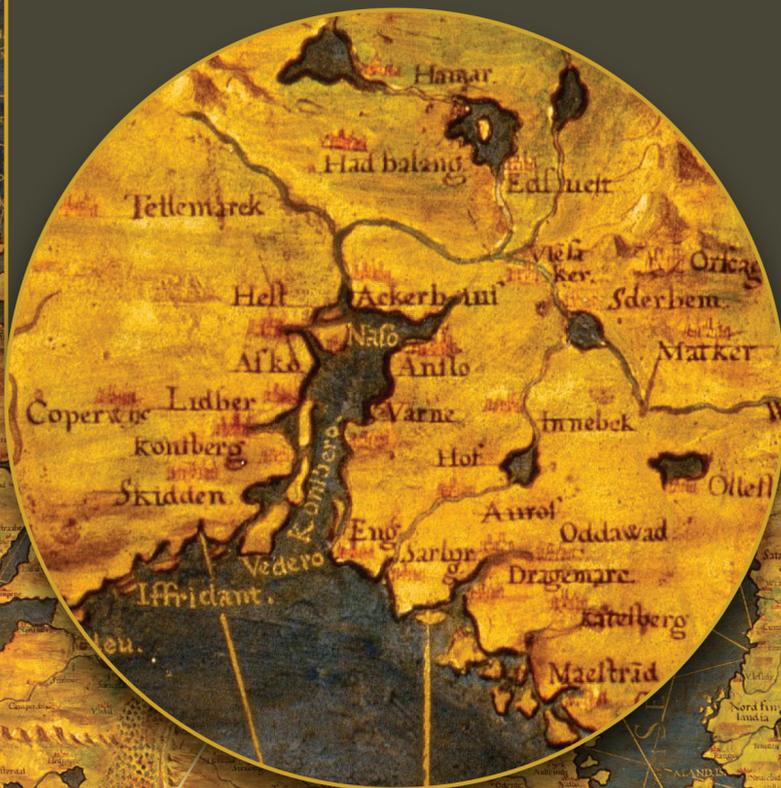


Jerusalem in Viken

Crusading Ideology, Church-Building and Monasticism
in South-Eastern Norway in the Twelfth Century

Bjørn Bandlien (Ed.)



Jerusalem in Viken

Bjørn Bandlien, Editor

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CRUSADING IDEOLOGY, CHURCH-BUILDING AND
MONASTICISM IN SOUTH-EASTERN NORWAY IN
THE TWELFTH CENTURY

CAPPELEN DAMM AKADEMISK

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Contents

Preface	7
Chapter 1 Jerusalem in Viken. An Introduction	9
<i>Bjørn Bandlien</i>	
Chapter 2 St Olav's Church in Tønsberg. The Excavation of 1969-70 in Retrospect	33
<i>Øivind Lunde</i>	
Chapter 3 The Round Church of Tønsberg and the Octagon of Nidaros	57
<i>Øystein Ekroll</i>	
Chapter 4 Jerusalem in Tønsberg. Round Churches and Storytelling	81
<i>Jes Wienberg</i>	
Chapter 5 The Premonstratensians and Their Round Church in Tønsberg: Scandinavian Contexts and European Networks	111
<i>Bjørn Bandlien</i>	
Chapter 6 A Failed Crusade? The Danish-Norwegian Crusade Account. <i>Historia de protectione Danorum in Hierosolymam</i> (c. 1200)	161
<i>Karen Skovgaard-Petersen</i>	
Chapter 7 The Picture Across the Water. The Foundation of Templar and Hospitaller Houses in Britain and Ireland in the Twelfth Century	177
<i>Helen J. Nicholson</i>	
Chapter 8 The Archaeology of the Hospitallers in Medieval Scandinavia	193
<i>Christer Carlsson</i>	
Chapter 9 The Arrival of the Hospitallers in Norway	223
<i>Trond Svandal</i>	
Contributors	241

Preface

This book originates in the international conference ‘Jerusalem in Viken’ in Tønsberg and Borre in April 2017. The theme of the conference might seem somewhat narrow and of marginal interest in European history, considering that its points of departure were the ruins of a church and abbey in Tønsberg, and a site east of the fjord with barely any visible remains left of the buildings that had once stood there

However, these ruins can be seen as the remains of an extraordinary attempt at ‘recreating’ the Holy Land in the second half of the twelfth century. In Tønsberg an unknown patron, or patrons, decided to build the largest round church in Scandinavia, or indeed in northern Europe – not so very much smaller than the more famous Temple Church in London. The round church was part of a Premonstratensian abbey, the first of this order in Norway. Around the same time, members of the famous military order of the Hospitallers arrived at Varna, or Værne, a farm close to the modern town of Moss.

Scholars were invited to discuss why these ambitious buildings and institutions were established here in Viken (the medieval name for the region surrounding Oslo Fjord), and why at this exact time. Who initiated the foundations, and what were the local, national and European background and contexts? Factors such as holy warfare, sacred topography, developments of royal ideology, and the growth of papal and episcopal power may help to explain some of the background. Still, the fact that neither the Premonstratensians nor the Hospitallers, nor other round churches, spread to other parts of the Norwegian kingdom suggests that there were certain special interests and conditions in this region not found elsewhere in Norway. This book presents some clues to answering these questions, and will hopefully open up the field for new questions and further research in the relations between crusading, monasticism, networks, architecture and spirituality in relation to power and society.

The conference was organized in association with the research project *Tracing the Jerusalem Code* hosted by the Norwegian School of Theology under the direction of Kristin Aavitsland and Eivor Oftestad. This project studied Jerusalem as a cultural focal point through two millennia, and its impact on piety, pilgrimage and warfare in the Western tradition – in imitations, re-presentations and re-enacting of the Holy City in art, architecture and liturgy. Some of the papers from the conference in Tønsberg and Borre were included in the first volume of the project's publication, named *The Holy City Christian Cultures in Medieval Scandinavia (ca. 1100–1536)*, edited by Kristin B. Aavitsland and Line M. Bonde, and published by De Gruyter in 2021.

The editor wishes to express his deep gratitude to the many people who presented their papers at the conference, and to those who facilitated our excursions and helped with all the practicalities – you made this event a joy to organize!

The conference was hosted in the best way possible by Slottsfjellsmuseet, Haugar Art Museum, and Midgard Viking Centre. This book is published with the generous support of the Cultural Heritage section, Vestfold County.



St Olav's Church, Tønsberg. Photo: Trond Isaksen, Riksantikvaren.

CHAPTER 1

Jerusalem in Viken. An Introduction

Bjørn Bandlien

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Sometime in the third quarter of the twelfth century, a remarkable round church dedicated to St Olav, the Norwegian patron saint, was built in Tønsberg, a small town on the west coast of the Oslo Fjord in south-eastern Norway. Its uniqueness is partly due to its circular form; the diameter of the nave makes it the largest round church in Scandinavia, and comparable to, for example, the more famous and roughly contemporary Temple Church in London. The circular shape of the nave was complemented by smaller circular designs for the choir and apsis, and even the sacristy attached to the northern wall consists of a semi-circle. The founder and the architect must have been aware that this church was unprecedented not only in the kingdom of Norway, but also in the whole of Scandinavia. The result was remarkable. St Olav's Church in Tønsberg is still among the largest round churches in northern Europe and must have been an impressive sight to those visiting the small town. To add to the innovative construction, the round church was part of a Premonstratensian Abbey – the only house of this order in Norway, except for a canonry in Dragsmark, established a few decades later.

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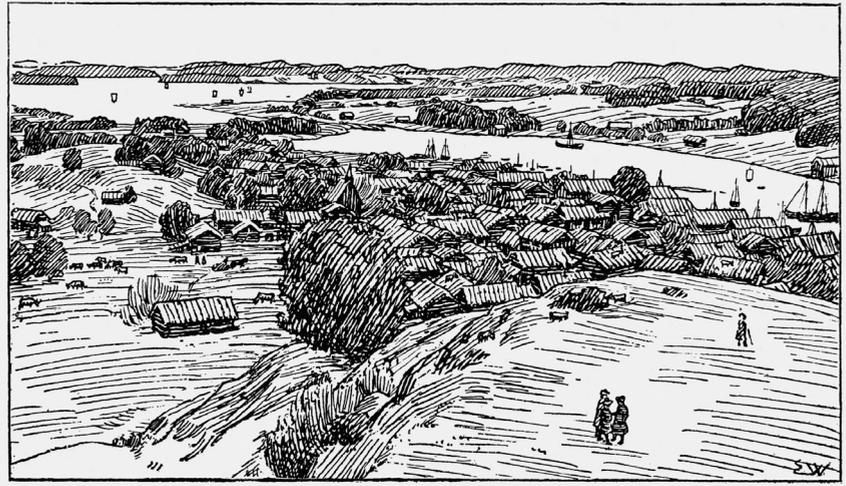


Figure 1. Medieval Tønsberg, seen from Slottsfjellet ('Castle Hill'). Drawing by Erik Werenskiold, 1899. Photo: Nasjonalmuseet.

Despite its extraordinary features, St Olav's Church and the abbey were more or less forgotten after the Reformation. This was, to a large degree, a consequence of the unfortunate coincidence that the church, along with a large part of Tønsberg, was ruined by a fire in 1536. A few decades earlier, in 1503, the important fortress Tunsberghus, or *Castrum Tunsbergis*, had been destroyed by an attacking Swedish force and never rebuilt. The town had ceased to be of strategic importance, both politically and militarily. Oslo, at the head of the Oslo Fjord, with its imposing Akershus Castle, and its important cathedral, became the indisputably most important centre in Viken – the region surrounding the Oslo Fjord in south-eastern Norway.

In a Norwegian context, 1536 is not only a watershed in the history of Tønsberg, but also the year in which significant political, administrative, and religious changes affecting the whole of Norway were introduced. After a period of political unrest, the Evangelical Lutheran Church was introduced and monastic institutions were dissolved. 1536 was also the year in which Norway became a province in the kingdom of Denmark. St Olav's Abbey as a name, however, survived the Reformation for centuries. Although the church and abbey itself were reduced to ruins, its substantial land holdings and rights to the use of natural resources were

made into a rich fief, and offered by the Danish king to loyal noblemen who sought a career in Norway.¹

Tønsberg as a town survived the fire and the Reformation, but only two of the medieval churches survived the fire, St Mary's, in the central square, and St Lawrence's, to the northwest. In 1750, Jens Müller, parish priest in Tønsberg, published the first study of the town's history. He listed all the churches and monasteries mentioned in the medieval documents he had available to him, but he was forced to guess (wrongly, as it turned out) where St Olav's Church had once been. Moreover, Müller was certain the monastery dedicated to St Olav was separate from the church and was situated outside the town, at Teie on the island Nøtterøy, just south of Tønsberg (Müller 1750: 29–36). His bewilderment, despite his access to and use of many charters and letters, was admittedly justified. Not a single written source actually mentions the circular shape of the church, and by the eighteenth century the remains were completely covered by earth and new buildings, and remained so until about 120 years after Müller published his work.

In 1551 it is said that the church was 'broken down' (*er bleffuen affbrott*), implying that stones were used in cellars and other constructions and buildings elsewhere, whether inside or outside the town. Sometime in the seventeenth century a blacksmith had established his workplace amidst what remained. Late in the eighteenth century the site was used as a cowshed and pigsty. When Tønsberg, as a result of shipping and the booming whaling industry, started to prosper in the mid-nineteenth century, there were mostly sheds and outhouses at the site (Jahnsen 1992). This economic growth also explains why the ruins resurfaced. When a 'modern' dwelling house was to be built at the site in the 1870s, the architect Håkon Thorsen made the surprising discovery of the remains of a round church structure.²

Thorsen's discovery happened at a time when most Norwegians were not so very interested in the history of the crusades, the papacy,

1 See Ekroll 2019 for a useful overview of this process in Norway.

2 See discussion and references in Lunde and Bandlien, this volume.

the Catholic church or European culture in the Middle Ages. The two remaining churches in Tønsberg that survived the Reformation had recently been torn down: a new cathedral had been consecrated at the site of the Church of St Lawrence in 1858, and in 1864 the St Mary's had to give way for the new town hall in the central square. On the other hand, there was a growing interest in Norwegian medieval history, not least because of the struggle for independence from Sweden. There was a new narrative: Norway as an independent kingdom with a glorious and heroic past from the Viking Age, at least up to the fourteenth century, became important for an awareness of Norway's status as a nation. The sagas of Snorri Sturluson about the kings of the past became popular reading, and also a support for the study of antiquities and the conservation and restoration of medieval architectural remains, including churches. The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Norwegian Monuments (Foreningen til norske Fortidsminnesmerkers Bevaring) was established in 1844, saving several of the iconic wooden stave churches from the same demise as the medieval churches had suffered in Tønsberg.



Figure 2. Folded lead plate with runic inscription, medieval Tønsberg. Only a third of the runes are visible: *eluas ut* and *hac famula dei, amen*. The plate was probably used as an amulet by a woman from Tønsberg. Photo: Mårten Teigen/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

However, in 1880, only a few years after Thorsen recovered and documented the ruins of St Olav's church in Tønsberg, the archaeologist Nicolay Nicolaysen excavated the Gokstad mound, just 20 kilometres south of Tønsberg. The ship was spectacularly well preserved, indeed the first Viking ship to be documented, and fuelled the notion that the Norwegian achievement in the Viking Age rivalled and even surpassed the Danish and Swedish contributions to Scandinavian art, culture, and impact on Europe. In this context, a round church – rather an anomaly for Norway and a sign of foreign impact – was not easy to integrate in the national narrative and consciousness. In the construction of a memorial culture in the nineteenth century, churches were important, particularly the Nidaros cathedral as a remnant of an independent national church and the stave churches as a unique version of church architecture and art that indicated the strength of the people's national character. Although Thorsen's excavations were mentioned in the Yearbook of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Norwegian Monuments, it was known only to a small group of experts. It remained a curious and anomalous site of local interest, rather than being seen as an important part of the national heritage. Even today the ruin of the round church is primarily a gem of local heritage culture, and is seldom mentioned in surveys of Norwegian history.

The round church and the Premonstratensian Abbey in Tønsberg share to some extent their fate with another foundation at the eastern side of the Oslo Fjord. Here, at Værne (known as Varna in the Middle Ages), in the backyard of the present farm, we find the barely visible remains of what was the only house of the Hospitallers, and indeed of any of the Military Orders, in the Norwegian kingdom. While Sweden and Denmark had several large commanderies of the Hospitallers, the order never expanded in Norway beyond Varna. This commandery of the Hospitallers was also regarded in early scholarship as more of an anomaly, or a dead end, in the history of medieval Norway.

Admittedly, Varna has received more scholarly attention than St Olav's Church and Abbey in Tønsberg. This is partly due to the comparably well-preserved registers of its land holdings and rights to natural resources, and partly because the commandery was attached

to the king's court as a Hospital that, according to King Magnus the Lawmender's *Hirdskrá* (the Law of the *hird*, i.e. king's liegemen and the royal household) from c. 1274, housed retired retainers of the royal court.³

To arrive at a better understanding of these sites, it is crucial that they are analysed and discussed not only individually, but in relation to each other and, not least, that they are interpreted in a wider, international context. The fact that the excavation reports and fundamental studies have, with a few exceptions, been published in Scandinavian languages, has made it difficult to integrate these sites in the international scholarship on crusades, the Military Orders, architecture, as well as on political and religious culture. This collection of articles seeks to remedy this situation, intending to not only present new interpretations but also initiate further studies on the nuances and complexities in politics and religiosity in medieval Scandinavia.

Jerusalem and early Christianity in Norway

Kristin Aavitsland has argued that in Scandinavia 'references to Jerusalem seem to have provided a forceful means of shaping a new religious and political identity' (Aavitsland 2014: 121). She identifies two main representational modes used to evoke Jerusalem in Scandinavia: first, the transfer or translation of its sacredness by relics associated with the life and Passion of Christ or imitations of the architectural structures found in the Holy Land, and, second, a 'template or a prefigurative pattern that shaped cultural memory of the young churches of the North' (Aavitsland 2014: 126). Aavitsland also points out that such references in art and architecture shaped political practice and identities, when war and kingship became increasingly related to St Olav and the defence of Christianity during the twelfth century.

3 See references and discussion in Svandal, this volume.



Figure 3. Brick from the ruins of St Lawrence's Church in Tønsberg, with the inscription *Kyrie* in runic letters. Photo: Vegard Vike/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Arguably, these references to Jerusalem were part of the Christianization process around the year 1000. At the Battle of Nesjar on Palm Sunday 1016, the panegyric poetry celebrating king Olav Haraldsson, later St Olav, compared his victory at the battle to the entry of Christ into Jerusalem (Bandlien 2020). More fundamentally, the erection of churches was in itself an expression of the massive investment in the new religion. The opening paragraph of *Borgarþingslög*, the district law code for the Oslo Fjord region in south-eastern Norway, states: ‘This is the first in our laws, that we shall bow to the east and surrender to Christ, and provide for churches and clergy.’⁴ To bow to the east was a physical manifestation of humility and obedience to a new set of rites following the Christianization of Norway. The new religious architecture came to dominate the rural landscape as well as the growing towns, many of them established in the

4 Halvorsen & Rindal 2008: 120: *Þet er uphaf lagha uarra, at austr skulum luta oc gevaz Kristi røkia kirkiur oc kenne menn*. This law code, as we know it today, is only preserved in manuscripts from the twelfth century and later, but many paragraphs seem to date from shortly after the Christianization of Norway or at least before the reforms of the Church initiated by the Archbishops of Nidaros in the latter half of the twelfth century.

wake of the Christianization in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. The early churches were small wooden churches that hardly lasted for more than a couple of generations, but from the second half of the eleventh century stone churches were built, especially in the emergent towns and close to royal farms in the districts. However, while an increasing number of stone churches were built in the countryside, and, from the early twelfth century, also on farms belonging to the aristocracy and in wealthy rural communities, wooden architecture continued to dominate the landscape with its refined technique of stave churches. During the period from around 1050 until 1200, calculations indicate that there would be a church consecrated every month – in addition to those rebuilt after fire, extended or renovated. Considering the population in Norway was about 300,000 in 1200, the speed of church building in this period was impressive.

In addition, each of these churches, and the clergy belonging to them, had to be provided for from the main economic resource at that time, landed property. During the two centuries after the conversion of Norway around the year 1000, these churches, as well as the monastic foundations, owned perhaps as much as a third of all the land in Norway, surpassing the extent of royal estates many times over.

Every one of these early churches was oriented towards the altar in the east, as a compass in sacred geography that directed attention towards the Holy Land. To accept the prescribed humble posture and look eastwards, towards where Christ had lived, died and resurrected, meant not only that one accepted a new centre of the world, the very real city of Jerusalem, but also that one become part of a wider Christian community that sought a place in Heavenly Jerusalem.

This reorientation of the cult from households towards Jerusalem seems to have attained a special meaning in Scandinavia. In early medieval Christianity, the ‘farthest north’ had often been associated with barbarian raiders and the forces of evil. The *Passio Olavi* from the latter half of the twelfth century, which contains legends about the St Olav and his martyrdom at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, collected by the Archbishopric of Nidaros, places Norway as the region most close to the ultimate north. This is that same ‘north’ that Jeremiah had said every evil

would come from (Jer 1, 13–14). The prophet had once promised that God would finally overturn the reign of the ‘boaster’ in the north and ‘build His city’ even in these remote realms. The same allusions are found in the Nidaros sequence *Postquam calix Babylonis*, probably composed in the late twelfth century. Here, a subtle wordplay is made; the seething pot (*ollam*) of the north, as mentioned by Jeremiah, is no longer filled with evil, but with the good oil (*oleo*) made by St Olav. In this sequence, the sacred topography seems turned on its head. The Northmen, when in the service of the Christ-like St Olav, become God’s assistants against the wicked in the south, namely the city of Babylon (Kunin & Phelpstead 2001, 26–31; Skånland 1956; Kraggerud 2002).



Figure 4. A figure, possibly a female saint attached to a reliquary, made in Limoges, St Lawrence’s Church, Tønsberg. Photo: Kirsten Helgeland/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The literature and cult of St Olav was closely attached to Nidaros cathedral, an archbishopric since the visit of Cardinal Nicholas Breakspear (later Pope Adrian IV) in 1152/53 (Phelpstead 2001; Boje Mortensen & Mundal 2003). The image of St Olav developed into something like a Christ-like crusading saint, whom the Norwegian kings were supposed to imitate as *miles Olavi*, defending the Church and Christianity. The cathedral attained holy relics like a piece of the True Cross and a drop of the Holy Blood. Moreover, an octagon over the relics of St Olav in the Nidaros Cathedral was erected, establishing a clear link to the Holy City of Jerusalem. Sometime in the 1170s the fortress not far from the cathedral was named Sion, and the hill where pilgrims would see Nidaros for the first time was called *Feginsbrekka* (Old Norse for Montjoie, the hill just north of Jerusalem where pilgrims first got a glimpse of the Holy City). At this time, those fighting for the anointed king of Norway, the vassal of the patron saint, were promised martyrdom if they fell on the battlefield.⁵ Nidaros Cathedral thus became a focal point in the construction of a new royal ideology gaining authority from its associations with Jerusalem.

Viken, crusader institutions, and a sacred topography

However, this leaves the question of why Viken, and not Trøndelag, was the region where we find the most ambitious attempts to make visible reminders of the Holy Land and to found churches and abbeys during the twelfth century. In this part of the kingdom of Norway, there is a remarkable density of art, architecture and institutions associated with the Holy Land, all from the twelfth century. Viken, the area surrounding the Oslo Fjord, thus seems particularly fitting for a regional study of the Jerusalem code in medieval Scandinavia.

There are at least four sites that deserves special attention, of which the first two are the main focus in the book.

⁵ On these themes, see the articles by Ekroll and Bandlien in this volume.



Figure 5. Fragment of a scallop, probably a pilgrim badge supposed to be from Santiago de Compostela. Found at Storgaten 16-18, Tønsberg, close to the St Olav's Abbey. Photo: Mårten Teigen/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

St Olav's Church and Premonstratensian Abbey in Tønsberg

This round church is the only one of its kind in Norway, and the largest in Scandinavia. It is not known who the founder was, or exactly when the church was constructed. However, it must have been finished before c. 1190, when it is mentioned in a short crusading chronicle written c. 1200, the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*. By then, it was the abbey church of the Premonstratensians in Tønsberg.

The round church in Tønsberg is the subject of four articles in this book. First, the documentation of the church ruins is discussed by archaeologist Øivind Lunde, who led the most recent excavations in 1969. He points out several interesting features, for instance traces of a construction made of copper in the centre of the nave and the many burials inside the church. Some of these were of very prominent families, and it may have been intended as a mausoleum for the Baglar kings in the early thirteenth century. The *Baglar* (the 'Crozier') had emerged from the resistance against King Sverre of the *Birkibeinar* ('Birchlegs') faction, who had killed King Magnus Erlingsson and his father, the regent Erling Skakke ('Wry-neck'). Erling and King Magnus were supported by the Archbishopric of Nidaros,

and the rule of King Sverre sent both Archbishop Eystein (1157–1188) and his successor Eirik (1188–1206) in exile for long periods. The Baglar were led by Bishop Nikolas Arnesson of Oslo (1190–1226) and supported pretenders who claimed descent from King Magnus. While King Sverre argued for the king's superiority over a Church led astray by pride and immorality, the Baglar seem more inclined to accept the authority of the archbishop as an intermediary between God and the king.⁶ From the end of the 1190s, the Baglar had established their authority in Viken, with a stronghold in Tønsberg. In the period following the death of Sverre in 1202 and until 1217, when Håkon Håkonsson, Sverre's grandson, became sole ruler in Norway, there were two kings in Norway, one of them based in Viken. This region seems to have had stronger connections to the Danish kingdom and the continent than the Birkibeinar had, but the full history of the Baglar and their importance in central Scandinavia has yet to be written. For further studies on this period, Lunde's research on the physical remains of St Olav's Church in Tønsberg will be of crucial importance.



Figure 6. Censer from Tjøme Church, south of Tønsberg. It is one of thirteen preserved censers from the workshop of Jakob Rød in Svendborg, Denmark. Most of these, produced in the first half of the thirteenth century, are found on Fyn, and the one from Tjøme is the only one found outside Denmark. Photo: Ulla Schildt/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

6 For a summary and discussion of this phase of the so-called civil war in Norway, see Bagge 2010: 40–68, especially pp. 45–46.

Jes Wienberg surveys the other round churches in medieval Scandinavia, and discusses not only the founders' motivations, but also the somewhat troubled historiography of the circular churches throughout much of twentieth-century scholarship. If not neglected by many medievalists, their circular construction has been interpreted as, on the one hand, a kind of church-fortresses where people could defend themselves and their valuables during turbulent times, or, on the other, as nodes in a sacred and forgotten (except by the few initiated) geometry that often points to some kind of treasure. Wienberg's article can be considered in relation to Catherine Hundley's recent study of the round church movement that swept across Europe from the second quarter of the twelfth century until the fall of Jerusalem in 1187.⁷

Øystein Ekroll compares the round church to other possible parallels besides the Anastasis in Jerusalem: the octagon in Nidaros cathedral, and the Temple Church in London. In Norway it is associated with the contemporary construction of an octagon at the most holy site in Norway, over the shrine of St Olav in the Nidaros cathedral in Trondheim, which connected the shrine of the royal saint of Norway to the empty tomb of Christ. The strict circular shape of the church in Tønsberg, however, links it even closer than the octagon to the so-called round church movement that swept across Europe in the twelfth century.

Karen Skovgaard-Petersen revisits the chronicle *Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam* that is traditionally believed to have been written at the Premonstratensian Abbey in Tønsberg, since its author shows detailed knowledge of the town and also states that he had lived there for some substantial time. However, Skovgaard-Petersen finds it more likely that it was commissioned by one of the families of the participants of the crusade made in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem in an attempt to justify it as a proper crusade even though many perished during the journey and the survivors only arrived in the Holy Land after a settlement had been made between Richard I and Saladin. This makes it no less interesting in this context, as it tells of the involvement of Norwegian crusaders and indicates a close connection between the Premonstratensian abbeys in

⁷ Hundley 2018. She presented a version of this paper at the conference in Tønsberg in 2017.

Børglum in northern Jutland and its daughter house in Tønsberg at the end of the twelfth century. It is also striking that we would not know about this crusade at all if it had not been for this chronicle, only preserved in copies made in the seventeenth century. This should make historians cautious about other important and more frequently cited sources from this time; Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. The former seems to downplay the importance of crusading ideology, while the latter focuses mainly on King Valdemar and his relative Archbishop Absalon.⁸

Bjørn Bandlien discusses the dating, contexts and possible patrons of the round church dedicated to St Olav and the Premonstratensian Abbey in Tønsberg. It is argued that both can be dated to the period c. 1155–1177. The introduction of the Premonstratensians to Norway was most likely connected to the generous grants of the Danish king to Premonstratensians in Scania in 1170. The inspiration behind the Abbey thus seems to come from Denmark and to be related to the rivalry over Viken between the Norwegian regent Erling Sakke and the Danish king, Valdemar I. Valdemar visited Viken twice in the 1160s, the last time immediately before his conquest of Rügen, and Erling Skakke had to make a vow of loyalty to him in 1170. The round church, however, seems more related to similar constructions of the military orders in London and Paris. Erling Skakke is one of the possible founders, and an obvious choice because he had visited Jerusalem in the early 1150s, and was married to Kristin, the daughter of King Sigurd the Crusader. However, two alternatives are discussed: first, members of an important family at Bratsberg that were associated with crusading and with a strong power base in Viken, and, second, a royal representative in Tønsberg in the mid-twelfth century who was possibly married to an English woman. Although she is not named in contemporary sources, she seems to be both a sister of the abbot of St Victor in Paris and a relative to Lawrence Abbot of Westminster Abbey in London, and thus an intermediary between Tønsberg on the one hand and both Paris and London on the other.

8 In this context, Pål Berg Svenungsen's discussion of the crusade of Earl Ragnvald Kale, along with Erling Skakke, in the early 1150s, at the Tønsberg conference in 2017 is relevant; see Svenungsen 2020.

The commandery of the Hospitallers at Varna (or Værne)

As in the case of the round church in Tønsberg, this house is the only one of its kind in the Norwegian kingdom. Its foundation on the eastern side of the Oslo Fjord cannot be dated precisely from textual sources, and the ruins are poorly preserved and have never been properly excavated. The earliest textual reference is only from the late thirteenth century, when it was used as a hospital for retired retainers at the royal court. However, as Trond Svandal argues in his article in this volume, there are other elements that strongly indicate that the Hospitallers had already come to Varna by around 1170. This would make Varna contemporary to the round church and abbey in Tønsberg, and Svandal's revision of the founding history of Varna places these other foundations in a wider context.



Figure 7. Varna Commandery, Østfold. Photo: Mona Beate Buckholm Vattekar/Østfoldmuseene.

Helen Nicholson extends the view to Britain and Ireland and contextualises the patronage of Varna from this non-Scandinavian perspective. While the Order of the Templars were dependant more heavily on royal

donations, the Hospitallers enjoyed a wider pool of patronage. However, the houses outside England, for instance in Ireland where the Hospitallers arrived at roughly the same time as in Viken, the main acquisitions came from the king and the most prominent nobles.

Christer Carlsson surveys the commanderies of Knights Hospitaller in Scandinavia. He discusses not only the archaeological documentation of the larger houses in Denmark and Sweden, but also the results from georadar surveys at Varna. These indicate a much richer and more successful institution than previously known and is a valuable addition to our knowledge of the Knights Hospitaller in Norway.

Rygge Church

Just a few kilometres from the commandery of the Knights Hospitaller at Varna, there is a church constructed with a peculiar visual characteristic. The walls are constructed from two types of stones, a local granite in a brighter tone, and a special type of intrusive rock with a red colour. Stones of these two types of rock were clearly placed alternately, thus producing a red-white pattern. This must have been an intentional choice, as the red stone has been identified as not existing on the eastern side of the Oslo fjord. Instead, it has been shown to have been brought from a quarry close to Tønsberg and shipped to Rygge. The same stone is found in parts of the round church in Tønsberg, where the same visual effect might have been desired.

In his paper held at the Tønsberg ‘Jerusalem in Viken’ conference in 2017, Kjartan Hauglid pointed out that this red and white pattern was meant to imitate the arcades of the Anastasis of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, as well as those found in many other important churches in Western Europe – for instance the Palatine Chapel in Aachen, the Abbey of St Mary Magdalene in Vézelay, Speyer Cathedral, and even the Mosque at Córdoba. In a recent article, Hauglid has developed this argument. Although traditionally dated to 1170, he argues that there are sound reasons for dating the first phase of the construction of Rygge Church to around 1120, with perhaps two more phases before it was completed in the 1170s (Hauglid 2019). Hauglid re-dates Rygge Church to c. 1120,

putting it in the context of the reign of King Sigurd the Crusader, after returning from his journey to the Holy Land.



Figure 8. Rygge Church, Østfold. Photo: Hans A. Rosbach/Wikicommons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

It seems reasonable to assume that the purpose of bringing the red stones across the fjord, a project that demanded considerable resources and complex logistics, would have been to evoke associations with Jerusalem and the Anastasis, although in a slightly different way than at Tønsberg or Varna. This church may rather be seen in light of the argument in the ground-breaking article by Richard Krautheimer on medieval architecture and imitations of the holy sites of Jerusalem. He suggested that there were various ways to imitate Jerusalem in western architecture; the attempt to make an exact copy of all measurement and elements was far less common than using mimetic elements, such as crypts under the east end of the chancel, octagonal layouts, or tapered chancels, to create an image of Jerusalem.⁹ According to Bianca Kühnel, such elements and

9 Krautheimer 1942, especially p. 32: 'As in any mediaeval copy, the model has been broken up into its single elements; a selection of them has been made and the selected parts have been re-arranged, possibly under the collateral influence of related structures.'

forms were meant as mnemonic devices ‘to smooth the way of the spectator towards identification of the scene, in order to remember or internalize it without difficulty.’ (Kühnel 2012: 264).

Sigurd the Crusader and Konghelle

There were no Norwegians mentioned in the first crusade, but in the aftermath of the conquest of Jerusalem aristocrats went to the Holy Land. The most famous expedition was in 1107–1111, when King Sigurd Magnusson of Norway (*r.* 1103–1130), known in Old Norse as *jórsalafari* (‘the Jerusalem-farer’, or ‘the Crusader’), led a large fleet to the Holy Land (Svenungsen 2016; 2020). King Sigurd received several relics during his crusade, most notably a piece of the Holy Cross from King Baldwin I of Jerusalem (1100–1118) and the Patriarch Gibelin (1108–1112). According to Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*, written a century later, this relic was supposed to be placed close to the relics of St Olav in Nidaros Cathedral. Instead, King Sigurd wanted the Holy Cross placed close to the southern border to defend his kingdom from heathens and enemies of Christianity. He built a church at Konghelle for the relic, and with it placed other prestigious items there: a gilded table, made in Constantinople, of copper and silver decorated with enamel and jewellery, a *plenarius* written in golden letters given to the king by the Patriarch Gibelin, and a reliquary given to him by the Danish king (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: Magnússona saga*, chs. 11, 32). This relic cross must have been a very prestigious relic associated to Jerusalem, and perhaps carried in a procession on special feast days such as the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on 14 September or the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* celebrated on 3 May.

The relic of the Holy Cross was later used, with some success, at battles during the initial phases of the internal struggles of Norway, pointing at its relevance the religious legitimation of royal authority. When Magnus Sigurdsson, the son of King Sigurd the Crusader, fought a battle against his uncle Harald Gille at Fyrileiv, north of Konghelle, in 1134, he carried the relic on him (Snorri, *Heimskringla: Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*, chs. 2–3, 8). Konghelle was sacked by the Wends in 1135, a disaster that was later explained by King Sigurd placing the True Cross

at Konghelle, far away from its intended spot beside St Olav's relics in the Nidaros cathedral (Snorri, *Heimskringla: Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*, chs. 9–11). This may be a later rationalisation of the disaster in 1135 where the central position of the Archbishopric at Nidaros in the Norwegian church was emphasised.

The True Cross relic from Konghelle is said to have reached Nidaros. However, a cross relic with a pendant attached to it, indicating that it was intended to hang around the neck, was found in a ditch during construction works in Tønsberg in the late nineteenth century. Traces of a small piece of wood still remain in it. Its provenance is disputed, but the style is conventionally considered to be in a Byzantine style and dated to the late eleventh century.¹⁰ Whether or not this is indeed the True Cross relic given to King Sigurd during his stay in Jerusalem remains a matter of debate.



Figure 9. Reliquary cross, Byzantine style, late eleventh or twelfth century. It was found in the 1870s during the digging of a ditch in central Tønsberg, close to St Mary's Church and not far from St Olav's Abbey. A small piece of wood is still preserved inside, by some interpreted as the relic of the Holy Cross brought back to Norway by Sigurd the Crusader in the early twelfth century. Photo: Kirsten Helgeland/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

¹⁰ Raupp 2020 compares the Tønsberg relic cross with two others found in Denmark, also in Byzantine style and conventionally dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.

If this indeed is Sigurd's cross, it must have been taken out of Nidaros Cathedral and perhaps worn by one of royal pretenders during the internal struggles around Tønsberg. In the early twelfth century, Konghelle was merely a minor trading site, but not a particularly important economical centre. As a town at the borders of both the Swedish and Danish kingdoms it served mainly military and ideological functions (Hermanson 2009). For the Norwegian kings, Konghelle was also an important stepping-stone for travels to the south – to Denmark, the continent and into the Baltic Sea. Situated on the southern frontier, it was also exposed to enemies. However, Konghelle was rarely threatened by its neighbouring kingdoms, Sweden and Denmark; the main danger was the Wends. In a Norwegian context, Konghelle was the frontier of Christianity against its enemies. These were most often identified as Slavs, such as the Wends, but could at this time also be Swedes, as indicated by the expedition of King Sigurd against alleged heathens in the area around Kalmar in the early 1120s (Jensen 2018).

This expedition to Kalmar and Småland in 1122/23 may partly be explained by Sigurd's rivalry with his brother and co-regent Eystein Magnusson (*r.* 1103–1123). King Eystein founded one of the earliest monasteries in Norway in Bergen, as well as many churches, and seems supportive of the Norwegian bishops. His power base, however, was in western Norway and Trøndelag, while King Sigurd, after his return from the Holy Land, spent more time in Viken and was more involved with the Danish alliances and politics than his brother was. In this context, King Sigurd seems to have wanted to initiate a sacred topography related to the Holy Land centred on Konghelle, and perhaps initiated an extension of this with the construction of Rygge Church at this time. This may have raised the awareness of the people of this part of the Norwegian kingdom of their special position as a border area in the defence of Christianity in the north already from the 1120s, and prepared for the establishment of the round church and a house of the Hospitallers in this area.

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The foundation of a round church in Tønsberg and the house of the Hospitallers at Varna should thus not be dismissed as a rather

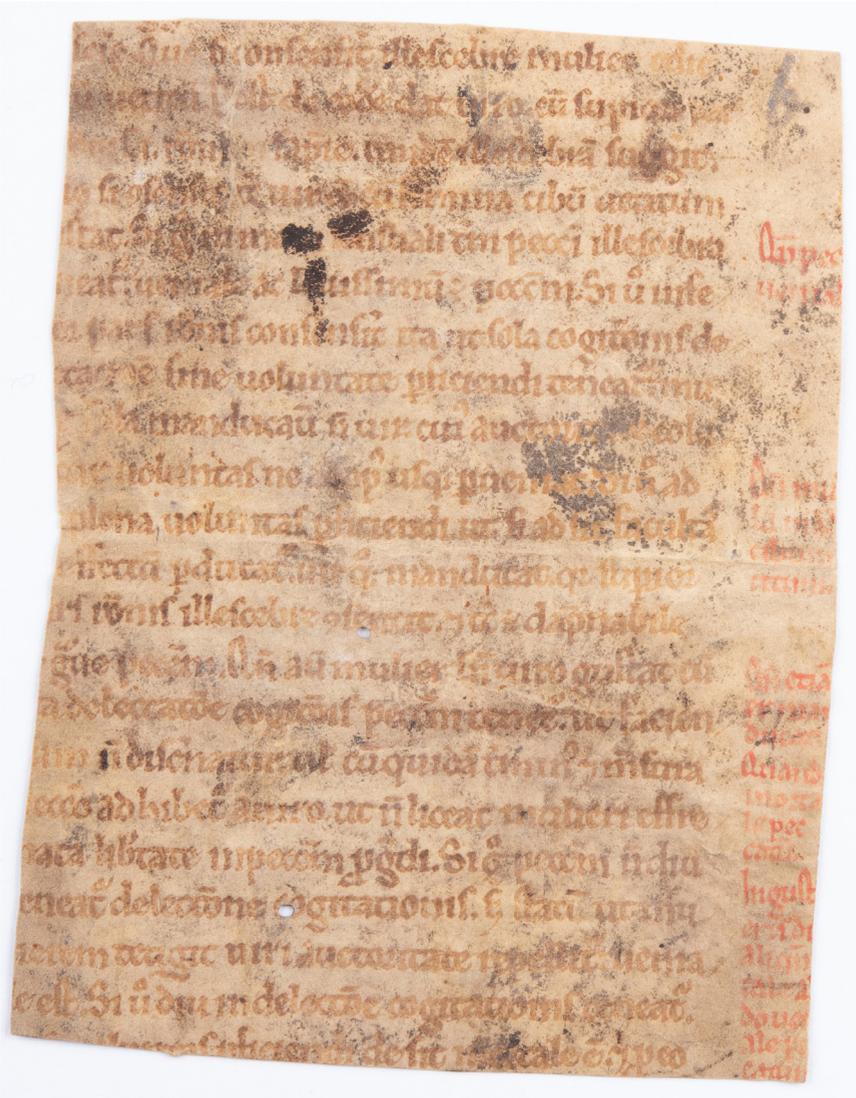


Figure 10. Fragment of a late twelfth-century French manuscript of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*. It was used in the bindings of account books for Tønsberg Len in 1637. It is not unlikely that it was used at the Latin school of St Lawrence's Church shortly after its production, considering the close connections to schools such as St Victor in Paris. Photo: Mekonnen Wolday/Norwegian National Archives.

marginalised phenomenon with little relevance for the development of the Norwegian kingdom. Rather, they should more fruitfully be understood in the wider contexts, both regional and internationally. A main purpose of this anthology is to look afresh at these contexts, both within

the region, within Scandinavia, and in the wider world. The topic of sacred topography is especially relevant here, since there seems to be a density in associations with the Holy Land, a phenomenon we also find elsewhere in Europe, especially in border areas.¹¹ In the Viken region there were several endeavours by kings and community to establish connections with the Holy Land; these were distributed at various sites in the landscape, playing their part in the creation of mnemonic devices in buildings and institutions, and helping to shape these very institutions and to develop ideas of royal and religious authority, and of a new view of the world.

