



# Sacralisation of Land and Seascapes on the West Coast of Norway – A Reality or Misconceptions on Renaissance Maps?

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The paper discusses the geographical sacralisation that seems to be present in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century maps of the land and seascapes around Bergen on the Norwegian west coast. The hagiotoponyms may represent foreign mapmakers' misconceptions when faced with unfamiliar and incomprehensible local place-names. That is, the toponyms' original meaning may have been secular and the origin Norse. Alternatively, the maps may correctly reproduce and preserve medieval sacral place names, of which meaning subsequently has been lost. The toponyms that are discussed are Sotra, Krossfjord and Lyse, which may be linked, respectively, to the prominent medieval religious institutions of the region, the Benedictine Munkeliv Abbey, the Cross Church of Fana and the Cistercian Lyse Abbey.

## Introduction

Sacralisation of landscapes seems to be a less frequent phenomenon in Scandinavia than in the rest of Europe. According to Sørensen (1990) the Scandinavian transition from paganism to Christianity did not in general lead to a substitution of old cultic place names with Christian place names. For example, there are in general few recorded hagiotopo-

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nyms, i.e., place names related to saints, and hardly any that are known to have replaced Pre-Christian cultic names.

Settlement names related to saints are common in Europe – primarily in the Carpathian basin, Germany, Italy, France, and Spain (Tóth 2011). Hagiotoponyms also appear frequently in Scotland (Clancy 2013) – which may be of special relevance to Norway, given geographical proximity and political ties during the Middle Ages.

In this respect the sacralisations on early sea maps of the west coast of Norway appear to be an interesting exception to the Scandinavian rule. This study examines whether the sacralisations that are present on these maps are foreign misconceptions, i.e., folk-etymology, of which original form has no sacral meaning, or whether the maps correctly reproduce and preserve medieval sacralised place names.

The basis for this study is the first printed sea maps that in some detail include the Sotra archipelago on the west coast of Norway outside Bergen, i.e., the cluster of islands outside the medieval capital of Norway.<sup>1</sup> The maps are the Dutch sea maps of Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer and Willem Blaeu issued in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and the British/Italian mid-seventeenth-century maps of Sir Robert Dudley. Some early fourteenth-century portolan charts and sixteenth-century maps with less cartographic detail are also discussed.

On these sea maps the Sotra archipelago's name is given as variations of "the land of St. Olaf" – the patron saint of Norway. Foreign map-makers seem to interpret the first two letters of Sotra, 'so', as an abbreviation of *Saint Olaf*. This contradicts accepted modern etymology, which assumes that Sotra is a pre-Christian Norse name.

The article is organized as follows: Section 1 discusses the sacralisations as foreign misconceptions emerging in the Renaissance. Section 2 discusses the alternative hypothesis that the St. Olaf sacralisation represents an original local medieval tradition, i.e., that Sotra is an abbreviation of the Latin term *Sancti Olavi Terra* – 'the land of Saint Olaf'. The section views Sotra as a part of a cluster of sacralised place names and discusses in some detail the toponyms Krossfjord ['the cross fjord'] and Lyse. The section links the potential hagiotoponym 'S: O. terra' to the Benedictine

1. The use of Renaissance maps as a source for studying Old Norse or Norwegian medieval place names appears to be novel to this study. For a similar use, though related to the transition of religions in the Old Norse society, see Mikkelsen (2019).

Munkeliv Abbey, the toponym Krossfjord to the medieval silver cross of the Fana Church and the toponym Lyse to the foundation of the Cistercians Lyse Abbey. Section 3 discusses the archipelago's potential original Old Norse name that preceded the name Sotra. Section 4 concludes.

### The etymology of the archipelago toponym Sotra

The archipelago Sotra creates a sheltered fairway, both from north and south, to Bergen – Norway's medieval capital and key trading hub between Europe and the north. The etymology of the name Sotra has been debated. Several interpretations have been suggested. Many of them are related to characteristics of the sea, like currents and maelstroms. It is generally assumed in the literature that the name is pre-Christian. It has been suggested that the name Sotra, due to its structure and obscurity, is among the oldest names in Scandinavia.<sup>2</sup> The name in Old Norse is often regarded to be *Sotr*, which is the form that appears in a fourteenth-century version of the poetic Edda.

In texts from the late medieval period Sotra is known in the versions *Soter* (1427, 1463, 1490), *Sothir* (1427) and *Sotor* (1490). See table 1 below.<sup>3</sup> Almost all the written versions are, up to the seventeenth century, spelled with an initial 'so'. Renaissance mapmakers appear to have understood 'so' as a Latin abbreviation of *Sancti Olavi* – Norway's patron saint.

The first printed detailed map of the fairway to Bergen is Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer's map *Custe van Noorweghen, tusschen Berghen, ende de Iedder*, which was printed in the 1588 issue of the *Spiegel der Zeevaert*.<sup>4</sup> The map shows the Sotra archipelago as one single island. Waghenaer

2. Brevner (1942) suggests that *Sotr* is a Proto-Norse *tr*-derivation of *sjode*, 'to boil'. Jöran Sahlgren (in Brevner) suggests that the name is derived from the word *suga* ['to suck']. Alternative etymologies include a parallel to the Old Norse *setr* 'a settlement', or, according to Bugge (1905: 143–160), *Sotr* is derived from an Old Norse word *\*Sutru* or an old Germanic word *\*Sutro* – both words constructed – that consists of two parts: *s-utro*. The last part is supposed to mean 'otter' ['*lutra lutra*'].
3. The 1427 versions are related to documents from the Munkeliv Abbey in Bergen, at the time the abbey was taken over by the Bridgettine order. As discussed below this may be of some importance in this context. Post-reformation versions of the name include *Saatter* (1610), *Satter* (1611) and finally *Sartor* (1723).
4. The map was first printed in the Dutch 1588 edition but was probably made for the Latin 1586 edition of Waghenaer's *Spiegel der Zeevaert*. See Ginsberg (2012).



