the outline of the present Nidaros Cathedral.

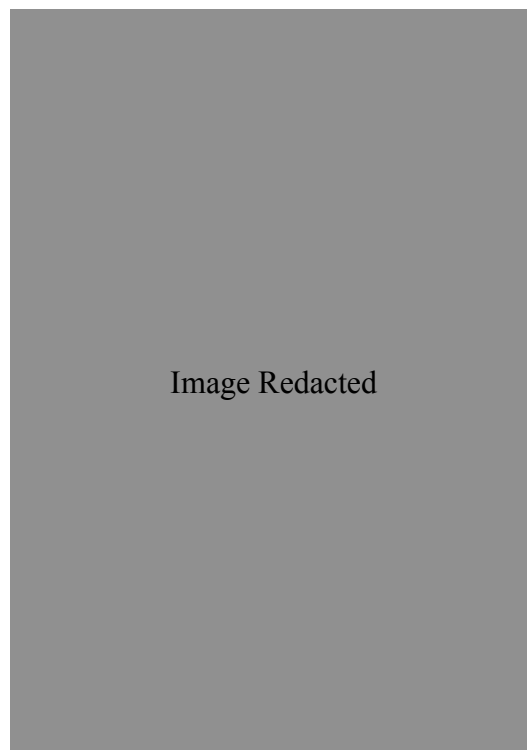


Figure 4.25: Chevron-carved column in the south transept chancel, mid-twelfth century.

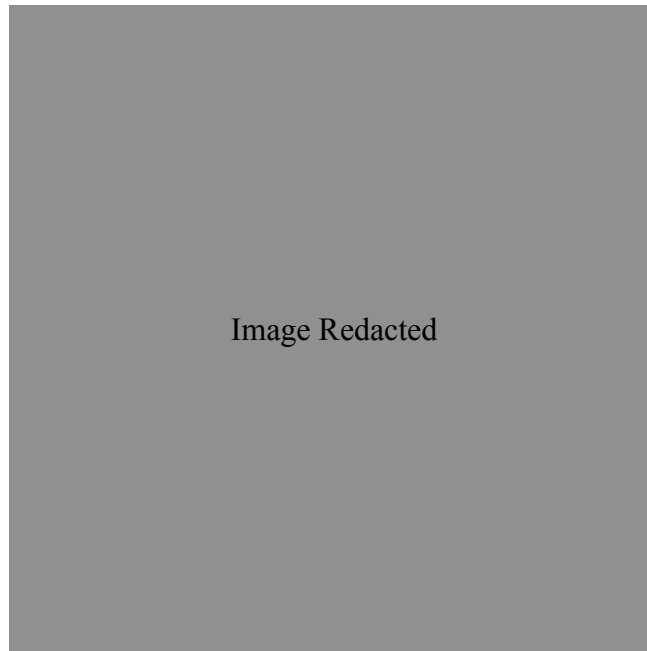


Figure 4.26: Column and chevron fragments from unfinished nave at Nidaros Cathedral, mid-twelfth century.

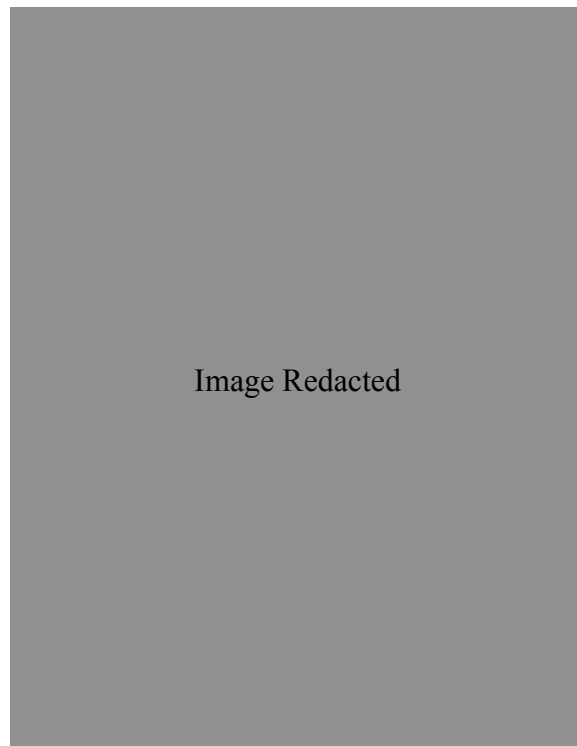


Figure 4.27: Constructed elevation of Nidaros Cathedral's Anglo-Norman nave.