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¹¹ For recent discussion of sacred topographies related to the Holy Land, see Wyche 2016 and Villads Jensen 2013.

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CHAPTER 2

St Olav's Church in Tønsberg. The Excavation of 1969–70 in Retrospect

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Location

The location of the round church dedicated to St Olav must have made a huge impression on visitors to Tønsberg during the Middle Ages. It was situated on the outskirts of the urban settlement, at the end of Storgaten, or Long Street (fig. 1). The terrain rises gradually from the fjord towards the hill Haugar. In this area we find the oldest traces of human activities in the district, mainly farming fields but also several prehistoric burials. Along with the other monastic buildings between Haugar and the fjord, the church building must have dominated the view for anyone coming by sea from the southeast.

From St Olav's Church, Storgaten runs northwest towards St Lawrence's Church at the far end, the great basilica next to the Royal Palace by the sea. Rising behind St Lawrence's is the impressive Slottsfjellet ('Castle hill') with St Michael's Church. Along Storgaten, between the churches of St Olav and St Lawrence, there are the churches of St Mary and St Peter, both parish churches during the Middle Ages.

The many churches within the town, including the small hill Haugar with its the ancient tumulus, suggest that there was some planning in the development of the town. In what way might St Olav's church be part of a religious landscape, or cityscape?

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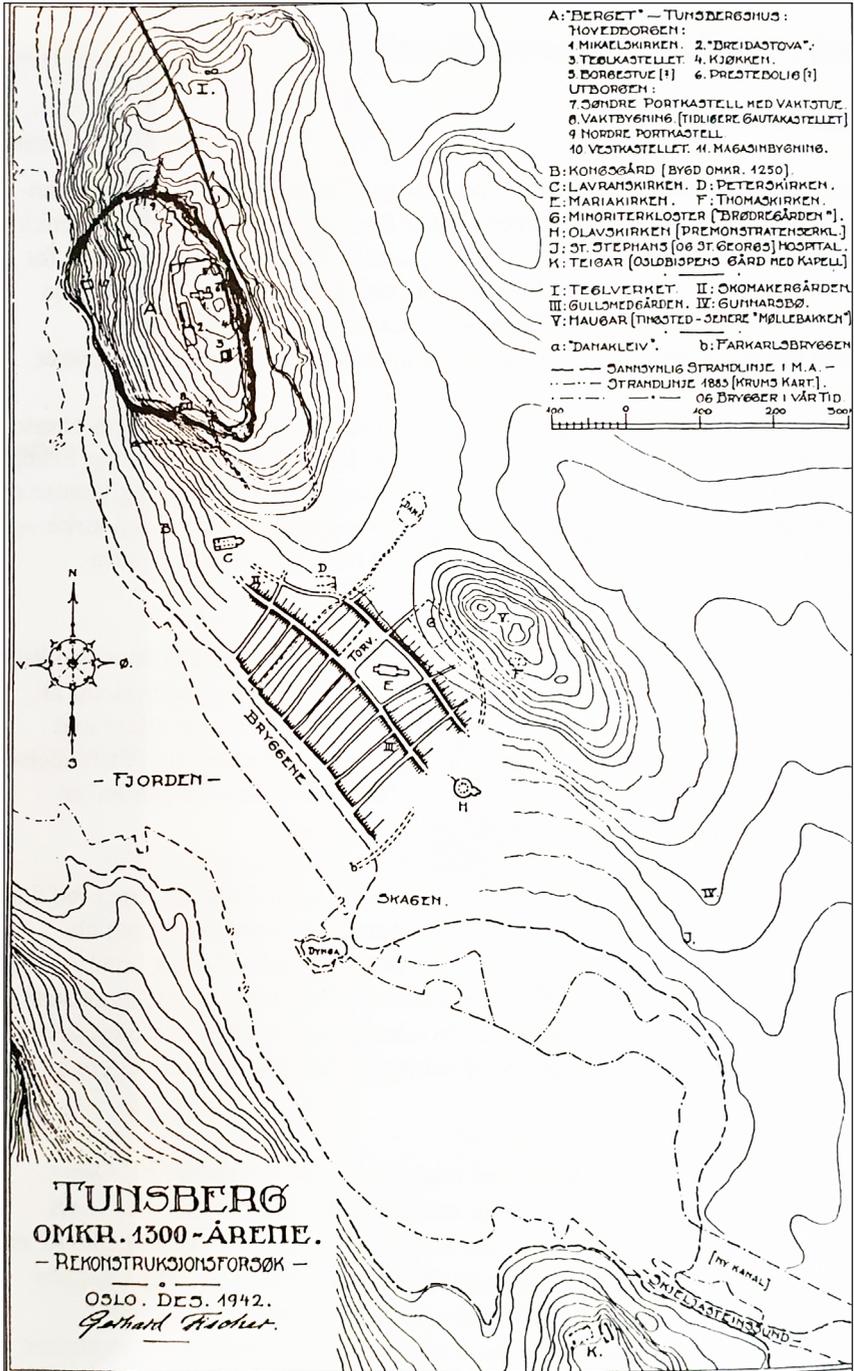


Figure 1. Tunsberg around 1300, reconstruction. Illustration: Gerhard Fischer.

Early excavations

The first excavation of St Olav's church in 1877–78 took place after the original site and remains of the church had been discovered when a new building was being planned. The western part of the original church had for the most part disappeared, but architect H. Thorsen was able to draw the ground plan, a section and other details (fig. 2a–c). He left his

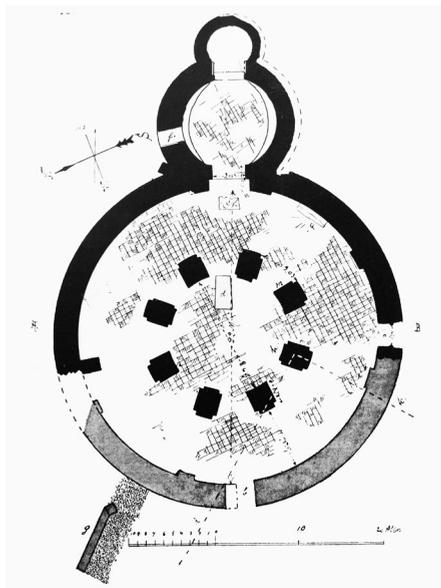


Figure 2a. Plan of the church and section through the church marked A–B. Illustration: H. Thorsen.

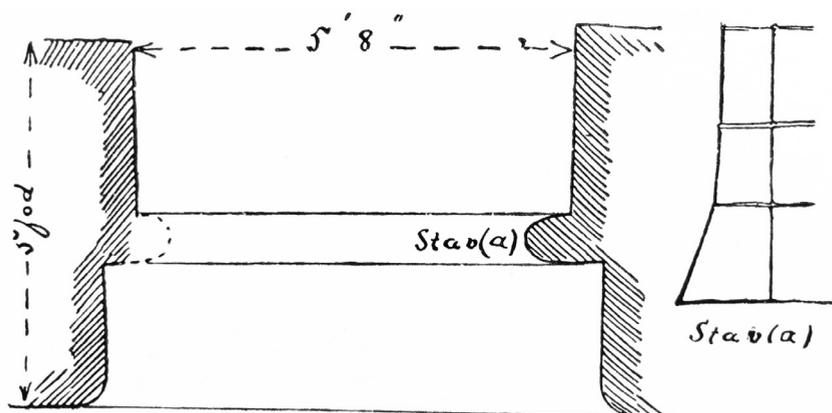


Figure 2b. Later destroyed south doorway marked B on the plan. Illustration: H. Thorsen.

documentation to Hugo Frölén who included it in his study ‘Nordic fortified round churches’ (in Swedish), published 1911. We can here see that he found floor-tiles, but also that he did not dig any deeper than that level. The section with an east-west orientation tells us what was left of the round building in 1878. The southwest doorway was later removed.

Further building work began on the site in 1928. Architect Gerhard Fischer conducted some smaller excavations to check the preservation of the ruins under the houses. The question of how to conserve the ruin was raised, but nothing happened for many years.

Tønsberg Sparebank (Tønsberg Savings Bank) bought the whole property in 1963 and made it possible to initiate a project for exposing the old church ruin, conserve it and carry out excavations (fig. 3). Bernt C. Lange from Riksantikvaren (Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage), was responsible for the project, which lasted five years. His first step was to excavate the rubble from 1878, and he found what was left of the ruin. The rubble contained many original stones from the



Figure 3a. Exposure of the ruin under older buildings in 1964. Photo: Jan Greve/NTB.



Figure 3b. Visit by fellow students from Institute of Medieval Archaeology at Lund University 1970. Student Ø. Lunde at right. Photo: Tønsbergs Blad.

church that he could use in the restoration. He stopped excavating just above the old floor-level.

The walls in the nave were preserved more or less as before, but columns, doorways and the chancel had been more or less torn down. Enough of the original stones from the church remained, however, making it possible to reconstruct and conserve the ruin in 1967 as it is today.

The excavation of 1969–70

Locally, after the ruin had been brought to light and restored in 1967, there was a growing interest to know the history of St Olav's Church. I became responsible for the small research project in 1969–70, with some funding from Tønsberg Sparebank. However, this funding was insufficient for a large-scale project and the result was an old-fashioned, inexpensive excavation carried out by volunteers. The aim was to find out as much as possible of the building-process, later alterations, and dating. This implied that we looked for the original building level, later layers and floor-levels, connections between building elements such as nave, columns, chancel, vestry, altars, graves, doors, etc. It was also important to find out if the central room had had any special use. Students from Lund and Oslo participated, and we were helped by some interested local people.

In 1969 we excavated nine very small sections, and a report was written. After discussions at the Institute of Medieval Archaeology, Lund University, I supplemented the 1969 excavation with six small new trenches and extended two of the old trenches in 1970 (fig. 3b). We managed to finish that plan before other duties robbed me of the chance to continue, and no final report for this two-year excavation was ever written.

The archaeological result from the 1969–70 excavation

Nearly 20 smaller or larger sections were excavated (fig. 4). We usually excavated down to the familiar black culture layer (agricultural soil) over the sterile sandy deposits above the clay, or we stopped above foundations, other constructions, or graves. Following the Riksantikvaren's decision, we did not excavate the graves to their complete depth. We had to limit the area we excavated so as not to destroy too much.

In the following paragraphs, I will start from the lowest layer, the ground the church was built on, and comment on the stratigraphic situations above it and the different elements of the building.

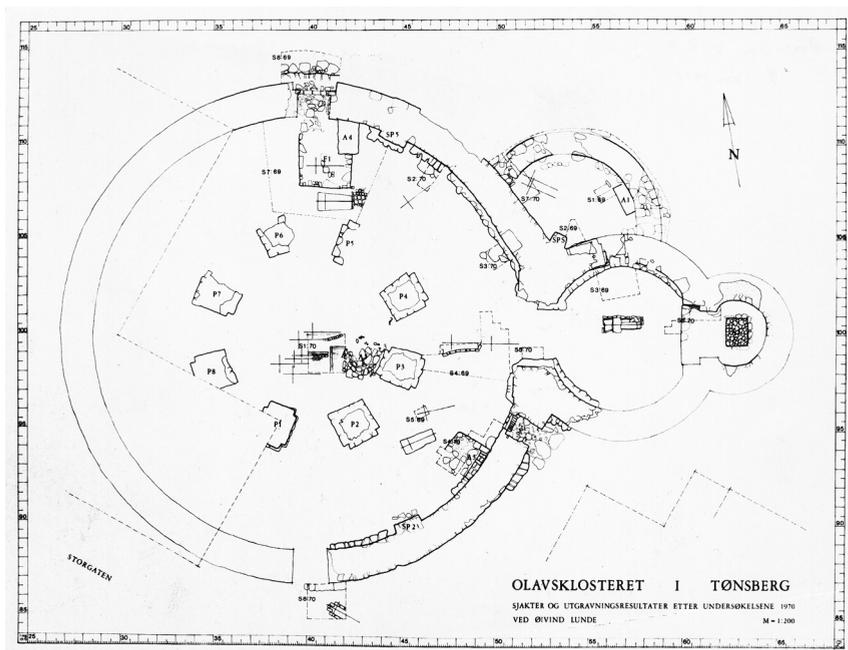


Figure 4. Trenches and archaeological remains, plan 1969–70. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.

The foundations and building level

The area on which the church was built was relatively flat agricultural land. The fatty black sandy layer did not contain any finds. The black layer is a bit higher in the northwest section where it disappears because of levelling for the floors.

We had this black layer nearly everywhere, and above it, in the southern and eastern sections, a building-layer without traces of bricks or datable finds (fig. 5a, b). In the northwest we had yellow-grey sand over the black layer. Above this level the layers are more complex and vary from place to place because of graves, constructions, and floor-repair (fig. 5c).

The church-plan

The round church has a round chancel with round apse and a round vestry (fig. 6):

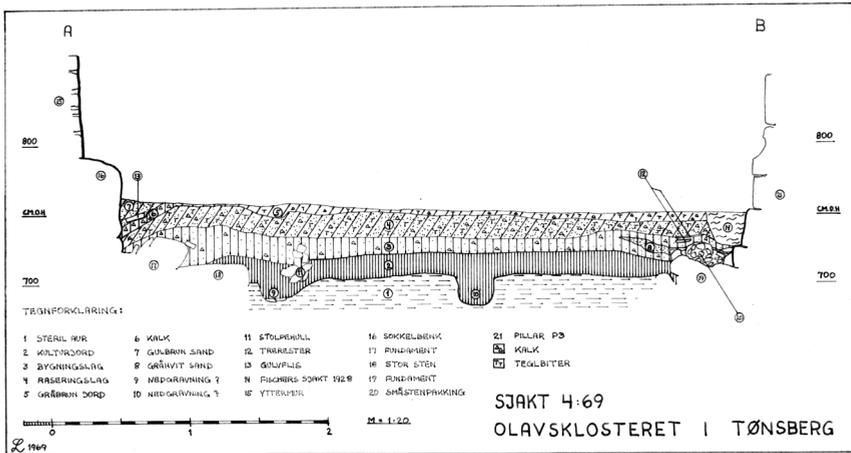


Figure 5a. Trench 4:69 between pier P3 right and the entrance to the Chancel left, facing south. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.



Figure 5b. Trench 4:69 between pier P3 right and the entrance to the Chancel left, facing south. Photo: Ø. Lunde.

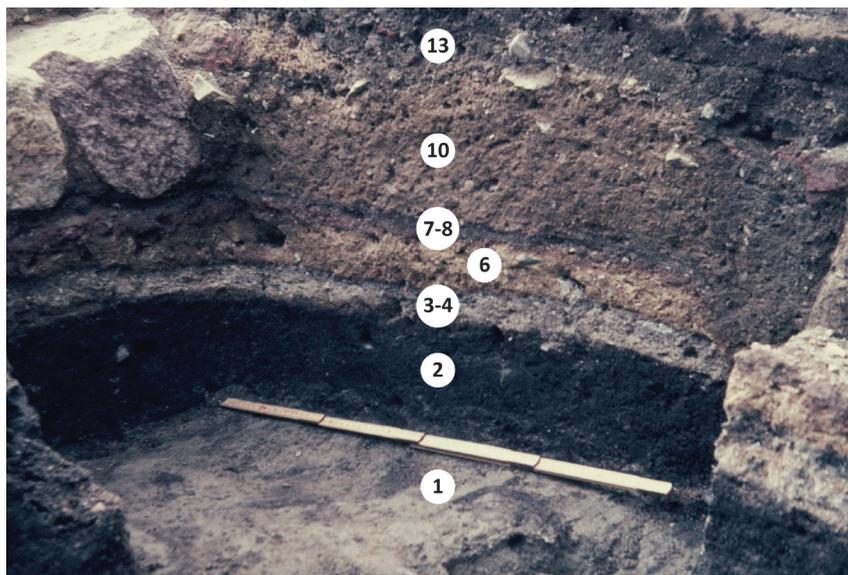


Figure 5c. Trench S1:70, West of pier P3 with remains of an altar in the central room: Layers from bottom and up: 1) original ground, 2) black layer, agricultural soil, 3-4) building layer with sand, chalk, chips of red stone with a darker thin level on top before next layer, (5) not used here, 6) yellow sand, 7-8) darker level on top of 6 with red stonechips and dark earth on top with bits of wood. Probably a floor of wood above that later was removed. 10) yellow sand perhaps to fill up to the new floor level of glazed tiles. 13) Grey sandy soil. Photo: Ø. Lunde.

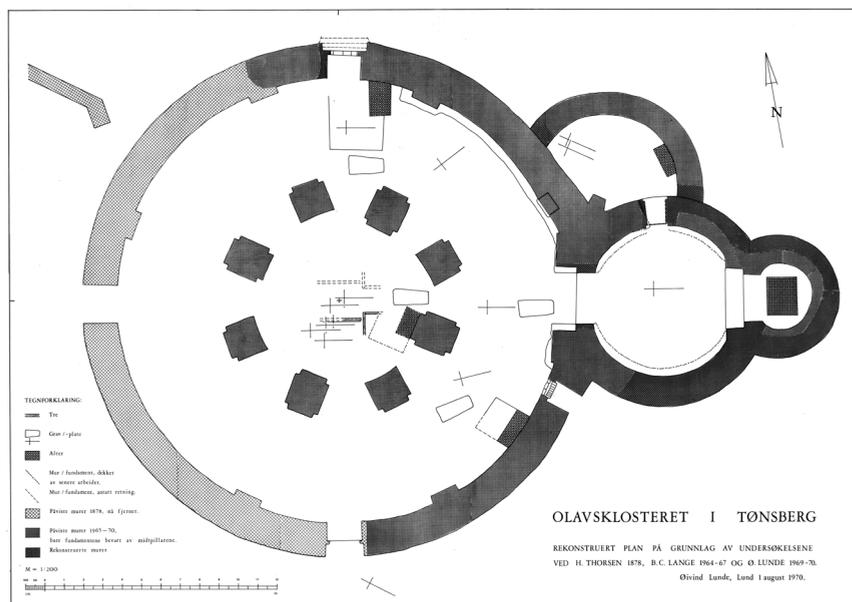


Figure 6. Reconstructed church plan. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.

- The roundhouse with diameter of 23m internally and nearly 27m externally. The central room with 8m in diameter with 8 square columns with pilasters and an ambulatory around it.
- The chancel has the same size as the central room and a smaller round apse in the east.
- The round vestry between the chancel and the roundhouse on the north side has the same diameter as the chancel.

The walls and traces of vaulting

The excavation revealed the following measurements of the walls:

- The roundhouse wall is 1,80m wide and built as a cavity wall of red local granite with rough-hewn square stones in relatively even layers.
- The northeast wall (fig. 7) and the lower southeast wall are relatively well preserved.
- The entrance to the chancel is restored, but the opening can be estimated to 3,5m.



Figure 7. Roundhouse wall in northeast from inside in the sacristy. Photo: Ø. Lunde.

- The walls in the chancel are 1,50m and the apse and the sacristy 1,20m.
- Part of the chancel walls has been restored from the foundations where traces on the stones gave the alignment. Original profile-stones that had finished the wall over the foundation were found and reused. (fig. 8a, b).

Just north of the entrance to the chancel a few meters of the wall have been rebuilt with smaller stones in a rough fashion and there are no traces of changes outside on the vestry-side. On top of the wall there is a large stone slab that is cut off at the front. In 1964 archaeologists found traces of plaster on this stone slab that gave the dimensions of a niche here (96cm wide and 58cm deep). Could there be a grave in the wall? If there is a grave in the stone wall, the most likely candidate would be King Erling Steinvegg ('Stonewall') who died in 1207.



Figure 8a. Apse from outside with the original profiled stones. Photo: Ø. Lunde/Riksantikvaren.

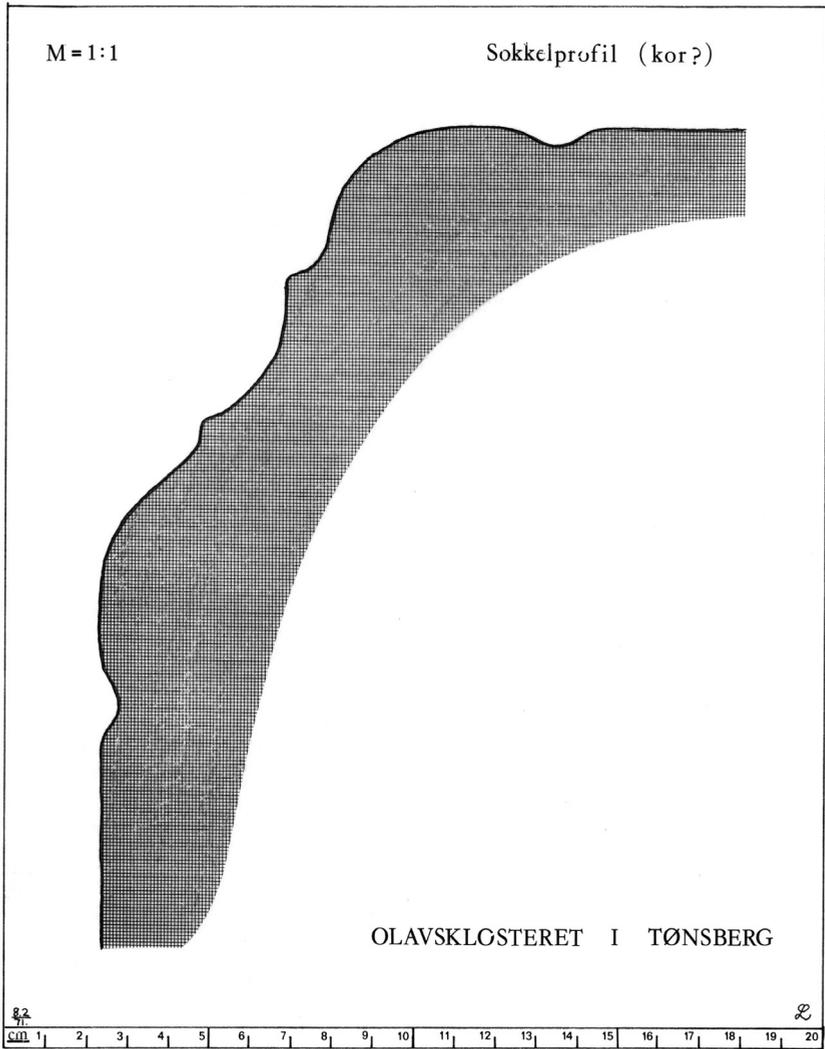


Figure 8b. Base profile around the apsis wall. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.

The eight square columns in the roundhouse are restored from the first course of stones that had survived demolition (fig. 9a). Most of the stones used in the restoration were found in the rubble. The profiled bases of the columns could be reconstructed with mostly original stones (fig. 9b).



Figure 9a. Eastern part of the roundhouse and entrance to the Chancel. Photo: Ø. Lunde.

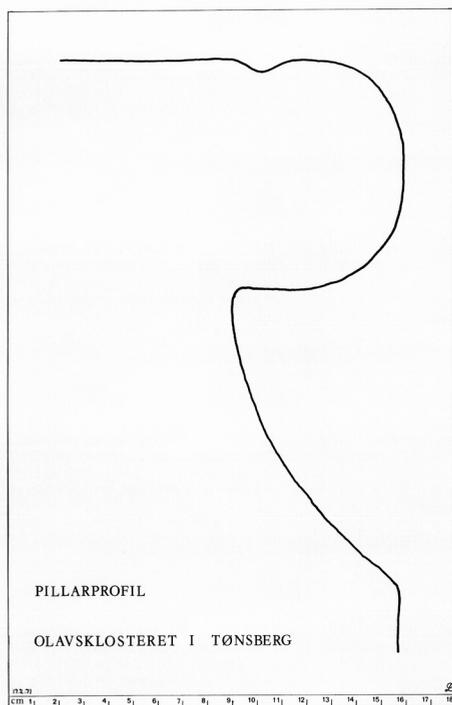


Figure 9b. Base profile used on the piers. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.

Every second column had pilasters on all four sides, while the other four columns only had pilasters on two sides which supported the arches between the columns. The columns with four pilasters supported arches over the central room and over to the outer wall in the ambulatory as well as the arches between the columns. At the outer round wall there are pilasters that would meet the arches in the ambulatory (fig. 10).

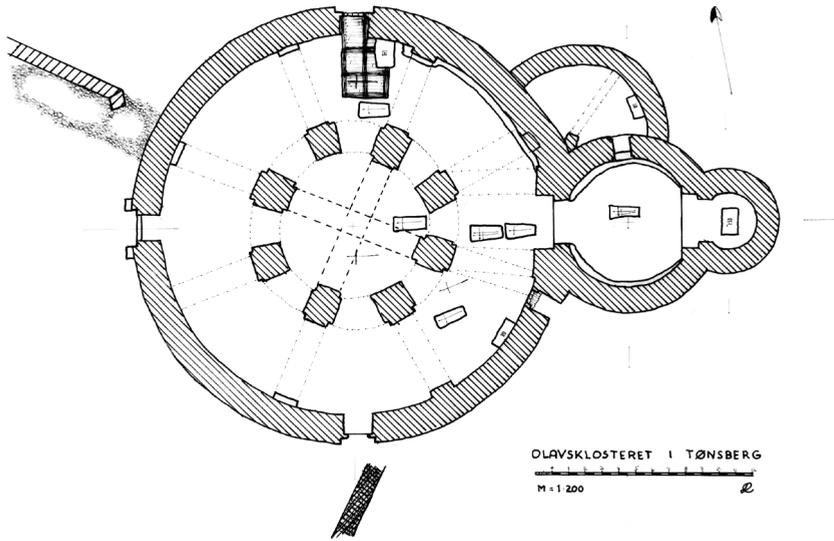


Figure 10. Church-plan with arches for the vaulting. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.

Two crossing arches could have been carrying a vault in the central room. In both 1878 and in 1970 parts of arches were found (fig. 11). The vaulting in the central room, chancel and vestry could have been part of the first phase of building, but it is difficult to prove this. Since molded bricks shaped to be part of a vault were found where they meet the walls, it is reasonable to suggest that the ambulatory has been vaulted at a later stage.

The arches between the central room and the outer wall, intended to lead the forces of weight, are probably from the first building phase. We know the vestry has been vaulted with one arch from the corner between the roundhouse and chancel and the outer wall (fig. 12). We have found parts of the arch there. This is the same construction as they found between two of the columns in 1878.



Figure 11. Part of vaulting found 1970. Photo: Ø. Lunde.



Figure 12. The vestry reconstructed 1970. Photo: Ø. Lunde.

Floors

Floor-tiles were used as the final flooring in the whole church. The floor was in a poor state with large areas needing repair and patches with different sizes of tiles could be seen.

In the roundhouse we had traces of an older wooden floor under the final one. This floor must have been a kind of 'floating floor' with joists under the floor planks, at least in the southeast and east (fig. 5). The planks were mostly removed when they laid the final floor of glazed tiles. The tile-floor was on nearly the same level as the earlier wooden one. The space between the two floors had been filled up with sand and building-rubble: bits of stone, bricks and chalk.

There is one step up from the roundhouse to the chancel where there is a partial floor of thin stone slabs under the later floor-tiles. From the chancel there is one step up to the apse and we could see the flat stone slab floor. The same kind of floor is also in the vestry.

Doorways

Only the northern and southern doorways in the round church are documented. The southern doorway, destroyed after 1878, was very similar to the northern one. The northern doorway has survived, but it must have been blocked relatively early since the threshold is hardly used. However, the fact that there are no traces of any blocking could indicate that this door had rarely been in use. There was probably, in the late medieval period, an altar near the doorway with a platform in front of the doorway (fig. 13a). There are remains of the old wooden floor under yellow sand at the sides of this platform and over the final tile-floor. In this final floor there is a marble slab with a kind of lily cross (fig. 13b).

The third opening in the southeast next to the chancel is a simpler doorway that must have been the entrance from the monastery. It is important to note that the door opened out of the church and the door could be bolted from the outside, that is from the monastery (fig. 6 and fig. 9a). This doorway has been rebuilt several times and could have been in use after the medieval period.

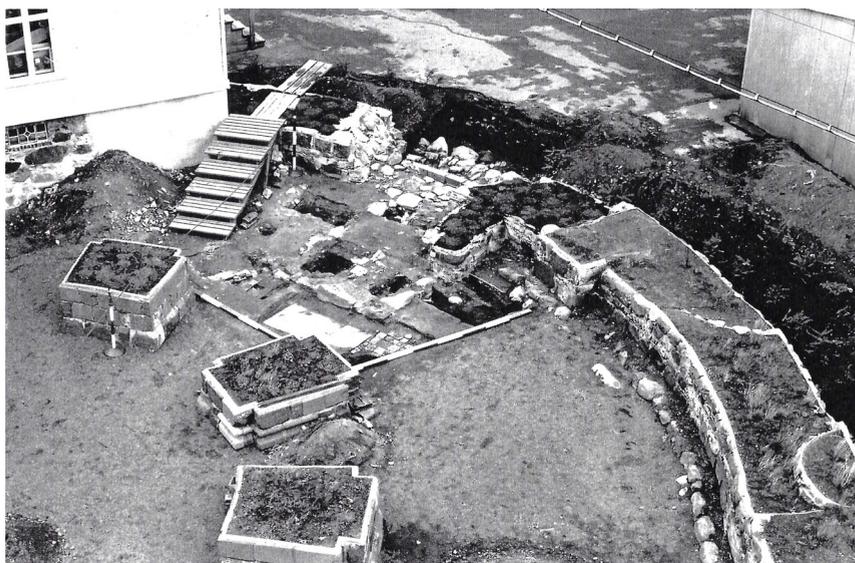


Figure 13a. North doorway and the ambulatory with tile-floor, grave slab and platform with altar.
Photo: Ø. Lunde.



Figure 13b. Detail of 13a with the grave slab with a kind of lily cross and the last glazed tile-floor.
Photo: Ø. Lunde.

From the chancel we have traces of two doorways to the vestry above each other. They correspond with the two floor levels here (fig. 12). We found no traces of any other doorway to the vestry.

Thorsen indicated in 1878 a doorway in the west, but he probably had not seen it himself and he did not comment on it in his notes. However, it is possible he simply received information about this doorway, and that it had been demolished just before he arrived. Still, we cannot be sure about the existence of the western doorway, but it would have been strange not to find a doorway here facing the Main Street to the west.

Altars

Remains of altar foundations were found in five places in the church, but there could have been others where the walls were never recorded (fig. 6).

The main altar in the apse has a very elaborate construction (fig. 14a). It is made as a small chamber with well-made sides filled with mostly



Figure 14a. Main altar in the apse after excavation. Photo: Ø. Lunde.



Figure 14b. Main altar in the apse from northwest during excavation. The water washed stones between the chamber's walls and the apse wall comes from the chamber. Under the stones it was a layer of lime over big lumps of iron slag set on a layer of gravel and more lime on soil, gravel and chips from stones cutting over the foundation stones for the apse. Photo: Ø. Lunde.

water washed stones (fig. 14b). Under it was a layer of lime over big lumps of iron slag on a layer of gravel and more lime. Then, over the foundation stones for the apse, lay soil, gravel, and chips and fragments from stone-cutting.

Other altars are to be found in the vestry, in the ambulatory near the doorway to the monastery, just east of the north doorway and in the central room at the column opposite the monastery door.

Finds of coins suggest the late medieval period for the platform and altar at the north doorway (fig. 10).

We have coins and other finds from later periods, but nothing that can help us with the dating of the earlier periods.

There is also a problem in that the finds from the excavation in 1970 have been regarded as lost for many years. The finds were brought to the County Museum in Tønsberg and later, in 2009, sent to The Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, but never properly studied.

Graves

Burials have been found in nearly all the small trenches (fig. 6). Five of the graves have grave slabs of marble from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Many of the graves were constructed of brick, and one contained a coin from around 1280.

The central room

In the central room, small bits of copper and copperplates were found both in 1878 and in the 1969–70 excavation (fig. 4). One of the important goals of this later excavation was to get some idea of how this part of the church was used. There is no evidence to be found in the first phase with the wooden-floor, but in the last phase we have clear evidence that there must have been a wooden construction set in the tile-floor. This construction can be located to the eastern and central part of the room, and it could have been covered with copper. We could only guess as to what it was and what it looked like.

A canopy?

The old altar at the column (P₃) could still be used in connection with this new construction. 7–8 burials were found under this construction in the tile-floor. In one of the graves was a coin, which could be dated to the late fourteenth century. This or a similar construction could very well have been placed on the old wooden floor.

Rebuilding

No major rebuilding has been observed, except for the final tile-floor with yellow, green, and brown glazed tiles. This floor was in bad condition and has been repaired; it is possible it has been there a long time. We have no finds that can help give a more exact date other than the general date of thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Many moulded bricks were found during the earlier excavations and these bricks indicate a later vaulting of the ambulatory. It is possible that the vaulting was done at the same time

that the tiled floor was laid. This could explain the thick building layer everywhere in the church. Alterations to the doorways could then have been necessary as well. Moulded bricks with elaborated profiles can be linked to doorways or windows that would fit in the same period.

Sequences and dating

It seems very likely that the round church had two main building periods. During the first period the church could have been built in one process in the local red granite-stone. The arches would have been built at this time, and probably the vaulting in the central room, in the chancel, apse and vestry.

During the second period bricks were used, tiled floors were laid, the ambulatory was vaulted, and changes were made to the doorways and to other places where bricks could be used.

There are no traces of bricks being used in the first period. This means the old building must pre-date the start of brick-production in Tønsberg – which occurred in the thirteenth century.

Church and monastery

In 1970 we had a small trench on the south side of the church near the southern doorway (fig. 6). We found a grave in a brick coffin and foundations for a wall going southwest. On the other side of the main street, Storgaten, some remains of the monastery buildings were found in 1971. In association with the building of the new library, in 1987 and 1991 more substantial remains were found.

One of the leaders of the excavation, Dan Petterson, made a reconstruction of the remains of the monastery south of the church. This reconstruction includes the area north of the church, and it suggests that there was a graveyard there (fig. 15).

It is difficult to understand how the buildings were organized within the monastery that probably owned the ground further south and southwest to the fjord. The reconstruction shows a long building leading from the church to the remains of walls a bit further south.

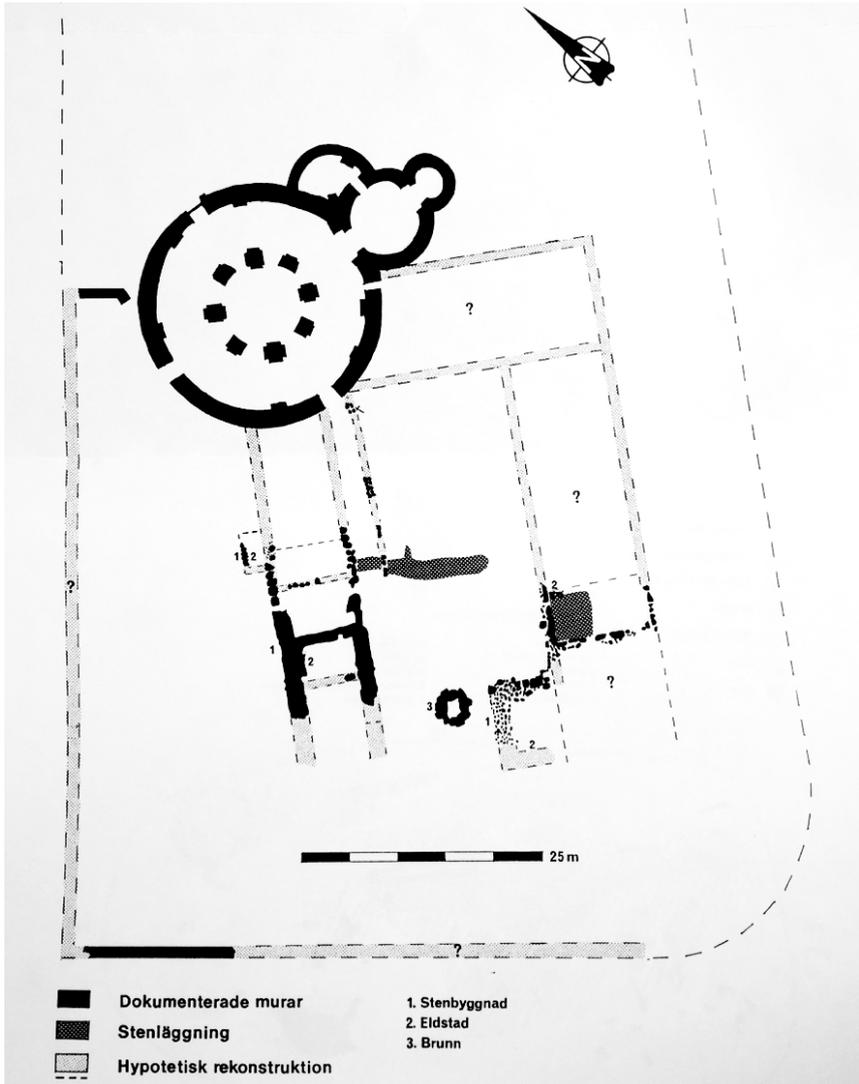


Figure 15. Plan of the church with remains of the monastery at the south side of the church. Remains can be seen in the library. Illustration: Dan Petterson.

What this reconstruction shows could be the west-wing of the monastery. East of these remains, there is a well and remains of walls and floors.

Petterson suggests that the cloister is near the church, and he reconstructed a north wing at the roundhouse between the south doorway and the southeastern doorway next to the chancel. He links this northern

building by the church walls with an eastern wing running down to the wall-remains further south. Since hardly any remains were found to support this suggestion, it is not possible comment on its validity. However, it would give meaning to the eastern doorway being an exclusive entrance for the canons between their private quarters and the east end of the church. The excavation of the monastery gave only a more general date to the thirteenth century.

In conclusion, we have no certain archaeological evidence to date the church before the burial of King Erling Steinvegg in 1207, but the architecture suggests that the church is definitely older.

Concluding remarks

Hugo Frölén said in 1911 that St Olav's Church is the most typical three-circle church he knows of in the Romanesque tradition of central buildings. He would probably have known about the round vestry as well. It is difficult to see how this extraordinary planned round church could be part of building traditions for monasteries.

I understand that it is very convenient to think that the church has its own, older history before it became part of a monastery. It could be so – I have believed it to be so a long time, but I am not so sure any longer.

I could go on referring to historic and art historic evidence and theories, but the main aim of this presentation was to make the results of this fifty-year-old excavation more readily available. I hope the short presentation of the archaeological evidence can be useful for future research.

However, since the excavation was planned for a doctoral thesis at the University in Lund, I will finish by mentioning some circumstances we found interesting during discussions in 1970 at the seminar for students in medieval archaeology:

- The Premonstratensians had no rules for how to organize the buildings in the monastery. They usually followed Cistercian traditions.
- The Paschal Mystery was their most important rite since the founder Norbert of Xanten's vision around 1120. In that context a round church could be an interesting choice.

- After 1140–50 Premontr  rarely took any direct initiative in establishing new daughter houses. Only through their own first daughter-houses. There is some circumstantial evidence suggesting that Premontr  could have had a personal interest in T nsberg, and that this might have led to the church and monastery there being established relatively early.
- Archbishop Eskild of Lund (1138–79) was responsible for establishing five or six of eight new Premonstratensian monasteries in Denmark before 1155. He was also archbishop of Norway up to 1153 (when the archbishopric of Nidaros was established), so he could easily have influenced an establishment in T nsberg.

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CHAPTER 3

The Round Church of Tønsberg and the Octagon of Nidaros

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Introduction

In the centre of modern Tønsberg lies the ruin of ‘The Round Church’, one of the most intriguing medieval churches in Norway. The church fell into ruin after the Reformation, and a quarter of the nave was removed by building work in 1877–78. In connection with this work the ruin was excavated by the architect Håkon Thorsen. In 1911, the Swedish author Hugo Frölén included the church in his work on Scandinavian round churches which he believed were built for defensive purposes (Frölén 1910–11). For this work, Frölén borrowed Thorsen’s drawings and diaries, which afterwards unfortunately seem to be lost.

In 1964–70, the ruin was again excavated, and the remaining walls were restored (Wienberg 1991: 40; Lunde 1993; Lunde in this volume). Across the street, remnants of the adjacent monastic buildings have been excavated and are preserved inside the new Public Library. This is all that is left of the once so wealthy Premonstratensian Abbey of St Olav, dedicated to Norway’s patron saint and *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* – the eternal king of Norway.