Figure 1; Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer, *Custe van Noorweghen, tusschen Berghen, ende de Iedder*, 1586, part: coastline from Austevoll to Bergen (from a French 1590 edition)

calls the island *S. Oloffs holm*,<sup>5</sup> which seems to be an abbreviation of ‘the island of Saint Olaf’.<sup>6</sup>

The British navigator and mapmaker Sir Robert Dudley issued the first non-Dutch printed sea map of the west coast of Norway.<sup>7</sup> The map, published in 1646, is called *Carta particolare della parte Australe della Noruegia XXXXIII*. Cartographically the map deviates significantly from

5. Variants appear in the accompanying sailing-descriptions, e.g., *S. Oeefs Hollem* in the 1588 Dutch edition and *S. Aloffs Hollem* in the 1589 German edition.
6. Old Norse *holmr* usually means ‘a small island’. It originates from a root \*kel-, meaning to ‘rise, elevate’ (NSL:1976). Note also Russian ‘xoam’ [‘height’, ‘hill’] and the many toponyms including the term ‘holm’ in the Baltic Sea area.
7. The German cartographer Matthaeus Merian’s 1641 Norwegian sea maps are reengraved versions of Willem Blaeu’s 1623 *Zeespiegel* maps, i.e., cartographically they are part of the Dutch tradition.

Waghenaer's outline, which suggests that it is based on a different maritime tradition. The map was issued in Florence, Italy, but it probably represents the British navigational knowledge at the time. Dudley calls the archipelago *I. S. Olauo*, which presumably is an Italian abbreviation of 'the Island of Saint Olaf'.<sup>8</sup>

As far as the name of the Sotra archipelago is concerned, these two early sea maps are not representative of later cartographic works. Nearly all late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sea maps apply the name *Het Groote Eylandt*, i.e., 'the great island'. These later maps are nearly all based on Willem Blaeu's map *Het Liet van Bergen*, from his 1623 *Zeespiegel* atlas. However, the change in names can be traced back to a second map by Waghenaer from 1592 – the second printed sea map of the Norwegian west coast – called *Beschrijvinge van Noorwegen, dat een wonderlijck monster is va allen laande* and printed in his *Thresoor der Zeevaart*. Willem Blaeu's first map of the area, *Pascaarte van Noorweghen, vertoonende de Zee-custen geleghen tusschen der Neus en Berghen* from 1608, follows closely Waghenaer's 1592 map, which includes the use of the name *Het Groote Eylandt*.<sup>9</sup>

On these later maps the name *S. Oloff holm* (Waghenaer 1592)<sup>10</sup> is used to describe the small Bjorøyna Island to the east of the main Sotra Island. This alteration seems to be due to the mapmaker's misinterpretation of the accompanying sailing-descriptions. The sailing-description printed in 1588 goes from the south to the north, whereas the sailing-description printed in 1592 goes from the north to the south. The switch of directions appears to have caused the confusion of the location of *S. Oloffs holm*. In the 1586 sea map the Bjorøyna Island is called *Wagestroom*, after the maelstrom *Vatlestraumen* between Bjorøyna and the mainland (figure 1). Waghenaer's authority as a nautical cartographer

8. *I.S. Olauo* also appears on Dudley's map *Questa carta contiene l'Isolle di Fero... XXXXV*. Ginsberg (2012) fig. 9A.3a.

9. On the Dudley *Questa carta contiene l'Isolle di Fero...* map, a church, centrally placed on the island *I.S. Olauo*, is called *Storo*. This is probably the medieval Fjell Church. *Storo* may be derived from Danish *\*storø* ['big island'], which corresponds to the term *Het Groote Eylandt* on Dutch sea maps from the Renaissance. In Jan Janssonius' map *Nova at accurata Tabula episcopatum Stavangriensis, Bergensis et Asloiensis* (1636) (Ginsberg 2012: 36), based on a lost map of Bishop Laurids Clausen Scavenius, the terms are merged, and the island is called *Store Soteren*, which corresponds to the name *Store Sotra*, i.e., the current name of the largest island of the archipelago. An old altarpiece depicting St. Olaf and St. Sunniva and a medieval St. Olaf figure have survived the Reformation and the demolition of the medieval Fjell Church.

10. In Blaeu (1623) and later *St. Olofs holm*.



probably cemented the error on later maps. Only in the eighteenth century the error is corrected, e.g., Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen-Trémarec, *Relation d'un voyage dans la mer du Nord* (1771), uses both names, i.e., *Olossholm ou Behoriayen*.

Robert Dudley's second Norwegian west coast map *Carta di Noruegia piu moderna*, also from 1646, is closer to the contemporary Dutch maps than the abovementioned first Dudley map. In the *piu moderna* map Dudley uses the term *I:S:Tolauo* for the Bjorøyna Island.

The naming confusion on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps seems to indicate that the maps were drawn based on written sailing-descriptions. Therefore, the printed sailing-descriptions may represent the oldest available source of the sacralised toponym.

It is unclear from where the navigational knowledge and toponyms of the Dutch sailing-descriptions are derived. Bergen was a thriving medieval and Renaissance trading hub. The Danish 1599 expedition to the north, headed by Christian IV, reflects the increased strategic importance of Norwegian coastal waters in the late sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Sailing-descriptions of the fairway attributed to the Hanseatic League are not known. However, Dutch cartographers of the late sixteenth century may have had direct access to local informants.<sup>12</sup>

Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina* from 1539 is far less detailed than the later sea maps. The whole fairway from the Bømlo Island in the south to Bergen in the north is represented by one single island. There appears to be no mention of a 'land of Saint Olaf'. However, the term does exist on Gerard Mercator's 1595 Russia/Scandinavia land map, in the form *Solofsholm*. This map was printed posthumously (Ginsberg 2006).