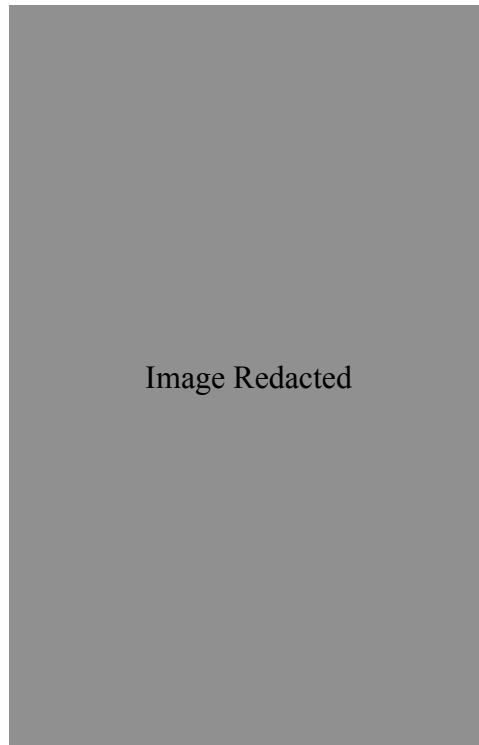


Figure 5.1: Alfred Jewel, enamel and quartz, ninth century.

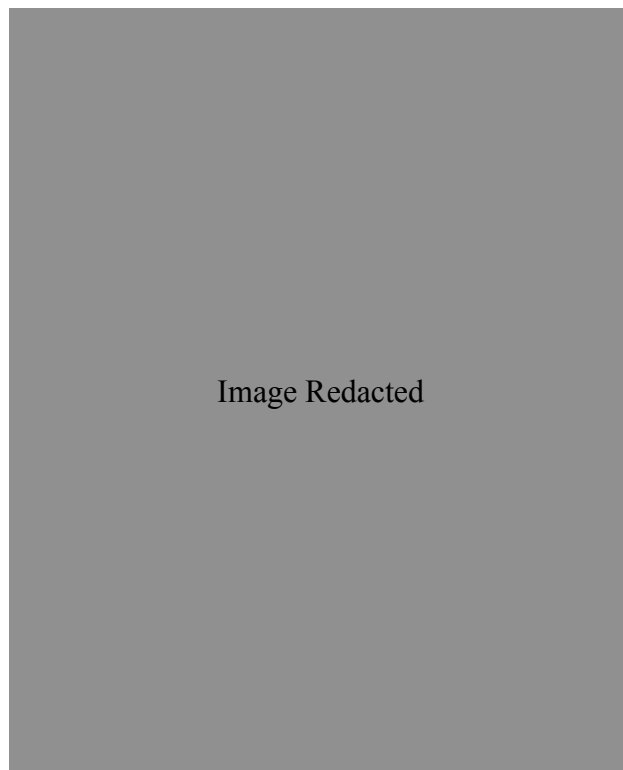


Figure 5.2: Solomon Enthroned, Bible of San Paolo fuori le mura, fol. 188v.

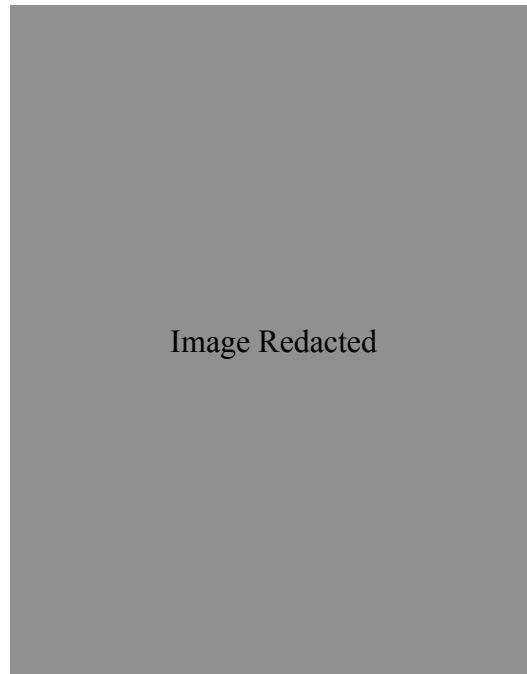


Figure 5.3: Charles the Bald Enthroned, Cayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 14000, fol. 5v.