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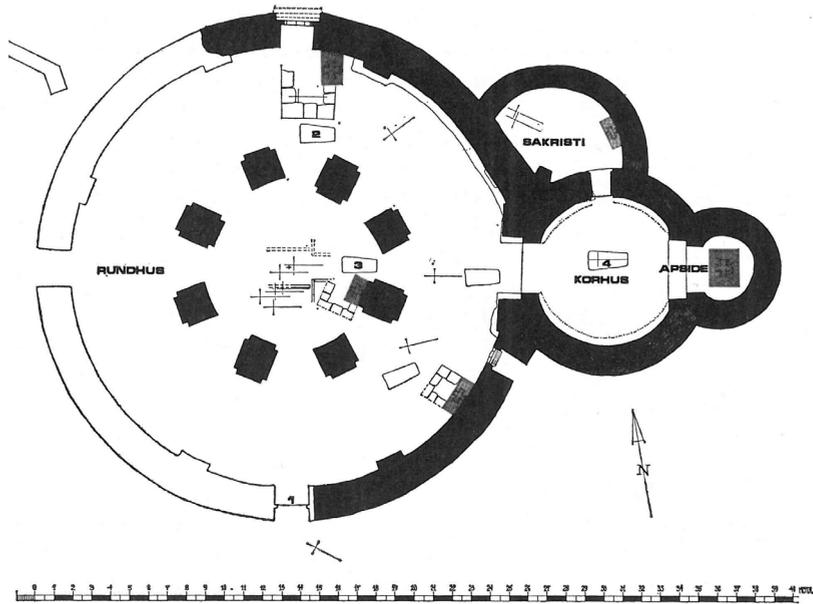


Figure 1. Ground plan of St Olav's Church in Tønsberg after the excavation. The outlined western part of the nave was removed in the 1870s. Illustration: Ø. Lunde.

The Premonstratensians in Tønsberg are first mentioned in 1191, when a group of Danish crusaders visited the town. In a book describing these crusaders and their activities, known as *Historia de Profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (the History of the Danes travelling to Jerusalem), a somewhat uncommon arrangement is mentioned, namely that the canons lived in the town but their livelihood came from St Michael's Church on Slottsfjellet ('Castle Hill'), located inside the royal castle. (On this literary work, see Skovgaard-Petersen in this volume.)

A monastic institution in Tønsberg called *muncalif* ('*munkeliv*', or 'dwelling of monks') is mentioned in the Saga of King Sverre relating to 1190, when the king's brother Earl Eirik died there (*Sverris saga* 2007, ch. 115). This was probably St Olav's Abbey (see also the discussions in Lunde and Bandlien in this volume). The church of St Olav was first explicitly mentioned in 1207 when Erling Steinvegg ('Stonewall'), one of the many Norwegian kings during the civil war period 1130–1240, was buried in the church. However, there is every reason to believe that the

church already existed by 1191. No information survives concerning who built it or why it was built, but it is usually dated between 1170 and 1190. It could, however, be even older (Wienberg 1991: 44).

At the time of its construction, the church was located just outside the south-eastern end of the small town, near the end of Tønsberg's main street which ran parallel to the harbour. The remains of the abbey buildings are clearly of a secondary nature, and it seems obvious that the church was built as a free-standing structure which was later given to the monks who added monastic buildings on the south side of the church. The church and the monastic buildings are also differently oriented (Lunde 1993: 20). A round church is not well suited for a monastic community unless it is placed in the centre of the complex, and the physical connection between the church and the monastic buildings was awkward, to say the least. No other monastic community in Scandinavia had a round church.

The round church in Tønsberg is one of only two known in medieval Norway, together with the small round church at Orphir in the Orkney Islands which belonged to the Norwegian kingdom during the Middle Ages. In all, at least 34 round churches are known in medieval Scandinavia as a whole (Wienberg 2017: 7). The Tønsberg round church is, however, by far the largest of all the Scandinavian round churches. The external diameter of the nave is c. 25m and the internal diameter is c. 22m, which is twice the size of most of the other round churches in Scandinavia. The nave originally had three portals facing the north, the west and the south. A fourth portal was later opened in the southeast part of the nave in the monastic period, probably giving direct access to the cloister. The nave had a central room supported by eight heavy piers, probably terminating in a tower-like structure with a pointed roof rising above the ambulatory roof.

The ambulatory walls are constructed of rough stones of the hard local red granite and would have been plastered and whitewashed inside and outside. The eight piers are constructed from well-cut ashlar of the same red granite and have moulded bases, alternating between a chamfered edge and a moulding. The latter piers correspond with responds in the outer walls, showing that the ambulatory was vaulted with a barrel

vault interrupted by transverse arches. The nave probably had an upper floor, or at least a gallery above the ambulatory. The gallery probably had openings towards the central room, and if the ambulatory walls were tall enough, there might have been small windows giving light to the gallery. Towards the central room, all eight piers have responds which show that the central room was covered by a circular rib vault, probably situated above clerestory windows which gave light to the central room (Frölen 1911: 11–15; Wienberg 1991: 40).

The choir is also round, internally measuring 7m across. Towards the east, it terminates with a small horseshoe-shaped apse with an internal diameter of c. 3.5m where the foundation of an altar was excavated. Externally, the choir has remains of a wall base decorated with the Attic base moulding. On the north side of the chancel a doorway leads to a segment-shaped room interpreted as a vestry. The entire building thus consists of four circular or partly circular elements. This makes the Tønsberg church a unique example among all round churches, and in every sense an unusual building. The building's architecture, its dedication to St Olav and its possible royal connection give only a few clues, but very important ones, to the context in which the church was originally erected.

Two reconstruction drawings were made of the church in 1927 and 1932 respectively. The first, made by Johan Meyer, was clearly inspired by the Round Church in Cambridge, but with a small tower or turret added over the choir. The second, made by Harald Sund in 1932, was based on Frölen's theory that all the round churches were also built as defence churches. Sund's reconstruction shows not just the nave and the choir with crenellated passages covered by roofs, but the apse as well (Wienberg 1991: figs. 27 & 28; Wienberg fig. 2 in this volume). The round churches have an interesting parallel in Norwegian wooden medieval architecture. Some Norwegian stave churches, e.g., Borgund Church, have an eastern apse covered by a small round tower or turret, a feature which seems to be inspired by centralized stone churches like the Tønsberg church. Frölen's theory about the defensive nature of the round churches has been refuted (Wienberg 2017: 14–15). The only possible exceptions in Scandinavia – that is, round churches with a defensive function – are perhaps the round churches on the island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea.

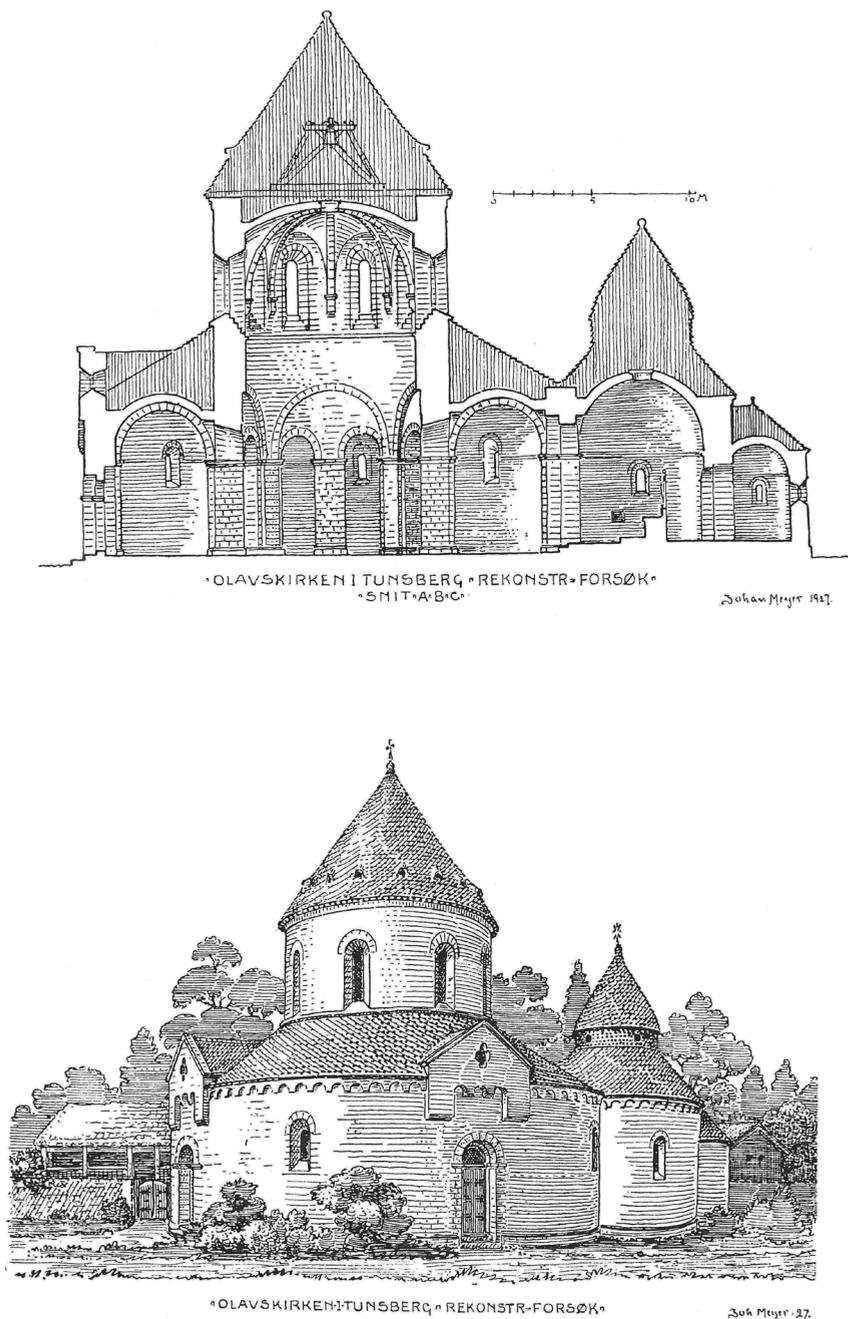


Figure 2. Reconstructed section and perspective of St Olav's Church. Illustration: Architect Johan Meyer, 1927.

History of centralised churches

In 313 AD, the Emperor Constantine the Great recognised Christianity as a legal and official religion in the Roman Empire. Christians could now publicly erect buildings – called churches from Greek *kyriakos* – for their cult and gatherings. The favoured design was the rectangular, aisled basilica, which could hold many people, but churches with a centralised plan, both round and polygonal were also built, especially when centred around the graves and shrines of martyrs. This design was inspired by the mausoleums of the Roman emperors during the third and fourth centuries, for example Diocletian's mausoleum from c. 305 AD in Split (Johnson 2009: 57ff), and it demonstrates a conscious effort to establish the cult of the greatest Christian martyrs and saints in imitation of the cults of the divine emperors.

Constantine erected several centralised churches, for example the 'Golden Octagon' in Antioch, but the most important of these, and the only one which partly survives today, was the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem. It constituted a part of a large building complex consisting of a basilica, a large atrium and the rotunda, as well as many adjacent buildings for the clergy and pilgrims. In the centre of the rotunda, the rock-cut Tomb of Christ was encased in a round or octagonal structure which was surrounded by an arcade supporting a cupola and a lower ambulatory with a gallery and three protruding apsidal chapels (Biddle 1999: 21–28). The rotunda was much restored after the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, and this work was probably completed by 1149 (Pringle 2007: 21). The cupola was replaced by a tall, cone-shaped roof with an oculus, and the raised central room with its pointed roof became a distinguishing feature of the round churches which were built in northern Europe (Pringle 2007: 41).

Most of the round or octagonal churches in northern Europe were built during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and there is little doubt that the Holy Sepulchre Church was the ultimate if indirect inspiration behind their design. Few if any round churches were built after the thirteenth century when the crusades stopped. Some of these churches were also dedicated to the Holy Sepulchre, for example, the so-called Round Church in Cambridge in England. Many of the smaller Danish

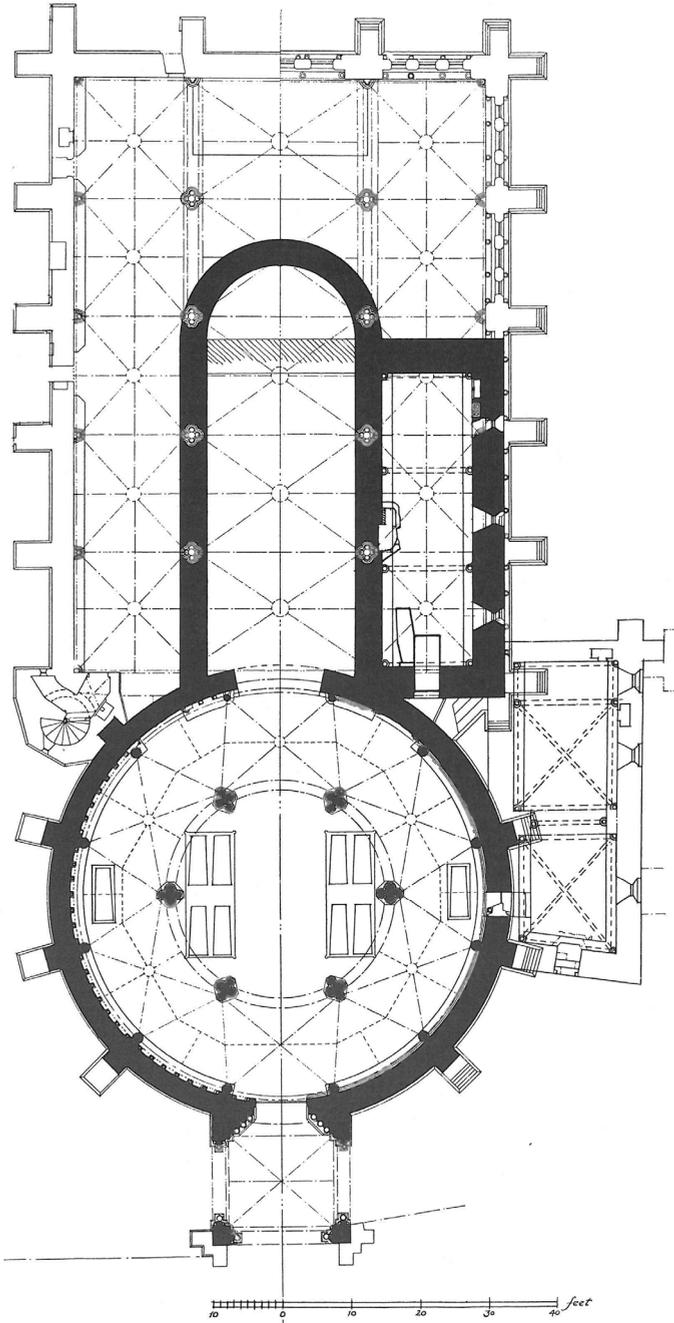


Figure 3. Ground plan of the Temple Church in London, with its original choir (demolished) in black and later additions outlined. Illustration: W. H. Godfrey, *Archaeology* 95 (1953), pl. XLVI; adapted by Jeffrey J. Dean.



Figure 4. The interior of the round nave of the Temple Church with arcade, gallery and clerestory. Photo: Øystein Ekroll.

and Swedish round churches were also erected by people who had participated in crusades, or who intended to do so, or who had crusader connections, one example being the churches built by the Danish magnates known as the Hvide family. Many were built as private chapels on manors and later became parish churches. These churches can thus be viewed as a cultural expression by royals or magnates of ‘conspicuous architecture’, intended to demonstrate their social prestige (Wienberg 2017: 23).

Round churches were also built by the knightly monastic orders that originated in Jerusalem, the Knights Templars and the Knights Hospitallers (the Order of St John). Both orders were founded shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem, and they rapidly established houses in many countries in western Europe, especially in France and England. A minority of these houses had round churches, for example in Paris and London – the round church in London is still preserved and is known as the Temple Church (Jansen 2010: 55). It is worth noticing, however, that the houses in major towns and cities did seem to favour round churches. These complexes were usually situated on the outskirts of, or just outside, the towns and cities, not unlike the situation in Tønsberg.

The Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem

No single church played a greater role in the medieval Christian mind than the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem, which in its centre contained the rock-cut tomb of Christ. From the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great, when the tomb and the rock of Golgotha were miraculously rediscovered under thick layers of backfilled debris, until today, this remains the most important site of pilgrimage in Christendom. During the period from 1099 to 1187, when Jerusalem was in the hands of Western Christians, countless numbers of pilgrims set out to visit this site, and many perished on the road. Those who returned to their homeplace gave friends and family first-hand reports on the wonders they had seen. All brought back some souvenirs, ranging from the costly relics of biblical persons or pieces of the True Cross obtained by kings to some humble dust or rocks from the holy sites brought home by the poorest.

The Holy Sepulchre Church was not just an allegorical or symbolic inspiration for the new churches, but some of its features were also transferred directly to the West. In his seminal paper from 1942, Richard Krautheimer explored the medieval concept of ‘copy’ (Krautheimer 1942). He demonstrated that, in the Middle Ages, buildings that were claimed to be copies of the Holy Sepulchre Church looked nothing like a modern person’s understanding or definition of a copy. To a modern person, two buildings must be virtually indistinguishable for it to be claimed that one is a copy of the other. In the Middle Ages, however, a single common feature sufficed to accept that one building was a copy of another, for example a measurement, a decorative feature or a common ground plan (Krautheimer 1942).

Scholars in the Middle Ages were endlessly fascinated by numbers and geometry, and God was often depicted as a geometer constructing the world by help of a compass. The biblical design of the Heavenly Jerusalem, as described in the visions of the prophet Ezekiel, was studiously analysed, not least during the twelfth century in the Augustinian Abbey of St Victor in Paris, the most important house of the order during the twelfth century (Delano-Smith 2012, 41–77). The third and fourth archbishops of Nidaros, Eirik (1188–1205) and Tore (1206–14), were educated at St Victor and were thus Augustinians, as was probably the second, and most important, archbishop of Nidaros, Øystein Erlendsson (1157–88). When writing in Latin, he used the name Augustin, demonstrating that he identified with the Church Father.¹ As archbishop of Nidaros, Øystein founded two or three Augustinian houses, and the remaining three or four Norwegian houses of this order were also founded during his reign by kings and magnates (Ekroll 2015).

Interestingly, all the most important Christian sites in Crusader Jerusalem were in the hands of canons belonging to the Order of the Augustinians, including the Holy Sepulchre Church (Ekroll 2017; Pringle 2007: 12). This Augustinian connection created a direct link between Jerusalem and the West through which knowledge about buildings and measurements could

¹ Augustin is no translation of Øystein (Old Norse: Eysteinn), but rather an *onomatopoeia*, i.e., it sounds almost identical when spoken with stress on the first syllable.

be transmitted through writing or through the rotation of canons between abbeys, even as far north as Nidaros. The abbey of St Victor in Paris was the obvious centre of gravity in this Augustinian network.

After 1149, the ambulatory of the Holy Sepulchre rotunda was gradually divided by new partition walls into several sections and thus lost its original function. The ambulatory diameter of 34.5m was also far too large to be employed in new churches. The single large space that remained open was the central room of the Rotunda, surrounded by the large arcade and containing in its centre the Tomb of Christ. The easiest measurement to take, and far easier to utilize than the ambulatory diameter, was the diameter across the central room arcade, which is c. 22.5m internally (the inside of the pier bases) and c. 24.5m externally (the outside of the pier bases). These measurements could be taken with a rope, a metal chain, a rod, or simply by pacing the distance. In fact, the diameter of the arcade was about the only measurement possible to take in the cluttered maze of buildings and partition walls which constituted the Holy Sepulchre Church.

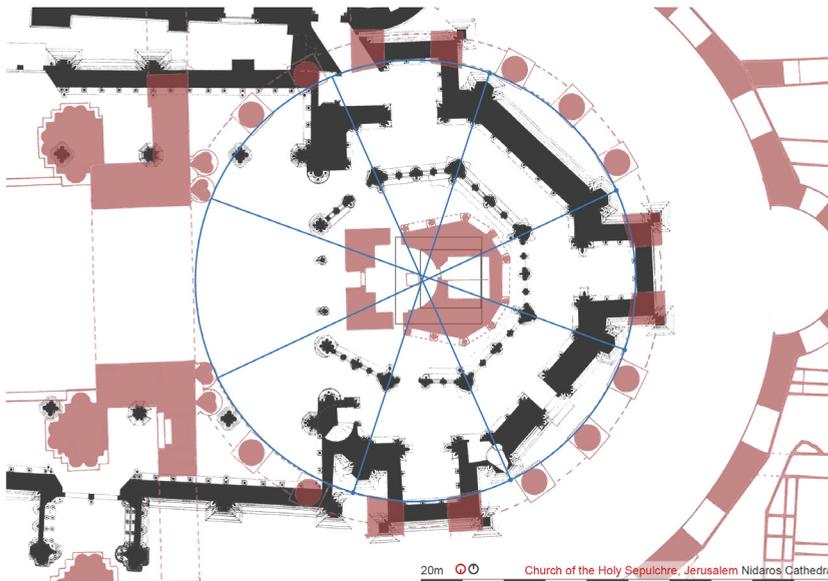


Figure 5. The ground plan of the Nidaros Cathedral octagon (black) interpolated on the ground plan of the Holy Sepulchre Church. Notice that the external diameter of the octagon and the Jerusalem arcade are virtually identical at ground level. Graphics: Samuel B. Feragen.

The internal or external diameter of the arcade bases were clearly measurements which were well known in some circles, especially among the Augustinians. When comparing the plans of the Holy Sepulchre Church with some other churches, such as the Nidaros octagon, the plans clearly converge (Ekroll 2015: 356). When measuring the diameter across the external corners of the octagon, it fits exactly inside the Jerusalem arcade, and the external diameter of the arcade fits with the diameter of the octagon measured across the external walls of the protruding chapels.

Even more importantly, when interpolating the ground plans, the position of the Tomb of Christ and the grave site of St Olav under the main altar of the octagon also converge almost exactly. Both are situated not in the centre of the building but a little off-centre. The external diameter of the octagon corners at ground level also matches very well with the external diameter of the Temple Church in London, which was clearly designed employing the same measurements.

The Nidaros Cathedral octagon

From the time of his canonisation in 1031, St Olav was regarded as a *martyr* who had given his life for Christ, and his martyrdom and Christ-like persona became the central aspect of his cult. When the new metropolitan cathedral of Nidaros was nearing its completion towards the end of the twelfth century, it was decided to literally crown the church with a highly unusual, but most appropriate building around the grave of the saint: an octagon designed to resemble a Late Classical *martyrion*.

For a long time, the Nidaros Cathedral octagon was regarded as the first stage in the major rebuilding of the cathedral in the Gothic style (Fischer 1965: 127–134). New research, however, has shown that the octagon was rather the completion of the Romanesque cathedral and that it was added to the eleventh-century nave which now became the choir of the enlarged cathedral (Ekroll 2015: 113). When completed in c. 1210–1215, the octagon would thus have been visually far more dominant than today, when it is dwarfed by the Gothic choir and the tall central tower. According to

a tradition written down c. 1230 in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, the octagon's altar stands over the grave site of St Olav, and the shrine containing the saint's incorrupt body stood on the altar, directly above the grave (Ekroll 2015: 110; Ekroll 2006: 9–11). It is doubtful whether St Olav was buried on this spot, which is the highest point of the Nidarnes peninsula. The most probable location of the king's original grave is the riverbank south of the cathedral, which consists of sandbanks. Here, near the Elgeseter Bridge, lies a natural water source known since the nineteenth century as 'St Olav's Source'.

The Nidaros octagon consists of a central room containing the high altar, surrounded by a narrow ambulatory with three small rooms or chapels protruding to the north, east and south respectively. There is a narrow portal in the southeast ambulatory wall, and formerly a passage led from the west through a vaulted corridor into the north chapel. The ambulatory begins and ends in the central nave of the choir, and unlike other pilgrimage churches it is not connected to the choir aisles. This would have created a continuous ambulatory providing seamless transfer of people around the saint's shrine. Instead, even today everyone must enter and leave the ambulatory from the central nave of the choir, creating endless practical problems. This proves that the octagon was conceived and built as an addition to the single-nave eleventh-century Christchurch of King Olav the Peaceful (r. 1066–93), not the later Gothic choir, the aisles of which end blindly towards the east.

The external N-S diameter of the octagon at ground level, when measured across the north and south chapels, is 24.7m, and the external diameter of the ambulatory is 19.6m across. The internal diameter of the ambulatory is 14.8m and the central vault reaches a height of 19m above floor level. The start of the building work was traditionally dated to the period after Archbishop Øystein returned from his English exile in 1183. Recent research has suggested that the building work started somewhat later, perhaps around 1200, but this question is still not solved (Ekroll 2015: 31).

There is little doubt that the design of the octagon was inspired by the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem. When comparing the ground plans, the external diameter of the Nidaros ambulatory turns

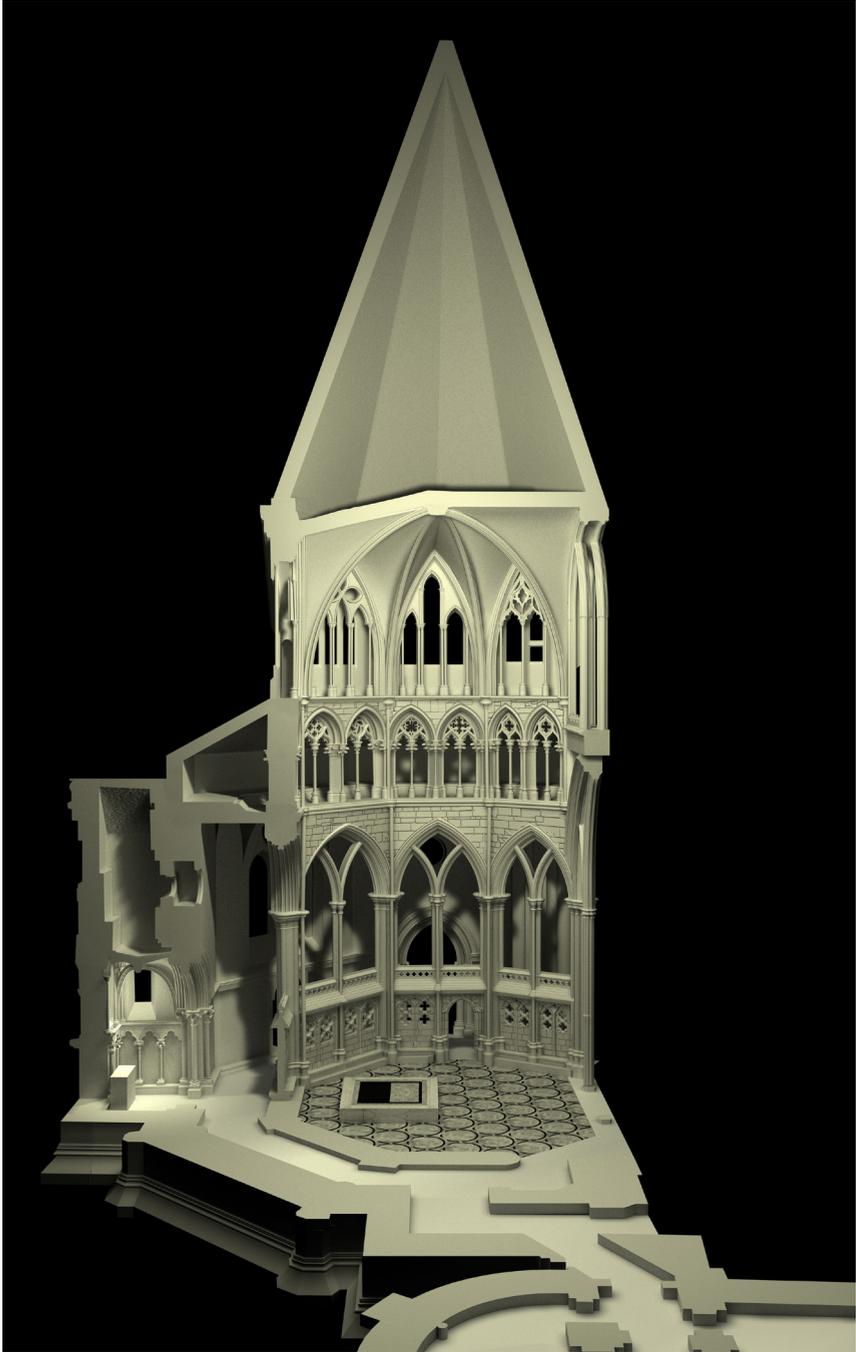


Figure 6. 3D model with section of the Nidaros Cathedral octagon, showing the central room, the ambulatory and the protruding east chapel. Graphics: Nidaros Cathedral Restoration Workshop.

out to be identical with the internal diameter of the central arcade in the Holy Sepulchre Church (Ekroll 2015: 355; Ekroll 2021: 292–96). Also, the position of the altar above the purported grave of St Olav is identical with that of the Tomb of Christ. But why was an octagon and not a rotunda built in Nidaros? One possible answer is that in the twelfth century, the word ‘rotunda’ was used for all centralised churches, be they round, heptagonal, octagonal or decagonal (Ekroll 2015: 353; Wienberg 2017: 4). The design of the Nidaros octagon must also be influenced by the tradition of building octagonal churches in western Europe, beginning with Charlemagne’s palatine chapel in Aachen from c. 800.

Another important connection is that both are *martyrions*, built to visually express to the world that they contained the tombs or graves of martyrs who had given their lives for their faith. A third part of the explanation is another very important building in Jerusalem: The Dome of the Rock (Qubbat as-Sahkra). This Islamic building was built c. 695 and is the most perfect octagon ever built, but the first crusaders believed it was the Temple of Solomon. They converted it into an Augustinian abbey dedicated to St Mary (Pringle 2007: 401). It enjoyed a status on par with the Holy Sepulchre, and the Nidaros octagon appears to be a blend of the measurements and designs from these two most important buildings in Jerusalem in the twelfth century.

No other stone building in Norway, nor, probably, anywhere in Scandinavia, is as richly decorated with stone carvings as the Nidaros octagon. And no other part of the octagon is richer than the ambulatory walls, thanks to the soft but compact steatite (soapstone) used as building material. While the exterior abounds with sculpture, the interior is almost bereft of sculpture during this phase. The rich floral and decorative elements include laurel leaves, acanthus, palmettos, astragals, kymathions and other features borrowed from Late Classical funerary architecture. In comparison, the granite walls of the Round Church in Tønsberg appear stark and austere with their simple wall base mouldings. The lost upper parts of the church may of course have been more richly decorated, but twelfth-century stone architecture in south-eastern Norway generally contains little stone sculpture. Portals and capitals are, on the other hand, often richly moulded.

Other Scandinavian octagons

The Nidaros octagon is the only certain Nordic martyrion church. The shrines of the two other Nordic royal martyred saints, King Erik of Sweden and King Knud of Denmark, were kept in churches with more traditional designs in Uppsala and Odense respectively. These churches were built close to, but not on the sites of their martyrdom. On these sites, small churches or chapels of traditional design were built.

At Stiklestad, a church was built over the death site of St Olav, with its altar incorporating the bloodied rock on which the dying king leaned. Likewise, an apsed church was erected at Haraldsted Forest where St Knud Lavard was murdered in 1131, and a small chapel was built on the site of Finderup Barn in which King Erik Klipping was murdered in 1286. The relics of all other Scandinavian martyr saints were also moved from their burial place to churches when they were enshrined.

Only two other churches with octagonal naves are known in Scandinavia, Store Heddinge on Zealand and the Holy Spirit Church in Visby on Gotland. The design of both churches is closely related, but their connection is still unexplained. Store Heddinge Church was probably a royal foundation and was built c. 1200, but little is known about its function and history. It is dedicated to St Catherine.² The rectangular choir has two storeys, and in the corners behind the internal apse lie small chambers on two levels. The nave measures externally 21.6m and internally 17.1m across, and it had an ambulatory surrounding a raised, octagonal central room supported by eight piers. The central room had a clerestory with windows and a tall, pointed roof. After a fire in the 1670s, the central room was demolished and the whole nave was covered by a single conical roof.

The early history of the Visby church is even less known. Its dedication to the Holy Spirit is probably secondary, when it became the church of a hospital, but its original dedication and purpose is uncertain even though St Jacob/James is a possibility (Bohrn & Svahnström 1981: 95). It was probably founded c. 1200 and completed by c. 1250 (Bohrn & Svahnström 1981: 61–63). Like Store Heddinge, the rectangular choir has small corner

2 *Danmarks Kirker VI: Præsto amt*. Available online: <http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/praestoe/store-heddinge-kirke/>.

chambers behind the internal apse. The nave measures externally 17.9m and internally 14.1m across, and it has two storeys each supported by four sturdy piers with an octagonal oculus in the floor between the upper and lower storey, thus connecting them visually and aurally. The nave wall had eight gables, and possibly a small central turret with a pointed roof, which would create a visual similarity with the Nidaros octagon. During the Late Middle Ages, the tower and the upper parts of the gables were removed and the whole nave was covered by a conical roof (Bohrn & Svahnström 1981: 32–48).

While these two octagons certainly have some kind of connection with the Nidaros octagon, the Round Church of Tønsberg seems to be more closely connected with the other round churches built in western Europe after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. There is little doubt that it predates the Nidaros octagon and the two other octagons. Like some of these churches, its dimensions point towards an ultimate but indirect inspiration from Jerusalem.

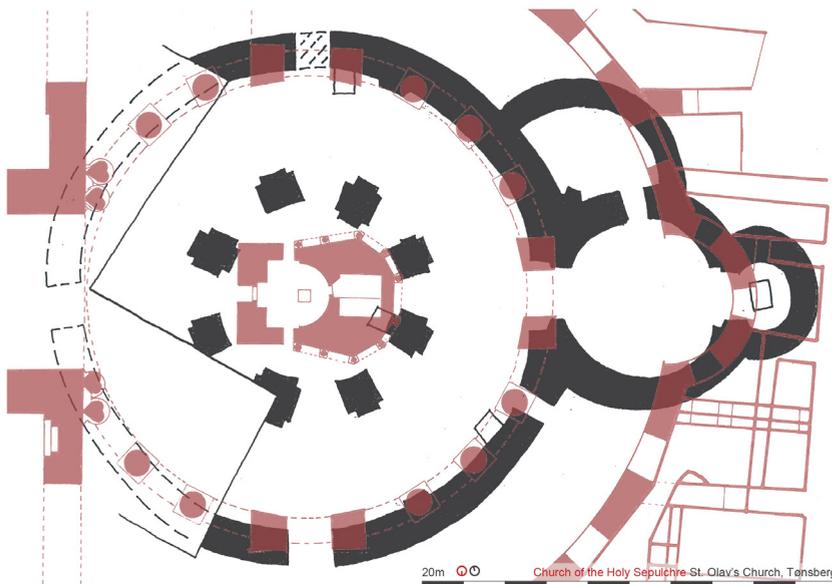


Figure 7. The ground plan of St Olav's Church in Tønsberg (black) interpolated on the ground plan of the Holy Sepulchre Church (red). Notice that the diameter of the Tønsberg nave and the Jerusalem arcade are almost identical, and that the Tønsberg choir fits into the apse of the Jerusalem ambulatory. The Tomb of Christ would fit exactly into the central room of the nave. Graphics: Samuel B. Feragen.

This brings us into uncharted territory. Several older authors have suggested that Earl Erling Skakke was the man behind the construction of the Tønsberg church, but, while this is possible, there is no substantial evidence to support this hypothesis (Bugge 1932; Bugge 1933: 222–223). Erling led a fleet of Norse and Orcadian crusaders, including a bishop, to the Holy Land in 1152–55, visiting Jerusalem and bathing in the River Jordan, so he and his followers gained first-hand knowledge about the monuments in Jerusalem (Svenungsen 2021: 95–131).

King Valdemar the Great of Denmark (1131–1182) laid claim to the part of Norway – Viken – which is situated on each side of the Oslo Fjord (Svandal 2010). In 1170, Earl Erling Skakke accepted King Valdemar as the lord of Viken, became his earl and received the area as a fief (Helle 2000). Earl Erling and King Valdemar are also closely connected with the foundation of the abbey and hospital of the Knights Hospitaller at Værne (ON Varna) in Østfold on the east side of the Oslo Fjord in the 1170s.

Could a similar foundation be envisaged on the west side of the Oslo Fjord? If the Tønsberg church was built after 1170, then, as rulers of the region, Earl Erling and King Valdemar would surely have been involved in this project. Round churches are connected to both Knights Hospitallers and Knights Templars, not least in England (Jansen 2010: 55). King Valdemar was closely connected to the powerful Hvide family whose member Sune Ebbesen built the round church at Bjernede on Zealand, which was completed before his death in 1176 (Frölen 1911: 128–129). Much restored, it now appears as a rotunda with a conical roof with a small turret.

Sune Ebbesen was the first cousin of Archbishop Absalon of Lund and of Esbern Snare, and in c. 1220 Esbern's daughter Ingeborg and her husband Peter Strangesen built the magnificent Kalundborg Church on Zealand with a ground plan like a Greek cross surmounted by five octagonal towers.³ This family was closely connected with the crusades, albeit in the Baltic Sea region and not in the Holy Land.

3 Kalundborg Vor Frues kirke. In *Danmarks Kirker IV: Holbæk amt* (p. 3099). Available online: <http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/holbaek/vor-frue-kirke/> Jørgensen & Johannsen 1979–2001. Online edition visited 25.11.2017.

It is difficult not to see the proliferation of round and octagonal churches in South Scandinavia in the late twelfth century as a mental expression of the crusading idea which during this period was popular with the monarchy and the magnate class. Several authors have suggested that St Olav's Church in Tønsberg was inspired by the Holy Sepulchre Church, e.g., Gerhard Fischer in 1928, or by the churches of the Knight Templars (Wienberg 1991: 42; Lidén 1981: 30–32).

When reading the short description of Tønsberg in 1191 in *Historia de Profectio Danorum in Hierosolymam*, the arrangement with the Premonstratensians living in the town while being supported by the income of St Michael's Church on the Castle Hill looks spurious. These two churches are situated at opposite ends of the town, separated by a distance of c. 700m as the crow flies. If the canons served both churches, it meant crossing the town very often and ascending and descending the steep hill. The castle and its church belonged to the king, so royal permission for this arrangement is evident. This could have happened during the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson (1161–84), son of Earl Erling, both of whom had close relations to Archbishop Øystein of Nidaros. In 1533, the bishop of Oslo claimed that the abbey – not necessarily the *church* – was founded by his ancestors, i.e., the bishops of Oslo (DN X: 667). This could have been the little-known Bishop Helge (1170–90) or the infamous Bishop Nikolas Arnesson (1190–1225).

Most authors have taken it for granted that in 1191 the canons had received the Church of St Olav as their abode, and there is no reason to question this conclusion. On the other hand, it was highly impractical to situate the monastic community permanently next to St Michael's Church inside the royal castle on the Castle Hill, hence this strange arrangement. No trace of monastic buildings has been found attached to St Michael's Church, but its choir was extended in the thirteenth or fourteenth century with a vestry on the north side.

It means, however, that the Church of St Olav was some kind of 'white elephant', which seemingly did not yet own enough land to support a community of canons -- instead, they had to rely on the income of St Michael's Church for their sustenance. In the Late Middle Ages, the abbey became very wealthy, and by 1399 it owned 209 farms (Lange

1856: 451), so when was it endowed with so much land and by whom? Were the original foundation donations for both churches combined into one? But who gave these two churches to the canons and had the authority to do so? We must clearly look to the highest authorities, either the Church or the monarchy. At least five of the six Augustinian houses in medieval Norway were founded by Archbishop Øystein and Earl Erling Skakke in the period 1160–90. Earl Erling was the *de facto* ruler of Norway 1161–79 through his young son King Magnus, and the archbishop and he enjoyed a cosy relationship with mutual benefits. Tønsberg lacked a monastery, and with the foundation of St Olav's Abbey the town clergy at least doubled in size. The archbishop provided the clerics, and the earl donated royal property for the foundation of the abbey.

But why was St Olav's Church built at all, situated outside the built-up area of the town, without a solid economic foundation and seemingly also without a clear purpose? What was its intended function? In my view, it seems highly improbable that this church was specially built for the Premonstratensians, but that they were given a church which had lost the purpose for which it was originally conceived, perhaps before it was even completed.