Earlier land and sea maps are generally low on details of this region, and there seems to be no earlier map reference to 'the land of Saint Olaf' than the first sea map of Waghenaer of 1586. If the term *S. Oloffs holm* is a foreign misconception, of which the original name has no medieval sac-

11. According to Sivert Grubbe's diary, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1599, waiting for favourable winds, the king, uninvited and incognito, attended a local wedding at the farm Grimstad east of Bjorøyna. As the unexpected guest endorsed adherence to old traditions, a toast to the memory of St. Olaf kicked off the celebrations. That is, the Protestant Christian IV witnessed first-hand local veneration of St. Olaf.

12. A well-known example from the time of the compilation of Waghenaer's *Spiegel der Zeevaert*, is Magnus Heinason (1545–1589), a profiled local navigator, who served the Dutch navy in the early 1580s.

ral meaning, it likely originated with Waghenaer or the sailing-description he used. Given the fame of Waghenaer's works, his sea maps were surely known by the cartographers who later used the term, i.e., Mercator (before 1594), Blaeu (1608 and 1623) and Dudley (1646).



Figure 2; Sir Robert Dudley, *Carta particolare della parte Australe della Noruegia XXXXVIII*, 1646, part: coastline from Austevoll to Bergen

Table 1; Early manuscript and printed versions of the Sotra toponym

Year	Toponym	In text	Source
Early 14 <sup>th</sup> century	Sotr	Sotr	AM 748 I b 4 <sup>o</sup> folio 21r
Early 14 <sup>th</sup> century	Sot	j sot kkiu s.	Björgynjar Kálfskinn, 30b
Early 14 <sup>th</sup> century	Sotor	j soterskkiu	Björgynjar Kálfskinn, 32b
1427	Soter	i Soter	Munkaliv, DN XII, 159, 165
1427	Sothir	i Sothir	Munkaliv, DN XII, 152,153,155,157,160
1463	Soter	j Soter,	Munkaliv, DN XII 199
1490	Soter	Soter	Munkaliv, DN XII 229
1518	Saathr	Saathr skiprd	Bergen Royal Castle, NRJ I 120
1519	Sothtr	Sothtr skiprd	Bergen Royal Castle, NRJ I 346
1519	Sothr	Sothr skilberde	Bergen Royal Castle, NRJ II 511
1586	S.Oloffs holm	(map)	Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer
1588	S. Oelefts Hollem	(sailing-description)	Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer
1589	S. Aloffs Hollem	(sailing-description)	Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer
1595	Solofsholm	(map)	Gerard Mercator
1599-1600	Sater	Sater schibredtt	Björgvin jordebok, 54
Before 1607	Soteren	(map)	Bishop Anders Foss
Before 1626	Store Soteren	(map)	Bishop Laurids Clausen Scavenius
1646	I S Olauo	(map)	Sir Robert Dudley

### The case for Sotra as a medieval sacralisation

St. Olaf hagiotoponyms are not uncommon in northern Europe. The form *I:S:Tolauo* has a British parallel in London's Tooley Street of Southwark, which appears to be an abbreviation of the medieval *S:T Olave Street* (Sharp 2010). The 'holm' construction has a parallel in *S:t Olofsholm* at Gotland, Sweden. In this case the Old Norse name is known – *Akergarn* (Geber et al. 2023). St. Olaf's links to these locations are well established in the saga literature.<sup>13</sup> The St. Olaves village in Norfolk, England, holds the remains of the Augustinian St. Olave's priory. The Olsker settlement in Bornholm, Denmark, takes its name from its medieval church *Sankt Ols Kirke* ['St. Olaf's Church']. The *S:t Olof* settlement in Skåne, Sweden, takes its name from the medieval *S:t Olof's Church*. The original name of this settlement is *Lunkede*.<sup>14</sup> Markus (2017) links the main medieval shipping routes between Scandinavia and Rus and a network of St. Olaf chapels and churches in the Baltic Sea area. In this context, the shoal that formed the medieval harbor of Sääre, at the southwest tip of Ösel, called in Swedish *Olofsgrund* ['shoal of Olaf'] and in Estonian *Olavimadalik*, appears to be a sacralisation of the seascape at a key point of navigation between Scandinavia and Rus.

Even though the term *S. Oloffs holm* outside Bergen may be ascribed to Waghenaer's 1586 map, it cannot be ruled out that Waghenaer based his work on older, now lost, sailing-descriptions. If this is the case, the toponym Sotra may be a medieval sacralisation of the landscape outside Bergen. As discussed below, medieval context and space seem to support this. Place names in the southern part of the Sotra archipelago appear to form a cluster of sacralised toponyms. Two toponyms from this cluster, Krossfjord and Lyse, are discussed in some detail below.

13. The old St Olave's Church of Tooley Street was located next to the Bridge House at the south end of London Bridge. *Heimskringla* attributes the destruction of London Bridge to St. Olaf. According to *Guta Saga* St. Olaf landed at *Akergarn* and converted Gotlanders to Christianity.

14. It may be debated to which degree the Danish *Olsker* and Swedish *S:t Olof* place names represent sacralisation of space or rather that the spaces are named after the St. Olaf churches at these locations.



*The case for Krossfjord as a medieval sacralisation*

South of the main island of Sotra are the Austevoll Islands, which are separated from the rest of the archipelago by a fjord that exposes the south-north fairway to the Norwegian Sea. This is the preferred exit point when sailing to England, France and beyond. Hence, it is a key crossing point between the fairway and deep-sea navigation. Appropriately, the fjord is called Krossfjorden, 'the cross fjord'. (On the Waghe-naer 1586 sea map *Cruys foert*, figure 1).

The name may be a medieval sacralisation and not a reference to the waterway's layout. The original Old Norse name seems to have been *Harðsæ*. The name *Harðsæ* appears numerous places in Old Norse sagas and other texts, for example in the second verse of the *Fjarða heiti* poem – a poem that is listing predominantly Norse fjords.<sup>15</sup> This may imply that the name Krossfjord represents a later medieval sacralisation of the fjord seascape, i.e., the toponym may have a religious meaning in addition to identifying the topographical cross shape of the fjord system.