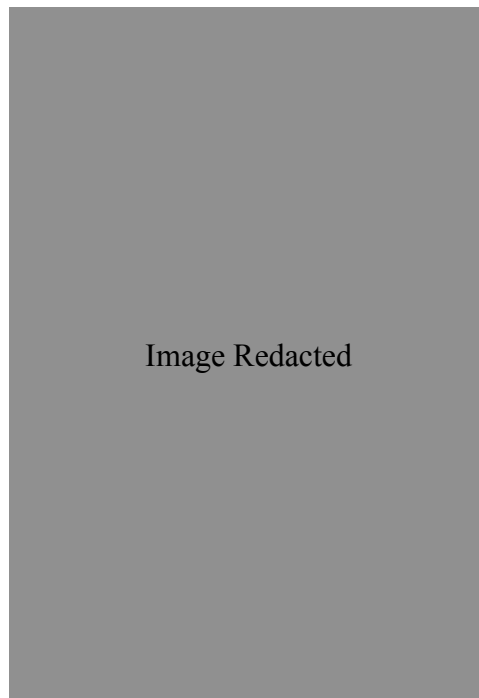


Figure 5.4: Possible sculpture of Rognvaldr with a stringed instrument against his left leg, c. 1400.

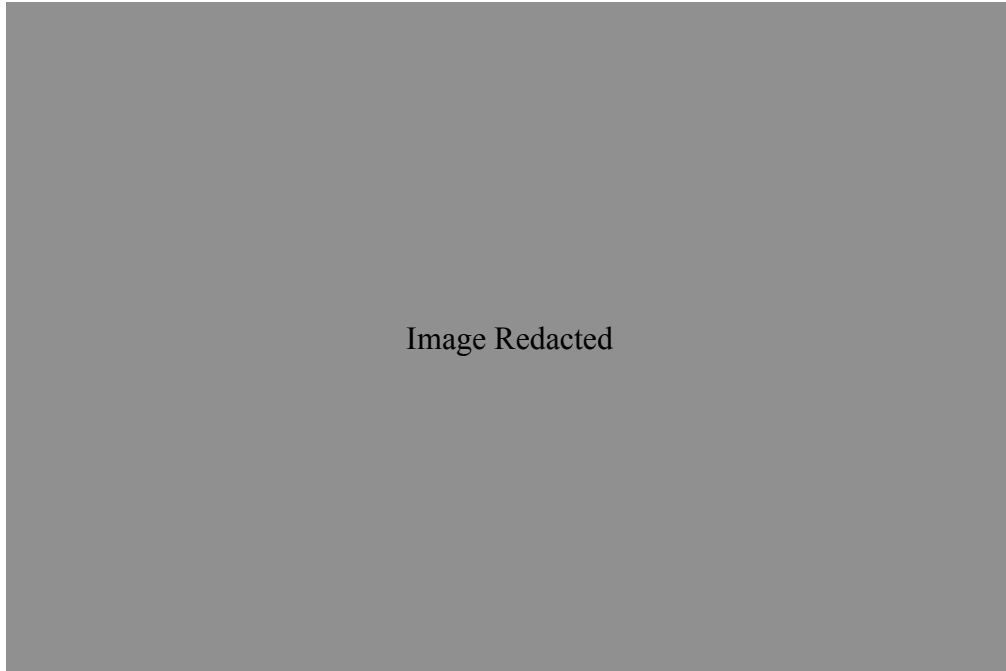


Figure 5.5: Ruins of King Sverrir's Síon (Zion) on Steinbjørg, Trondheim, Norway.