St Olav's Church in Tønsberg is the largest of all the Scandinavian round churches. Its nave is even wider than the Knight Templars churches in London and Paris (Ekroll 2015: figs. 168 & 169) and equal in size to the nave of the Knights Hospitallers church at Clerkenwell in London. These churches had, however, rectangular choirs providing space for the knights/monks (Jansen 2010: fig. 4). They were much larger than the round Tønsberg choir, which is very small for a monastic church, even when including its tiny apse. There was hardly room for stalls for the canons in the cramped choir, and these were probably placed in the central room of the nave which gave a direct view to the main altar.

Another interesting question is why the choir was not extended or rebuilt during the monastic period? The abbey became wealthy and could surely have afforded a new square or rectangular choir with ample room for the canons and their stalls. During the second half of the thirteenth century or later, all the other Romanesque churches in Tønsberg (St Peter's, St Lawrence's, and St Michael's) were extended with

larger Gothic choirs (Wienberg 1991: 21, 25, 29, 31). So why was the choir of St Olav's Church not extended? Was perhaps the number of canons so small that the old choir in St Olav's Church sufficed? Or was the old arrangement of choir stalls deemed sufficient?

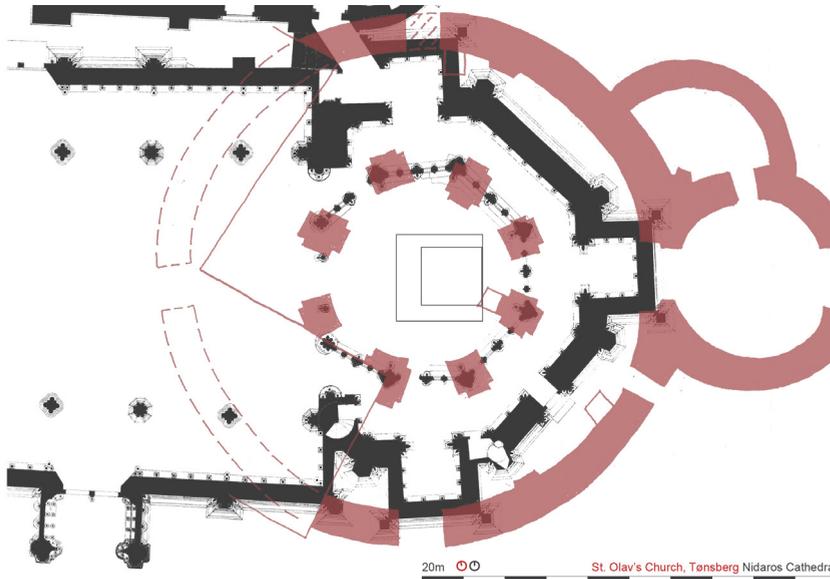


Figure 8. The ground plan of the Nidaros Cathedral octagon (black) interpolated on the ground plan of St Olav's Church in Tønsberg (red). Notice that the external diameters of the two buildings at ground level is virtually identical. Graphics: Samuel B. Feragen.

Summing up

There remain many unanswered questions in connection with the Round Church in Tønsberg. It is the largest round church in Scandinavia and its nave is equal in size to the largest round churches in England and France. It dates to before 1207 and was probably in existence by 1191. Its dedication to the royal martyr St Olav suggests a parallel to the octagon surrounding the grave and shrine of St Olav in Nidaros, but the Round Church is probably older. It constitutes a part of a group of round and octagonal churches built in Scandinavia during the second half of the twelfth and the first decades of the thirteenth century. The ultimate inspiration for these churches were the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem

and its imitations in the West. During the Crusader period, the interest in the Holy Land was strong in Scandinavia, and the Nidaros Cathedral Octagon is the best example of this interest. The historical circumstances behind and around the construction of the Round Church are still blurred, but a connection with the Knights Hospitaller at Varna, King Valdemar of Denmark, and Earl Erling Skakke is suggested. The use of the church as a royal burial church in 1207 also attests to a special bond between the monarchy and this church.

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Jerusalem in Tønsberg. Round Churches and Storytelling

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Discovery

Remains of a medieval church were discovered in Tønsberg in Norway in 1877–78, when construction on a new house began. The identity of the church was easily determined as the Premonstratensian monastery church of St Olav. However, the unusual form and size of the church was a puzzling surprise. The remains revealed the largest Romanesque round church in Scandinavia, 27m in external and 23m in internal diameter, and the basilical nave had 8 central piers (fig. 1).

Round churches are frequently perceived as enigmatic because of their unusual architecture. Both still-standing and ruined round churches therefore attract great attention both from professionals and laypeople. Questions are asked and theories are put forward concerning their dating, their function, their social context, type of church chosen and if there was an overall plan. When professionals cannot answer these questions the Knights Templar are free to ride onto the stage and with them the search for secret geometry and hidden treasure.

The aim of this article is to comment critically on the stories we create to explain the round churches, and to present my own view that round churches in general and the church in Tønsberg in particular are not mysterious.

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Figure 1. Round church of Saint Olav in Tønsberg, Norway. Photo: Jes Wienberg.

St Olav's Church in Tønsberg

Since its discovery the architecture, history and property of St Olav's church and monastery in Tønsberg have been described several times. Most of this is uncontroversial information.¹ The controversies take off in a number of competitive interpretations of the function and reconstruction of the round church, on its dating, and on the identification of the initiators and their motives.

St Olav's in Tønsberg has been interpreted and reconstructed as a fortified church several times, often seen as inspired by churches on Bornholm. The art historian Anders Bugge presented, in an article, the church as fortified, where it was drawn with two floors and crenellation by the architect

¹ E.g. Frølen 1910–11: II, 11–15; Johnsen 1929: 206–232; Lunde 1971; Lunde 1993; Wienberg 1991: 38–45, 94–97, 108–111. After this article was written, relevant studies have been published that it was not possible to include in the discussion here. These include Kersti Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region, 1100–1250* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) and Jan Brendalsmo, *Tønsberg i middelalderen: Kirker, klostre, hospitaler og bispegård* (Oslo: Novus, 2021).

Harald Sund (fig. 2; Bugge 1932). The possibility of a fortified church was also suggested by the medieval archaeologist Øivind Lunde, who perceived its localisation as ‘strategic’ near the entrance to the town from the east (Lunde 1971: 73; Lunde in this volume). The advertising expert Harald Sommerfeldt Boehlke wrote that the church might have been fortified, and drew a building with four floors, with a cross-section reminiscent of the structure of Østerlars on Bornholm (2000: 65–68; 2007: 87 fig. 14). The society ‘Rundkirkens Venner’ (Friends of the Round Church) has released a leaflet with a photomontage made by the illustrator Morten Myklebust, where the round church of St Olav on Bornholm is relocated to present-day Tønsberg.² This choice again of a model from Bornholm is made despite this church on Bornholm having a diameter of only about 14m, half the size of the nave in Tønsberg, and a structure with three floors resting on a central pillar. Most recently, a model in bronze (fig. 3) was unveiled at the ruin in 2015, where the church is presented as a copy of Nylars round church on Bornholm, again a church with three floors resting on a central pillar.

To relate St Olav’s in Tønsberg to the crusades is tempting, as a famous chronicle, *Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam* (‘The history of the journey by the Danes to Jerusalem’) described a rather unsuccessful expedition by Norwegians and Danes passing the town; when they finally arrived in Jerusalem, which had fallen in 1187, it was too late to take part in any fighting. The chronicle was written by a canon ‘X’ in the 1190s, probably in the Premonstratensian monastery.³

The round church of Tønsberg has been interpreted as a copy of, or as being inspired by, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The architect Johan Meyer drew the round church as a copy of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge (Johnsen 1929: 211–212), but more recently the medieval archaeologist Øystein Ekroll has pointed to the inner diameter as a reference to Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (2015: 339–340).

The round church of St Olav’s in Tønsberg must have been built at the latest in 1207, when King Erling Magnusson Steinvegg died in Tønsberg

2 ‘Rundkirken i Tønsberg’ at www.rundkirken.no.

3 *Scriptores Minores*, II, pp. 457–492; *Kroniker*, pp. 117–175; Skovgaard-Petersen 2001; Svenungsen 2016: 105–114. On this chronicle, see Skovgaard-Petersen in this volume, and on the written sources as evidence for dating, see Bandlien in this volume.

and was buried in the ‘stonewall’ near the altar of the church according to the *Baglar saga* (*Eirspennill*, p. 457). However, it might have been built earlier, since a monastery Munkelif (‘Monk life’) was mentioned in 1190 (*Sverris saga*, p. 121 (ch. 115), and according to the crusader chronicle the church of St Michael at the (later Castle) Mount was supporting Premonstratensian canons in the town in 1191 (*Scriptores Minores*, II, 473–474; *Krøniker*, pp. 145–146).

It has been suggested by Anders Bugge and Øivind Lunde that the round church was built in the period c. 1160–80 by Earl Erling Ormsson Skakke (d. 1179) and his son King Magnus Erlingsson (d. 1184), to legitimize his rule in Viken; the kingdom was taken as a fief of St Olav’s at the coronation in 1163 (Bugge 1932: 88–92; Lunde 1993: 15–16; also Ekroll 1997: 169–170). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the round church might not have been a monastery church from the beginning, as a stone building has a different alignment from the church (Lunde 1993: 20; also Rasmussen 1968: 552).

Since the nineteenth century it has been presented as a fact that the Knights Templar erected round or polygonal churches (e.g. Frölén 1910–11: I, 11–15; Krautheimer 1942: 21; Ödman 2005: 118–136). In line with this the Norwegian art historian Hans-Emil Lidén wrote in his *Norges kunsthistorie* (Norwegian Art History) that the church of Tønsberg resembled the churches of the Knights Templar (Lidén 1981: 30–32). Øivind Lunde noted that both the Temple Church in London and Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge were built by the Knights Templar (Lunde 1993: 12–13).

Finally, Harald Sommerstedt Boehlke has in his book *Det norske Pentagram* (‘The Norwegian Pentagram’), and later also in *The Viking Serpent*, claimed that there was a sacred geometry with lines stretching from Orkney to Gotland, including a line from Trondheim to Tønsberg; the round church of Tønsberg is also reconstructed in a drawing as a copy of the Temple Church in London (Boehlke 2000: 65; 2007: 86 fig. 12).

To summarize, we have several interpretations, scientific and/or alternative, but we do not know for sure when precisely the round church was built, if it was a monastery church from the beginning, the identity of the initiator(s) or why it was built at all. Do these questions and uncertainties turn St Olav’s in Tønsberg into an enigma? No! This is a normal situation concerning medieval churches in Scandinavia.

Now let us look more closely into the main stories behind the interpretation of St Olav's in Tønsberg and other round churches.

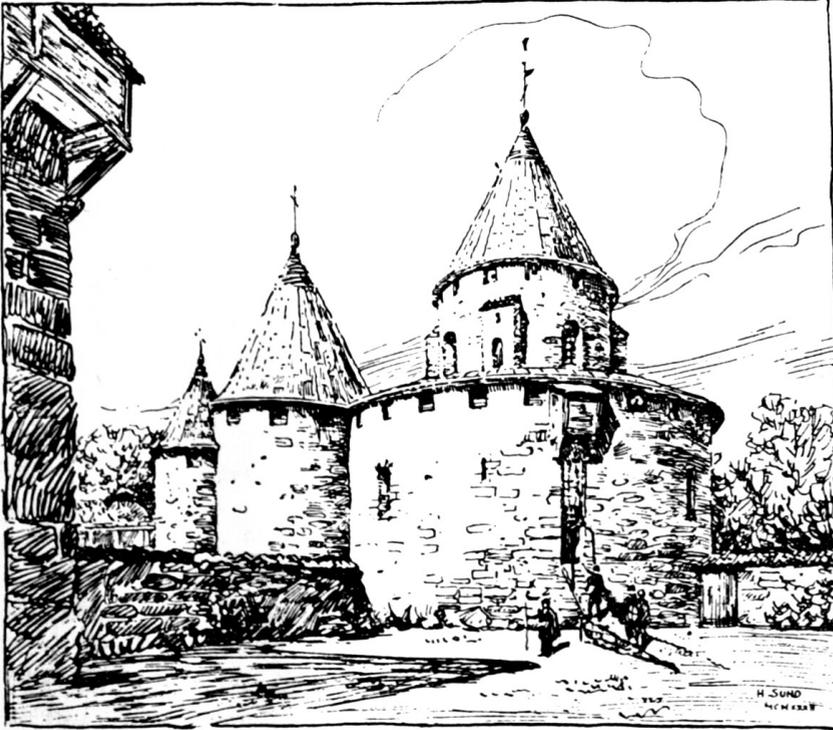


Figure 2. Reconstruction of Saint Olav's in Tønsberg as a fortified church by Harald Sund. Illustration: Harald Sund.

Castles of God

The idea of a group of fortified or defensive churches in Scandinavia goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Churches on Öland in Sweden were described in 1634 as constructed for both worship and defence (Boström 1966: 61, 70–72). And the round churches on Bornholm were described in 1756 as citadels or fortified towers, where the population might take refuge and hide their treasures from pirates and enemies – and from where they themselves might plunder others (Thurah 1756: 52; cf. Wienberg 2004: 36).

The concept of defensive churches developed in the nineteenth century and culminated in the decades around 1900, i.e. in a period when land-based fortifications were a subject of political debate. This was the context for the art historian Hugo F. Frölén, who interpreted all round churches as fortified in his ground-breaking two-volume dissertation *Nordens befästa rundkyrkor* ('The Fortified Round Churches of Scandinavia' Frölén 1910–11). The idea that many churches were fortified was, in fact, strongly challenged even when it was at its most popular, particularly by scholars who pointed out that churches were unconvincing as defensive units compared to contemporary castles (e.g. Blom 1895; Mowinckel 1928), but it was difficult to dislodge. The concept of defensive churches remained popular through the twentieth century (Wienberg 2004). It was simply a good story to tell.



Figure 3. Model of Saint Olav's in Tønsberg as a copy of Nylars on Bornholm. Photo: Jes Wienberg.

The idea of what has been called ‘Castles of God’ is not at all an exclusively Scandinavian phenomenon, but an international one, with the best examples being the fortified churches of Transylvania in present-day Romania. Here there is no doubt that they actually were fortified (Harrison 2004; Fabini 2010).

The popularity of fortified or defensive churches seems to follow ideological conjunctures over time. The idea that many churches were fortified was, in fact, strongly challenged even when it was at its most popular, particularly by scholars who pointed out that churches were unconvincing as defensive units compared to contemporary castles. Instead, the churches in the Baltic Sea region with upper floors were interpreted as being equipped for storage for commodities or items paid as taxes, as rooms for accommodation or meetings. New concepts were introduced – merchant churches, churches with secular functions, storage churches and multi-functional churches (Anglert 1993: 164; Wienberg 2004: 38–41).

The downplaying of the defensive church took place despite the tension of the Cold War, with an Iron Curtain down through Europe and hot wars in, for example, Korea and Vietnam. At the present time, when Scandinavian countries are participating in ‘peacekeeping’ abroad, the concept of defensive churches has been revived, with church towers and churchyards been again interpreted as fortified (e.g. Bertelsen in *Danmarks Kirker IX*: 23–24, 2256–2262; Skov 2010). Maybe we have been too naïve in the modern West, ignoring the importance of conflicts in both the present and past (cf. Keeley 1996; Bornfalck Back 2016).

The recurrent core examples of the stories about fortification or defence are the four round churches of Bornholm; every year more than 100,000 tourists visit Østerlars (fig. 4), the largest of them. However, the churches on Bornholm are not representative for Scandinavia. They belong to a certain type of multi-functional churches with several floors, most common close to the Baltic Sea. The four round churches on Bornholm happen to be well preserved because of the relative poverty of the island during the Late Middle Ages, whereas the majority of the eight round churches on Zealand disappeared during Gothic rebuilds (Wienberg 2002: 184–186; 2014: 212–213).



Figure 4. The church of Østerlars on Bornholm, Denmark. Photo: Jes Wienberg.

Round churches and crusades

From written sources it is documented that medieval round churches in Europe were perceived as copies of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (fig. 5) and in a number of cases were erected by returning crusaders as a kind of memorial – for example in Senlis in France, in Northampton in England and in Eichstätt in Bavaria (e.g. Krautheimer 1942; Kroesen 2000: 12–43; Morris 2005: 223, 230–245; Krüger 2006: 66). The round church as a memorial might be compared to returning Vikings erecting rune stones mentioning distant expeditions or pilgrimages – for example, in Täby in Sweden, Estrid erected a rune stone in memory of her husband Östen, who went to Jerusalem but died in ‘Greece’, i.e. in Byzantium (*Sveriges runinskrifter* VI: Uppland 136).

An incisive example of this view is to be found in Frölén:



Figure 5. Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Photo: Solveig Borgehammar.

By erecting in his homeland a copy of the Holy Sepulchre he might not only receive a confirmation of an already achieved indulgence, but, what was more important, he himself could rest and receive his death masses in a building which – however smaller and simpler – might be said to depict the Holy Sepulchre of Christ himself. However, other motives might have played a part as well. By erecting such a memorial at home an abbot or knight could in the best way strengthen his personal reputation and consolidate the memory of his journey. (Frölen 1910–11: I, 8)

When research into crusades was revived from the 1970s and the definition was broadened to include expeditions in the Baltic Sea and the Iberian Peninsula (cf. Jensen 2000a; Lind et al. 2004), this also renewed the interest in Scandinavian round churches. Thus the round church of Valleberga in Scania (fig. 6) was suggested to have been erected by a crusader not returning from Jerusalem, but from a Northern Crusade (Andrén 1989). Upper storeys in churches were now interpreted as space



Figure 6. The church of Valleberga in Scania, Sweden. Photo: Martin Hansson.

used as accommodation for travelling knights or pilgrims, for meetings in the Canute Guilds or storage of equipment used in the crusades (cf. Wienberg 2004: 38–40, 43–44).

An example of the renewed interest in the Baltic Crusades can be seen in the work of the journalist Jan Eskildsen. He proposes that the round churches on Bornholm and at Kalmar might be dated to the 1120–30s and could have been built as a consequence of the so-called Kalmar expedition, a crusade in 1123 by King Niels of Denmark (he did not show up), King Sigurd Magnusson, the Crusader of Norway, and Duke Boleslaw III of Poland to christianize Småland in Sweden. Poland is known to have had many minor round churches. Eskildsen is inspired by the studies of Scandinavian-Polish connections conducted by the art historian Evert Wrangel back in the 1930s, which was interrupted by World War II. He even finds that round churches were built on land in Sweden belonging to the Danish King Valdemar II (Eskildsen 2014: 77–109, 155–157 with fig. p. 84; cf. Wrangel 1933; 1935; Krambs 2014).

Recently I have rejected the idea by Frölén and others to narrow down the initiative of round churches to returning crusaders. Many possible

church builders actually participated in the crusades. However, an example from Paderborn in Germany demonstrates a need for a more open quest for initiators and their motives. Thus the Bishop of Paderborn, Heinrich II of Werle, was persuaded to erect a round church in Krukenberg in 1126 instead of going on a planned pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Morris 2005: 232–233). I have therefore interpreted the round church as a conspicuous, but at the same time ambiguous, symbol of the crusader ideology (Wienberg 2014: 226–231; cf. Jensen 2000b: 62–65): ‘Look, I, the church initiator, have already been to Jerusalem or another similar destination, I intend to go soon, I would go if only it was possible – or I support the whole idea of crusades.’

The latest contribution by the art historian Kersti Markus is in line with the crusader perspective. Markus perceives the round churches as a ‘visual culture’ in the context of the Danish crusader kingdom during the Valdemarian rule. From written sources, types of churches, choice of building material, iconographic interpretation and the social and historical context she writes a story with a more precise chronology than seen before, relating individual churches to named kings, (arch)bishops and the aristocratic Hvide clan – and also relating the round churches to political and ecclesiastical development. The Danish round churches are all framed into three main periods: 1) the 1120s with the two-cell round churches of Schleswig (phase 1) and Roskilde influenced by the Polish Piast dynasty; 2) the years 1171–74 when there was cooperation between King Valdemar I and Archbishop Eskil – i.e. after Eskil’s visit to Jerusalem and before he went into exile – Schleswig (phase 2) and the majority of round churches on Zealand e.g. Bjernede (phase 1 in stone); 3) Around 1200, i.e. after the fall of Jerusalem, a number of round churches are built in brick, e.g. Thorsager, Bjernede (phase 2) and also the five-tower cruciform church of Kalundborg by Esbern Snare (d. 1204). The four round churches of Bornholm are given a relative chronology starting with Østerlars c. 1150 in the context of a local manor, then St Olav’s as a fortified round church together with the nearby castle of Hammershus on the initiative of Archbishop Absalon of Lund (d. 1201), finally Nylars (fig. 7) and Nyker after c. 1200. Absalon and his brother Esbern Snare might have been inspired in their building by a visit to the octagonal chapel in Trondheim in 1188 (Markus 2015).



Figure 7. The church of Nylars on Bornholm, Denmark. Photo: Jes Wienberg.

Round churches and the Knights Templar

When mentioning crusades it is difficult to avoid the Knights Templar, who have achieved a special position in history, and in popular and alternative culture as medieval knights of great power and deep secrets. Nor is it a coincidence that the final scenes of Dan Brown's novel, later turned into a movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, were located in the round Temple Church in London (Brown 2003). Nor is it a coincidence that a Norwegian terrorist in 2011 identified himself as a crusader and Knight Templar. We are here dealing with an apparently innocent and entertaining genre of 'invented history' filled with conspiracies and esoteric speculations with deep roots in a radical political environment (Andersen 2006: 57–87).

Where the Knights Templar appear in popular and alternative culture they are often related to postulated sacred geometries and secrets. Thus the journalist Erling Haagenen has, in books, websites and movies, some of them together with the author Henry Lincoln, promoted the round churches on Bornholm as built by the Knights Templar. The churches are

supposed to have been located according to a complicated sacred geometry and to have hidden the secrets of the Holy Grail or Templar documents. The churches are interpreted as observatories used by the Templars to measure the circumference of the Earth (e.g. Haagensen & Lincoln 2000).

However, except for a few cases, the Knights Templar did *not* erect round or polygonal churches. The idea that they did is a factoid wrongly repeated again and again, as pointed out by several people – seemingly in vain (Götz 1968: 289–98; Untermann 1989: 77–81; Naredi-Rainer 1994: 116–137; Morris 2005: 235; Eskildsen 2014: 111–158). An example of these far-fetched claims is the belief that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge was built by three men united in a religious fraternity (Morris 2005: 232–233). And there are no clues whatsoever of any Knights Templar ever having been on Bornholm (Wienberg 2002) – and no clues of their presence in Tønsberg either.

Now let us look more closely at my view of Scandinavian round churches, at St Olav's in Tønsberg in particular, and at storytelling in general.

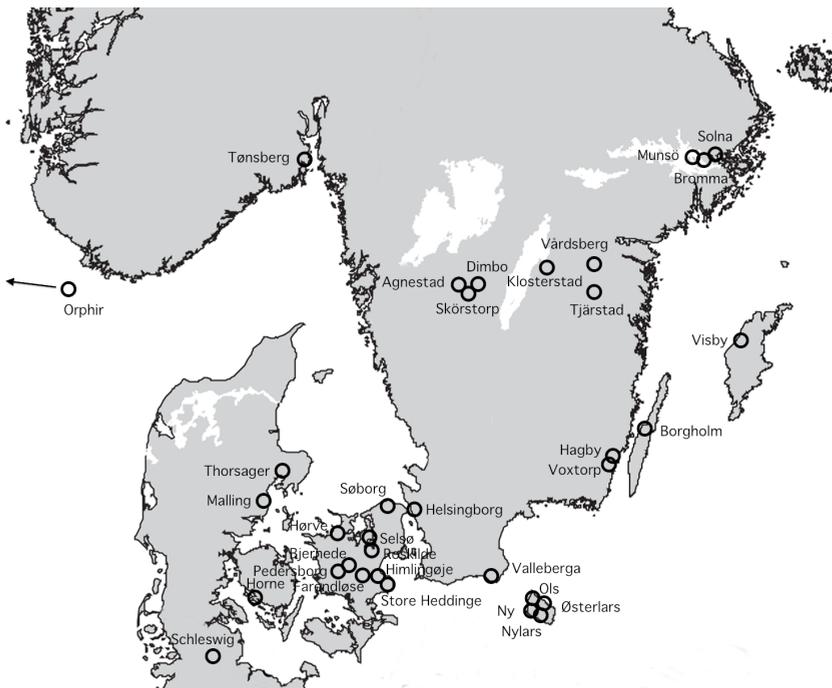


Figure 8. Overview of the medieval round churches of Scandinavia. Map: Jes Wienberg.

Round churches - rare, but normal

The round churches in Scandinavia are exclusively few. According to my present survey covering medieval Scandinavia, and including churches with octagonal naves, 34 round churches (fig. 8) are documented. More round churches will be discovered, as happened in Tønsberg in 1877–78 and most recently in Klåstad (fig. 9) in Östergötland in Sweden in 1997 (cf. Hedvall 2007), although the number cannot change dramatically in the future. Thirty-four round churches represent only 0.8 % out of roughly 4400 medieval stone churches in the region (Wienberg 2014: 209–213). Almost the same relationship can be seen in the occurrence of round tower churches, where 16 or 3.8 % are known in a population of about 420 Romanesque church towers in medieval Denmark (Wienberg 2009; cf. Wienberg 1993: 103–104).

The round churches are very few in number, but they are normal in most other respects. When the patron saints are known, they do not deviate from the choice at other medieval churches in Scandinavia – All Saints, Holy Cross, Holy Spirit, James, Lawrence, Martin, Mary, Michael, Nicholas, Olav, Paul and Peter; none of the Scandinavian round churches are known to have been dedicated to the Holy Sepulchre (Wienberg 2014: 210).

The size and architecture of the round churches varied from the tiny two-cell church at Orphir in Orkney up to the large basilical round church in Tønsberg. The round churches did not deviate from the regional building tradition, whether the churches were normal with one floor, or adhered to a tradition of two or three floors or even a tradition with fortifications as in the Baltic Sea (Wienberg 2014: 213–215).

Their function varied from castle chapels, such as St Michael's in Helsingborg, to parish churches, such as Hagby in Småland, and the monastery churches – the Benedictine St Michael's in Schleswig and the Premonstratensian St Olav's in Tønsberg (Wienberg 2014).

The round churches in Scandinavia are all Romanesque from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but it is only possible to date a handful more precisely, namely Schleswig in Jutland before c. 1140, Bjernede on Zealand 1151–86 and Tønsberg before 1207 (written sources), Nylars on Bornholm after 1202 (coin under main altar), Solna in Uppland 1195–96 (dendrochronology) and Voxtorp (fig. 10) in Småland after 1241 (dendrochronology, maybe of a second phase). However, all these dates can be



Figure 9. The excavation of the round church of Klåstad in Östergötland, Sweden.
Photo: Rikard Hedvall.



Figure 10. The church of Voxtorp in Småland, Sweden. Photo: Jes Wienberg.

and have been disputed (Wienberg 2014: 215–218; Bonnier 2018: 70; also Beseler 1985: 71–72).

Finally, from written sources and the local context of runic stones, so-called Eskilstuna monuments, medieval manors or castles, it is probable that round churches were erected by an elite of kings, earls, bishops and noblemen/women, of whom at least some had experiences of crusades in the Baltic or the Mediterranean (Wienberg 2014: 218–221). However, this is no new or surprising observation (e.g. Frölén 1910–11: I, 136–137; Johannsen & Smidt 1981: 53–61; Nilsson 1994: 42–43).

To summarize, the Scandinavian round churches were ‘normal’ apart from their elite context and for being round. So why, then, did the elite erect this rare architecture?

Conspicuous round churches

The round churches can be described as a ‘conspicuous architecture’ (cf. Wienberg 2014). They were conspicuous in their medieval presence

and are conspicuous today. They were meant to attract attention – and they still do. The medieval elite of kings, earls, bishops and noblemen/women chose to erect a conspicuous architecture in their mutual rivalry for status (cf. Johannsen & Smidt 1981: 53) – or to keep the necessary ‘distinction’ from others (cf. Bourdieu 1979).

The concept of ‘conspicuous architecture’ is inspired by the sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who introduced the concept of ‘conspicuous consumption’ to describe the lifestyle of the American upper class (Veblen 1899). This concept by Veblen has already been used by archaeologists, for example by Bruce G. Trigger to understand monumental architecture and by Jan Brendalsmo to explain the elitist church building of medieval Trøndelag (Trigger 1990; Brendalsmo 2006: 24–28). Shortly afterwards I also used the concept to understand the Romanesque round church towers of Scandinavia (Wienberg 2009: 110–111).

The round churches occurred where the presence of the elite was dense, that is, in landscapes with many monuments and manors. The round churches were also surrounded by richly decorated churches with apses, early towers and galleries. Thus the round church is an appeal for attention in a competitive aristocratic environment.

There were several architectural styles that could attract attention: to build in stone or brick, when these materials were new; to build large, for instance a basilica; to build with a cruciform, round or polygonal church; to add an apse, a central or western tower, a round tower or twin towers; to establish a monastery; and to give rich paintings and inventories. So why choose to erect a monastery with a large basilican round church as in Tønsberg? Why a round building symbolizing Jerusalem?

Jerusalem in Tønsberg

Every medieval church building represented a new creative situation. Forms and meanings from different buildings were reused in new contexts and had partly new meanings. Inspiration might come from many physical and metaphysical locations. Every building thereby becomes a unique and ambiguous node in an infinite web of influences (Wienberg 2014: 228–229).

According to the art historian Richard Krautheimer, prestigious buildings such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem were imitated by selecting minor parts in a ‘metonymic copying’, where the form was less important than the symbolic content. The explanation for the great variety in architecture was to be found in the way people copied by citing selected elements, in the ability to copy and in the fact that elements were combined in new ways (Krautheimer 1942; cf. Johansen & Smidt 1981: 105–106).

When copying the Holy Sepulchre you might select the round plan, the ambulatory, the number of pillars or columns, the cupola, the gallery, the absidoles, the aedicule, the dimensions, the liturgy, the dedication or you might only bring back relics from a pilgrimage. The metonymic principle meant that the central fourteen columns and six piers of the Holy Sepulchre might turn up somewhere else, copied to the number of twenty, fourteen, eight, six, four or maybe only one.

The round church of St Olav in Tønsberg was undoubtedly a symbolic copy of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in its basic plan. Melted copper has been found in the centre of the nave; as a hypothesis, this might be remains of an altar representing the ‘aedicule’, the building covering the tomb of Christ in the Holy Sepulchre.

When it comes to the reconstruction of the ruin it cannot have looked like the fortified churches with several floors on Bornholm, even though the ground plan of Østerlars has some similarities to a rounded chancel and six piers in the nave, creating a narrow ‘oven’; they belong to another type and regional context. Instead, one should look for a church with an apse, a rounded chancel and a basilican round nave, preferably with eight piers supporting a central clerestory. Elements of this can be identified at the Churches of the Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge and Northampton (both eight piers), as also at the Temple Church in London and St Michael’s in Schleswig (both six piers). Accordingly, Morten Myklebust created a new inspiring photomontage (fig. 11) in 2017 to show how the church of St Olav in Tønsberg might look were it to be rebuilt in present-day Tønsberg as a copy of the Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge. However, the creativity in the process of copying means that there is no exact model out there to be identified and that resolves all the questions.



Figure 11. The Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge relocated to present-day Tønsberg. Photomontage: Morten Myklebust/Fantasi-Fabrikken AS.

We do not know the precise dating of the other churches in the town, but they all, including the round church, used the local stone ‘Tønsbergitt’, broadly indicating a common origin in handicraft and time (cf. Brendalsmo & Sørensen 1997). Still, one might say that St Olav’s as conspicuous architecture would have to compete with the St Michael’s central tower church on the (Castle) Hill, the St Lawrence basilican church with a central tower and twin western towers – and two more ordinary parish churches. If it did not win this competition, it would certainly not be ignored. However, the round church in Tønsberg was not the only representation of Jerusalem in Viken. Every Romanesque apse framing an altar symbolized the Holy Sepulchre and its aedicule.

If we are looking for location in relation to the expression of power or the past, one might notice that the monastery was established at the foot of the Haugar *thing* with its two, maybe once three, barrows, where kings

were proclaimed – and directly above a burial ground where boat graves have been excavated (Brendalsmo & Molaug 2014: 149).

It has been proposed that the church was earlier than the monastery. However, I find it remarkable to construct such a large church, requiring several clerics, if it was not a collegial church or monastery from the very beginning. The stone house belonging to the monastery might simply represent a later phase, as many monasteries were expanded over a long period of time.

It might have been built as a so-called ‘House monastery’ (cf. Hill 1992), a burial place and mausoleum for the royal dynasty, although the Bagler Erling Steinvegg was the only king who ended up here (Johnsen 1929: 214–215; Bugge 1932: 95).

I have nothing new to add to the discussion of the dating of the round church in Tønsberg. The dating still depends on speculation concerning possible initiators and political motives. However, if we accept another ‘suspect’ as initiator, the church might belong to the 1190s.

Prime suspect and the Bagler faction

The prime suspect behind the round church in Tønsberg, Earl Erling Skakke, is known to have been a crusader who reluctantly accepted the Danish King Valdemar I as his royal lord in Viken. Valdemar I visited Tønsberg with a fleet in 1165 and in 1168, as did his son Valdemar II in 1204 (Saxo XIV.29.18, XIV.38.2; Johnsen 1929: 82–85, 106). The rule in Viken was disputed and uncertain. King Magnus Erlingsson was not the son of a king, but his father Erling was a crusader, as was also his more famous grandfather King Sigurd the Crusader (Helle 2000; 2003; Svenungsen 2016: 93–95). A large round church referring to the crusader ideology and reminding of crusaders in the dynasty would have been well chosen as a symbol supporting a faltering rule. Furthermore, it would have consolidated the Danish kingdom with almost similar basilican round monastery churches at the border to the south in Schleswig and at the border to the north in Tønsberg.

However, as the example from Paderborn has demonstrated, the church initiator does *not* need to have participated in a crusade him- or

herself – it might instead be the bishop. In Scania, for comparison, it is known to be Archbishop Eskil of Lund, friend of Bernhard of Clairvaux, who was the initiator of several Premonstratensian monasteries together with the king (Wallin 1961). It is actually mentioned in 1533 by the Oslo Bishop Hans Reff that the monastery of St Olav was built and founded by ‘our ancestors’ (DN X 667; cf. Johnsen 1929: 207; Bugge 1932: 88–90; Lidén 1981: 30–31).

Therefore, a second suspect might be the Bishop of Oslo, either Helge I (d. 1190) or maybe more likely his successor Nicholas Arnesson (d. 1225), the last a half-brother of King Inge Haraldsson the Hunchback (d. 1161) and a supporter of King Magnus Erlingsson. Bishop Nicholas together with Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson of Nidaros (archbishop 1188–1205, d. 1213) were the initiators in 1196 in Scania of the ‘Bagler faction’, named after the bishop’s staff, the ‘baculus’. The Bagler were striving for power, having Tønsberg at their main base and interacting with the Danish crusader rulers and Absalon, the Archbishop of Lund (Stefánsson 2000; Bagge 2003). After his death Nicholas was succeeded as bishop in Oslo by Abbot Orm from Tønsberg, probably from the Premonstratensian monastery (Johnsen 1929: 131).

It is a thrilling thought that Bishop Nicholas might have taken the initiative for the round church and monastery in Tønsberg in the 1190s, because his political ally, the archbishop, was probably the initiator of the erection of an octagonal shrine chapel at Nidaros Cathedral – according to the latest investigation by the medieval archaeologist Øystein Ekroll, the octagon must have been erected in the years between 1200 and 1220 (Ekroll 2015: 347–358). In that case the Bagler faction created two copies of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, both dedicated to St Olav, one in the south and one in the middle of Norway. This happened in a time of crusader mobilization as also seen in the crusader chronicle written either in the Premonstratensian monastery in Tønsberg or in the monastery of Børglum in Denmark (cf. Svenungsen 2016: 107; Skovgaard-Petersen in this volume). The memory of a failed crusade to Jerusalem could be eclipsed by a large material memorial – Jerusalem in Viken.

However, the number of suspects might be made greater. Other possible initiators have been mentioned: King Inge the Hunchback (Johnsen

1929: 207), the Danish Archbishop Eskil and King Valdemar I (Svenungsen 2016: 125) and King Sigurd the Crusader (d. 1130) (Brendalmsmo, *pers. comm.*). So an independent dating of the church would be useful, as we are moving here within a wide time frame.

Deductive interpretations

Examining more closely the different stories about the Scandinavian round churches, we discover that they rest on uncertain ground even when they are told with great conviction. The stories are full of biased interpretation, hypothesis and speculation – including my own story, of course. Most of all there is a tendency to ‘deductive interpretation’, i.e. the overall perspective controls the perception of facts. In the attempt to provide a narrative that embraces all round churches, gaps are filled with hypotheses and contradictions are ignored.

The thesis that churches in Scandinavia were defensive or fortified rests on very little evidence. In fact, there is no evidence of defensive churches ever having been attacked or besieged during the Middle Ages in Scandinavia. The few churches known from written sources to have been used for refuge were normal unfortified churches. Similarly, the Scandinavian round churches might be a symbol of the Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but there is no evidence relating them directly to the crusades, and the principle of ‘metonymic copying’ makes every inquiry into influences arbitrary.

The round churches are in several cases dated according to historical interpretations, where independent dating should be preferred: Østerlars should have been erected after 1149, when three-quarters of the island was donated to Archbishop Eskil, and before 1161, when the archbishop went into an exile (Smidt 1935). Valleberga must have been built by Eskil after his return in 1167, but before he retired in 1177 (Svanberg 2002: 347–362) – or in the period 1171–74 (Markus 2015: 18–19). Round churches must have been erected in the 1120s or ’30s in Schleswig and Roskilde (Markus 2015: 11–17) as also on Bornholm and at Kalmar (Eskildsen 2014: 77–109). And as we know, the round church of Tønsberg fits well into the framework of political events either in the years 1160–80 or in the 1190s.

As in the national history writing of the nineteenth century, there is a tendency to relate the significant monuments to persons that appear in the written sources: Earl Ragnvald Kolsson at Orphir on Orkney; Earl Knud Lavard at Schleswig; Peder Strangesen at Pedersborg; Bishop Peder Vognsen of Århus or his brother and successor Skjalm Vognsen at Thorsager; Magnus Nielsen at Roskilde; Archbishop Absalon at Selsø and St Olav on Bornholm; Archbishop Eskil at Søborg and Valleberga; Bishop Albert of Riga at Visby; and finally Earl Erling Skakke, King Magnus Erlingsson, or Bishop Nicolas Arnesson at Tønsberg. In most cases there is no proof, only circumstantial evidence or wishful thinking. The relations might be right, but we actually do not know.

The stories are full of peculiarities even when we ignore the Knights Templar, long-distance geometries and hidden treasures. The round churches on Bornholm all have a three-cell plan, as does Voxtorp at Kalmar, which is claimed to be inspired from Poland where most churches are two-cell churches. The datings from at least Nylars and Voxtorp are much later than the Kalmar expedition. The assumed two phases at the round churches in Schleswig (cf. Beseler 1985: 71ff; Vellev 1997) and Bjernede are disputed (Frölén 1910–11: II, 16–17; cf. *Danmarks Kirker* V: 351–362). The Romanesque north portal of Østerlars is interpreted to be either older or later than the round church, depending on the expected dating of the church (cf. Smidt 1935; *Danmarks Kirker* VII: 395–399; Wienberg 1986: 52–53). The church in Kalundborg is normally dated to the period 1200–25, which would place it in the context of Peder Strangesen and Ingeborg, the daughter of Esbern Snare (*Danmarks Kirker* IV: 3096–3100). Hammershus cannot have been built on the initiative of Archbishop Absalon, as it has been dated to the decades around 1300 (cf. Engberg *et al.* 2015). Absalon and Esbern Snare cannot have been inspired by a visit to Trondheim in 1188, as the octagon was not built yet (cf. Ekroll 2015: 347ff). Finally, the Swedish round churches are located close to rune stones and other social indicators, but the claimed correlation between the property of Valdemar II and clusters of rune stones with special titles or pictures is highly speculative.

These deductive interpretations are constructive as working hypotheses waiting for testing by independent methods in the future. Presented without hesitation as the truth, they are doubtful.

Round churches and storytelling

There is an evolutionary background for the emergence of ‘Homo narrans’ – the storytelling human being. Confronted with the world, we create patterns and tell stories to make our observations and actions meaningful. Thus we cannot see fragments without looking for patterns – patterns that might be our own inventions (Mankell & Vera 2000; Gärdenfors 2006; Boyd 2009).