The sacralisation of the Krossfjord area appears to be linked to the Cross Church of Fana. According to a letter from Pope Gregor IX, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1228, the Hospital and Cross Church of Fana was 'founded anew'. The Cross Church seems to have been organized as a religious institution – headed by a rector and occupied by *fratribus* ['brethren']. However, there is no conclusive evidence, besides the papal letter, that it originally was anything else than a local parish church. In the early sixteenth century there are records of donations to the holy cross of Fana from the royal castle of Bergen. In 1626 the Norwegian/Danish student Jonas Skonvig recorded the following legend related to a venerated cross or rood:

In Fanø Church, Fanø Parish in Nordhordleen County, a silver cross has been standing, which was discovered at Krossnes at the Krossfjord, and which first was supposed to be kept at the farm Milde, but it became so heavy that it could not be moved there, after which it came to Fanø Church, where it was venerated greatly, and it was sought out by lame,

15. *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* places *Harðsæ* south of *Greningasund* and north of *Santkaudru*, which matches the location of the Krossfjord. *Harðsæ* ['hard/rough sea'] is a section of the fairway exposed to the open sea. For classical discussions of the poem see Munch (1846) and Rygh (1896).

limpers and many sick people, who, when they became cured, donated substantial gifts to it...<sup>16</sup>

The toponym Krossfjord may represent a sacralisation of the seascape of the mythical origin of the venerated silver cross, or the toponym may simply be derived from its proximity to the Cross Church of Fana.<sup>17 18</sup>

*The case for Lyse as a medieval sacralisation*

On the sea map of Sir Robert Dudley there are a few additional potential sacralised place names. According to the map there seems to be two churches or monasteries southeast of Sotra, i.e., *Lise* and *Crus Ford* (figure 2).

The Lysefjord [‘the fjord of light’] represents the top of the topographical cross, shaped by the Krossfjord. In 1146, at the east end of the fjord, in the Lysedal, i.e., the ‘Valley of Light’, Cistercian monks from the Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, England, established the Lyse Abbey by invitation of Bishop Sigurd of Selja.

The ‘mother’ abbey, Fountains Abbey, was founded some 14 years earlier and *Lyse* was established only 31 years after the foundation of the ‘grandmother’ abbey, *Clairvaux* [‘Clara Vallis’] Abbey of St. Bernard. The name Lysedal may have been inspired by the names of the abbey’s European peers, e.g., the grandmother abbey’s original French name, *Clair Vallée*, Vaclair Abbey of Laon, the Chiaravalle abbeys of Italy and the Vauluisant Abbey of Sens.<sup>19</sup> Note that the abbot at Fountains Abbey at

16. The author’s own translation. Original text: «I Fanøe Kirke, Fanøe Præstegield i Nordhordleen haver staaet et Sølvkors, som blev fundet paa Korsnes ved Korsfiorden, og først skulde have været forvaret paa Gaarden Milde, men blev saa tungt at det ei kunde føres derhen, hvorpaa det kom til Fanøe Kirke, hvor det blev holdt i meget stor Ære, og blev søgt af Lamme, Halte og mange syge Folk, som igjen, naar de bleve helbredede, betænkte, det med anseelige gaver ...».

17. The venerated cross of Røldal, dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, has a similar story of origin related to the Krossfjord area.

18. According to Sivert Grubbe’s diary, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1599, as the Danish 1599 expedition sighted the Krossfjord they heard mass over Luke 5. The similarity between Simon the fisherman in Luke 5 and the folklore of the origin of the Fana and Røldal crosses may indicate that the expedition’s crew members were aware of the crosses’ stories of origin.

19. The start of the foundation document of Lyse Abbey says, “Anno ab incarnatione domini nostrum Ihesus Christi MCXLVI fundata est in honore sanctæ dei genetricis semperque virginis Mariæ abbatia in territorio Berginensi, loco, qui lingua Norrensi Lysa, Latina Lux appellatur”. Lyse Abbey is also called *Coenobium Vallis Lucida*. See

the time Lyse Abbey was established, Henry Murdac, later Bishop of York, used to be a monk at Clairvaux Abbey, and later abbot at Vaclair Abbey, before he returned to his homeland and Fountains Abbey. It seems reasonable to assume that the name *Lysa* or *Vallis Lucidæ* is a sacralisation in line with St. Bernard's naming tradition. It may have been constructed by Abbot Murdac and Bishop Sigurd in 1145/46.

The location of Lyse Abbey is according to the Cistercian ideals: in a forest valley, by a river and reasonably far away from the nearest town.

#### *A sacralised seascape*

The religious institution *Crus Ford* on Dudley's map is a bit harder to locate than the Lyse Abbey. It may be reasonable to relate it to the Cross Church of Fana, given the location to the north of *C. di Crusford*, i.e., Krossneset ['the cross promontory']. However, the name itself, and the location south of Lyse, may suggest a location in the Krossfjord area, which makes the medieval church at Sandtorv Island a potential candidate.<sup>20</sup>

Local names that are still in use support a medieval sacralisation of the Krossfjord area. From the Krossfjord to the southeast, towards the Sandtorv Island, we find the following locations: Krosshamn ['cross haven'], Krossøya ['cross island'], Kyrkjesundet ['church sound'], Munk-eide ['monk isthmus'], and Kyrkjebøen ['church field'].

The St. Michael Munkeliv Abbey was a major landowner in the Krossfjord area before the Reformation. However, the ownership seems to be of a late medieval date. The Munkeliv Abbey's ownership in the Krossfjord area is not mentioned in a letter of protection from Pope Eugenius III of 1146. This letter seems to be motivated by the establish-

G. Storm, *Monumenta Historica Norvegia*, 1880: 171. As pointed out by Frederick Metcalfe (editor), *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi*, 1881: 3, note 2, the name Lyse Abbey may be inspired by the name of the Cistercian *Vauluisant Abbey* (*Vallis Lucens*) – founded in 1127 near Sens, France. The Swedish Cistercian *Nydala* ['new valley'] or *Nova Vallis Abbey* from 1143 seems to be named according to the same tradition (A point suggested by E. Haug). Another location called Lysefjorden, at the southwest coast of Norway, is probably related to the river name *Lysa*. Alternatively, for both locations: the name *lyse* is referring to the 'light' colour of the rocks that forms the Lysefjord. See NSL 1976: 211.

20. The stave church was decommissioned in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The church's artwork, to a large extent related to St. Olaf, is in the University Museum of Bergen. On Waghenaer's maps the church is referred to as *Crabbekerck*. Note also *Papesondt* in the same area (figure 1).

ment of the Lyse Abbey, as pointed out by Johnsen (1965). Abbot Orm of Munkeliv, in response to Bishop Sigurd's ambition to establish a new abbey, seems to have contacted the Curia to secure his abbey's land-ownership and to prohibit Benedictine monks from leaving the order and joining the new Cistercian abbey. The letter, signed by Cardinal and Chancellor Robert Pullen, an Englishman and friend of St. Bernard, contained the necessary reassurances.

The Munkeliv Abbey's main possessions were, according to the letter, the St. Michael Abbey itself, with its fields, the *Aumar Islands*, with the St. Clemens Church, and the Herdla Island, with the St. Nicholas Church (Johnson 1965: 27). The Aumar Islands, called Kvitsøy today, is the south entry of the fairway of Bergen. The Herdla Island is the north entry of the fairway of Bergen. There is no mention of the Krossfjord/Harðsæ area, i.e., the central entry of the fairway of Bergen. Since Abbot Orm of Munkeliv most likely was aware of the planned location of the new Lyse Abbey, i.e., in the Krossfjord area, he would surely have made the Curia specify any possessions in this area – if any existed.

A similar conflict prompted the formation of Fountains Abbey – Lyse's mother institution. In 1132 monks left the Benedictine St. Mary Abbey of York and founded the Cistercian Fountains Abbey.<sup>21</sup> The St. Mary Abbey of York, established in the 1080s, was based on the St. Olave's Church of York, commissioned by Siward, Earl of Northumbria, sometime before 1055.<sup>22</sup>

In the early fifteenth century, the land of the Benedictines around Bergen was taken over by the Bridgettines – the new Swedish order. It is interesting in this respect to observe that Gerhard Mercator, on his map *Svecia et Norvegia cum confinijs*, writes *S. Brigitte mo*, approximately at the same location where he on the map *Russia cum confinijs* writes *Solofsholm*. The names may suggest that the Sotra archipelago, potentially 'the land of St. Olaf', was partly owned by the St. Michael Munkeliv Abbey, which later converted from a Benedictine to a Bridgettine community. Note also that the first appearance of the term *Soter*, in 1427, is in a document related to Munkeliv's change of monastic orders (Munch 1845).

21. Hugh of Kirkstall, *Narratio de fundatione Fontanis monasterii in comitatu eboracensi*.

22. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 1055.

A local late sixteenth-century map, linked to Bishop Anders Foss, keeps the basic 1427 spelling *soter*, but adds a Danish definite article suffix, i.e., *Soteren*. That is, Foss appears to regard the name Sotra to be an inflected feminine noun – with the Norwegian definite article ‘a’ – in contrast to Danish ‘en’. This indicates that Foss did not perceive the toponym Sotra to be a Latin acronym.

### The case for an Old Norse name for the Sotra archipelago

If the name *Sotra* is a hagiotoponym, the archipelago’s original name, before the sacralisation of the landscape, could maybe still be found in medieval sources. There seems to be clues in this direction in skaldic poems.

#### *The Eyja- and Fjarða heiti þulur*

The first time *Sotra* is mentioned in a manuscript is in an appendix to a fourteenth-century copy of the Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson.<sup>23</sup> The appendix mainly contains skaldic verses. The relevant section is often referred to as the *Eyja heiti* [‘islands’ names’], which consists of seven verses. *Sotr* does not, however, appear in any of these verses, but the name appears in a verse by itself, which seems to be independent of the other verses. This þula goes as follows (Munch 1846):

*Bókn, Kǫrmt, Brising, Vikna,  
Brúa, Hírar, Dun, Síri,  
Sotr, Þomb, Selja, Hítrar,  
Sigg, Rótt, Bataldr, Þjóttá,*

Several of the island names listed in this verse are repeated in the seven *Eyja heiti* verses. In contrast to this, there are no repetitions in-between the seven verses of the *Eyja heiti* þula. This may suggest that the verse, which contains the name *Sotr*, may be of a late medieval date and is potentially younger than the original *Eyja heiti*.

The first two lines of the first verse of the above-mentioned *Fjarða heiti* [‘fjord’s names’] þula go as follows (Rygh 1896):

23. AM 748 I b 4° folio 21r.



*Fjorðr sogn iall  
folld ofoti*

The first word *fjorðr* just introduces that the poem is a list of fjord names. The four fjords in the first two lines are traditionally assumed to be as follows:

*Sogn*: This is the Sognefjord, the large system of fjords, which runs from the west coast towards the east.

*Iall*: This is assumed to be the Yell Sound between the islands Yell and Mainland in the Shetland Islands (Munch 1845: 205).

*Folld*: This is the main fjord of the east of Norway, going north, which ends at the city of Oslo, today known as the Oslofjord.

*Ofoti*: This is the fjord Ofoten, a major northern fjord system and the centre of the ancient dry cod industry.

The names of the first verse of *Fjarða heiti* represent the most important Old Norse fairways, except for *Iall*, which has been assumed to be the *Yell Sound* in the Shetland Islands.

In the Old Norse *Orkneyinga Saga* from about 1230 the Yell Sound is called *Alasund*. It has consequently been assumed that an island mentioned in verse five of *Eyja heiti*, called *Jala*, is the island *Yell*.

The only major fairway system that seems to be left out of the *Fjarða heiti* poem entirely, according to the traditional interpretation of the poem, is the fairway to Bergen. Given that Bergen was the capital of medieval Norway, it seems strange that this fairway is left out of the poem.