The round churches are embedded in stories focusing on fortification, secular use or symbolic meaning. Stories are told about the need for protection in periods of unrest, of fireproof storage for commodities before the rise of towns and castles, of crusades and pilgrimage to Jerusalem or in the Baltic Sea, stories about kings, bishops and knights – and stories of great planning.

Fact and fiction here entangle to create convincing stories, or just good stories. Conscious selections and deselections are made among the few sources. Fragments from the past are connected and the many gaps are filled with qualified guesses. As postmodernists we might believe all stories to be equal, fact or fiction only being a question of perspective. However, if we do not believe in ‘alternative facts’, we must approach these stories with scepticism and try to distinguish between scientific facts and pure fiction along a graded scale.

The stories of the round churches are often very instructive, exciting and entertaining, but, in my opinion, this might be an expression of our longing for an enchanted past when living in a modern disenchanted present, not an expression of a past reality. The difficulties in achieving clear-cut answers to questions of dating, social context and motives are common to most medieval churches in Scandinavia, and are no reason for postulating mysteries.

Therefore, there is no need to pretend there is something enigmatic about the round churches. In fact, enigma as a concept might itself be part of the rhetorical way we try to gain attention for our competitive storytelling.

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Webpages

Rundkirkens venner: www.rundkirken.no

The Premonstratensians and Their Round Church in Tønsberg: Scandinavian Contexts and European Networks

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Neither the Premonstratensian Abbey dedicated to St Olav in Tønsberg, nor the round church belonging to it, are exceptional in a twelfth-century European context¹. Norbert of Xanten's foundation at Prémontré in 1120 inspired thousands of clerics all over Europe to join communities where they could devote their lives to learning, liturgy and preaching with the help of a strict version of the Augustinian rule. By the end of the twelfth century, there were hundreds of abbeys all over Europe that followed the example set by Prémontré.¹

The rise of the Premonstratensians coincided with what has been called the round church movement. Although some round churches were erected in early medieval Europe, there was a wave of circular churches built from the 1130s until about 1190. These churches are conventionally seen as recreations of the most holy of all churches, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. As Catherine Hundley has shown, the round church

1 On the spread of the Premonstratensians in the twelfth century, see Bond 1993.

movement was at its most intense from the second quarter of the twelfth century until the crusaders lost control over Jerusalem. From 1187 and into the thirteenth century the number of new round churches dropped dramatically (Hundley 2018). St Olav's Church and Abbey, whether contemporary or not, can both be dated roughly to between 1160 and 1190, and were thus built at the time both the Premonstratensian Order and the round church movements peaked in Europe.

In Norway, St Olav's Abbey was only one of many ambitious monastic foundations in the twelfth century. The other new abbeys from the late 1140s onwards were, however, mainly of the Cistercian and Augustinian orders. Only one other, quite small, Premonstratensian abbey, dedicated to the Virgin, was founded within the Norwegian kingdom, in Dragsmark in Bohuslän (present-day Sweden) about half a century later than St Olav's Abbey in Tønsberg.² Similarly, the round shape of the church has no precedence and hardly any successors in the Norwegian kingdom. The structure of the church, with its circular nave, choir, apsis, as well as the added semi-circular sacristy, must have been carefully planned by someone who appears almost obsessed by circles. As Øystein Ekroll shows, St Olav's Church in Tønsberg not only has a shape that imitates the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre, but also has measurements that seem to parallel it. The only other structure that parallels this way of imitating the Holy Sepulchre was the rotunda, as part of the ambitious Nidaros Cathedral that was being rebuilt and extended from the 1160s onwards (see Ekroll in this volume). However, even though round churches were fairly popular in the neighbouring kingdoms, Denmark and Sweden (see Wienberg in this volume), the Norwegian outgrowth of the round church movement never really extended beyond Tønsberg and the Nidaros rotunda.

There are also some peculiarities to the Abbey and the round church even in a wider, European context. The combination of a Premonstratensian abbey and a round church is to my knowledge unparalleled anywhere

2 There are only a few studies published on Dragsmark Abbey, and the written sources to its early history are sparse. The year of foundation is uncertain, but it must have been in existence by the 1250s. The conventional dating is the 1230s. It is situated west of the modern city Uddevalla, now in Bohuslän, Sweden. This area remained a part of Norway until 1658. Dragsmark Abbey was excavated in the 1890s; see Berg 1895–99. Nyberg 1978 and 1993 discusses the dating and background, and its place in the *circaria Dacie et Norwegie*.

beyond Tønsberg. Moreover, even though dedications of churches to St Olav were popular all over northern Europe during the twelfth century, only one other round church, Sankt Ols, or Olsker, Church on Bornholm, was dedicated to this martyr saint of Norway. Third, no other Premonstratensian Abbey was associated with the cult of the Norwegian royal saint. Finally, it is one of very few Premonstratensian foundations placed within a town. There were others, for instance those associated with cathedral chapters, but the order attempted, like the Cistercian order, to avoid the urban entrapments.

St Olav's Abbey and its church thus consist of both typical elements of twelfth-century architecture and monastic spirituality, and at the same time a unique combination of various institutional, material and spatial features. In this article, I will discuss what the background – both the immediate, local context in the town of Tønsberg and the region of Viken, as well as the Scandinavian and European political, spiritual and intellectual networks Tønsberg was a part of – meant for the planning, financing, foundation and construction of St Olav's Church and Abbey. Since we, lacking written sources, cannot be sure if the church and the abbey were founded at the same time, or may have been two distinct projects, with different dating, patrons and reasons, these contexts and networks need to be discussed separately. However, because no abbey could be without a church, it is reasonable to assume that the round church was built before the abbey – or at least not after it (no other church, earlier or later, has been revealed on the site). Working backwards, we will first look at the most likely date for the Premonstratensian Abbey, and then consider whether the round church may have been older and built in a different context.

Dating the Abbey

There are no charters or letters that allow us to date the abbey and its church precisely, and archaeological excavations have so far not offered a precise year or decade for the structures.³ Thus, attempts of a likely

3 There are perhaps materials under the altar that potentially, with new methods, can date the church more exactly than has been the case so far; see Lunde's article in this volume.

chronology must necessarily be based on few and fragmentary sources, each of which requires careful examination and evaluation. The most recent scholar to sift through the relevant sources of all Premonstratensian foundations in Scandinavia has been the Danish historian Tore Nyberg. He suggested that Tønsberg Abbey may have been planned in the 1160s but established in the early 1170s. His argument is part of his thorough discussion of the establishment of the diocese and the introduction of the Premonstratensians in Børglum, northern Jutland. From later sources, we know that Tønsberg was the daughter house of Børglum, and Nyberg suggests that it must have taken a generation from the establishment of Premonstratensians at Børglum until they had the resources to become a mother house for the Abbey in Tønsberg. However, the arrival of the Premonstratensians at Børglum is also contested and difficult to date: traditionally this has been placed in the 1180s, and the abbey is not indisputably documented until a letter from Abbot Gervasius of Prémontré to Børglum Abbey in 1216. However, Nyberg established that Børglum Abbey must have been considerably older (see below).

Two different sources firmly establish 1190 as the latest possible date for the foundation of Tønsberg Abbey. The first is the short *Historia de professione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, written c. 1200. The anonymous author describes how, after the Danish court received the news of the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, a group of noblemen planned and carried out an expedition to the Holy Land. Following a long period of shipbuilding and preparations, a fleet left Denmark in 1191 and stayed for some time in Tønsberg. Although the author might not have been a native of Tønsberg, and probably wrote his chronicle in Børglum, it seems plausible that he had lived for a considerable time in Tønsberg – at least long enough to claim knowledge of the drinking habits of the town dwellers and to give a detailed description of the natural conditions of the town. More specifically he tells that on top of Slottsfjellet ('Castle Hill') in Tønsberg, there is a beautiful church dedicated to St Michael. The landed property of this church is used to finance the canons of the Premonstratensian order.⁴

4 *Historia de professione Danorum*, ch. 9. On the chronicle, see Skovgaard-Petersen 2001, and her article in this volume. In the latter article, she quotes the description of Tønsberg in full, from the forthcoming edition and translation of *Professione*.

Although this chronicle was written a decade after the events, there is little reason to doubt that the Premonstratensians were firmly established when the Danes stayed in Tønsberg.



Figure 1. Seal matrix found in Tønsberg, probably belonging to King Sverre Sigurdsson (r. 1177–1202): *Verus testis ego/nuntia vera tego*. Photo: Ellen C. Holte/KHM.

The second reference is in *Sverris saga*, the story of King Sverre Sigurdsson of Norway (r. 1177–1202). In 1188 the half-brother of King Sverre, Eirik Sigurdsson, had been appointed Earl and the ruler of Viken. In 1190, however, Eirik became seriously ill when in Tønsberg. When his condition got worse, *Sverris saga* tells us he entered a monastery and took on ‘monkish dress’. There he stayed for five days before he died. His wife died on the same day, while their young son survived them by just two days (*Sverris saga*, ch. 115). The name of this ‘monastery’ is not mentioned, but we know that there were no other monasteries in Tønsberg at the time – the only alternative in 1190 would be the Hovedøya Abbey of the Cistercian order, near Oslo. From the context, it seems most likely that Earl Eirik was buried in St Olav’s Church in Tønsberg in 1190, and that the abbey must already have been in function for at least a few years.

The earliest possible date for the foundation of Børglum Abbey is more difficult to pin down. From the lists of the order's convents made at Ninove Abbey in the thirteenth century, it is clear that Tønsberg Abbey was a daughter house of Børglum in northern Jutland.⁵ Still, the problem of dating the arrival of Premonstratensians to Børglum remains. Tore Nyberg has discussed the few and sometimes vague sources associated with its foundation (Nyberg 1986). Nyberg suggested that the Abbey of Børglum originated at the Provincial Synod of Lund in 1139, led by Archbishop Eskil of Lund (d. 1177). Also present at the synod was the canon Heriman, or Herman, from the Augustinian Abbey of Kloosterrath or Kloosterrade, near Rolduc just north of Aachen. Heriman had, the previous year, been sent to Rome by Bishop Eskil of Roskilde, who had to wait for the pallium before he could call himself archbishop of Lund. The purpose of this embassy was to attain papal confirmation of the supremacy of Lund over the churches in the Scandinavian kingdoms, after this had been lost to Hamburg-Bremen in 1133. The metropolitan status of Lund was indeed recognized by Pope Innocent II, and Heriman brought back the pallium from Rome to Eskil, who was consecrated archbishop at the Synod of Lund.

In Lund, Heriman met Bishop Silvester of Børglum. Bishop Silvester wished, apparently, to establish a house of regular canons affiliated to the cathedral chapter. Although this is not explicitly stated in the sources, Silvester may have felt that the authority of Børglum was challenged by the important Vestervig Abbey in the western part of the diocese. At Vestervig a popular cult of St Thøger had developed since the 1070s, and a large church and a convent of regular canons had been established in the early twelfth century. Børglum lacked any such cult and had more likely become the episcopal centre of the diocese because it was initially a royal estate. The introduction of regular canons would raise the prestige of the cathedral chapter.

5 There is a short description in the so-called *Catalogus Ninivensis II*, written c. 1235 with supplements added until c. 1270. This text was first printed in Backmund 1960, 386–402, for Tønsberg see p. 393: *In provincia Nidrosiensi Distat a civitate Asleensi per tres dietas si per terram si per mare ad unam Insula est ad leugam a diocesi Asloensi Tunsbergia usque occidentem et dicitur ista abbatia Tunsberga filia Burgilanensis Oleuum*. It is printed without interpunctuation, and the passage is a bit unclear, especially concerning the geographical distances, but the affiliation to Børglum and placement in the diocese of Oslo in the province of Nidaros is accurate enough.

Heriman seemed to be an ideal emissary for this purpose. Klosterrath, the abbey of Heriman, had been important for Norbert of Xanten in the years just before he founded Prémontré in 1120. However, Heriman had been a controversial figure during his time in Klosterrath, as is evident in the abbey's annals (*Annales Rodenses*). He is depicted as opposing the introduction of a stricter interpretation of the Augustinian rule. He was blamed for instigating a fire in the abbey church and for the expulsion of two abbots, and after an unfortunate attempt to establish a new convent he more or less had to flee to Roskilde where he became Bishop Eskil's chaplain. Heriman seems to have come to terms with the canons at Klosterrath after his return from Rome.

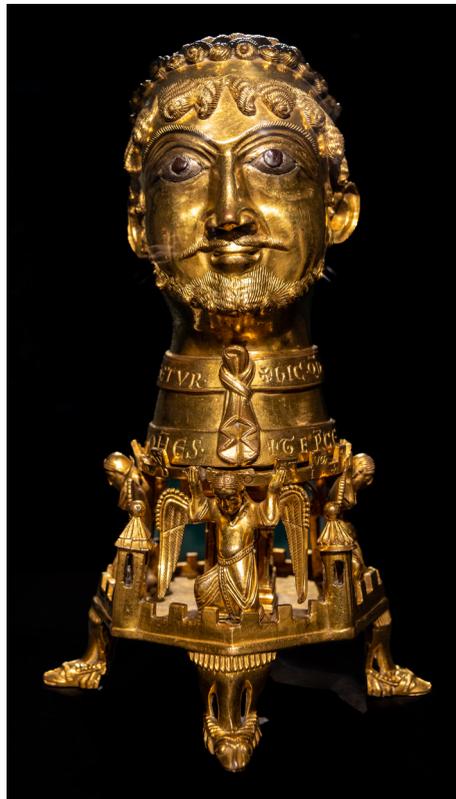


Figure 2. Cappenberg Head, reliquary bust in bronze commissioned before 1158 by Otto of Cappenberg, godfather of Frederick Barbarossa and founder, with his brother Gottfried, of the first Premonstratensian abbey in Germany. The was long considered to be a portrait of Barbarossa, but it more likely depicts John the Evangelist, the patron saint of the abbey church. Photo: Rainer Halama/Wikicommons, CC BY-SA.

Heriman ended his life as canon in Lund. His background close to the epicentre of the foundation of the Premonstratensian order, not only in the development of regular canons, but also to influential schools of art and architecture, has led scholars into seeing him as a personification of the influences from the Alsace-Westphalia region on Denmark. He has been attributed the application of a rule for regular canons in Lund based on statutes used at Marbach Abbey in Alsace, the so-called *Consuetudines Marbacenses*, but these were introduced before the arrival of Heriman. Similarities in sculpture between the abbey church in Klosterrath and the cathedral in Lund suggest perhaps not Heriman's personal contribution, but may rather indicate several levels of contact between Alsace and Westphalia with Denmark at the time.⁶

Despite his relations to Heriman, there is no evidence that Bishop Silvester of Børglum did actually introduce the regular canons to Børglum before he died c. 1145. This is also indicated by the necrology of Prémontré, where the establishment of a Premonstratensians convent in Børglum diocese is attributed to Sylvester's successor Bishop Tyge (Gelting 1992: 52, n70). Heriman might still be the one who contacted Klosterrath's daughter house, Steinfeld Abbey, to assist with the new foundation in northern Jutland. At Steinfeld, they followed the Augustinian rule, but had in the 1120s introduced the statutes for a stricter way of life that had recently been established by Norbert of Xanten. Tyge was bishop of Børglum from c. 1145 to 1176/77, which gives a wide timeframe. Still, Nyberg suggests that the foundation of the Premonstratensian Abbey should most probably be dated to the early period in Tyge's episcopacy: the late 1140s or early 1150s. This dating remains ambiguous, but Nyberg points to several indications that previous suggestions that the Premonstratensians

6 On the discussions concerning Heriman's influence on the customs for the regular canons in Lund, see Ciardi 2016: 45–46, 80–81. On the possible influence on sculpture, see Timmers 1969. However, Heriman seems to have left Klosterrath just as the construction started; see van Hartog 2011 on his turbulent career before he went to Denmark. The workshop responsible for the mural paintings at Vå church, later part of a Premonstratensian Abbey, as well as the paintings in several other churches in Zealand in the early twelfth century, seems to have introduced elements from the Rhine-Meuse area and Westphalia region, for instance from the church of Knechsteden Abbey just north of Cologne; see Kaspersen 2003. For the most recent discussion of the dating of the murals, with references to previous debates about datings, see Ödman 2021.

did not arrive to Børglum until the late 1170s or 1180s are most probably too late: first, Steinfeld Abbey is known to have founded daughter houses up to the 1140s, but not later; second, Børglum would hardly have been able to establish a daughter house in Tønsberg until some years, perhaps some decades, after its foundation, and this took place, as we have seen above, in the 1180s at the latest; third, Abbot William of Æbelholt, an Augustinian canon from Paris who was invited to Denmark by Archbishop Eskil in the 1160s to reform the regular canons, wrote to Bishop Trugot (Tyge) of Børglum in the mid-1180s about the unruly canons in his diocese. The reference is vague, but as Abbot William seems to refer to a larger group of canons associated with the bishop, he might be alluding to the Premonstratensians at Børglum. Nyberg pointed out that it would take a second generation of canons to diverge from the discipline of the first canons, so this would again confirm a dating c. 1150. Perhaps most convincing is the many establishments adherent to and promoting new aspects and ideals of reform under Archbishop Eskil in the 1140s. The Cistercians established had their first abbey in Denmark in 1144, and the following year Premonstratensian canons may have been invited to establish an abbey in the old cathedral of Lund, when the new one was consecrated in 1145 (Nyberg 1986: 79–102; 2000: 159–160; 2008: 37–38).

Later studies have nuanced Nyberg's conclusions, pointing to the lack of evidence of Premonstratensian canons at the cathedral chapter itself in the twelfth century. The first letter dealing explicitly with the abbey (from Abbot Gervasius of Prémontré in 1216), suggests that the canons had just recently moved to Børglum. Since there was a Premonstratensian nunnery at Vrejlev, only some 13 km east of Børglum, in the thirteenth century, some scholars have suggested that Vrejlev in its early phase was a double monastery, consisting of both canons and nuns. In the aftermath of a fire in the early thirteenth century, the canons could have moved to Børglum while the nuns stayed in Vrejlev (Krongaard Kristensen 2013: 13–14; Lindholt 2017). The Premonstratensian Abbey in northern Jutland would then, in its early phase, not have been part of the cathedral chapter but situated at a more remote site. At Vrejlev, the Abbey would have been a centre for preaching and pastoral duties in the eastern and northern part of the diocese, while the Augustinians in Vestervig served the western

part. This adjustment of Nyberg's conclusions does not necessarily affect an early dating of the introduction of the Premonstratensians to northern Jutland, but does question if the Premonstratensian community lived in the episcopal centre at Børglum until about the 1180s.

Whether in Børglum proper, or initially living in Vrejlev at a short distance from it, Nyberg's conclusion that the Premonstratensian were introduced to this diocese c. 1150 has been relatively unchallenged. Then, as a daughter house of Børglum, 1150 would be the absolute earliest possible dating of St Olav's Abbey. Since Børglum Abbey would hardly have been able to establish a new community only a few years after its own foundation, this would give a plausible timeframe for the foundation of an abbey in Tønsberg from the 1160s until the mid-1180s.

If we attempt to narrow this frame even further, we have to move into even more speculative territory. There is an undated letter from Ulrich of Steinfeld, provost from 1152 to 1170, referring to an unknown bishop in an unnamed kingdom who requested assistance to establish a new house of the Premonstratensian order. Ulrich's wording points to a certain intimacy with the messenger that brought the request, suggesting that the kingdom in question was a neighbour of the kingdom of the messenger, and that there were no previous Premonstratensian Abbey in the kingdom where the bishop resided. In his analysis of this letter, Tore Nyberg argued that its content makes sense if the intermediary is from Børglum, the daughter house of Steinfeld, acting on behalf of a bishop in a neighbouring kingdom. This bishop would then be from either Sweden and Norway, but the Premonstratensians never had any convents in Sweden, nor are there any other sources indicating that there were plans in this direction in the 1150s or 1160s, when Ulrich was provost. The information given in the letter thus suggests that the kingdom lacking a Premonstratensian abbey, would be Norway. Steinfeld Abbey had ceased to establish daughter houses at this time, and it would then make sense that it was Børglum Abbey that became a mother house instead (Nyberg 1986: 110, n 481).

Assuming that this letter refers to the plans for introducing the Premonstratensians to Norway, the unnamed bishop who had made the initial request would most likely be Bishop Torstein of Oslo

(1157×61–1169). The sources offer little information about his background and involvement in foundations of new churches and monastic houses, except that he was a benefactor of the Cistercian abbey at Hovedøya, founded in the late 1140s, close to Oslo. A letter from Pope Alexander III, probably written in December 1169, says that the bishop of Oslo had been killed by some ‘cruel men’. Archbishop Eystein of Nidaros was granted permission to consecrate a new bishop, but the pope expressed his bewilderment that the king of Norway had not punished this horrible crime.⁷ Bishop Torstein’s request of assistance from Ulrich of Steinfeld would then be sometime in the 1160s. But following his violent death, the foundation of a Premonstratensian abbey would have been postponed.

His successor, Bishop Helge (1170–90), may have taken up his predecessor’s initiative and pursued the establishment of the first Premonstratensian Abbey in Norway. Still an *electus*, he went to the large royal assembly in Ringsted in Denmark in June 1170. This meeting was an important manifestation of the Danish king Valdemar I’s idea of kingship, his relationship to the church, as well as his ambitions of political and religious hegemony in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea area (see further discussion below). In the context of dating St Olav’s Abbey in Tønsberg, it is relevant that both the orders of Premonstratensians, especially Vå Abbey in Scania, and the Hospitallers at Antvorskov, received most generous donations. The final settlement of the Premonstratensian Abbey in Tønsberg may then have received a push in the form of general support and donations from Erling Skakke and Valdemar I at the large assembly in Ringsted in 1170, or shortly after. The early 1170s may thus be as close as we get to a plausible date for the establishment of St Olav’s Abbey, but it may have already been planned from the mid- or late 1160s.⁸

7 *Latinske dokument*, no. 17, with comments on pp. 14–16. The king in 1169 was Magnus Erlingsson, who had been hailed as king at a thing assembly already in 1161, then only 13 years old. The *de facto* rulers were his father, Erling Skakke and his mother Kristin, daughter of Sigurd the Crusader (see below).

8 Saxo XIV.40.1. See also Johnsen 1976. He suggested that the foundation of the Tønsberg Abbey was inspired by the donations given to Vå Abbey by King Valdemar at Ringsted. He does not, however, discuss a possible preparation of the foundation by Bishop Torstein of Oslo.

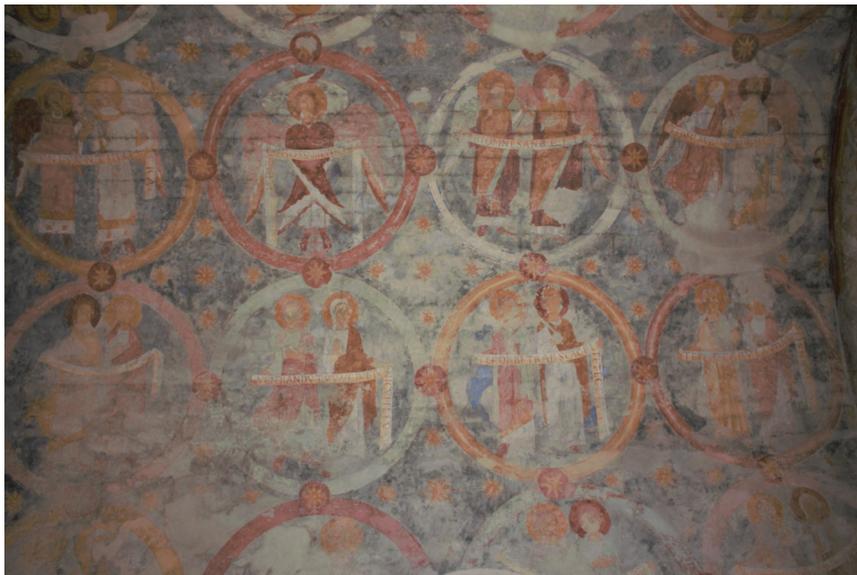


Figure 3. Ceiling murals in the chancel, Vä Church, twelfth century. The angels are carrying speech scrolls with the text of the hymn *Te Deum*. Photo: Yakikaki/Wikicommons, CC BY-SA.

Since these events unfolded during the minority of the young King Magnus Erlingsson and the regency of his father Erling Skakke, it is tempting to see the latter as the person who founded the Premonstratensians in Tønsberg. As Trond Svandal argues (see his article in this volume), Erling Skakke, perhaps in agreement with Valdemar I, founded the Hospitallers at Varna after the model of King Valdemar's support of the Hospitallers in Denmark (Svandal 2006, see also his article in this volume). However, if the Premonstratensians were invited by Bishop Torstein, we should consider the bishopric's role as well. We will therefore have to take a closer look at the relationship between Valdemar and Erling Skakke leading up to the Ringsted assembly in 1170.

Premonstratensians, the murder of a bishop, and the rivalry over Viken

25 June 1170 has been termed 'one of the most important dates in the history of Denmark' (Riis 2015: 100). On this day all the clerical and secular elite of Denmark, along with Archbishop Stephen of Uppsala and the

elected Bishop Helge of Oslo, were assembled in Ringsted. Archbishop Eskil led two important ceremonies this day, first the translation of King Valdemar I's father Knud Lavard who had been killed in 1131 and in 1169 been canonized by Pope Alexander III, and second the crowning (and possibly anointing) of the king's seven-year-old son Knud. These ceremonies were clearly inspired by parallels in the Holy Roman Empire, where Frederick Barbarossa initiated the canonization of Charlemagne and the crowning of his son Henry in 1169. King Valdemar had himself been crowned by Frederick Barbarossa in 1162, after paying homage to him. This subordination had implied that King Valdemar accepted the so-called Antipope Victor IV. Archbishop Eskil of Lund remained loyal to Pope Alexander III and was forced into exile. From the mid-1160s, the emperor became deeply entangled in his Italian affairs and the Ringsted assembly was the end point of a reconciliation process with Alexander III and Archbishop Eskil on the one hand, and a break with the dependency on Germany on the other.

In this way, the assembly is often interpreted as the start of the strong monarchy under Valdemar. At the same time, it also signalled Danish expansion into the Baltic Sea with papal approval. Shortly before the assembly, Rügen had been conquered and its people converted, and its church organization was acknowledged at the Ringsted assembly as being part of the Roskilde diocese. Moreover, Archbishop Eskil had already, during his exile in 1165, appointed Fulk as bishop of Estonia, with the support of Pope Alexander III and Archbishop Henry of Reims. Estonia proved hard to win, and only Valdemar II, who was born just weeks before the Ringsted meeting in June 1170, managed to gain control over Estonia half a century later. However, by 1170 the ideology, attention and institutions of the Danish kingdom were directed eastwards, and were at times closely involved with holy warfare (see e.g. Jensen 2001).

To a certain extent, during the 1160s, the Norwegian regent Erling Skakke had a similar relation to Valdemar as the Danish king had to Frederick I in Germany. The background for the tense alliance between Erling Skakke and King Valdemar I of Denmark had started at least a decade before. Erling belonged to a powerful family based on the

farm Etne, south of Bergen. In the early 1150s he had journeyed to the Holy Land along with Ragnvald, earl of Orkney, and the Norwegian Eindride Unge ('the Young') who had served in the Varangian guard for the Byzantine Emperors since the 1140s. Just before this expedition, or perhaps shortly after, Erling Skakke married Kristin, the daughter of Sigurd Magnusson, known as 'the crusader'. Kristin was the cousin of King Valdemar I, since their mothers were sisters, daughters of Mstislav I of Kiev.

After returning from the crusade in 1155, Erling Skakke became one of two major supporters of King Inge Haraldsson. The other regional leader supporting King Inge was Gregorius Dagsson, who had his farm at Bratsberg, close to the town Skien in Viken. Gregorius and Erling were rivals, and in 1160 their men were fighting each other. Only with difficulty did King Inge reconcile them, but the grudge they had against each other was obvious to all. Therefore, Erling remained in the western part of Norway, while Gregorius followed the king to Viken. However, within a few weeks early in 1161, they both died during their armed struggle against King Inge's nephew, Håkon Herdebrei ('Broad-Shouldered'). Håkon Herdebrei was only aged 13 at the time, but was supported by Sigurd of Rør, a magnate from Ringsaker, just north of Hamar, the episcopal seat in the inland part of eastern Norway. Håkon was then hailed as a king of Norway.

Erling Skakke reacted swiftly following these events. He had his five-year-old son Magnus hailed as a king at a thing assembly in Bergen in 1161 and went to Denmark to seek the support of King Valdemar I against Håkon Herdebrei. He had the late King Inge's mother Ingerid with him, along with her new husband and two of their sons. In her first marriage to Henrik Skadelår, the cousin (and one of the murderers) of Valdemar's father, Knud Lavard, she had a son, Buris, who had become Duke of Schleswig and also participated in the negotiations in early 1161. After securing the support of Valdemar, Erling Skakke returned to Norway the same spring, made a surprise attack on the men of King Håkon in Bergen, and then made an attempt on the life of King Håkon himself, who at that time had moved to Tønsberg. Håkon fled, but the following year he was killed at the Battle of Sekken in western

Norway. In 1163, Sigurd of Rør was defeated and killed at the battle at Re, outside Tønsberg. Later in the same year, Sigurd Sigurdsson, half-brother of Håkon Herdebrei and fostered by Markus (and thus named Sigurd Markusfostre), a relative to Sigurd of Rør, was defeated and executed. Following these battles, the sagas claim that Erling Skakke struck a deal with Archbishop Eystein of Nidaros; if he crowned and anointed Erling's son Magnus, now seven years old, despite not being son of a king (but, as Erling pointed out, such a breach of tradition did not exclude William the Bastard from becoming king of England), the reform-minded Eystein would receive most of the privileges he wanted for the church.⁹



Figure 4. The anointment of King Magnus Erlingsson in Nidaros Cathedral 1163/64. Archbishop Eystein stands on his left. His father Erling Skakke and his mother Kristin, daughter of Sigurd the Crusader, are to the right of the young king. Drawing by Erik Werenskiöld, 1899. Photo: Wikicommons.

⁹ This summary of the complex events of the early 1160s is based on *Fagrskinna*, esp. ch. 93, and Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla, Magnús saga Erlingssonar*, esp. ch. 21.

The deal was concluded, and Magnus was crowned and anointed in Bergen shortly after, probably late in 1163 (although Snorri dates it to 1164). Interestingly, a legate from Pope Alexander III (then exiled), Stephen of Orvieto, was also present in Bergen at this time. Although he can hardly have been sent to Norway for the coronation – he does not seem to have taken any part in the ceremony – he probably trusted Eystein’s judgement of the alliance with Erling Skakke. Eystein had shown his loyalty to Alexander III during his visit to Rome and France in 1160–61. Stephen of Orvieto might have been concerned about Erling Skakke’s position because he had, since 1161, been allied to Valdemar I, the supporter of the Antipope Victor IV, but Stephen must have been convinced of the benefits for the young archbishopric (only established a few years earlier, in 1152/53).

What Erling had to offer in return for Valdemar’s support in 1161 differs substantially in the main sources for the events: the Danish version by Saxo Grammaticus, whose patron was Archbishop Absalon of Lund, Valdemar I’s relative and most important counsellor, and the Norwegian version represented in the sagas *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*.¹⁰ According to the kings’ sagas, Erling had to swear an oath of loyalty to Valdemar and cede the area of Viken to him – an area extending from Lindesnes at the southern tip of Norway, all the way up to Oslo and from there south-east to Konghelle (just north of present-day Gothenburg in Sweden). Viken was a region that at the time was regarded as a realm traditionally under Danish rule, notably during the reigns of Harald Bluetooth, Svend Forkbeard and Cnut the great. Hence, Valdemar I could merely claim that he recovered what was his inheritance to begin with. Saxo, however, says that Valdemar I started to oppose Erling Skakke in 1164, especially after the remnants of the flock who had followed the slain Sigurd Sigurdsson sought his assistance. For Saxo, Erling Skakke acted too independently in Viken, without seeking the support or advice of the Danish king.

Whatever the background for Valdemar’s enmity against Erling Skakke, the Danish king seems to have felt that Erling Skakke had let him

¹⁰ On the differences between the sagas and Saxo concerning these events, see Gawthorne-Hardy 1946–53. He argued for the reliability of Saxo’s version, while the sagas, he concluded, show a muddled chronology.

down. The saga version says that Danish men, disguised as pilgrims, went to Nidaros and tried to recruit men there in opposition to Erling Skakke. Valdemar I then led a large fleet to Viken in 1165, settling in Tønsberg where he wanted to organise a thing assembly at Haugar, a hill next to the town where kings traditionally were hailed by the local people. The expedition, however, seems to have been less a conquest and more an attempt to gain formal recognition of Valdemar over Viken. However, no one from Tønsberg or its hinterland showed up at the assembly site. Instead of plundering Tønsberg and Viken as a punishment, Valdemar is said to have thought it more prudent to raid in heathen lands in the east. Then, Erling Skakke attacked and raided Jutland before his wife Kristin went to the court of Valdemar and negotiated a peace between her cousin and her husband. Then, in the sagas, this is the end of the fighting.

Saxo's version, however, indicates that the sagas compressed a more enduring conflict into the period 1164–66. According to Saxo, Valdemar was hailed as a king in Viken, at the thing assembly in Borg, east of the Oslo Fjord, in 1165. Erling attacked Denmark, in alliance with Buris Henriksson (the half-brother of King Inge Haraldsson, who Erling Skakke had supported until Inge died outside Oslo in 1161). Buris had a claim to the Danish throne, and he was potentially a serious threat to Valdemar I. However, he was caught in 1167, blinded and castrated and probably died shortly after. In 1168 Valdemar returned to Viken and Tønsberg but achieved little. Kristin, the wife of Erling, acted as an intermediary between them and even travelled to Denmark to negotiate a settlement. The elected bishop of Oslo, Helge, was then present at the assembly in Ringsted in June 1170 and probably had meetings with Valdemar on behalf of Erling Skakke. The result was that Erling was to rule Viken as an earl, and if Erling's son, King Magnus, died without an heir, Valdemar's son should be king of both realms.

This suggests that the years 1167–68 seem to have been the most critical phase of the conflict. As it happens, another pretender who claimed to be the son of a king started to fight against Erling Skakke at this time. This was Olav Ugjæva ('the Unlucky'), the son of a magnate from the northern part of eastern Norway and a daughter of King Eystein Haraldsson (the brother of King Inge). Olav Ugjæva was especially active in the Viken

area, and in 1167 he managed, with the help of a local priest, to surprise Erling at a farm north of Oslo and almost managed to kill him. Erling made a narrow escape (hence Olav's nickname) and took his revenge by killing Olav's father the following year. Olav had to escape to Denmark and waited in Aalborg in northern Jutland. Here he mustered troops and prepared a fleet in expectation of the best new opportunity to have another go at Erling Skakke. Unexpectedly, he became sick and died soon after. He was buried in St Mary's Church in Aalborg, where he – for a time at least – was revered as a holy man (Snorri, *Heimskringla: Magnús saga Erlingssonar*, chs. 31–34).

This uprising of Olav Uggjæva is noteworthy to our discussion for two reasons. First, Olav seemed to have had support from Denmark, especially in northern Jutland, against Erling Skakke in 1167 and may have been prepared to rule Viken under Valdemar I. Second, the assistance he received from a priest indicates that some of the clergy opposed the rule of Erling at the time. Although not explicitly stated in the sources, Bishop Torstein of Oslo may have been part of this opposition to Erling. If Torstein had close relations to Børglum and had the support and confidence of Bishop Tyge in the period 1163–68, this would be during Valdemar I's allegiance to Victor IV – although it is unclear if all bishops supported the policy of Valdemar and Bishop Absalon of Roskilde in this respect. However, establishing regular canons in his diocese as a daughter house of a Danish abbey at this time must have been somewhat controversial, and this makes it less likely that the initiative came from Erling Skakke.

Erling Skakke and Kristin Sigurdsdatter, his wife, had admittedly founded a friary of Augustinian canons at Halsnøy in 1163, in close cooperation with Archbishop Eystein of Nidaros. There are no sources that say exactly when and where Archbishop Eystein had studied in his youth, but St Victor Abbey in Paris, following the Augustinian rule, sometime in the 1140s has been suggested as the school where he was most likely educated.¹¹ In 1160–61, during his travels to the curia to receive the pallium,

11 See Gunnes 1996, 32–40. Gunnes also suggests he was for some time in Lincoln. A parallel would be the Icelander Þorlákur Þórhallsson who studied in Paris and Lincoln in the 1150s, and later became Bishop of Skálholt and Eystein's ally in introducing Church reforms to Iceland.

Eystein visited St Victor and possibly also Canterbury in England (Gunnes 1996: 82–89). After his return to Nidaros, both the literature, liturgy and architecture produced at, or in association with, the cathedral chapter show heavy influence from, and links to, northern France (especially the Victorines) and England (especially Canterbury, Lincoln and York).¹²

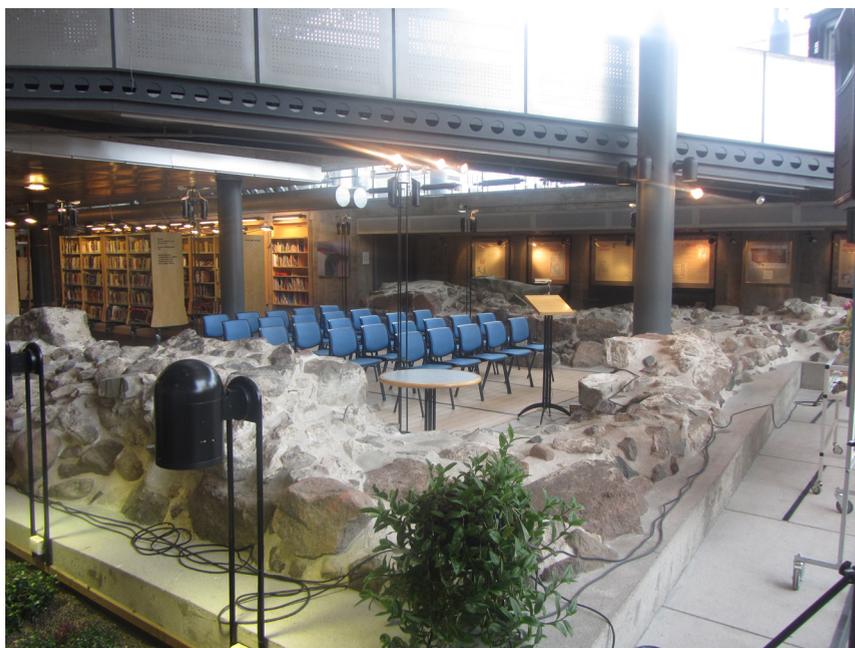


Figure 5. Ruins of the Premonstratensian Abbey, now integrated within Tønsberg and Færder library. Photo: Stig Rune Pedersen, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Halsnøy Abbey was situated not far from Etne, where Erling Skakke had his farm and owned much land. His and his wife's donations must have been substantial, and Halsnøy came to be one of the richest monastic institutions in medieval Norway (Iversen 2013). From a miracle collection of St Cuthbert written by Reginald of Durham a few years later, we know that the prior of the Augustinian Wellow Abbey in Grimsby,

12 The literature on Archbishop Eystein and the influences of international networks on Nidaros Cathedral and intellectual culture is large and growing: see for example Johnsen 1939; Boje Mortesen & Mundal 2003; Andås 2004; King 2008; Ommundsen 2010; Duggan 2012; Harrington 2012; Norton 2012.

Lincolnshire, was in Norway at the time, probably to assist the foundation of Halsnøy and possibly providing canons and manuscripts for their work.¹³ Although situated in a rural environment, Halsnøy Abbey most likely had close relations to cathedral chapters of Bergen and Stavanger. At the same time, it was responsible for teaching sons of the élite families in the district and for providing the more talented canons to the cathedral chapter, and probably had obligations concerning preaching and working on sermons. Archbishop Eystein himself founded an Augustinian priory in Trondheim, at Elgeseter, close to Nidaros cathedral. Elgeseter priory is first mentioned in relation to events in 1183, but must have been established earlier, perhaps in the late 1160s or early 1170s, and was modelled on St Victor. In the case of Elgeseter, there is no mention of Erling Skakke's or Kristin's financial support. This makes it more likely that they funded Halsnøy generously and prestigiously, as part of their alliance with Archbishop Eystein in 1163. Other monastic or canonical institutions, especially in the troublesome Viken, were probably not on their agenda.