Today the fairway is simply referred to as *Leia* [‘the fairway’], or more formally *Bergens Led* [‘the fairway of Bergen’]. To the north of Bergen, the fairway splits into *Hjeltefjorden* (west) and *Herdlefjorden* (east). To the south of Bergen, the fairway splits into *Kobbaleia* (west) and *Vatlestraumen* (east).

*Iall* may not be the Yell Sound after all, but rather the fairway of Bergen. If the original name of the fairway is *Jali*, then the name of the archipelago that shapes the fairway – the original Old Norse name of *Sotra* – could be *Jala*. As already noted, an island *Jala* is listed in verse five of *Eyja heiti*.

The main geological characteristic of the mountains of Sotra is the thrust faults and fractures, in a mostly west – east direction. In the local dialect these cliff formations are called *hjedlane* (plural). The thrust faults create a shelf- or step-like profile of the island to the west and more gentle slopes to the east. When sailing either from the north or south towards Bergen these gigantic shelves or steps are easily recognizable. Hence, the ‘Jala’ island may simply mean the ‘cliff island’ – from Old Norse *hjallr* [‘scaffold, shelf’].<sup>24</sup>

If *Jala* is the original Old Norse name of the archipelago, then the probability that *Sotr* is a medieval hagiotoponym is high, as *Sotr* appears for the first time in a thirteenth-century manuscript at the same time as the name *Jala* seems to disappear into obscurity.

#### *Alolandia and the Dalorto map*

The portolan charts of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century revolutionised the cartographic representation of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coastline north to the Netherlands and Great Britain (Campbell 1987). Portolan charts are traditionally regarded as visualisations of portolans, i.e., visualisations of written sailing-descriptions. The making of the early portolans relied extensively on the newly invented maritime compass. A portolan typically describes navigation from one port to the next in terms of compass bearings, the approximate distance, and sea-scape characteristics like distinct coastal profiles.

Given the high precision already achieved in the fourteenth century, Mediterranean charts only marginally improved during the Renaissance. Truly accurate sea maps did not appear until the eighteenth century, i.e., not until the invention of the marine chronometer.

The medieval cartographic representation of the north is sketchy and markedly inferior to the representation of the south. As discussed, Waghenauer’s 1580s maps are generally regarded to be the first sea maps relevant for practical navigation of Norwegian coastal waters. From the early fourteenth century onwards, Hansa League domination of northern trade appears to have hampered the diffusion of Mediterranean map-making skills to northern pilots. The Hansa League domination also re-

24. In a medieval source, the location of the Fjell Church is known as *undir Fjalle* [‘under the mountain’] (1338), (NSL 1976: 109). The location is to the northwest of the largest thrust faults of the archipelago around the mountain *Liatårnet* [‘the tower of Li’].

duced Spanish and Italian merchants' incentives to trade on the north. According to Campbell (1987), the establishment of a Hanseatic staple in Bruges in 1323 denied southern ships access to the Baltics and consequently also the opportunity for Mediterranean pilots to make first-hand observations of northern waters.

Angellino de Dalorto's 1325 portolan chart of Europe is one of the first to indicate the Norwegian coastline (Sørli 1944). Well into the sixteenth century, the Italian and Majorcan cartographic schools copied the early fourteenth-century portolan charts' representation of the Norwegian coastline.

The Dalorto 1325 portolan chart seems to be based on sailing-descriptions that predate the establishment of the Bruges staple, which implies that the knowledge inherent in the chart can be of relevance for the study of early medieval navigation of the northern region.

The Dalorto portolan chart's depiction of the Norwegian coastline represents Genoese knowledge of navigation on Bergen. That is, the northern part of the map is probably Dalorto's visualization of information from a, now lost, Genoese portolan – information in the form of compass bearings, distances, and coastal profiles useful for safe navigation on the medieval capital of Norway.<sup>25</sup> If this assumption is correct, Dalorto did not possess first-hand knowledge of the northern region and the process of constructing the portolan chart based on sailing-descriptions may have been prone to error.

The map's green ink indicates a mountainous coastline (figure 3). Three major towns, *trunberg* [Tønsberg], *trunde* [Trondheim], *bergis* [Bergen], and the landscape *alogia* [Hålogaland] represent the four medieval coastal regions of the Norwegian mainland. Most of the portolan chart's names are in black ink, whereas red ink is reserved for major locations. Dots representing islands cover the coastal waters from *trunberg* to northwest of *bergis*, i.e., the dots probably represent the islands that shape the sheltered fairways of southern Norway.

*Alolandia* is the only toponym along the Norwegian coastline – in addition to the four regional centres. *Alolandia* appears twice – just north of *bergis* and at the extreme north of the map. *Alolandia* is written in red ink, i.e., the choice of colour indicates a location of high navigational importance.

25. The capital was moved to Oslo in 1314, but Bergen remained the main trading hub.

Nansen (1911) suggests that *alolandia* is a version of *alogia*, which would imply that the landscape Hålogaland is represented three times on the Dalorto map. Alternatively, it is suggested that *alolandia* represents the Swedish landscape Halland – incorrectly located.

On later portolan charts, Nordenskiöld (1897) does not record *alolandia* among Norwegian toponyms – including the related Angelino Dulcert 1339 map.<sup>26</sup>

The medieval Kingdom of Norway included the European Atlantic islands north of Scotland. In the north, the Dalorto map shows the islands *Insula ornaya* (the Orkney Islands) and *Sialand* (the Shetland Islands). The Orkney and Shetland Islands were instrumental for safe navigation from Europe via the British Isles to Bergen.

The compass bearing from the Yell Sound<sup>27</sup> (Old Norse *Alasund*) in the Shetland Islands (Old Norse *Hjaltland*) to the Hernar Island<sup>28</sup> at the entry of Heltefjorden is east, close to 90°. <sup>29</sup> The distance is about 175 nautical miles. From Hernar Island to Bergen is sheltered navigation south-southeast and then east.