Bishop Torstein of Oslo, for his part, may have been inspired by the introduction of the Augustinian canons at Halsnøy and Elgeseter, but seems more distant from the Anglo-French influence dominant in western Norway and at Nidaros cathedral. If it was indeed him that was mentioned as the 'bishop of a neighbouring realm' in Ulrich of Steinfeld's letter, he may have sought to support a different nuance within the wave of establishments of houses for regular canons.

Clerics living in a community following a rule had become popular in Europe already from the eighth century, following Chrodegang of Metz's regulations in the 750s and the revised version from Aachen in 816. In England, it was more often Benedictines who served at the cathedral chapters. Both these forms of communal life were introduced after

13 Reginald of Durham 1834: 108–109. The presence of the Augustinian prior of Wellow Abbey, founded by Henry I, was first discussed in Norway in Bull 1915. His publication also provided a drawing of the seal matrix of a prior of Wellow Abbey, depicting both St Augustine and St Olav of Norway. This seal matrix had shortly before been discovered by chance in a bay close to Stavanger by the painter Eilif Peterssen. To medievalists, Peterssen is best known as one of the artists illustrating the costly publication of a translation into Norwegian of Snorri's *Heimskringla* (often called the 'Storm-edition') published in 1899, illustrations that have since become reproduced frequently. See also Nenseter 2003: 46 and Myking 2017. On the fragmentary remains of the library at Halsnøy, see Ommundsen 2013.

the Christianization of Scandinavia; the Rule of Aachen was introduced at Dalby at the end of the eleventh century, and later at the chapter of Lund with the additions of statutes formulated at the Marbach Abbey in Alsace. The Benedictines in the English tradition were introduced at Odense in Denmark, Selje in Norway (the predecessor as a diocese of Bergen), and possibly also Stavanger. However, with the reforms of the Aachen rule, older traditions, such as allowing private property, were seen as too lenient. The Augustinian rule became more widespread in the second half of the century, adapting to the new demands of clerical reform with celibacy and asceticism.

However, the Augustinian rule was spread in two versions, one stricter than the other. While the Victorines were canons who emphasised the combination of learning and contemplation, Norbert of Xanten was more inspired by the Cistercian ideal of stricter asceticism and a tighter balance of seclusion from society and the urban world of the schools on the one hand, and the call to preach and be an example for the laity on the other. In the case of Norbert himself, he first established the remote Prémontré Abbey, but on the other hand he also became a powerful prelate in the circle of the Emperor as the Archbishop of Magdeburg.

In the diocese of Oslo, covering most of the Viken region, there were no institutions like this in the 1160s. The only monastic foundations were two Benedictine nunneries, one in Oslo and the other at Gimsøy, close to Skien, and the Cistercian abbey at Hovedøya, a small island just south of Oslo. However, churches in the eastern part of Norway from the twelfth century generally show more traits in common with Danish and German architecture than with those in western and northern Norway.¹⁴ It is a distinct possibility that Bishop Torstein had initially planned to have regular canons for the support of the cathedral chapter in Oslo. This would have had precedence especially in northern Germany, but also at Børglum where, as discussed above, there are reasons to believe that Premonstratensians were supposed to act as a balance to the influential, prestigious and rather independent Augustinian community in

14 There is the potential for more systematic studies of this variance, but important surveys include Solhaug 2001 and Ekroll 2004. See also Hauglid 2019 on Rygge church in Østfold, a church that seems to have been influenced by Vestervig church.



Figure 6. The invitatory of *Mariae Conceptio*. Fragment of a manuscript used in binding of account books from Tønsberg len. Photo: Mekonnen Wolday/Norwegian National Archives.

Vestervig. Bishop Torstein must also have been familiar with the new establishment of regular canons at Viborg in the 1140s, the neighbouring diocese to Børglum.

A community of regular canons in Viken would then counter-balance the influence of Erling Skakke in the region, and this could have served

the interests of Bishop Torstein of Oslo. There are at least indications that the bishop supported the unlucky pretender Olav Uggjæva in these unpredictable years. After his unfortunate attempt to kill Erling Skakke in 1167, Olav Uggjæva had to flee from Norway. He was welcomed in Aalborg, in the diocese of Viborg, not far from Børglum. The notion of him being a holy man witnesses to his popularity and possibly to initial plans of supporting a new candidate who could challenge the rule of Erling Skakke in these years. After Olav Uggjæva's premature death in 1169, Valdemar I might have come to terms with the fact that it would be hard to replace Erling Skakke. Kristin, Valdemar's cousin, seems crucial in finding a solution that both Erling and Valdemar could accept. Still, if Bishop Torstein had been in some way involved in the attempted assassination of Erling, this would explain both his murder in 1169 and why nothing seems to have been done to punish this 'cruel act', as Pope Alexander III calls it in his letter written at the end of that year.¹⁵

In the following centuries, St Olav's Abbey was remembered as the foundation of the episcopacy of Oslo.¹⁶ However, the property of the abbey indicates that the backbone in its income came from a royal donation. The story of the Danish crusaders states that the income came from St Michael's church, which was located within the royal castle in Tønsberg. Some of the richest property that belonged to St Olav's Abbey previously belonged to royal farms.¹⁷ This indicates that after the settlement between Valdemar and Erling Skakke in Ringsted in 1170, promoted by Kristin and the new Bishop of Oslo, Helge, Erling Skakke may have agreed to invest in the project and support its foundation economically.

15 *Latinske dokumenter*, no. 17, and Vandvik's comments on pp. 14–20 where he suggests that even Archbishop Eystein was ready to shift his support from King Magnus and Erling Skakke to Olav Uggjæva before the latter died in 1169. This is controversial and has been met with scepticism in later scholarship.

16 Bishop Hans Rev of Oslo claimed in 1533 that St Olav's Abbey in Tønsberg was founded by one of his 'ancestors', DN X 667.

17 St Olav's Abbey was by far the richest clerical institution in Tønsberg during the Middle Ages. The farms in its possession had a higher average income than other churches in Tønsberg, indicating wealthier donators. The main part of its property was in the central parts of Vestfold, some of it was in the vicinity of the royal farms, such as Sem just a few kilometres north of Tønsberg; see Wienberg 1991: 71–74; Eriksson 1993.

As Trond Svandal argues, he could have done something similar with the Hospitallers at Varna (see his article in this volume).

This combination of a house of Hospitallers and Premonstratensians was a parallel to the strategy of King Valdemar, under supervision of Archbishop Eskil of Lund. Although Viken was at that time recognised as part of the Norwegian kingdom, this combination was still very estranged from the church politics and clerical institutions supported by Archbishop Eystein of Nidaros. The negotiations between King Valdemar and Earl Erling Skakke were, as we remember, only a minor part of what was going on at the assembly at Ringsted in June 1170; the canonization of King Valdemar's father Knud Lavard and the crowning of his son Knud were of prime importance. At the same time, there were establishments of monastic and church institutions that served the expansion eastwards into the Baltic Sea. Archbishop Eskil had supported the establishment of many monasteries of several orders in Denmark since his episcopacy in Roskilde in the 1130s. Already in 1159 or 1160 Peter of Celle complimented Eskil for his efforts to multiply the brethren of the Cistercians and Premonstratensians.¹⁸ The first of the Premonstratensian houses he promoted was probably that of the Church of the St Trinitatis and St Salvator in Lund, perhaps as early as in the mid-1140s.¹⁹ The Premonstratensian Tömmarp Abbey in eastern Scania was a royal estate, to which Archbishop Eskil added a donation, and it received its foundation letter from Pope Hadrian IV in 1155. Then Öved and Vå were founded in the following years – the latter, especially, had been an important royal estate with which Bishop Simon of Odense had been involved around 1160.²⁰ Presumably in response to the tension between Valdemar, who had supported Victor IV, and Eskil, who went into exile because he had refused to abandon his support to Alexander III, these donations and privileges to the Premonstratensian foundations were not confirmed until the assembly of 1170, maybe as a sign of reconciliation between king and church.²¹

18 Peter of Celle, *The Letters*, no. 12, p. 32. On the difficulties of dating the letter precisely, see Haseldine's discussion at pp. 703–704.

19 Cinthio 2002: 146–159. The Premonstratensians in Lund probably moved out of Lund at the end of the century.

20 For an overview of the Premonstratensians in Scania, see Wallin 1989.

21 For the royal donation to Vå in 1170, see Skyum-Nielsen 1952.



Figure 7. Fragment of a ram, Östra Tommarps Church, late twelfth century.
Photo: Kulturmiljöbild, Riksantikvarieämbetet/Wikicommons.

The four Scanian abbeys seem initially to have been somewhat distanced from the abbeys around Kattegat and Viken: Børglum, Tønsberg, and later Dragsmark. This group of western and northern abbeys even seems to have included Fearn Abbey in Scotland, that later was part of the Danish-Norwegian province, or *circaria*. However, the events in 1170 would still have been inspiration for Bishop Helge of Oslo and Erling Skakke to work for the foundation of a Premonstratensian Abbey in Tønsberg (cf. Johnsen 1976: 521). Although it is impossible to be certain about this, the most likely scenario is that St Olav's Abbey in Tønsberg was planned in the late 1160s by Bishop Torstein of Oslo, but that after he was killed the project was taken on by, and the abbey eventually founded by, Erling Skakke in cooperation with Bishop Helge in the early 1170s. However, the purpose would then have changed; from being planned as a community of regular canons supporting the cathedral chapter in Norway, it now became a companion of the Knights Hospitaller at Varna on the eastern side of the Oslo Fjord.

The introduction of the Premonstratensians and Hospitallers in Viken shortly after 1170 would have been associated with the pan-Scandinavian crusading project. Archbishop Eskil seems to have been the architect

behind this project, but both Archbishop Stefan of Uppsala and Bishop Helge of Oslo must have been well informed about this. Pope Alexander III seems initially to have perceived Eskil's plans more as evangelizing than as a military venture, but in a series of letters written to Scandinavian rulers in September 1171 or 1172 he gave his full support to a Baltic crusade, authorizing penitential warfare against the cruel Estonians and other heathens (Fonnesberg-Schmitt 2012: 355–359). In this Baltic context, the relationship of the Hospitallers to Premonstratensians in Denmark and Viken can be compared to the one the Templars had to the Cistercians in Champagne and Burgundy.²²

The Premonstratensians were, despite the deeply charismatic and highly influential Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux, more efficient and trained for preaching – including in the context of the crusades. When Bernard was asked to send some Cistercians to the Holy Land, he refused. Instead, he sent Premonstratensian canons to the Holy Land, in the 1130s, with a letter of recommendation to Queen Melisinde of Jerusalem. The canons founded abbeys at two important sites, St Habacuc in Lydda and St Samuel on Mount Joy (Slack 1991–92; Hiestand 1995). All over Europe, numerous Premonstratensian abbeys were named after sites in the Holy Land, and the Order's ordinal indicates that the offices held during the Holy Week were to imitate those performed in the Holy Sepulchre. Their white habit itself, although clearly inspired by the Cistercians, was interpreted as a reminder of the most joyous day in Christianity; this was in imitation of the angel robed in white at the Holy Sepulchre on Easter Sunday, who told the visiting women that Christ was no longer there but had risen from the dead.²³

Being associated to the world of withdrawal and practice of virtue, and at the same time having the obligations to edify the laity through words and the example of their conduct, they joined the old division of the active and contemplative lives. Bishop Anselm of Havelberg, Norbert of Xanten's

22 See Schenk 2012: 85–109. This included not only the spiritual and religious boost the Templars received from Bernard of Clairvaux's praise in *De laude novae militiae*, but also the many familial networks between the houses of the two orders.

23 Petit 2011: 89–102. On the white habit of the order, Petit cites Adam of Scot (Abbot of Dryburgh 1184–89), *De ordine et habitu canonicorum Praemonstratensium* (pp. 101–102), and Zachary of Besançon, *De concordia evangelistarum* (p. 115).

pupil, stated in his *Apologetic Letter*, written in 1138, that the perceived dichotomy between Martha, representing the secular clergy who worked in the world, and Mary, representing monks who lived in constant prayer and devotion to the Lord, was false. Instead, the Premonstratensians imitated Christ who edified both Martha and Mary.²⁴ The process of personal conversion, from heathen or Jew to Christian, or the carnal into the spiritual, of sinner to saved, clearly appealed to twelfth-century nobility in the age of the crusades.²⁵

This emphasis on preaching and edifying contributed to the popularity of Premonstratensian canons during the northern crusades. Anselm of Havelberg was appointed the papal legate during the Wendish Crusade in 1147 (Lees 1998: 70–97). Up to the early thirteenth century, when Gervase of Prémontré, abbot-general 1209–20, was one of the most important preachers of the Fifth Crusade, the Premonstratensians were central promoters for the expansion of Christianity (Slack 2001: 156–166).

Erling Skakke himself was closely familiar to crusading and penitential warfare. Not only had he fought against Muslims on his way to the Holy Land in the early 1150s, but he also used several elements of crusading rhetoric and practiced penitential warfare in his encounters with rivals and pretenders. During his battle against Sigurd of Rør outside Tønsberg in 1163, for example, Erling Skakke had his warriors make confession, receive communion and sing *Kyrie eleison* as they approached the enemy army. During their struggles against Sverre Sigurdsson towards the end of the 1170s, Erling Skakke and Archbishop Eystein promoted the idea that those who died in battle against Sverre would become martyrs.

24 Anselm's text is translated in *Norbert and Norbertine Spirituality*; see especially pp. 53–58. On the interpretations of the story of the different way Mary and Martha served Christ, see Constable 1995.

25 On the popularity of the Premonstratensians among the crusading nobility in northern France and Flanders, especially in the Coucy family, Slack 2001. On the new spirituality of the regular canons, although not distinguishing the Premonstratensian from other strands of this movement, see Bynum 1979 and 1982: 22–58. On the emphasis on, and concept of, conversion in the alleged autobiography of Herman the Jew, a complex text written at the Cappenberg Abbey, see Schmitt 2010. Both the concept of conversion and the mixture of active and contemplative life seem heavily influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux's language of mixed beings.

This adaptation of holy warfare to the internal struggles within Norway was closely linked to the idea that the king was a knight of the perpetual king of Norway, the martyred St Olav. Thus, at the crowing and anointment of Magnus Erlingsson, the young king was termed a *miles Olavi*. St Olav was increasingly portrayed as a crusader saint from the 1140s onwards, when he was said to have been particularly helpful in battles against heathens or other enemies opposing those who fought for the sake of the martyr king of Norway. This militarized aspect of the cult of St Olav was especially important among Scandinavians who served in the Varangian guard of the Byzantine Emperor, and homecoming Varangians may have supported its integration into the discourse of royal authority and warfare.²⁶ Indeed, as Kersti Markus has argued, there was a rapidly increasing number of churches dedicated to St Olav built in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century in the frontier regions of the eastward expansion initiated by Archbishop Eskil in 1170 (Markus 2017; 2020).



Figure 8. A small bell found within the ruins of St Olav's Abbey Church. Photo: Eirik Irgens Johnsen/KHM, CC BY-SA 4.0.

²⁶ On crusading ideas in the internal wars of Norway in the twelfth century, see the discussion and references in Bandlien 2021.

The focus of the Danish expansion, as well as in the letters of Pope Alexander III in the early 1170s, was Estonia. In the mid-1160s a certain Fulk, a monk in Peter of Celle's monastery in Reims, was ordained as the Bishop of Estonia by Archbishop Eskil, who at the time was living in exile. Other references to Estonians at this time indicate that Norwegians were involved in this region too. In the Norwegian sources, Estonia was associated with a dangerous and wild world. In *Historia Norwegie*, a short chronicle probably written in Trondheim shortly after the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros in the mid-twelfth century, the Baltics, and especially Estonia, was a region full of pirates that imprisoned and enslaved Christians.²⁷ At the same time, there are signs of more peaceful relations linked to trade, even before 1170. The area was heavily visited by Scandinavians from the Viking Age, a traffic that continued also in the shadow of the sharpening of confessional borders (Jonuks & Kurisoo 2013).

When Alexander III sought to support Bishop Fulk's mission to Estonia, he probably knew of such Norwegian-Baltic relations. He sent a letter to Archbishop Eystein, requiring him to recruit the Estonian Nicholas to serve as an interpreter for Fulk. Nicholas was at the time a monk in a monastery in Norway, probably the Benedictine Abbey in Stavanger. Whether or not he ever met Fulk and returned to Estonia is uncertain.²⁸ In the miracle collection of St Olav, written by Archbishop Eystein in the 1160s and 1170s, a story is included of two young Estonians who visited Nidaros cathedral as pilgrims. They told about the many miracles performed by St Olav in their homeland, and also how he had converted the father of one of them, a stern heathen who had opposed Christianity for a

27 *Historia Norwegie*, ch. 17, see also Snorri, *Heimskringla: Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, chs. 6–8.

28 Peter of Celle, *Letters*, no. 96, pp. 398–400 (recommendation of Fulk to Archbishop Eskil of Lund); no. 181, pp. 686–688 (recommendation of Fulk to King Knut Eriksson of Sweden (1167–1196) and Archbishop Stefan of Uppsala (1164–1185)). Archbishop Stefan had been to the curia as a legate in 1169 and would have had the opportunity to meet Fulk on his return, during his stay at the assembly in Ringsted. The sources do not reveal if Fulk ever went to Estonia. He still seems to have had the status of a missionary bishop around 1180, visiting Peter of Celle in Reims and bringing letters to Archbishop Absalon of Lund (1178–1201); *Letters*, no. 104, see also Nyberg 1998: 60–61. Fulk must have travelled to Denmark for the first time no later than the autumn 1173, see discussion by Haseldine in his edition of Peter of Celle, *Letters*, pp. 719–720. The literature on Fulk (and Nicholas) is extensive as he is mentioned in most accounts of the Northern crusades – see for instance Christianson 1997; Bysted et al. 2012; Selart 2015: 50–52.

long time (Jiroušková 2014, II: 70–71; *A History of Norway*, transl. Kunin, pp. 67–69). The message of the miracle was clearly that St Olav was the most effective saint in Estonia.

Neither Erling Skakke nor his son King Magnus ever joined an expedition to the Baltics. The son of Valdemar I, Knud VI of Denmark (r. 1182–1202), did not lead an expedition to Estonia until 1197, after forcing the Wends to submit to Danish rule. Only with Knud VI's brother and successor, Valdemar II (r. 1202–1241), in the early thirteenth century, was there a successful attempt to conquer Estonia. However, there was a constant focus on fighting off Estonian pirates, and in 1184 an association of Danish town dwellers organized an expedition against Estonia. Sometime in the mid-1180s, perhaps accompanying this Danish fleet, a Norwegian also went on a military expedition to Estonia. This was Eirik Sigurdsson, allegedly a half-brother of the kings Håkon Herdebrei (r. 1157–1161 (årspennene veksler her, men det bør være med århundre også for konsekvens skyld)) and Sverre Sigurdsson (r. 1177–1202).

Eirik Sigurdsson had, in his youth, made a career as a member of the Varangian guard, and returned to Norway in 1181 with a notable following. He had been in the service of Emperor Manuel Komnenus (r. 1143–1180) and probably in the late 1170s made a visit to the Holy Land, including the main sites in Jerusalem. Returning to Norway, he claimed to be the son of King Sigurd Munn ('the Mouth', r. 1136–1155). According to *Sverris saga* (ch. 59), Eirik had proved this when he submerged himself in the River Jordan with a candle in his hand; it was still burning when he rose from the water. Even though Eirik had several men with him who could testify to this miracle, King Sverre made him undergo an ordeal. He passed the test, and Sverre reluctantly accepted him as his brother on condition that he would not make a bid to be accepted as a king. Still, it must have been obvious for anyone that Eirik, his son and any future offspring were all potential pretenders in the future.²⁹

29 A similar agreement had been made when Harald Gille (r. 1130–1136) had arrived from the British Isles in the late 1120s and by an ordeal proved he was the half-brother of Sigurd the Crusader (d. 1130). Harald promised not to strive for kingship after Sigurd's death, but was hailed as a king at Haugar, the thing assembly in Tønsberg, in 1130. This challenge to the reign of Magnus, son of Sigurd the Crusader, who was hailed as king at an assembly in Oslo at the same time, ignited the so-called civil wars in Norway.

Sverre continued to be suspicious of his half-brother and must have felt threatened when, in 1185, Eirik asked to have a share of the kingdom. Sverre flatly refused the request, and Eirik instead went east with five ships and many men to raid in heathen lands. They won several battles in the Baltic Sea region, looting heathens in Vieik in Estonia, as well as looting Saxon traders on Gotland. This successful journey made it possible for Eirik to return to Norway in 1188 with eleven ships. His fleet was filled with experienced warriors, and his large booty could be distributed as gifts to recruit new supporters. Sverre at first gave in; he gave Eirik the title of earl and put him in charge of Viken. Eirik's main base from 1188 seems to have been the fortress on Slottsfjellet ('Castle Hill') in Tønsberg (*Sverris saga*, ch. 113). It was here, in 1190, that he and his family became sick and died. There were rumours that this was an assassination instigated by Sverre, caused by the fear that Eirik would make Tønsberg his personal stronghold in order to challenge King Sverre's power. It has been suggested that Eirik supported the faction later known as the Baglar ('the Croziers'), led by Bishop Nikolas of Oslo against Sverre. If this is the case, being a generous benefactor to the Premonstratensian Abbey, the most important preachers to the laity in Viken, would have been strategically important for Eirik's purposes. After Eirik and his family were buried in St Olav's in Tønsberg, the Premonstratensian Abbey functioned as a royal mausoleum for the Baglar until 1217.³⁰ The Baglar supported pretenders descending from Magnus Erlingsson, whom Sverre had killed in battle in 1184, and sought support from the Danish kings with such zeal that Valdemar II was welcomed to Tønsberg in 1204. Even so, the Premonstratensian author of *Profectione*, writing c. 1200, included a fairly positive portrait of King Sverre (see Skovgaard-Petersen in this volume). Eirik Sigurdsson's burial in St Olav's Abbey still points to the important role of the Premonstratensians in these struggles between pretenders, and between the Church in Viken and King Sverre.

30 Vandvik 1958, 512–513. Vandvik discusses some papal letters that probably refer to Earl Eirik. Most notable is a letter indicating that he had been responsible for having killed a priest. Pope Clement III (1187–1191) still spoke of Eirik with considerable respect. He received merely a lenient punishment, at the same time as Clement III reacted harshly to Norwegian clerics for acting like laymen, see *Latinske dokument*, nos. 25–26. Vandvik concluded that Eirik had the favour of the pope because from 1188 he, Eirik, was secretly allied to the Croziers in Viken.

The round church and the intellectual networks between Tønsberg, Paris and London

The Premonstratensians in Scandinavia had, in contrast to, for example, the Cistercians, no distinct architectural programme for their churches. At most, the distinguishing feature of the Premonstratensian churches in Scandinavia, such as in Vä, Lund and Børglum, is that they show signs of being prestigious buildings with wealthy donors (Lorenzen 1928). St Olav's Church fits this pattern in that it must have had ambitious founder(s), who seem to have been almost obsessed with the circle shape. There is thus the possibility that the planning of the church's structure may be separate from the establishment of an abbey of regular canons. Whether it is older or younger than the abbey cannot be established for certain from either archaeological or written evidence, but there are no indications that the Premonstratensians used another church when they settled in Tønsberg. It is also difficult to place it chronologically within the Scandinavian branch of the round church movement, since it differs in size and structure from those in Sweden and Denmark – it is twice as large as the second largest round church in Scandinavia, and it is the only one with three circles, with a sacristy in the shape of a semi-circle added later.

It seems most likely that the church was projected before the abbey was founded and then fitted into it in the 1170s. In this case, the building of the church would have been initiated in the 1160s. In this section I will discuss the possibility that inspiration came from contemporary round churches elsewhere in Europe, in particular the Temple Church in England built between 1158 and 1161 (Wilson 2010: 19–21). To this can be added other significant churches of the military orders, such as those of the Templars in Paris from the late 1140s, and of the Hospitallers in London from around 1150, both with a circular nave. From the hypothesis that the round church was constructed in the years before the establishment of the abbey in the early 1170s, possible founders that were active in Tønsberg, showed interest in the crusades, and were part of international networks in the late 1150s and 1160s, will be considered.

In Scandinavia, around thirty round churches were built (see Wienberg in this volume). Charters or narrative sources do not, however, reveal a

precise date for any of them, nor mention names of the founders, and for some their early history is merely known through excavations. However, most of them seem to be from a relatively confined timeframe, most from the latter half of the twelfth century, and some from the early thirteenth century.

For the rather extensive group of Danish churches, however, we have some clues to go on with respect to dating and founders.³¹ A cluster of these round churches reveal a network of founders in the circle around Valdemar I and Archbishop Absalon. An inscription on two tablets on the wall of the round church of Bjernede, some 40 kilometres southwest of Roskilde, states that Ebbe Skjalmsen raised a church together with his wife Ragnhild, and that his son Sune had a church built in stone. This may indicate that Ebbe Skjalmsen (d. 1151) built a wooden church at the site in the 1140s, and his son Sune Ebbesen (d. 1186) replaced it with the round church in stone, presumably around 1170. At Pedersborg, a few kilometres southwest of Bjernede, there was another round church, possibly erected a few years before Sune Ebbesen's church. Of this round church only the ruins are visible, but as the establishment of Pedersborg itself is associated with the magnate Peder Thorstensen (d. 1175), it can be assumed that he was the founder of the church as well. The round churches at Bjernede and Pedersborg are thus roughly contemporary and also comparable in their dimensions.

Peder Thorstensen was married to Cecilia, the daughter of Sune Ebbesen. His grandson Bishop Peder Vognsen of Aarhus (d. 1204) is associated with a third round church, at Thorsager, that has tentatively been dated to the 1190s. An even more ambitious church, with certain similarities with Bjernede, Pedersborg and Thorsager, and perhaps by the same master-builder as the latter, is the Church of Our Lady at Kalundborg. This church is conventionally dated to the 1190s or shortly after 1200. It has a remarkable and unique structure, with five towers surrounding the round nave, giving an impression of a circled town, an image of Jerusalem. This church was probably initiated by Esbern

31 On this subject, see Nilsson 1994; Wienberg 2017; Markus 2019, as well as Wienberg's article in this volume.

Snare (d. 1204), and it might have been completed after his death by his daughter Ingeborg and her husband Peder Strangesen (Roesdahl & Sass Jensen 2014).

These patrons of round churches were, then, in some cases, and were central members of the Danish élite supporting King Valdemar I, his son Knud VI, and his cousin, Archbishop Absalon of Lund. Many of them had also taken part in, or were associated with, the crusades. Ebbe Skjalmsen's father, Skjalm Hvide (d. 1113), had been a close advisor of King Erik Ejegod, who died on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1103. Skjalm was the foster-father to King Erik's son Knud Lavard, who was killed in 1131 and canonized and translated at Ringsted in 1170. Ebbe Skjalmsen was the brother of Asser Rig, who in turn was the foster-father of Knud Lavard's son Valdemar, and the father of Absalon (d. 1201), bishop of Roskilde and archbishop of Lund. Another son of Asser Rig was Esbern Snare, one of King Valdemar I's closest advisors and the one who instigated the Danish crusade as told in the chronicle *Profectio Danorum* (see Skovgaard-Petersen in this volume). Sune Ebbesen's sons had important offices in the late twelfth century. Anders Sunesen (d. 1228) was the successor to Absalon as Archbishop of Lund, and later went to Estonia. Peder Sunesen (d. 1214) was a student at St Geneviève in Paris, a friend of the important canonist Stephen of Tournai (d. 1203), and from 1191 the bishop of Roskilde. Ebbe Sunesen (d. 1208) was an important landowner and benefactor of the Augustinians at Æbelholt Abbey, as well as of the Cistercian Abbey at Sorø where the family had their mausoleum.

This family and its network that extended not only into the Danish royal family and the Church, but also to European intellectuals, was clearly a part of the round church movement, but even they built churches only half the size of St Olav's in Tønsberg. Chronologically, the round church in Tønsberg was one of the earliest in Scandinavia, and even though the connections between Viken and Denmark were close (albeit complicated) in the 1150s and 1160s (Esbern Snare, for instance, spent some time as a hostage in Tønsberg during the struggles between Erling Skakke and Valdemar I in the 1160s), the ambitions and resources spent on the Tønsberg church could only be matched by the later Kalundborg.

The inspiration must have come from somewhere outside Scandinavia, and the most comparable round church built at around 1160 was the Temple Church in London.

This chronology seems again to point to the most powerful and internationally aspiring man in Norway at the time, the regent and former crusader Erling Skakke. However, we shall explore some alternatives. Jes Wienberg (2017) points out that round churches were not necessarily built to commemorate a visit to the Holy Land, but rather as replacements for a journey to Jerusalem. This might be someone who had intended to – perhaps even taken a vow to – participate in a pilgrimage or crusade, but for some reason had been barred from doing so, and then had spent what it would have cost to take part in such a venture to invest in local devotion to the Holy Land instead. Perhaps some people in their network had gone without them, or they had ancestors whose travels could be commemorated posthumously in this way.

Accordingly, can we find anyone in Tønsberg that could fit this description and at the same time have links to the Temple Church in London? Again, the sources are scarce and often fragmentary, but there are some candidates that stick out. Among them are the members of the most powerful family in Viken, residing at Bratsberg close to the town Skien: According to the sagas, the brothers Vatnorm (or just Orm) Dagsson and Gregorius Dagsson, who were active in Viken and Tønsberg from the late 1130s to the 1150s. Vatnorm and Gregorius, the most famous and powerful of the two until his death in 1161, were the sons of Dag Eilivsson. Dag is depicted in the sagas as one of the bravest warriors in King Magnus Bareleg's fatal expedition to Ireland in 1102–1103. He was married to Ragnhild, daughter of the wealthy Skofte Ogmundsson from Giske in Western Norway. Skofte is the first known crusader from Norway, travelling with his three sons to the Holy Land in 1101; all of them perishing during the journey. Although not explicitly stated in the sources, it is assumed that Dag Eilivsson was one of the followers of King Sigurd Magnusson the Crusader's journey to the Holy Land a few years later. He founded a Benedictine nunnery at Gimsøy, close to Bratsberg, where Dag and Ragnhild's daughter Baugeid was an abbess and where Gregorius was buried in 1161. Dag and Ragnhild were presumably also the patrons of

the church at Kapittelberget in Skien. This church is one of the very few containing a crypt in Norway (the other is the contemporary monastery church of Munkeliv in Bergen, built by King Øystein, brother of Sigurd the Crusader), and might have been inspired by the larger crypt beneath Lund Cathedral, consecrated in 1123.



Figure 9. Chalice from Dragsmark Abbey, Bohuslän. The chalice shows affinities to the work of Nicholas of Hereford, a German working in England, from the first half of the thirteenth century. It might have been a gift from the founder of the abbey, King Håkon IV Håkonsson (r. 1217-1263). Photo: B. Andersson/Bohusläns museum.

According to the kings' sagas, Vatnorm was a royal magistrate in Tønsberg from the late 1130s, leading its defence and making certain that the townspeople prepared ships and crew for maritime warfare (Snorri, *Heimskringla: Haraldssona saga*, ch. 5). Vatnorm is hardly depicted as a valiant warrior in the sagas, while his brother Gregorius is said to have been a bit too heroic; acting on impulse and notions of glorious honour rather than on the basis of strategic thinking (Ciklamini 1978). Gregorius was, along with his later opponent Erling Skakke, an important advisor and leader in the retinue of King Inge Haraldsson during the 1150s and is said to have often dwelled in Tønsberg, where he and his family were substantial property owners. Ragnhild, Skofte Ogmundsson's daughter,

herself owned a great deal of property in Tønsberg after becoming a widow when Dag Eilivsson died.

The brothers tick several of the boxes for a person we might expect to build the round church: great wealth, members of a respected and ambitious family with a strong position in Viken, associated to royal power, substantial property in Tønsberg, associated with the foundation of monastic communities, and potentially devoted to the memory of family members who had previously participated in expeditions to the Holy Land, or who wished to compensate for not going themselves. Moreover, they could be motivated by a wish to overshadow their rival Erling Skakke, who had actually gone on a crusade in the early 1150s. However, the brothers had no obvious link to England, and both were dead before the Temple Church was erected and would have made any impact on the local architecture. The brothers are not known to have had any children who might have erected the church to their memory. On the other hand, their sister Abbess Baugeid and their mother Ragnhild, in the lack of any immediate descendants, may have used their wealth to make a monument of the family in Tønsberg, although this must remain a vague possibility.³²

Another candidate, a contemporary of the Bratsberg family, is Solmund Sigurdsson, the *gjaldker* (steward) in Tønsberg in the early and mid-twelfth century. Solmund's family was an important and wealthy one, based in Agder in the southern part of Norway. His father had served King Magnus Bareleg on his expeditions to the British Isles until he was killed during a campaign at Anglesey in 1099. Solmund was a relative of Kale Kolsson, whose father was from Agder and mother was closely related to the earls of Orkney. In the 1120s and early 1130s, Kale is said to have traded in England, especially in Grimsby, almost every summer while spending the winter with Solmund (*Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 58; also Johnsen 1929: 83). In 1135 Solmund joined Kale, now having changed his name to Ragnvald, to the Orkneys and also supported Ragnvald's successful battle for winning the earldom. Later, Solmund is said to be among

32 Most of the family perished during the struggle against Håkon Herdebrei in the years around 1160, although a sister of Baugeid and Gregorius was married to the important Austrätt family near Trondheim and had many descendants. The rich family farm Bratsberg became the property of Gimsøy Abbey.

the most important men in Viken, although few details about his family and marriage can be found in the sources. During Ragnvald's campaigns on his way to the Holy Land in the early 1150s, Ragnvald recalled the yule-feasts with Solmund and contrasts these to the fighting he takes part in on this venture (*Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 87).

Solmund is also interesting for another reason: he has been identified as being identical with a man named Salomon (plausibly a Latinized version of Solmund) mentioned in a letter from the sister of Abbot Ernis (*aka* Hervé/Ervis) of St Victor in Paris. This letter was written in Norway during the years 1161–1172 (when Ernis was in office) and implies that she had married a Norwegian nobleman.³³ Ernis's sister names herself only as 'G.' (although a copyist of the letter in the seventeenth century, Jean de Thoulouse, named her Germunda), and she clearly had at least one adult son, named Geirmund (or Germundus) when writing the letter. Thus, she most likely had married a Norwegian in the late 1130s or early 1140s. In her letter she offers Ernis greetings from Salomon, who wants to thank Ernis for all his help, presumably during his travels abroad. The purpose of the letter was twofold. First, in exchange for the gifts brought by the messenger, skin from a polar bear, the tooth of a narwhale, and two gilded silver spoons, she asked to have cinnamon and carnation in return. Second, she had heard that there were many Norwegians who said they had been sent to St Victor by her husband, and who requested Ernis's hospitality, but she maintained that she and her husband had sent only two, Salomon and John. For the future, G. would like to agree on a secret sign that those men genuinely sent from her and her husband could show to Ernis.³⁴

In another letter, probably written after the previously mentioned letter of G., her son Geirmund writes to his uncle Ernis. He confirms that he has arrived safely back in Norway and expresses his longing to be back in Paris. However, there was so much pillaging and so many killings in Norway at the time that he hesitated to set out for a long journey.³⁵

33 Ernis's last years, however, were deeply troubled; see Duggan 1994. This is not reflected in the letters, so a tentative dating of the Norwegian letters would be at least before 1170.

34 The letter is edited in Johnsen 1939: 105–106, but this will be superseded in the forthcoming vol. 20 of *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*.

35 Johnsen 1939: 106; see also the excerpt from St Victor's obituary where the canon with the rare name Germundus is included, something that indicates that Ernis's nephew came to Paris after all.

This situation fits the period of the most intense rivalry between Erling Skakke and Valdemar, the uprising of Olav Ugjæva in 1165–69, and the killing of the bishop of Oslo.

These letters indicate not only that Ernis had familial relations in Norway, but also that the traffic back and forth to St Victor was extensive. We know from other letters that Eystein of Nidaros visited the abbey at least once, in 1160/61, and from a letter of Thomas Becket we learn that Eystein's envoys to Rome were welcomed there in 1169.³⁶

If indeed Salomon was the Norwegian husband of G. and father of Geirmund, as has been suggested, the only person featuring in the written sources with a similar name that fits the profile is Solmund, the steward in Tønsberg.³⁷ The close contact Ernis seems to have established with Solmund is in any case interesting for our discussion, since Ernis was most likely an Englishman. Although he had become a student at St Victor at least from 1139, he may have met Solmund in England during the latter's visit to Grimsby and Lincolnshire in 1135, where the important – at least in a Norwegian context, since it was associated with the foundation of Halsnøy Abbey in 1163 – Wellow Abbey was situated.

Furthermore, Ernis was most likely a relative of Lawrence of Westminster; at least this is indicated in how he addresses Lawrence in his letters.³⁸ Lawrence had also been a student at St Victor and had even transcribed some of Hugh of St Victor's sermons. From 1158, however, he moved back to England and was Abbot of Westminster until his death between 1173 and 1175 (Münster-Swendsen 2014a: 43–47). Lawrence was

36 See Johnsen 1939; Gunnes 1996; DN XIX 46. At least two successors of Archbishop Eystein, Eirik and Tore, studied in St Victor at this time. Archbishop Eskil of Lund was part of the network of Ernis, but they had a fallout when a huge deposit Eskil had made in St Victor turned out to have vanished when he reclaimed it; see the valuable study by Münster-Swendsen 2014b. It could be added to her study that Archbishop Eystein – or some of the Norwegian students – seems to have deposited books at the abbey, which between 1161 and 1168 were pawned at the request of Abbot Roger of St Euverte in Orléans to buy supplies, seemingly without Archbishop Eystein's knowledge. This did not scare off Norwegian clerics and bishops from using St Victor as a financial intermediary; e.g. Archbishop Guttorm of Nidaros deposited papal taxes in St Victor in 1220; see Johnsen 1939: 107.

37 See the note in Johnsen 1996: 56. I am grateful to Synnøve Myking who made me aware of this passage.

38 Münster-Swendsen 2014b: 91, n 2. Duggan 1994: 664–665, n 8, also points to this relationship, but suggests that both Ernis and Lawrence were from Normandy and thus French-speaking.

an essential force behind the canonization of Edward the Confessor, and he is said to have procured the translation on 13th October 1163. The Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx was also present and presented a new *vita* of the royal saint. Aelred stated in his preface that he had been asked to write this work by his relative Lawrence of Westminster.³⁹ Also present in Westminster was Achard, either an Englishman or a Norman, who was the second abbot of St Victor from 1155 until he resigned in 1161. It was Achard with whom Archbishop Eystein had made acquaintance during his visit in 1160/61. Achard remained active after his resignation; he was elected bishop of Avranches in 1161, was the godfather of Henry II's daughter Eleanor, born in 1162, and founded the Premonstratensian Abbey of La Lucerne in 1164. This church was where he was buried in 1172, rather than in the Cathedral of Avranches, where Henry II had made his penance for the murder of Thomas Becket shortly before Achard's death.

Lawrence of Westminster had no formal role in the foundation of the Temple Church. The patron of the New Temple was Robert de Beaumont, Earl of Leicester, the justiciar of Henry II and the regent during the king's absence from London. Robert de Beaumont regularly presided over the Exchequer in Westminster Hall, and was bound to have visited the neighbouring Abbey on occasions. Thus, it is plausible to assume that Lawrence was somehow involved in the planning and execution of the round church of the Templars in London (Wilson 2010: 23; Crouch 1986: 91).

This familial, intellectual and economical network of St Victor – Westminster – Tønsberg is only alluded to in the sources, and much remains uncertain. However, there were Norwegian envoys to Henry II in 1163, possibly in association with the consecration of the Temple Church. There are also the handicraft and artisan networks traceable in architecture: workshops and materials that connected northern France, London and Norway. The piers of the Temple Church, for instance, point to the influence from the Premonstratensian abbey church of Dommartin near Amiens, built 1153 to 1163, while its capitals probably came from, or were heavily influenced by, Tournai workshops. There are similarities to the

39 Scholz 1961. The familial relationship between Lawrence and Aelred is also mentioned by the latter's biographer Walter Daniel, although perhaps based on the preface in the *vita*.

new east arm added to York Minster around 1160, the waterleaf in the decoration of capitals is reminiscent of those found at Ripon Minster, as well as the Augustine Priory of Bridlington, east of York. Achard of St Victor is associated with the latter site, while the works made at Nidaros cathedral under Archbishop Eystein show a relationship to Tournai, York and Ripon.⁴⁰

There is also ample evidence of the numerous visits by Norwegian envoys to Henry II during these years, explicitly mentioned in 1155–56, 1158–59, and in 1162–63 (DN XIX 33, 34, 36, 40). Equally relevant in the case of Solmund and G., are the extensive trade relations between England and Norway at the time. Henry II regulated the apparently extensive trade centred on Grimsby, a town also Solmund knew well from his visits. The records of trade at this time, however, are restricted to luxury items, especially hawks and gyrfalcons (e.g. DN XIX 32, 37, 41, 42). The gifts of G. to her brother at St Victor did not include birds for hunting, but other luxury items from the Arctic areas. This is the kind of trade Solmund of Tønsberg and G. most likely were involved in, and these were items they could invest in building networks and prestige with the continent.

This makes the patronage of G. and her husband, who, as we have seen, was possibly Solmund Sigurdsson, of the round church at least plausible. They had the connections, and as G. was not only the sister of Ernis of St Victor but also related to Lawrence of Westminster (and thus also of Aelred of Rievaulx) she was a focal point in the communication between important nodes of intellectual, economic and political exchange in northern Europe. However, the question remains as to whether G. and her husband were able to finance such an ambitious task. For this purpose, the support of the Bratsberg family and not least of Erling Skakke may have been necessary to make the project a reality. With the rotunda of Nidaros being built at about the same time, the architectural know-how of circular churches must have been available in Norway.

40 King 2008; Wilson 2010. To this can be added a reference to an English father and son going to Norway to seek work in Reginald of Durham 1847: 349–350. Their line of work is not specified, but the demand for experienced workers who could build in stone must have been very high during the twelfth century.



Figure 10. Two stone faces from Dragsmark Abbey Church. Photo: Kristina Lindholm/Bohusläns museum.

Concluding remarks

Although we will probably never know who the patron of the round church and the abbey was, at least the acquisitions of the Premonstratensian Abbey point to a royal donor. The most likely dating is shortly after 1170, which makes it likely that it was associated with the better-known endowment by King Valdemar I to the Premonstratensian abbey at Vä in eastern Scania. In Denmark, this can be linked to the foundation of the Hospitallers at Antvorskov and the royal support of the guilds of Knud Lavard, both of which initiatives are associated with the expansion of Valdemar I into the Baltic Sea region. At the meeting in Ringsted in 1170, Erling Skakke made a pledge of allegiance to King Valdemar, and held Viken as a fief under Danish rule, although the control of Valdemar and his sons over this region continued to be fragile during the internal struggles in Norway. The initiative to found an abbey in Tønsberg may, however, have started already in the late 1160s by Bishop Helge of Oslo. His involvement in the uprising of Olav Ugjæva at the time, supported in Denmark and especially in northern Jutland near the mother house Børglum, could be the explanation for it becoming a Premonstratensian, and not an Augustinian, abbey.

The round church points in a slightly different direction. Besides the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple Church in London may have been a more likely model for the St Olav Church in Tønsberg, rather the smaller round churches in Denmark and Sweden. If the suggested dating of the

(pre-abbey) church to the 1160s, the regent Erling Skakke is again a likely candidate, having been to the Holy Land himself. His wife, Kristin, daughter of Sigurd the Crusader, had no less an interest in commemorating the importance of Jerusalem in a Norwegian context, especially since she is one of the candidates of having commissioned the painting of St Olav on a column of the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. However, Jes Wienberg has pointed out that round churches may rather have been built by people who did not go to the Holy Land, but who brought Jerusalem back to their home region. In that case, it is striking that there were several candidates that would have had the motives and means to support this impressive architectural feat in Tønsberg. Both Vatnorm Dagsson of Bratsberg and his family, and G. (Germunda?), the sister of Ernis of St Victor and related to both Lawrence of Westminster and Aelred of Rievalux, and possibly married to Solmund Sigurdsson, a close friend of the crusader Ragnvald Kale of Orkney, would most likely have been interested in making the church a reality. However, considering the rich property of St Olav's Abbey and its financial support from the St Michael's Church in the royal fortress of Slottsfjellet, the regent of Norway in the 1160s could have used this opportunity to rival and even surpass the foundations of Archbishop Eskil and King Valdemar I in Denmark.

By the end of the twelfth century, the round church was certainly part of the Premonstratensian abbey. The excavated ruins that are visible to us today are a reminder of the various ways Christians in western Europe shaped the presence of the Holy Land within architecture and landscape during the twelfth century. In this way, Premonstratensian canons would situate Tønsberg not only within a larger network of trade and politics, but also within the larger intellectual framework of preaching the ideals of the crusades, and within the military framework of participating in (or compensating for not participating in) these military ventures.⁴¹

41 Relevant here is also the participation of Norwegian in the Fifth Crusade, see Svenungsen 2017. The sources mention that townspeople financed one of the ships sent to the eastern Mediterranean, but do not specify which town. From the context, I am inclined to think they came from Tønsberg, and not Nidaros as assumed by Svenungsen.

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A Failed Crusade? The Danish-Norwegian Crusade Account. *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (c. 1200)

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The fall of Jerusalem in 1187 and the dramatic events following it gave rise to a rich and varied literature in western Europe. One of them is the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, a fascinating but rather little-known Latin account of a Danish-Norwegian expedition to the Holy Land in 1191–92, led by five Danish magnates and one Norwegian.¹

This ambitious enterprise is not known from other sources. Indeed, the text itself was only preserved for posterity by a happy stroke of fortune. Around 1620 a medieval manuscript was found in Lübeck, which contained, as the primary text, the Jewish historian Josephus's *De bello Judaico* (1st cent. AD) followed by three shorter texts connected to Denmark and Norway, among them the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (in the following referred to as *Profectio*). Had not this

¹ The standard critical edition of the text is M. Cl. Gertz's edition in *Scriptores minores* II, 1922. Quotations from the text in this article are taken from my own new edition (under preparation).

manuscript appeared, neither the account nor the events themselves would have been known to us today.²

It appears to be the story of a crusade that failed. Towards the end of the narrative it turns out that the expedition arrived in Jerusalem only after ‘the pagans had struck a firm peace with the Christians’, i.e. the peace between the English King Richard Lionheart and the Muslim leader Saladin in September 1192. The Danish-Norwegian expedition came too late to fight, and instead they were given a guided tour to the holy sites.

Nevertheless, the text does not describe the expedition as a failure. Throughout it is hailed as a noble and divinely inspired enterprise. As we shall see, the central message seems to be that the goal *was* achieved, that this was indeed a successful endeavour, not compromised by its late arrival.³

In other words, it makes good sense to read the text as a justification, an apology, and the apologetic argument runs along two lines. Not only is the overall outcome presented as a success; the dispositions that appear to have caused the delay in the first phase of the voyage, are also emphatically defended.

This first phase of the voyage took place in Norway. The expedition, as we shall see, follows a surprising route, starting from northern Jutland in Denmark then via Kungälv (near modern Gothenburg) to Tønsberg on the Norwegian south coast and from there northbound to Bergen on the Norwegian west coast. This was certainly not the direct route to Palestine. It will be my main argument in this article that the description of the events in Norway offers a key to understanding, or rather getting closer to understanding, the purpose of the *Profectio*.

2 The manuscript is no longer extant but from a catalogue of Lübeck Stadtbibliothek drawn up by Johan Kirchmann in 1622 we learn that it was a parchment manuscript in folio and that it contained the following texts: Josephus's *De bello Judaico* (1st cent. AD), Theodericus Monachus's *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, and a life of St Geneviève by William of Ebelholt (c. 1122–1203). Apart from the *De bello Judaico* these texts belong to the late twelfth century, and it seems a fair assumption that the manuscript was produced in the first decades of the thirteenth century (see also below). The history of the manuscript and its rediscovery in the seventeenth century is the subject of Skovgaard-Petersen 2002.

3 This interpretation was first suggested by Norbert Backmund in his chapter on the *Profectio* in *Die mittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreiber des Prämonstratenserordens*, 1972: 244–251. It is further developed in Skovgaard-Petersen 2001.

The Tønsberg-Børglum connection

But first let me briefly sum up what we can reasonably assume about the writer himself and the date and place of composition. The identity of the author is unknown, but it is generally agreed, on account of the way he renders some Old Norse proverbs and place names, that he was of Norwegian origin.⁴ Moreover, he presents himself as a canon, and since he reveals that he has spent some time in Tønsberg as the expedition arrives there (Chapter 9), most scholars see it as highly probable that he had been a canon of the Premonstratensian order in this town – which he singles out for special mention in the same chapter. Let us listen to the canon's vivid description of Tønsberg:

I can paint a clearer description of this place's setting, inasmuch as I lived in the district for quite a long time and came to know the ways of its people no less than its various localities. The sea flows over a broad area into a wide fjord and along many expanses separates the mainland from the islands, one of which, Nøtterøy, stretches its length opposite the town and owing to its position provides it with a harbour; because Tønsberg is built on the sea-coast it supplies wharves for all those who approach it. There is an enormous wealth of sea-fish there, but a scarcity of fresh water. Well populated, especially in summer when hosts of ships bring visitors from all over the world, it contains respectable citizens of both sexes who are celebrated for their generous and bountiful charity; but when they meet to carouse together, bad drinking-habits and frequent intoxication promote disorder and incite these folk even to the point of bloodshed.

Hard by the town a mountain juts high into the sky and, surrounded by sheer precipices, resembles a stout fortress, granting access nowhere except along a single man-made path, which when blocked off allows no easy approach to an enemy. On the mountain peak lies a beautifully fashioned church dedicated to St Michael; with its appurtenances it supports the canons of the Premonstratensian order who dwell in that township. Below the mountain spreads a plain, whose fragrant flowers are a sheer delight, and which provides a dock suitable for fitting or overhauling vessels.

4 This argument was first brought forward by Kr. Kaalund in 1896.

Needless to say these famous men, whose exploits I am recording for history, lingered in this town, overhauling their ships and almost rebuilding them afresh, for a huge and exceedingly perilous voyage lay ahead of them. (Chapter 9).⁵

Note how, in the last lines, the peaceful rest in Tønsberg is contrasted with the dangers waiting ahead. Throughout, the gravity and importance of the project are stressed.

Even more obscure than the author himself is the *dominus K*, to whom the text is dedicated. All we learn of him in the dedicatory letter is that he has commissioned the canon to write the account.⁶ Interestingly, it appears from the following chapter, the prologue, that not only he, but also the leaders of the expedition themselves had asked the author to commemorate the expedition in writing – a request that fits well with the apologetic character of the text.⁷

The events took place ‘a few years ago’ (*ante aliquot annos*), the canon informs us in his dedicatory letter to K – that is, some years after 1191–92.

5 All translations from the *Profectio* are made by Peter Fisher, Cambridge. The Latin wording is: *Situm loci huius eo possum euidentiori stilo depingere, quod in eo longiori tempore conuersatus mores hominum non minus quam locorum didici differentiam. Latitudo maris amplum quandam sinum profundens multis tractibus insulas a corpore terre secernit, quarum una, nomine Nioterei, contra oppidum distenta porrigitur et positione sua portum preparat ciuitati, que maris in littore constructa pontes prebet adeuntibus. Piscium marinorum inibi multa copia et aque dulcis inopia. Populosa satis (in estate propter nauium multitudinem undique terrarum aduentantium), ciues honestos utriusque sexus liberalitate et elemosynarum largitate preclaros habet; sed uitiosa potatio et frequens ebrietas societatem conuictantium turbat et usque ad effusionem humani cruoris instigat.*

Mons quidam iuxta oppidum excreuit in altum, preruptis undique rupibus quasi castrum quoddam fortissimum, nusquam aditum pandens preter unam semitam humano ingenio fabricatam, que reclusa facillime hostes adire non patitur. In cuius cacumine pulchre constructa patet ecclesia beati Michaelis honore consecrata, que cum suis pertinentiis canonicos Premonstratensis ordinis in eadem uilla commorantes sustentat. Planicies quoque suffusa monti, floribus odoriferis gratissima, stationem idoneam nauibus preparandis seu reficiendis administrat.

In hac nempe ciuitate moram fecere uiri gloriosi quorum gesta mando memorie, naues suas reficientes et quasi iam ex nouo solidantes. Grandis enim et periculosa nimis restabat uia.

6 ‘In order to transmit their achievements in a record for posterity with the praise they deserve, despite my ignorance and inarticulacy, you were willing to call upon me ...’ (*Vt ergo eorum gesta memorie posterorum digna laude traderentur, mihi, quamquam inscio et elingui, precipiendi commendare uoluistis ...*, Epistola)

7 ‘At the request of those esteemed individuals, I have undertaken to trace their history in some sort of style ... the individuals I mean are those who left behind the sweet embraces of their wives ...’ (*Et rogatu illarum uenerabilium personarum qualicumque stilo exarandum suscepi ... que uidelicet persone, relictā dulcedine complexus coniugalis ...*, Prologus)

Bearing in mind again the element of justification, it seems reasonable to assume that the account was written not too long afterwards, probably in the late 1190s.⁸

The expedition was a Danish-Norwegian collaboration, launched on Danish initiative. The leaders of the expedition, on whose request the account was written according to the prologue, were all Danish. It is most likely, then, in spite of the author's Norwegian origin, that the account was written in Denmark. This makes Børglum in north-western Jutland a likely place of composition since Børglum was home to a Premonstratensian monastery which was the mother abbey of the abbey in Tønsberg.⁹ Closely connected to Tønsberg as it was, also geographically, Børglum must have been a milieu characterized by the combined Danish and Norwegian outlook that is found in the text.



Figure 1. Børglum kloster by J. F. Richardt, 1846. Photo: National Museum of Copenhagen.

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- 8 Another factor in favour of a date of composition in the late 1190s is the fact that three powerful men – the Danish King Knud VI, the Norwegian King Sverre, and Archbishop Absalon – are mentioned with no indication of their death. Absalon died in 1201 and Knud and Sverre in 1202.
- 9 This has been demonstrated by Johnsen 1976 and Nyberg 1993. Moreover, the uncle of one of the leaders of the expedition, a former Bishop Toke in Børglum, is referred to as master (*dominus*), which may indicate the author's Premonstratensian allegiance (Ch. 22, cf. Ch. 6).

Survey of contents

Before we focus on the Norwegian themes, let us briefly go through the narrative as a whole. It falls into three parts. In the first part we hear of the background and the preparations of the journey. Here the Christian and spiritual dimensions of the journey are strongly emphasized. As a result of man's general sinfulness, we learn, Jerusalem has now fallen into pagan hands. It is made clear from the very beginning that the Danish-Norwegian members of the expedition are followers of Christ. The travellers renounced their homes and families in order to follow the command of Jesus to his disciples; they are presented as a kind of new disciples. This is one of the recurrent *topoi* of twelfth-century crusading discourse.¹⁰

A letter from the Pope exhorting Christians to reconquer what has been lost, is rendered. By placing this papal admonition at the beginning of his account, the author marked the expedition as a crusade. The crusades were characterized by being launched by the popes and conducted under the spiritual leadership of the popes. The expedition that forms the subject of the *Profectio*, was, it is thus shown, organized in response to the papal call. The letter connects the notion of renunciation, of leaving everything behind in order to follow Christ, to the idea of dying for Christ who died for us. Christ has suffered injustice through the pagan pollution of the city. Now the crusaders must not be afraid to give their lives to help Him, who once died for man.¹¹

We hear of the grief that seizes the Danish court at the arrival of the papal delegates. The astonishment is turned into determination to fight after a long speech delivered by Esbern Snare (ca. 1127–1204, brother of Archbishop Absalon). Reminding his audience of the great deeds performed in war by their ancestors, Esbern points out that they now have

10 The text as a whole is characterized by deep familiarity with contemporary European crusading discourse. A seminal study on this topic is Rousset 1945. See Skovgaard-Petersen 2001 for further references.

11 The authenticity of the letter is disputed. It is not identical to the bull *Audita tremendi* in which Pope Gregory VIII launched the crusade in October 1187. It is, however, accepted as authentic in the second edition of Jaffé-Loewenfeld's *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum* II (1888) no. 16073. I am inclined to regard it as a composition on the part of the author of the *Profectio*, but it must be emphasized that its theological outlook resembles not only the *Audita tremendi* but also other papal crusading declarations from the 1180s and 1190s.

much nobler goals to fight for. The travellers should follow the example of saints and be prepared to give their life for Christ.

Fifteen magnates now begin to organize recruitment and prepare their ships, but due to the interference of the Devil, ten of them later back out. The five remaining men are named and hailed as men 'who had received this divinely inspired virtue in their hearts'. Interestingly, three of them belong to the Hvide family, the most powerful family in Denmark – an indication that this must have been a highly profiled enterprise.

This is, we learn, an enterprise of cosmic dimensions, a fight between God and the Devil. The five leaders are said to be travelling with Abraham from Ur to see the Promised Land that flows with milk and honey. They are thus associated with both Abraham and the Israelites after their flight from Egypt, and this is another standard crusading theme. The narrator rounds this chapter off with an allegory: the Promised Land that flows of milk and honey refers to the Virgin Mary, who brought forth Jesus Christ, both Man and God, as indicated by milk and honey, respectively.

In the second part the religious dimensions are less prominent. This is the 'Norwegian' part which tells of the early phases of the journey. First, they sail to Norway, more precisely Kungälv (situated, as it says, where the borders between Sweden, Norway, and Denmark meet) to pick up a group of around two hundred Norwegian men who join the expedition under the leadership of Ulv of Lauvnes (known from *Sverre's saga* as one of Sverre's trusted men). Sailing along the south coast of Norway they make a stop in Tønsberg, from where a delegation is sent to Oslo to assure the Norwegian King Sverre that they have no hostile intentions. It is here the author informs us of his own connection to Tønsberg. Making a break at the Seløy islands (off the south-western coast of Norway) they decide, on Ulv's advice, to go northwards to the city of Bergen before heading for the Holy Land. In Bergen some of the Danes cause a major riot, whereupon all the Danes withdraw to a harbour close by.

In the next chapters Sverre, the Norwegian king, plays an important part. Arriving in Bergen, he spies on the Danish ships, protected by the dark. To the insolent shouting of the watchmen on the Danish ships, who do not realize his identity, he reacts with royal dignity. Then he consents to forgive one of the Danish leaders, the otherwise unknown Sven

Torkilssøn, who has recently joined a conspiracy against him and now fears meeting him face to face. Ulv now persuades his comrades to wait for him since he has to finish some business before he can leave. Most of the Danes, however, are too impatient and start out, while Sven and his men wait for Ulv.

The last part is about the voyage from Norway to the Holy Land and the journey home again. Attention is focused on the first phase, the crossing of the North Sea where the men are met by a violent storm. Here the crusading themes and *topoi* which figure so prominently in the first part, return. The narrator concentrates on Sven Torkilssøn's ship, which is destroyed. Those who die are hailed as martyrs while the miraculous survival of the rest of Sven's men is seen as a parallel to the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea. The other ships are unharmed, but some of the men on board lose all their belongings. Their comrades share their things with them, an act praised by the narrator as a renewal of the primitive Church.

Cast ashore on the Frisian coast they continue to Venice by land, from where they sail to the Holy Land, again suffering terrible hardships. Here they learn that peace has been agreed between Christians and pagans, and, having paid a visit to the sacred places, they return home, some via Rome, others via Constantinople. In Constantinople they witness a miracle. An image of the Virgin Mary (called *Eudoxa* or *Odigitria*), which is carried every day from one part of the city to another, on Tuesdays carries itself by angelic force, in front of a numerous crowd. From Constantinople they travel home through Hungary.

Followers of Christ

There is a remarkable imbalance between the detailed description of the preparations and the first phases of the journey in Norway and in the North Sea on the one hand – and on the other, the very cursory account of the experiences of the travellers in the Holy Land itself. Or to put it in thematic terms, the presentation of the expedition as a grand enterprise, a fight between God and the Devil, seems incongruent with the rather uneventful outcome, that they set out to liberate Jerusalem and end up on a guided tour to the holy sites, under pagan surveillance.

But these are only apparent paradoxes. While not taking part in the actual fight for Jerusalem, the expedition is faced with opposition on a similar scale, not from a pagan army but from Nature itself. The storm in the North Sea and the shipwreck they suffer, forms the dramatic culmination of the narrative. In their final hour the men who suffered shipwreck reminded each other that this expedition was divinely inspired and that they should not be afraid to die for Christ. And in the moment of death, we learn, they obtained remission of all their sins. They died as martyrs and were rewarded with eternal life.

This was an integral part of the theology of the crusades as it had developed in the course of the twelfth century.¹² Martyrdom may be seen as the ultimate fulfilment of the precept to leave behind everything and follow Christ, and to die for him who had died for them. Indeed, our travellers not only follow him, they also imitate him in their death, dying, as it is emphasized, on the same day in the same hour as he did.

In the *Profectio*, men did not die in battle, but some of them lost their lives on their way to the Holy Land. They too risked their lives to follow Christ. The purpose was to reach the Promised Land in the spiritual sense of following Christ and leaving everything else behind. This has been strongly emphasized in the first sections of the text. The point is that they fulfilled this purpose. And even those who did not die, are likened to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and to members of the primitive Church. They thus retain their exalted status. The text tells us that the enterprise was a success after all. This may also lie behind the final description of the miracle of the Virgin Mary the men witnessed in Constantinople. At an earlier point in the text the reader has learned that the goal of the expedition, the land that flows with milk and honey, is an allegorical expression of the virgin mother that brings forth God and man. Witnessing the miracle of the Virgin Mary may be yet another statement to the effect that they did reach their goal, the Promised Land, not only in its geographical sense, but also in the allegorical meaning of the Virgin Mary.

It is a reasonable assumption that after their return to Denmark the travellers were met with criticism. The whole project must have been an

12 Riley-Smith 1993: 151; Rousset 1945: 81–83; Skovgaard-Petersen 2001: 56ff.

expensive and prestigious affair – and they arrived too late to fight. By describing the journey in the literary crusading tradition, emphasizing that anyone who died on the crusade would receive the privilege of martyrdom, our canon makes it clear that they did not die in vain, that the project was not a failure. This must be regarded as the central message of the text.

The Norwegian intermezzo – a key to the interpretation

But can we get any closer in our attempt to understand the interests behind this text? The author indicates that some of the magnates who took part in the journey had asked him to preserve the memory of the great enterprise in writing. Among the five magnates, we follow one of them much closer than the others, namely Sven Torkilssøn. It is a very good guess that Sven Torkilssøn was among the commissioners, perhaps the only one (in addition to the dedicatee, K). It is the events onboard *his* ship that we hear about during the storm in the North Sea. Moreover, he plays a key role in the Norwegian section where we learn about his reconciliation with King Sverre after having taken part in a rebellion against the Norwegian king. Let us take a closer look at this Norwegian, second part of the text.

Having left Tønsberg the expedition reaches the islands of Seløyerne, and here they discuss their route. Some of the men want to take advantage of the mild wind to embark on the journey southwards immediately, but the Norwegian leader of the group of 200 Norwegians, Ulv of Lauvnes, is in favour of going northwards to Bergen first. He argues that the expedition would benefit from receiving the wise King Sverre's advice, and more men would join them there; to this he adds the personal argument that he does not want to look like a fugitive on the run from Sverre. Ulv's advice is followed without further discussion.

After their stay in Bergen, the contrast between the impatient Danes and the sensible Ulv is further illustrated when Ulv tries to persuade his comrades to wait for him, since he has to finish some business before setting off. Sven is the only one of the Danish leaders who stays with Ulf.

The other Danes are seized by an ardent desire to reach the Holy Land and in spite of cautious warnings from the more sensible among them, they now embark on the journey southwards. Their rashness is emphatically criticized by the narrator. Sven, however, stays behind in order to wait for Ulv. When Ulv finally arrives, Sven also sets out immediately in order to find the others. Ulv – still waiting a little – now sets off and, following a better course, he reaches the coast he was heading for.

Against the rashness of the Danes stands Ulv's sensible patience. The text leaves no doubt that if the Danes had cared to wait for Ulv and had respected his wiser judgement, they would not have been caught by the storm. His own destiny is described in vague but panegyric terms. We are told that he reached the coast he was heading for, by which is probably simply meant the Frisian coast:

But Ulv, though he did not immediately leave his mooring in pursuit of them, afterwards hurried to join their fleet, being a man with expert knowledge of wind and waves; nevertheless by following a straighter course he effected a short-cut, so that he did not overtake those he knew were wandering off on a roundabout route. By the same wind which carried the others, he was conveyed to the coast he was aiming for. When God's grace works in conjunction with them, observe how much even human beings can achieve with an active intelligence! (Chapter 18).¹³

Even though we learn nothing concrete about Ulv's fate, we are assured of his ability and his being under God's protection. Perhaps this is even meant to imply that he reached the Holy Land.

However that may be, we are to understand that the Danes might have reached the Holy Land at an *earlier* time if they had waited for Ulv. And this, it seems, is the point. The whole Norwegian intermezzo, the middle third of the text, may be read as an explanation, a defence, of the protraction that the expedition experienced in Norway. The theme first appears

13 *Supramemoratus autem Vlfus, licet non subita insectatione se moueret a loco, ad eorum tamen comitatum, utpote uir gnarus maris et uentorum, accelerauit; sed rectiori cursu compendium capiebat et illos non est consequutus quos nouerat per dispendium euagari. Qui eodem uento, quo hi ducebantur, ad optatum littus eductus est. Ecce quantum, cooperante Dei gratia, ualet etiam humane sagacitatis industria!*

in the discussion on the islands of Seløyerne where Ulv's arguments in favour of going to Bergen are accepted without criticism on the part of the narrator; nor are any objections put in the mouth of the other travellers. In Bergen they have to wait first for Sverre and then for Ulv. No explanation is given but it is made clear that the Danes were too impatient.

It seems a reasonable assumption, as mentioned, that the Danish leaders upon their return from Jerusalem, were met with reproaches because they arrived too late to fight. In particular, the long stay in Norway may well have been questioned. The text does not deny that they spent a long time in Norway. But it suggests that the Danes could have avoided their shipwreck if they had waited for Ulv – in other words that they might have reached the Holy Land in time to fight even when departing as late as they did from Bergen. Sven Torkilssøn is cleared of this blame since he did wait. This, in combination with the fact that he is followed much more closely in the narrative than the others, to my mind suggests that he was involved in the production of the *Profectio*.

The role of Sverre

But there is more to notice in the Norwegian section – namely, the emphatically positive picture of the Norwegian King Sverre as a just, mild, and forgiving monarch. A central scene is the meeting between King Sverre and Sven Torkilssøn in Bergen. We learn that Sven is afraid to meet Sverre since he had recently supported a rebellion against Sverre (which must be the Varbelg (Old Norse *várbelgir*) rebellion, known from *Sverris saga*, in 1190). However, Sverre forgives him with majestic dignity, his speech being related directly. He praises the entire project and expresses his understanding of its divine significance, even advising them to go the Orkney islands and wait until the next spring.

This portrait of Sverre must have been highly controversial in leading Danish circles. In Saxo's History of Denmark, written during the very same years around 1200, Sverre is heavily criticized.¹⁴ Saxo's views may be taken as representative of governing circles in Denmark, writing as he did

¹⁴ Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 14, 53.

under the supervision of Archbishop Absalon. The letters of William of Ebelholt (ca. 1125–1203), French-born abbot in Denmark with close connection to Absalon, attest to his strong support of the Norwegian bishops against Sverre's rule.¹⁵ This is yet another enigma of this text. As we have seen, three of the leaders of the expedition – not Sven Torkilsson – belonged to Absalon's family, the Hvide family. We can speculate that they may have opposed the detour to Bergen. But the focus in the text is on Sverre as a most respectable ally who supported the noble undertaking and whose loyal man Ulv was essential for its success.

Again, this reads like a justification. While the expedition itself, as it is described in the *Profectio*, was conceived among leading Danish men, its execution, with the close connection to the controversial Norwegian king, may have been looked upon with some scepticism in the circle around the Danish king and his archbishop. It seems at least possible that this powerful group formed part of the intended readership. The oldest textual history of the *Profectio* points in the same direction. In the only medieval manuscript known to have contained the text – the one discovered in Lübeck in 1620, which is now lost – were also found three shorter texts (in addition to the main text, Josephus' *De bello Judaico*). Apart from the *Profectio*, these were Theodericus's History of Norway (*Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* written ca. 1180), and an otherwise unknown life of St Geneviève written by William of Ebelholt (*Vita B. Genouefæ Virginis*).¹⁶ This may be taken to suggest that the manuscript was produced in the milieu of William of Ebelholt, perhaps in the early thirteenth century, and hence seen as a sign of interest in the *Profectio* in this same milieu.

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Many enigmas surround the *Profectio*, and much is left to speculation. The most likely scenario is, in my opinion, that the canon wrote the

¹⁵ See Johnsen 1976. While rightly emphasizing the positive picture of Sverre in the *Profectio*, Johnsen goes too far when he suggests that the text was the product of Sverre's chancellery aimed in particular at the Danish court.

¹⁶ This appears in the catalogue of Lübeck library from 1622, see Skovgaard-Petersen 2002.

account at the request of Sven Torkilssøn – and the unidentified dedicatee K – and that his task was to demonstrate that the expedition was not a failure, that it did indeed reach its goal, the Promised Land, both in a geographical and in a spiritual sense.

Moreover, and this has been my focus here, the canon was to make clear that the Norwegian detour was not a mistake. It is clear from the text that Sverre regarded the expedition with some suspicion, perhaps because Sven, who had recently supported a rebellion against him, was part of it. This may have been the reason that they went to Bergen. But the text emphasizes that the Danes nevertheless might have made it, that they might have avoided the storm – and by implication, arrived in the Holy Land before the peace in September 1192 – if they had not been so impatient.

This short text lets us trace the contours of close Danish-Norwegian contacts centred around Børglum-Tønsberg. The author himself, probably a Norwegian Premonstratensian canon living in Børglum, seems to personify the Danish-Norwegian relations to which the expedition itself is a testimony. Finally, it also deserves to be emphasized that his Latin prose, full of contemporary crusading rhetoric as it is, bears witness to an international literary and theological horizon.

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CHAPTER 7

The Picture Across the Water. The Foundation of Templar and Hospitalier Houses in Britain and Ireland in the Twelfth Century

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This article sets out to offer a wider context for the establishment of the Hospitallers' house at Værne/Varna by considering the foundation of Templar and Hospitalier houses just across the sea, in Britain and Ireland. These military religious orders arrived in Britain in the 1120s as the subject of royal and non-royal patronage, but did not reach Ireland until the 1170s. While the Templars seem to have relied on royalty for their initial acquisitions, the Hospitallers had a wider pool of patronage. That said, by the late twelfth century both orders were drawing on a wide pool of patronage in England, but in Wales, Ireland and Scotland their main acquisitions continued to come from prominent nobles and the Crown.

Scotland

Let us begin by considering foundations in the north of Britain – that is, nearest to Norway. The situation in the kingdom of Scotland appears

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the most straightforward, simply because least evidence survives. Yet the evidence that does exist reveals that the pattern of foundations in Scotland was similar to that elsewhere.

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the Templars gained their first properties in England and Scotland in 1128, when Hugh de Payns, master of the Templars, met King Henry I of England in Normandy, and then went on to Scotland to meet King David I. However, it has proven difficult to identify what King Henry I and King David gave them, and exactly when King David made his endowments. The Templars' house in the village now called Temple in Midlothian was first mentioned in documents as late as 1175, but scholars have usually assumed that this was King David's foundation, and that it was established in 1128 (Cowan, Mackay & Macquarrie 1983: xviii). The Hospitaller brother John Stillingflete wrote in 1434 that King David gave Torphichen to the Hospitallers, which (if this is true) means that they obtained it between 1124 and 1153 (Cowan, Mackay & Macquarrie 1983: xxvi; Stillingflete 1673: 551). Although the Templars first visited Scotland in 1128, given that the Hospitallers did not appear as witnesses to royal documents until 1160 and the Templars' house at Temple does not appear in records until 1175, it is likely that these houses were founded in the 1140s, although they may not have been established until the early 1150s.

After these initial donations by the king, donations from leading nobles followed. According to John Stillingflete, Fergus, lord of Galloway (who called himself 'king of the Galwitians'), gave the Hospitallers the land of Galvyte or Galtway, south-east of Kirkcudbright in south Galloway (Stillingflete 1673: 551). This donation must have taken place before Fergus's fall from power in 1160. By the early thirteenth century the Thane of Callander (in Perthshire, near Stirling) had given the Templars land in Falkirk, and before 1239 Walter Bisset, lord of Aboyne, gave the Templars Maryculter on the south of the Dee – reassuring the monks of Kelso that his gift would not prejudice their rights – while by 1242 he had given them the church of Aboyne on Deeside, as around this time the bishop of Aberdeen confirmed the donation (Cowan, Mackay & Macquarrie 1983: xix, 217).

The Templars and the Hospitallers were also given by the king one toft or house site in each Scottish burgh (Perkins 1910: 215; Cowan, Mackay

& Macquarrie 1983: xviii, xxvii, lvii). The Templars and Hospitallers also held a large number of very small holdings across the lowlands and up the east coast of Scotland, which were known as ‘Temple lands’. These small properties would not have housed Templars but would have been let out to rent, and presumably were given to them by noble and non-noble patrons in return for the order’s prayers for the donor and the donor’s family. All these properties were in the drier, less mountainous parts of Scotland where arable farming could be carried on.

Although the Templars’ and Hospitallers’ ostensible reason for coming to Britain and Ireland was to recruit manpower as well as to acquire land, very little evidence survives for recruitment in these early years, and it is not possible to know whether these orders drew recruits principally from the landowning nobility or from the lesser knightly and non-knightly families (Cowan, Mackay & Macquarrie 1983: xx–xxii, xxviii–xxix).

England

In the spring of 1137, Matilda of Boulogne, queen of England, gave Cressing in Essex to the Templars. Her uncles Godfrey of Bouillon and Baldwin of Edessa had been the first two Latin rulers of the kingdom of Jerusalem, while her father Eustace had been the closest heir to the kingdom on the death of Baldwin in 1118. Matilda had a strong dynastic interest in the kingdom of Jerusalem and wanted to support the religious order which was helping to defend it. However, she did not give to the Hospital of St John. We can only speculate as to whether her family had other links with the Templars which led her to prefer the Templars over the Hospitallers: for instance, some of the early Templars, such as Godfrey of Saint Omer and Archembald of Saint Amand, came from the Low Countries and the area around Boulogne. Godfrey was a vassal of the counts of Boulogne. Matilda later gave Witham in Essex and Cowley in Oxfordshire to the Templars. All her donations were confirmed by her husband, King Stephen of England, who himself was the son of one of the leaders of the First Crusade (Davis, Cronne & Davis 1968: 310–314; Lees 1935: xxxix–xl). Although Stephen’s predecessor Henry I of England had given Hugh de Payns money in 1128 and had allowed him

to collect donations in England, it was Matilda's generosity to the order of the Temple which laid the foundations of a long and close relationship between the Templars and the kings of England. Her gifts promoted the culture of crusading and could inspire her male relatives to give generously: King Stephen not only confirmed her gifts but also apparently gave the Templars Eagle in Lincolnshire (Lees 1935: clxxx, 41, 145–147, 176–177).

The Templars' first house in London was in Holborn; they probably acquired the site in the 1130s, at the same period as they were receiving gifts from Matilda and her husband. It may or may not have been given to them by Geoffrey de Mandeville, earl of Essex, whose body was taken there after his death in 1144, which could suggest that he was the founder, but who was never specifically named as such in contemporary records (Park 2010: 68–71). In 1161 the Templars sold this site and transferred their London house to a new site by the Thames, which was known as 'New Temple'. Presumably they bought the site of New Temple, as no donor is recorded. It has, however, been suggested that the Beaumonts, earls of Leicester and hereditary stewards of England, were involved in the Templars' acquisition, as the site was partly held from them (Wilson 2010: 23). King Henry II of England may have supported the Templars' move: sometime between 1159 and 1173 he gave them a mill site on the nearby River Fleet, a messuage near Fleet Bridge and the advowson of the church of St Clement Danes nearby (Gervers 2002: 253; Hamonic 2009). He also used New Temple as a safe-deposit. The church was probably constructed in the early years of his reign, between 1159 and 1165 (Wilson 2010: 28, 38, 40).

The English monarchy continued to endow and support the Templars for the rest of their history, although they also expected service in return. The Hospitallers were not so close to the monarchy in the first half of the twelfth century. Their major house in England was not founded by the king or queen but by Joseph de Bricet and his wife Muriel de Munteni, who around 1140 together founded the Hospitallers' house at Clerkenwell as well as the neighbouring women's house of St Mary Clerkenwell (Sloane and Malcolm 2004: 42).

On the other hand, in around 1185 King Henry II of England established the house of Hospitaller sisters at Buckland in Somerset specifically

so that the various sisters of the order in England could be housed there (Struckmeyer 2006: 90). In 1434 John Stillingflete insisted that King Richard I, 'the Lionheart', held the Hospitallers in special affection and recorded that he gave them property at Dinmore in Herefordshire, hospitals at Worcester and Hereford, and various other properties in that area (Stillingflete 1673: 555).

Stillingflete was at pains to emphasize the Hospitallers' many noble patrons, although the most important patron he mentioned, the family to whom the Hospitallers owed particular favour, was the Mowbray family because of Roger de Mowbray's gifts to the Templars (Stillingflete 1673: 551). Yet Beatrice Lees, in her edition of the Templars' inquest of 1185, pointed out that even though he was a crusader Roger de Mowbray did not give the Templars large properties. The Templars received considerable estates in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, but they were always in competition with the Cistercians and the Gilbertines (a local religious order). Although the great noble families gave them small donations, the bulk of the Templars' property came from lesser noble families, landed gentry, and royal officials: the leaders of county society rather than nationally significant figures (Lees 1935: cxcviii–cc). The Hospitallers also received donations from leading churchmen: Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester (1129–1171), gave the Hospitallers Godsfield in Hampshire, which became a commandery (Doubleday & Page 1903: 187–188). I have not found similar donations from churchmen to the Templars in England in the twelfth century, although in the 1230s Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln (1235–1253) gave them Rothley church in Leicestershire – here they already owned the manor, a gift from the nobleman John de Harcourt (Hoskins and McKinley 1954: 31–32).

It is worth noting that, as in Scotland, the bulk of the Templars' properties in England lay in the east of the country, on land that was suited to growing wheat. The Hospitallers were apparently not so wedded to wheat-growing, and were more prepared to accept donations in the wetter, western parts of Britain. That said, neither order held property in Cheshire, and only the Hospitallers held property in Lancashire: a small hospital at Stidd, which they acquired before 1265 and which by 1338 was leased out with the lessee holding responsibility for paying a chaplain

to serve the hospital chapel (Knowles & Hadcock 1971: 394, 111; Farrer & Brownbill 1912: 58–59). Neither order held anything in County Durham. It is likely that the bishop of Durham did not want these privileged orders in his diocese, but that does not explain their absence from Lancashire and Cheshire – indeed, as the sixth earl of Chester, Ranulf de Blundeville (d. 1232), took part in the Fifth Crusade, we might have expected him to have endowed the military orders, who supported the crusade, with land in his county (Eales 2004).

Although the Templars and Hospitallers in England and, as is discussed below, in Wales received considerable support from noble patrons, the surviving evidence indicates that they drew their recruits largely from the lesser nobility – knightly families – and free landowning families of lower social status (Forey 1986: 143–144). Interestingly, this is the same pattern as has been found for the Teutonic Order in Germany in the thirteenth century (Wojtecki 1971).

Wales

Following the pattern of donation to all religious orders in Wales, the military orders' lands were clustered in the areas of Wales which were settled by the Normans, English or Flemish: that is, south Wales and the Welsh March. Perhaps because they were less close to the kings of England than the Templars, the Hospitallers received more generous gifts in Wales, and received them before the Templars did.

The Hospitallers received their first donations of land in Wales and the Welsh March before 1150. The precise date of the Hospitallers' first acquisition is unclear. Sometime between 1176 and 1198, Bishop Peter of St Davids confirmed all the gifts to the Hospitallers within his diocese, and mentioned that his three predecessors, Wilfrid, Bernard, and David, had allowed the Hospitallers to remove any chaplain or clerk from their churches. This indicates that the Hospitallers had received responsibility for churches in south-west Wales by 1115, when Bishop Wilfrid died (Rogers Rees 1897: 106–107n9; Rees 1947: 25). Yet this was only two years after Pope Paschal II had acknowledged the Hospital of St John as a religious order; the Hospitallers did not begin to receive

gifts of land in England until after 1128 (Delaville le Roulx 1894: 29–30; Gervers 1991).