On the Dalorto map the relative locations of the toponyms *Sialand*, *Alolandia* and *Bergis* match the navigation from the Shetland Islands via Hernar Island to Bergen. In this respect, *alolandia* appears to be the Sotra archipelago.

26. The Angelino Dulcert 1339 portolan chart is also assumed to be drawn by Angellino de Dalorto, i.e., *Dulcert* is Spanish for *Dalorto* (Campbell 1987). Dulcert's map introduces a simplified squared representation of Norway – with four locations: *trubeg* [Tønsberg], *bergis* [Bergen], *Nidrovia* [Nidaros/Trondheim] and *troda* [Trondheim]. In addition, *marstrato* [Marstrand] appears on the southeast coast. Dulcert's 1339 representation of Norway – without *alolandia* – dominates the Majorcan cartographic school until the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Italian portolan charts after Dalorto generally do not include areas northeast of the Netherlands or the western coast of Denmark, which implies that the knowledge interred in Dalorto's 1325 representation of the Norwegian coastline does not appear to have been transferred to later maps.

27. Yell Sound: latitude 60.57°N, longitude 1.26°W.

28. In the medieval manuscript *Hauksbók*, in a version of the Old Norse *Landnámabók*, Hernar is the point of exit via *Hjaltland* for voyages to the west and northwest.

29. Hernar, 60.69°N, 4.75°E. Herdlevær (Old Norse *Herðliver*), 60.57°N, 4.82°E, west of the north end of the Herdlefjord, was another rallying point. See e.g., *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* – the campaign against the Scots. The description of the campaign illustrates the challenges of medieval navigation between Bergen, the Shetland-, and Orkney Islands.

The bearing from Kirkwall<sup>30</sup> (Old Norse *Kirkjuvágr* ‘church bay’) in the Orkney Islands (Old Norse *Orkneyjar*) to the island Marsteinen<sup>31</sup> at the entry of the Krossfjord, i.e., at the central entry into the fairway to Bergen, is east-by-north, 73°. The distance is about 250 nautical miles. The bearing from Kirkwall to Hernar is east-northeast, 65°. <sup>32</sup>

The Dalorto map shows the island *Insula tille* located off the northeast coast of Scotland. The toponym *Insula tille* probably refers to Thule – Pytheas’ mythical island of the north. The drawing of a church on *Insula tille* may depict the St. Magnus Cathedral of Kirkwall, which suggests that the cartographer regarded the Orkney Islands to be *Insula tille*.

The inclusion of the mythical *Insula tille* on Dalorto’s chart produced further errors. North of *Sialand* and northwest of *alugia* the chart shows the island *Insula ornaya* (the Orkney Islands). The incorrect placing of *Insula ornaya* – the correct location already being occupied by *Insula tille* – may help explaining the location of the *alolandia* of the north.

Figure 3 shows the part of Dalorto’s portolan chart of Europe that includes the Norwegian coastline. The added upper red colored triangle indicates the bearing from the center of the *Insula ornaya* to the point on the Norwegian coastline in the north called *alolandia*. The lower red colored triangle is identical to the upper triangle – but the triangle is moved south-west to represent a more correct location of the Orkney Islands, i.e., located just north of the Scottish mainland and slightly to the west of the Shetland Islands.

The bearing of the lower triangle points towards the *alolandia* of the south. The bearing is east-northeast, slightly above 60°, i.e., close to the bearing from Kirkwall to the archipelago outside Bergen.<sup>33</sup>

30. Kirkwall, 58.98°N, 2.96°W. According to *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* Elwick (Old Norse *Ellidārvik*) (on Shapinsay) and Scapa (Old Norse *Skálpeid*) (on the Mainland Island), both close to Kirkwall, were rallying points for the fleet during the campaign against the Scots.

31. Marsteinen: 60.07°N, 5.00°E.

32. From Kirkwall to Kvitsøy (Old Norse *Aumar* for the group of islands and *Hvitingseyjar* for the largest island), i.e., the south point of entry into the fairway to Bergen, the bearing is east 90°. For an alternative southern point of entry due east of the Orkney Islands, see *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and William, Cardinal-bishop of Sabina, who on his way from Continental Europe via England to Bergen, entered the fairway at the Utsira Island (Old Norse *Síri*) 17<sup>th</sup> June 1246.

33. It is reasonable to assume that a potential underlying portolan provided bearings versus the magnetic north – not the true north. As the magnetic north changes over time, any bearings implied from the portolan chart are proxies at best.



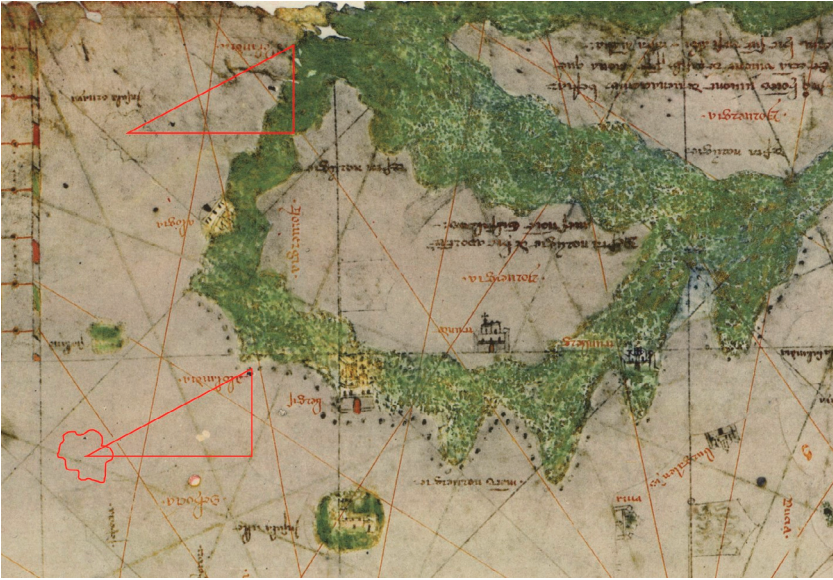


Figure 3; Angellino de Dalorto, portolan chart, 1325, part: north end of Scotland to the north (the collection of Prince Corsini at Florence)

Dalorto probably placed the *alolandia* of the south according to the bearing from the Shetland Islands. He probably placed the *alolandia* of the north according to the bearing from the Orkney Islands. As a consequence of the incorrect location of *Insula ornaya*, *alolandia* is recorded twice. In both cases, the location of *alolandia*, relative to the Shetland and Orkney Islands, respectively, suggests that *alolandia* is the archipelago Sotra outside Bergen. That is, the toponym *alolandia* on the Dalorto portolan chart seems to give support to the hypothesis that *Jala* is the original secular Old Norse name of the archipelago. The Dalorto portolan chart is contemporary to the AM748's *Eyja heiti folio*, which includes the name *Jala* and introduces the name *Sotr*. Therefore, the appearance of *alolandia* on the Dalorto map does not conflict with a potential switch of names from *Jala* to *Sotr* sometimes during the early fourteenth century.

If *alolandia* is the Sotra archipelago, then it may be reasonable to assume that the toponym Yell Sound is related to navigation between the medieval Kingdom of Norway's western islands and the Norwegian mainland, i.e., *Alasund* (Yell Sound) points to safe navigation due east to

\**alaland*, just as \**hjaltefjorðr* (Hjeltefjorden) points to safe navigation due west to *Hjaltland* (NSL 1976: 156).

In the beginning of the Hanseatic League era, an increasingly non-Old-Norse speaking population may have contributed to cementing a switch from \**alaland* to \**olafland*.<sup>34</sup> If so, a switch from ‘ala’ to ‘olaf’ may be parallel to the transformation of oronyms – related to the navigation on Bergen – into Germanic male names. The most prominent examples of this seem to be the switch from Old Norse \**alrekr* [‘the high reaching’] to Ulriken and from Old Norse \**leiðarhorn*<sup>35</sup> [‘the horn of the fairway’] to Lyderhorn.<sup>36</sup>

A transformation from *Jala* or *alolandia* to *sotr* may have been initiated by folklore in the early fourteenth century. However, the use of the term *sot* in *Björgynjar Kálfskinn*, a register of church property, which is contemporary to the Dalorto map, and *soter* in documents related to the Munkaliv Abbey about 100 years later, may suggest early clerical endorsement of the concept of linking St. Olaf to the archipelago outside Bergen.

### Concluding remarks

The existing academic literature is unaware of any extensive medieval sacralisation of a Scandinavian landscape. In contrast to this, sea maps from the sixteenth and early seventeenth century seem to indicate an extensive medieval sacralisation of the coastal landscape around Bergen.

In this paper three cases have been discussed, Sotra, Krossfjord and Lyse. Each appears to be linked to a prominent medieval religious institution – the Benedictine Munkeliv Abbey, the Cross Church of Fana and the Cistercian Lyse Abbey, respectively.

34. Note the form *S. Aloffs Hollem* in the Waghenaer 1589 German edition (see note 5 above), i.e., ‘aloff’ may be a transitory state in the potential transformation from ‘alo’ to ‘olaf’.

35. Old Norse *Lógðarhorn/ Læfðarhorn/ Lofðarhorn* (Bergen town law, NgL II: 201) and *Lofdar horn* (*Björgynjar Kálfskinn*). See also Claudius Clavus *Ladehorn* (the Vienna text) and *ladehorn insula* (the Nancy text) (Bjørnbo and Petersen 1904). In old sailing-descriptions *Leethoorn* (see e.g., figure 1). The oronym may be related to Old Norse *leið* [‘fairway’]. See NSL (1976: 210) for alternative etymologies.

36. Sivert Grubbe’s diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1599, illustrates the use of Germanic male names for prominent mountains in the coastal profile of Bergen: “Wldrich und Lyder Hoernn Sein für Bergen die besten Thoern”.

It cannot be ruled out that the observed hagiotoponyms represent folk-etymology – created by foreign mapmakers and merchants or locally. In time, the folk-etymology may have been endorsed by the church. *Jala* appears to be the original name of the archipelago Sotra and *Harðsa* appears to be the original name of the Krossfjord area. The existence of older secular toponyms, related to navigation, strengthens the case that the toponyms Sotra and Krossfjord are hagiotoponyms.

More research may reveal that the potential sacralisation of this coastal landscape is a part of a more common, still undisclosed, Scandinavian, or North European phenomenon. This research, which focuses on the west coast of Norway, together with the observed network of St. Olaf churches and St. Olaf related toponyms in the Baltic Sea area, suggest that it may be useful to study potential hagiotoponyms as parts of toponymic clusters or networks – formed by political conditions, religious institutions, and trade.

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*Thresoor der Zeevaert*, Leyden: Francois van Raphelengien.  
[https://kartverket.no/historiske/11/11300\\_museum\\_m15-167-1592\\_jpg100dpi.jpg](https://kartverket.no/historiske/11/11300_museum_m15-167-1592_jpg100dpi.jpg)

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## Sammendrag

Artikkelen diskuterer den geografiske sakraliseringen av kystlandskapet rundt Bergen på kart fra 1500- og 1600-tallet. Stedsnavn som fremstår som hagiotopeponym, kan ha oppstått som følge av kartografenes møte med ukjente og uforståelige lokale stedsnavn. Det vil si, stedsnavnenes opprinnelige betydning kan ha vært sekulære og opphavet norrønt. Alternativt kan kartene ha konserverert sakraliserte stedsnavn fra middelalderen – stedsnavn hvis betydning senere har gått tapt. Stedsnavnene som diskuteres er *Sotra*, *Krossfjorden* og *Lyse*. Stedsnavnene kan knyttes til sentrale religiøse institusjoner i regionen, henholdsvis, *Munkeliv kloster*, *Fana kirke* og *Lysekloster*.

Appendix: map of the northern part of the fairway to Bergen



Map source: Kartverket (Norwegian Mapping Authority)

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