It is not impossible that the Hospitallers had received some gift in Wales by 1115, for Anthony Luttrell has shown that the Hospitallers received donations in southern France very soon after the First Crusade (Luttrell 1997: 49). However, without other evidence, it is most likely that there is an error in Bishop Peter's confirmation and that the donations in question were to another hospital order; and that the Hospitallers obtained their first properties in Wales in the 1130s and 1140s.

The Hospitallers' earliest acquisitions were in south-west Wales, and were small manors and parcels of land and churches, given by local small landowners with Norman names, such as Philip de Kemeys and Richard son of Tancred (Rees 1947: 105–106). Walter son of Wizo the Fleming gave them the property that became their commandery of Slebech in south Wales before 1161, although the exact date that they acquired it is not clear (Rees 1947: 27–28). The Hospitallers already had a fine scattering of possessions in Morgannwg and Pembrokeshire in south Wales by the time that they received the lands which formed the bases of their two centres in the Welsh March: at Dinmore in Herefordshire, in the 1180s, and at Halston in Shropshire, perhaps before 1187 (Rees 1947: 120, 127; Knowles & Hadcock 1971, 303–304).

The surviving donation charters indicate that certain families consistently gave to the Hospital. For example, William Marshal senior (d. 1219), his son Walter Marshal, earl of Pembroke (d. 1245), and Walter's great-grandson Aymer de Valence (d. 1324) all made grants to the Hospitallers at Slebech.¹

The military religious orders' particular appeal lay in their involvement in helping pilgrims to the Holy Land and in crusading campaigns. As William Marshal travelled to the Holy Land in the 1180s and joined the Order of the Temple on his deathbed (Crouch 2004), historians have generally assumed that his family's donations to the military religious orders were intended to assist their work in the Holy Land. It is also possible, however, that the family gave to these orders because they were loyal

¹ Knowles & Hadcock 1971: 193; Rees 1947: 105, 107, 117. See also Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Slebech MS 11438, and see Fenton 1903: 326.

allies who could perform useful services. For example, Walter Marshal's donation gave the Hospitallers and their men, servants and burgesses, full liberty to buy and sell all kinds of merchandise, wholesale and retail, within and outside the earl's towns and boroughs, free from all tolls and customs; this was apparently to encourage trade along the eastern Cleddau river, on which Slebech stood.²

Unlike the Templars, whose lands were on the edges of Wales, the Hospitallers also received some properties in the parts of central Wales which were only temporarily under Norman domination, and in north-west Wales, which remained under Welsh lordship.

Ystrad Meurig in Ceredigion was donated to the Hospitallers by Roger de Clare after he recaptured Ceredigion in 1158. Rhys ap Gruffudd of Deheubarth, prince of south Wales, recovered Ceredigion in 1164 and confirmed the Hospitallers' holdings (Mortimer 2004; Pryce 2004; Pryce & Insley 2005: 166–167; Rees 1947: 28, 112, 113). There was a possible strategic advantage for him in fostering the Hospitallers' presence in this disputed region; it is also possible that he specifically wished to support the Hospitallers' work helping pilgrims to the Holy Land; while donating to a religious order connected to the crusade reinforced his status as a pre-eminent prince (Gerald of Wales 1868: 15; Rees 1947: 28, 113). As Ystrad Meurig lies on one of the pilgrim routes to St Davids, we may speculate that the Hospitallers maintained a hospice there for pilgrims – but this is only speculation.

While the Hospitallers were building up their estates at Slebech to become one of the wealthiest religious houses in Wales, the Templars received very little land within Wales. They did have estates in the borderlands of the Welsh March: they arrived in Shropshire at Lydley and nearby Cardington in the late 1150s, and at Garway in Herefordshire in the 1180s. Lydley was probably founded by William fitzAlan I. It is not clear who gave Garway to the Templars, but Stillingflete recorded that King Henry II was the donor (Stillingflete 1673: 552). Neither Garway nor Llanmadoc are mentioned in the Templars' Inquest of 1185, which dealt only with houses in England (Lees 1935: 1). King Henry II allowed

² Cardiff, Glamorgan Archives, CL/DEEDS I/3658.

the Templars to clear 2,000 acres of land ‘*in Walliis apud Garewi*’ (in Wales at Garway), and in 1189 his son Richard I confirmed them in possession of *Llangarewi, cum castellarario quod fuit Hermanni et cum omnibus pertinenciis suis* (‘the [church] enclosure at Garway with the castle that belonged to Hermann and with all its appurtenances’) (Lees 1935: 141, 142). Perhaps the kings of England valued the presence of these loyal servants in the Welsh March, as a reminder of royal authority to the Anglo-Norman Marcher lords.

The Templars’ only substantial estate in Wales itself was Llanmadoc on the Gower Peninsula. Margaret, countess of Warwick, gave the Templars the church, *vill* and land at Llanmadoc in 1156, a gift approved by her underage sons Henry, Robert and Geoffrey de Newburgh (Rees 1947: 127; Knowles & Hadcock 1971: 294; Dugdale & Dodsworth 1846: 841). We can only speculate as to why Margaret made this donation. The counts of Warwick were interested in the crusade; Margaret may have hoped that the presence of a military order on the Gower coast would help to defend this vulnerable area against the pirates in the Severn estuary, although the Templars were very reluctant to take on a similar role on Lundy Island, which was confirmed to them by King Richard I in 1189 but the brothers never took possession (Rees 1947: 54). The Gower is one of the few areas of Wales where wheat can be grown, and it is possible that this made it attractive to the Templars: in any case, at the time of the Templars’ arrests in January 1308 wheat was being grown here.³

Ireland

The Templars and Hospitallers came to Ireland because the invaders gave them lands there, but they were not part of the invasion. It is tempting to suggest that they were endowed in Ireland because the invasion itself was a crusade against the Irish – but the contemporary evidence does not support that interpretation. Some scholars have argued that Pope Hadrian IV’s bull *Laudabiliter* indicates that the invasion was a crusade, but Anne Duggan has suggested that the *Laudabiliter* that has come down to us was

3 Kew, The National Archives of the UK: SC 6/1202/3 and E 358/20 rot. 10r.

effectively a forgery by Gerald of Wales, and that in fact Pope Hadrian's original letter probably urged King Henry II to consult the Irish before taking troops to Ireland (Duggan 2007). That said, arguably all involved should have been crusading against Muslims rather than invading and conquering other Christian lands. Perhaps, as Kathryn Hurlock suggests, donations to the Templars and Hospitallers were a thank-offering for the success of the invasion (Hurlock 2011: 146).

The first clear mention of the Templars and Hospitallers in Ireland is in a deed witnessed by Archbishop Lorcan or Laurence O'Toole, 'Matthew the Templar', 'Ralph the Hospitaller' and others, which Paolo Virtuani has dated to 'around 1177' (Virtuani 2014: 28). Some writers have suggested that the Hospitallers took an active military role in the invasion, on the basis that one of the invaders was a Maurice de Prendergast, and in 1203 a Maurice de Prendergast was prior of Kilmainham, the Hospitallers' principal house in Ireland. Paolo Virtuani argues that the later Hospitaller is almost certainly the same man as the invader, but as the contemporary sources for the invasion do not call him 'Brother' or mention the Hospital, apparently Maurice was not a Hospitaller at the time of the invasion (Virtuani 2014: 15–21, 36; Lennox Brown 1985: 112). He could have joined the military order later in life, just as Philip de Milly, lord of Nablüs, had joined the Templars in the kingdom of Jerusalem, and Gilbert de Lacy had done in England (Barber 1994: 106; Lewis 2004).

In their classic study of religious houses in Ireland, Aubrey Gwynn and R. Neville Hadcock judged that the Templars received their important properties in Ireland between 1180 and 1200 (Gwynn & Hadcock 1970: 329). They stated that Clontarf, Crooke and Kilbarry were given by King Henry II, Cooley and Kilsaran by Margaret de Lacy and Kilcloggan by Connor O'More (Gwynn & Hadcock 1970: 330). However, in his study of the Hook Peninsula Billy Colfer reckoned that Henry II also gave the Templars Kilcloggan (Colfer 2004: 48). All the Templars' property, with the exception of Templehouse in Co. Sligo, was in the south and east of Ireland, the area most dominated by the invaders from Britain. Once again, the Templars preferred drier land suitable for wheat growing. The exception to this was their house in Sligo, situated on a strategic river

crossing and possibly given to them by a member of the Anglo-Norman de Burgh family in the thirteenth century as part of their establishing domination in the Sligo area (O'Connor & Naessens 2016: 130).

The Templars held no property in Ulster, unlike the Hospitallers, who received Castleboy (St John in Ards) at the southernmost point in Ulster from Hugh de Lacy. Otherwise the Hospitallers' Irish property, like the Templars', was concentrated in south and east Ireland and donated to them between the 1170s and 1216. Gwynn and Hadcock believed that the Hospitallers' estates were given to them by leading Anglo-Norman nobles: Walter de Lacy gave the Hospitallers Kilmainhambeg; Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, alias Strongbow, gave them Kilmainham; Maurice fitz Gerald gave them Kiltel; Alexander de St Helena may have given them Mourne; William Marshal, earl of Pembroke, may have given them their land at Wexford; Killerig was given by Gilbert de Borard, and Ainy in County Limerick (now known as 'Hospital') by Geoffrey de Marisco or Marsh – although many of the donors and precise dates of donation are uncertain (Gwynn & Hadcock 1970: 334–342; Browne and Ó Clabaigh 2016).

The military orders also held properties in the towns of Ireland (Nicholson 2013: 113, 117–118, 122, 125). King Henry II granted the Temple and Hospital the right to have a single *hospes* or guest in each borough in England and Ireland, who was exempt from tallage and other exactions, just as they had one house site in each Scottish burgh (Perkins 1910: 215; Cowan, Mackay & Macquarrie 1983: xviii, xxvii, lvii).

It is clear that the Templars' main patron in Ireland was the king of England, whereas the Hospitallers relied on a wide range of lords from Britain for their Irish property. These orders received little or nothing from the native Irish, and did not recruit from them: their early members were drawn from Anglo-Norman and Cymro-Norman families who had settled in Ireland (Nicholson 2016: 12–14). The future histories of both orders in Ireland reflected their connection with the invaders and particularly with the king of England. Even though the Hospitallers were not endowed by the king, they came to serve the government in Dublin even more than did the Templars.

Conclusion

There are two sides to the question of how the Templars and Hospitallers built up their land holdings in Britain and Ireland. The first problem is to identify their patrons. The evidence set out here has suggested that the monarch initiated and encouraged patronage and was then followed by the high nobility and then other donors. Where the monarch did not make endowments other lords might do so – as to the Hospitallers in Wales – and in certain political circumstances this would not necessarily be a disadvantage to a religious order. So the Templars' links to the kings of England may have been a distinct disadvantage to them in Wales. Yet, given that most of the country is not suitable for arable production, perhaps this was not a problem to them.

This leads us to the other side of the question: whether the order actually wanted land. As the Templars' preference appears to have been for land where wheat could be grown, they would not have been very interested in donations of land in Wales. Their only estate west of Cardiff, at Llanmadoc in the Gower, is in one of the few parts of Wales where wheat can be grown. It may be that the Hospitallers were more willing to accept property in areas less suitable for arable farming. More adaptable than the Templars and less tied to the king of England, the Hospitallers gained donations over a wider geographical area in these islands and ultimately were by far the more successful order.

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CHAPTER 8

The Archaeology of the Hospitallers in Medieval Scandinavia

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Introduction

Between 2004 and 2010 the author of this article carried out research work for a PhD degree at the University of Southern Denmark. The research focused on the economy and the archaeology of the Hospitallers in medieval Scandinavia. The study was based on information from almost 2000 documents and material from a large number of archaeological investigations at the various Scandinavian Hospitaller sites. By studying the preserved written sources and the archaeological material from these religious houses side by side a number of shorter and longer periods of better, as well as of less successful, economic conditions were identified. The aim of this article is to present the most important archaeological results of this six-year-long research project, and to make some concluding remarks.

The Hospitallers founded about 15 commanderies in Scandinavia throughout the medieval period. Donations of properties, land and privileges from various noble families and kings during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries laid the foundation for these houses

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which, especially in the late medieval period, became some of the most influential religious institutions in the region. A number of sites in the Scandinavian countries still have physical remains from the Order's properties, and even though this material is relatively well preserved a surprisingly low number of Scandinavian researchers has so far analysed the material in close detail.

The preserved remains from the Hospitallers' Scandinavian commanderies are, in comparison to the remains in the Orient, largely late medieval structures. During the latter part of the Middle Ages economic, political and religious changes swept across the western Europe. Such changes had a particular impact on the military orders that had been founded during the period of the crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and whose economies were based on donations of land and privileges. By adding such aspects to the analysis of the archaeological material new conclusions can be made regarding the economic conditions of the Hospitallers, and new knowledge can be obtained regarding the Scandinavian branch of the order.

The earliest of the Scandinavian Hospitaller commanderies were founded in the twelfth century, but from the beginning of the fourteenth century few new commanderies were built due to an extensive economic crisis inside the Scandinavian branch of the order. This period of harsh economic conditions lasted to the beginning of the fifteenth century, when an increasing number of new donations to the Hospitallers in Scandinavia improved the economy of the Nordic brethren. Contemporary economic reforms of the order helped to improve the economy even further. Written as well as archaeological sources indicate that a period of extensive building activity now occurred in the Scandinavian commanderies. This period lasted between approximately 1410 and 1520, an era during which many new commanderies were founded and the existing commanderies expanded.

From this it would appear that the Hospitallers gained from the improved economic situation, with more resources available to be invested in various building projects. This development seems to have followed a similar pattern in all Scandinavian countries and can therefore not only be explained by local factors. From about 1520 onwards,

however, the number of new donations to all Scandinavian Hospitaller commanderies dropped dramatically. The sources indicate that new economic problems began to spread, and as a result further expansion of the commanderies was no longer possible. When the Reformation swept across Scandinavia a decade later the Hospitallers lost all their land in the region, and a period of 350 years of Scandinavian Hospitaller history came to an end.

Eskilstuna

The first Hospitaller houses in Scandinavia were founded in the later part of the twelfth century. This is at least true for Antvorskov in Denmark, Eskilstuna in Sweden and Varna in Norway, that all seem to have been founded in a fairly narrow period between c. 1170 and 1200. These early houses were fairly limited in size, and parts of them were most likely made of wood. This is especially true for houses where evidence for early Romanesque structures has been identified during different archaeological excavations. We know for instance that there must have been an early wooden chapel dedicated to St Eskil in the area that later became Eskilstuna Hospitaller commandery. It is possible that this wooden structure was still standing by the time the chapel and its land were handed over to the Hospitallers, around 1180. A number of postholes from a possible wooden building were identified beneath the floor of the later commandery church in the 1960s.

These excavations, carried out by the Swedish archaeologist Sune Zachrisson, indicated that most of the former commandery had been destroyed shortly after the Reformation, when a new castle was built on the site (Zachrisson 1963). However, it was still possible for Zachrisson to reconstruct the plan of the most central parts of the former commandery (fig. 1). This part of the complex had obviously been constructed around a squared yard with the chapel to the north and further commandery buildings on the southern and eastern sides. There were no traces of a west wing, but it is likely that there was some kind of building on that side as well (Zachrisson 1963: picture III).

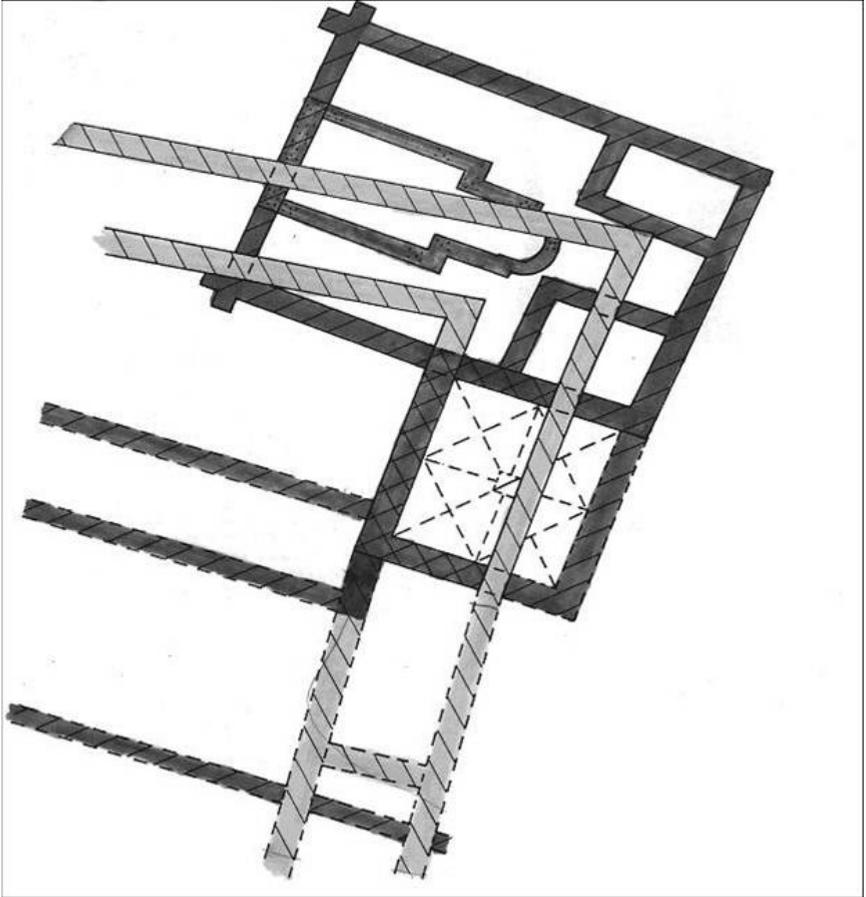


Figure 1. The different phases of building activity at Eskilstuna Hospitaller commandery. Illustration: Sune Zachrisson/Eskilstuna stadsmuseum.

The excavations inside the chapel revealed further information about the former commandery. One important discovery was that the chapel seems to have had at least three different building phases. From a small wooden chapel the site developed into a Romanesque stone chapel in the twelfth century, which gradually expanded into a large Gothic commandery church in the late medieval period. The fifteenth century seems to have been a period of particularly intensive building activity, and finds from inside the chapel consisted of different bricks from the collapsed vaults, items from various graves and fragments of medieval gravestones. Inside as well as outside the chapel a large number of graves were discovered,

representing at least four hundred years of burial activity. Some of the skeletons were of particular interest since it was possible to identify them on account of personal seals that were found in the graves together with the bones. The most famous individual to be identified in this way was a former donor to the commandery named Hemming Hatt Pedersen, whose life has been studied by modern historians. We know today that he died in the commandery of Eskilstuna as a *donati* in about 1475 (Ståhle 1949: 85). Coins and pottery are other examples of artefacts from the excavations in Eskilstuna, and similar archaeological material is available from other Scandinavian Hospitaller houses. This material was therefore used in the comparative study of the order's activities in medieval Scandinavia.

Antvorskov

From Antvorskov, the headquarters of the Hospitallers in the province of Dacia, archaeological investigations between 1887 and 1960 have provided us with much information about this large complex.¹ These excavations have made it possible to reconstruct the commandery and to say something about the functions of the various buildings (fig. 2). The ruins that were exposed in the 1880s were situated below the hill where the late medieval commandery was later going to be built. These early remains were made of bricks with preserved doors and window openings in a Romanesque style. The ruins could therefore be dated to the later part of the twelfth century or the early thirteenth century.² A similar date for the ruins has been given by Wilhelm Lorenzen in his book on the history of the Danish Hospitaller commanderies (Lorenzen 1927: 16). On one of the walls there were traces of a medieval toilet and under the floor there

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- 1 Excavations ca 1887–1960 by Magnus Petersén, Terje Schou, H. H. Schou, C. M. Smidt, Poul Nørlund, Mogens Clemmensen and Mogens Brahde. This material is mostly unpublished, but plans, artefacts and documentation from the excavations can be found at the National Museum in Copenhagen.
 - 2 Also T. Schou, H. H. Schou, V. Schou, C. M. Smidt and others discussed the date of the ruins in so-called 'Indberetninger' to the National Museum during the years 1882–1908. These are today preserved in the collections of the museum in Copenhagen.

were the remains of what has been interpreted as a medieval hypocaust (*Danmarks ruiner*, p. 10). This tells us something about the high living standards of the complex.

The collected picture of the archaeological material from the Romanesque ruins in Antvorskov is that they were used as living quarters as well as for representation. This impression was reinforced by the findings of further medieval buildings close to the Romanesque house a few years later. To the southeast of the Romanesque structure there was an old stone cellar, which some researchers believe is the oldest structure in the complex (Lorenzen 1927: 16). This cellar possibly belonged to the original donation given by Valdemar the Great.³ Adjacent to the Romanesque house a number of Gothic structures, which have been identified as economy buildings possibly built around 1250, have also been uncovered. These buildings may have contained kitchens and stables as a rich pottery material, a baking oven and horseshoes were found among the ruins (Lorenzen 1927: 19). It is likely that these economy buildings served the Romanesque house before the large late medieval commandery was built on the top of the hill some 200 years later.

Between 1925 and 1927 Poul Nørlund and Mogens Clemmensen carried out further investigations in a small area southeast of the hill. During these investigations a possible stable, and what could possibly have been the hospital of the commandery, were discovered.⁴ Further to the east a medieval water pipe from about the year 1500 was also uncovered.⁵ This pipe is a good example of the high standards of the late medieval Hospitaller complex. In the same area as the water pipe, early maps from the seventeenth and eighteenth century show a number of fish- and mill-ponds, and it is possible that these features also go back to the Hospitaller period.⁶ All these finds are indications that a possible economy area of the commandery was once located east of the complex. The Romanesque

3 This idea was presented as late as 1991 in *Danmarks ruiner*, p. 10.

4 Nørlund's *Beretning* is today preserved in the collections of the National Museum in Copenhagen.

5 Poul Nørlund's plan of the water pipe is today preserved in the collections of the National Museum in Copenhagen.

6 A reconstruction of the gardens of Antvorskov Castle from 1768 to 1769 is today preserved in the collections of the National Museum in Copenhagen.

house, the early economy buildings and the possible hospital east of the hill give a fairly complete picture of what a typical Hospitaller commandery could have contained in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

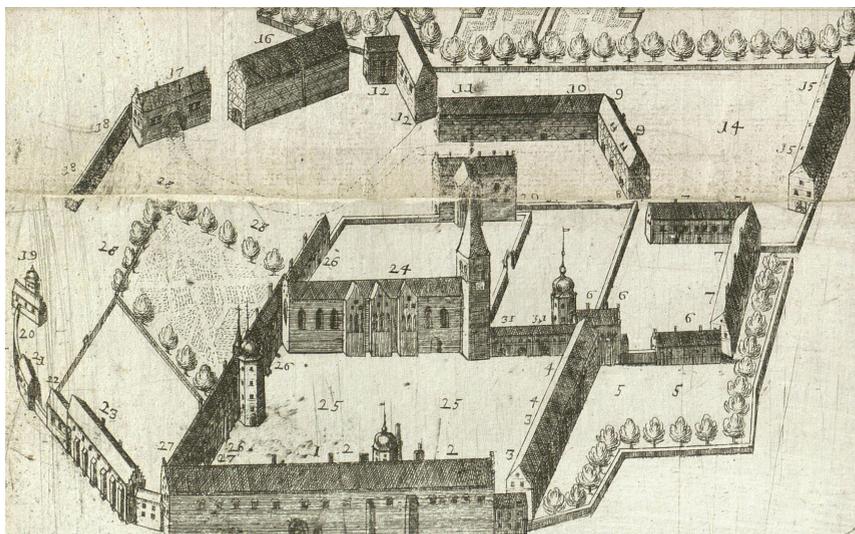


Figure 2. Antvorskov Hospitaller commandery in the seventeenth century, by Peder Hansen Resen, *Atlas Danicus*, 1677–95. Photo: Det Kgl. Bibliotek.

Between the years 1912 and 1917 further excavations were carried out at Antvorskov by Nørlund and C. M. Smidt. This time the investigations focused on the late medieval complex at the top of the hill, and especially the former commandery church, which had been demolished in 1774. The former choir and nave of the church were exposed, together with several interesting architectural details, most of which could be dated to the fifteenth century. There were signs that graves, probably belonging to an earlier church, had been cut by the fifteenth century foundations. In the quadratic late-medieval complex a reused twelfth century gravestone was also found, and this is a clear sign that an earlier church once existed in Antvorskov, even if the precise location remains unknown.

Of interest for the discussion is also a preserved church bell from Antvorskov, which is today in the Vor Frue Church in Copenhagen.

This bell bears the date 1490 and is an indication that it was made during the period when Jakob Mortensen Järnskägg was prior in Antvorskov, between 1467 and 1491.⁷ The very same Jakob Mortensen Järnskägg is also supposed to have been the man behind the large quadratic commandery at the top of the hill according to a number of (now lost) inscriptions which were placed on the walls of the commandery that once faced the courtyard of the complex.⁸ According to the inscriptions most of the building works would have been carried out around 1472 (Friis 1876: 13). If this date is correct it would mean that the large complex at the top of the hill is entirely of a late medieval date, and that it was built to replace the older and much smaller commandery below the hill. A more recent excavation was carried out on the site in 1995 by the Danish archaeologist Kirsten Eliassen. This excavation is important since it is the only modern investigation of the site. Eliassen has, for instance, used a modern contextual digging method where the artefacts have been linked to various contexts right from the start (Eliassen 1995).

Varna (Værne)

There was only one Hospitaller commandery in medieval Norway, located at Varna on the east side of the Oslo Fjord. This complex has never been the subject of any more extensive archaeological investigations as it is located on private land. For this reason we only have very limited information about the appearance and the previous building history of the commandery. A small investigation at Varna was carried out in the summer of 2008, and the author of this article was given the opportunity to participate in the fieldwork. This investigation focused on the remains of the chapel, but indicated that previously unknown remains are hidden beneath the grass in the area (Buckholm & Carlsson 2008). The investigation was also complemented by a georadar investigation, which confirmed the location of such remains (fig. 3).

7 Antvorskov klosterkirke. In *Danmarks Kirker V: Sorø Amt*, II, p. 618.

8 Langebek's studies of these inscriptions are described in *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger 1895–97*: 40.

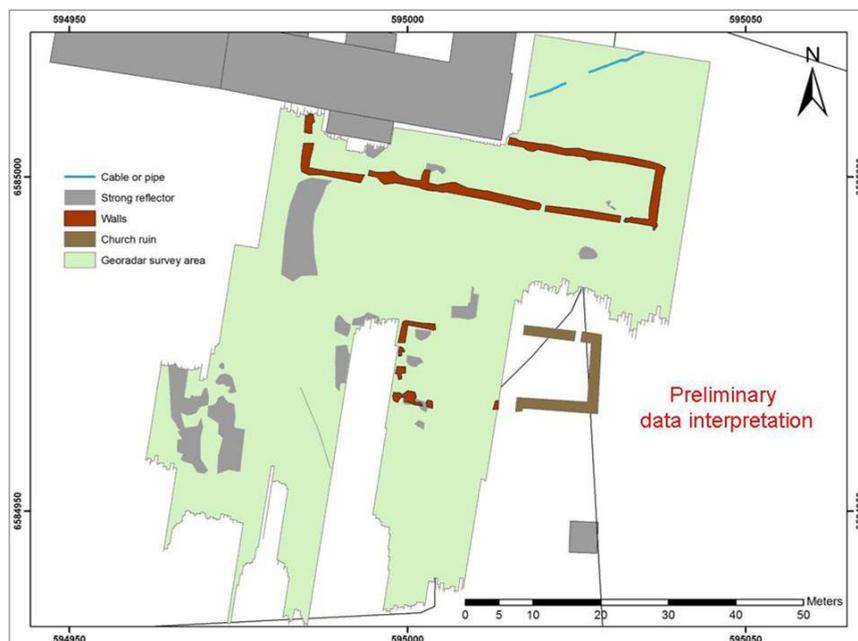


Figure 3. The results of the geophysical survey at Varna Hospitaller commandery. From NIKU Oppdragsrapport 2009. Geophysical survey at Varna Hospitaller Commandery. Illustration: NIKU.

The ruins that are visible above ground today belong mainly to the former commandery church, and especially its chancel. A number of foundation stones in the west indicate that the size of the chapel was about 30m x 11m. The original chapel, which possibly goes back to the twelfth century, is, however, likely to have been much smaller. The commanderies in Eskilstuna and Antvorskov were probably founded around small Romanesque chapels that were expanded or rebuilt into much larger churches in the late medieval period. A possibly Romanesque column is sticking out of the ground inside the chapel and may be an indication that an older church did exist at Varna. It is, however, difficult to spot traces of an earlier chapel, as any such remains would be hidden beneath the floor of the unexcavated late medieval structure.

The thick demolition layers that today cover the interior of the church are likely to be at least 1m thick. To remove, and archaeologically document, these layers would be of great scientific interest, as they are likely to hide the previous floor of the late medieval chapel. This floor may

hold important information, such as gravestones for important donors or distinguished members of the order, and could therefore contribute with important information regarding the history of the Hospitallers at Varna. An early drawing of the ground plan of the church was made by the antiquarian L. D. Klüwer in 1823 during one of his visits to Varna. In preserved correspondence Klüwer expressed his view that all remains of the previous commandery buildings were lost.⁹ In the light of the recent georadar investigation, however, this claim is most likely incorrect since at least one large structure is obviously preserved beneath the ground north of the church.

For the discussion of exactly when the present commandery church in Varna was constructed, a preserved letter from 1401–02 may contain some important clues. This year indulgence was given to people who contributed financially to the construction of a new church in Varna. This clearly indicates that a new commandery church was being planned at the beginning of the fifteenth century, but that the building work had obviously not yet been concluded (DN XVII 958). During the 2008 investigation foundations for the collapsed vaults were uncovered. Interestingly enough, it seems that these foundations had not always been tied into the walls behind them, an indication that the vaults of the church might have been secondary to the outer walls. If the outer walls are from the period after 1402, as indicated by the letter which was mentioned above, it would mean that the vaults were added later. Evidence for such a development is possibly also supported by the preserved bricks from the collapsed vaults inside the church. These bricks can probably be dated to the period c. 1450–1530, and support the impression that the remains we can see at Varna today are entirely of a late medieval date. Around 1570 this late medieval commandery church was finally destroyed during the Nordic Seven Years' War (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984: I, 204).

In view of the fact that, as noted above, a previously unknown building has been located north of the church in Varna, it is interesting that the georadar investigation also indicated that yet another structure may

9 Klüwer's travel description is today preserved in the collections of Østfoldmuseet.

have existed to the west. If this is the case, a closed courtyard may have existed north of the chapel, giving Varna a similar layout to Eskilstuna and Antvorskov, but on a somewhat smaller scale. The medieval complex may therefore have been much more impressive than what is the case today. The commandery was most likely entered from the south, where a part of the old medieval road still exists. This is the road where pilgrims would have passed the commandery on their way to the shrine of St Olav in the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim.

An area some 20m west of the commandery church is heavily undermined and this has caused the ground to sink. This may indicate that fishponds or further building structures were located in these parts of the commandery compound. Northeast of the present main building two further ponds exist that may go back to the Hospitaller period. Such fish ponds were common at military order sites and the commanderies in Odense and Antvorskov certainly had similar ponds. Areas of open water would typically have been located towards the outer ends of a medieval commandery complex and further investigations may give us a better idea of the previous layout and contribute more information about this fascinating Hospitaller site.

Kronobäck

The second Hospitaller commandery in medieval Sweden was Kronobäck, located on the Swedish east coast and given to the order in about 1480.¹⁰ Excavations in the complex were carried out by the Swedish archaeologist Nils Lagerholm in the 1940s. They were, however, mainly concentrated on the chapel, the best-preserved part of the complex, and no traces from other buildings were ever identified, although it is likely that the living quarters were situated to the south of the chapel. Inside the church was much demolition material from the vaults that had collapsed shortly after the Reformation. Lagerholm removed all this material in order to clear the interior of the chapel.

¹⁰ Johan Peringskjöld's *Diplomatarium* 18. Letter dated 16 July 1480.

He also identified and dated different building phases in the walls of the chapel and collected a large number of smaller artefacts, such as pieces of pottery, coins and liturgical items, from the cultural layers inside the church (Lagerholm 1949–51: 56).

Unfortunately Lagerholm was not as careful during his excavations in Kronobäck as Zachrisson would be in Eskilstuna some twenty years later. This makes it more complicated to work with the material from Kronobäck, since few artefacts can be tied to specific contexts. We simply have to trust that Lagerholm's interpretations of the layers inside the chapel are correct and that he was right in saying that the building activity in the fifteenth century was especially intensive. Further studies of the standing walls, carried out by the author of this article, have largely confirmed Lagerholm's conclusions that an old Romanesque chapel, which today forms the eastern part of the commandery church, is the oldest structure in the area and that the vast commandery church was erected by the Hospitallers as a western extension of this twelfth century chapel. Lagerholm also identified an old cellar south of the chapel as being of possible medieval date (fig. 4).



Figure 4. An aerial photo of Kronobäck Hospitaller commandery. 1. Chapel, 13th century; 2. Commandery church, ca. 1480; 3. Cellar, dated to ca. 1482; 4. Medieval cemetery; 5. Excavated area. Photo: Lantmätaren.

Prompted by construction works on the former graveyard east of the chapel, further excavations were carried out at Kronobäck in the 1950s. During these investigations some late medieval skeletons were found, most of which showed signs of recovering from severe war injuries. These individuals must have lived for some weeks after the injuries were first inflicted, so it is likely that they had been treated in the commandery for some time before finally dying from infections.¹¹ If this was indeed the case, the skeletons can hopefully tell us something about the medical skills that existed among the members of the Order of St John, if studied in more detail by a pathologist.

In an attempt to investigate the cellar south of the chapel a research investigation was carried out in Kronobäck by the author of this article in the autumn of 2007. This investigation focused on finding evidence for a connection between the cellar and the ruins of the Hospitaller chapel. For this reason a trench was opened up in the gap between the cellar and the church, but no foundation walls linking the two structures could be found. A number of burials, however, were found, indicating that the former cemetery had stretched into the area south of the chapel. Some of these skeletons proved to have war injuries, just like the skeletons from the 1950s. This is of interest as fights between the Danes and the Swedes did take place in this region around the year 1500 (Holmén, Ring & Carlsson 2008).

In order to date the preserved cellar more closely, a sample for dendrochronological analysis was collected from a preserved oak beam deep inside the masonry. This sample gave the date 1482,¹² a result which was later confirmed through carbon dating.¹³ The result fits well with the information that Kronobäck was given to the Hospitallers around 1480. It is likely that a fifteenth-century building was once located above the cellar. Such a building could have functioned as living quarters for the brethren and may also have contained kitchens and storage rooms. Further archaeological investigations at Kronobäck may reveal more information about this rural Hospitaller site.

11 The Kronobäck Infirmary Church. Kalmar County Council, p. 4.

12 Report with the results of the dendrodating, Lund University.

13 Report with results from ¹⁴C-analysis, Lund University.

Odense

The former Hospitaller commandery in Odense is the best preserved such site in Scandinavia. The complex is characterised by its irregular shape, where the church sticks out towards the east while the commandery buildings form a closed quadratic yard in the west (fig. 5). The site has been the subject of several archaeological investigations over the years. It is likely that the foundation of the commandery goes back to the donation of an old church to the Hospitallers in Odense around 1280. This church may have been a Romanesque chapel, as several stone fragments of possibly twelfth-century origin have been found in the area.¹⁴

The commandery and its church are mentioned in several preserved medieval documents, but it was only in the later part of the Middle Ages that the complex was given its present layout. The architectural design,¹⁵ as well as a number of dendrochronological samples from the roof structure of the church (NNU report, No. 5, 1998), suggest that most of the present complex was created in the later part of the fifteenth century. One of the bells in the church tower also bears the date 1496 (Lorenzen 1927: 45). All this evidence suggests that a large building program took place in the commandery in the period c. 1460–1500 (Boldsen Lund Mortensen 2000 & Tue Christensen 2008: 13). It is possible that the southern wing of the complex is the oldest, as it does not seem to be tied in with the western and eastern wings. The southern wing may have functioned as a kitchen and economy building (Lorenzen 1927: 83) and could date from about 1400 (Boldsen Lund Mortensen 2000: 84). The quadratic complex has in that case developed from this wing during the late medieval period (Krongaard Kristensen 2000: 47). The church had a number of side chapels, most of which are still preserved, that are linked to various Danish noble families of importance to the Hospitallers (Olesen 1975). The church has also preserved an external opening for preaching. Such openings are rare in Scandinavian monastic architecture and may also have been used to display relics to the crowds (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984: I, 172 and Lind *et al.* 2004: 17).

14 Lorenzen 1927: 36 mentions that older, possibly Romanesque worked stones were spotted during restoration work 1878–80, and Arentoft 1997: 10 mentions a Romanesque detail which was found during his investigations in 1997.

15 Lorenzen 1927: 29; S. Hans kirke. In *Danmarks Kirker IX: Odense Amt, III*, pp. 1221–1555.

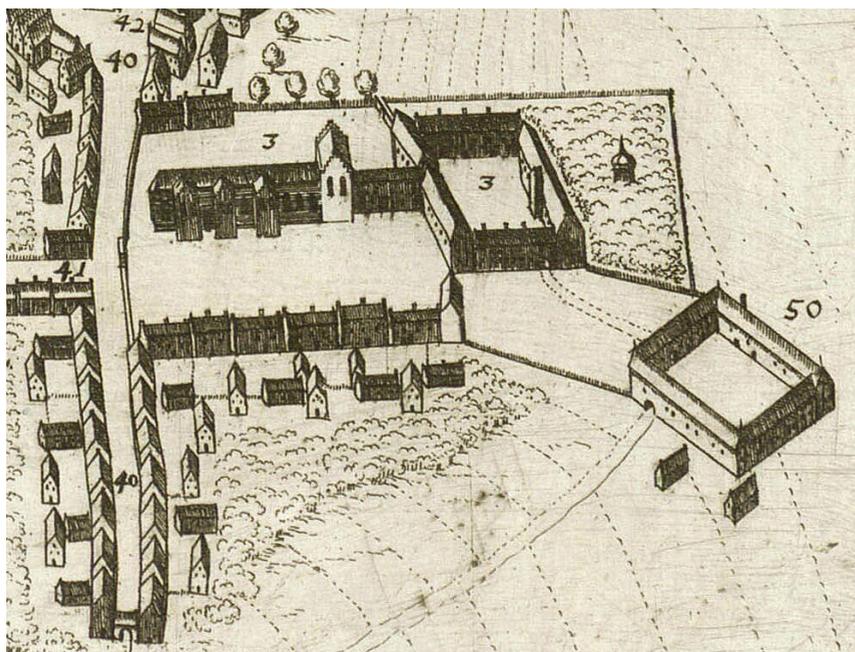


Figure 5. Odense Hospitaller commandery in the seventeenth century by Resen.
Photo: Det Kgl. Bibliotek.

It is likely that the first version of the commandery in Odense was considerably smaller, and that early buildings may have been located north of the church. During ground works thick demolition layers from possible earlier structures have been found in this area (Tue Christensen 2002) and remains from the thirteenth century have been uncovered in the same area.¹⁶ A recent georadar investigation has also identified a large stone foundation from a possible older building within the commandery.¹⁷ In the nearby park Kongens Have, north of the preserved commandery buildings, there are still a number of partly backfilled ponds that may go back to the Hospitaller period. Preserved pictures and maps of this area from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century show that stables and economy buildings were then located here. This suggests that

16 In a report by Dorte Lund Mortensen and Lars Froberg Mortensen from 1996 they mention on page 7 pits from the beginning of the thirteenth century, which the authors think predate the Hospitaller commandery.

17 A report of the georadar investigation is today preserved in the collections of the Møntergården Museum.

a large economy area was present here which may date back to the medieval period. The archaeological information from Odense Hospitaller commandery suggests that the complex was founded in the late thirteenth century, but that the buildings we know today are the result of a large building campaign during the latter half of the fifteenth century.

Ribe

In Ribe there is archaeological evidence for a 0.5m thick fill, which was spread out over the area for the later Hospitaller commandery around the year 1300. A wooden well, which was completely covered by this fill, has been dendrodated to 1273 (ASR 1200, p. 41), and the same area contained remains of simple wooden houses with domestic floor layers. This archaeological information suggests that a significant change occurred in the plot around 1300 and that this may be linked to the donation of land in the city to the Hospitallers. Archaeological investigations also indicate that the area where the Hospitaller commandery in Ribe was erected was not a former church site, but rather an ordinary block in the medieval city. If there was no church present from the beginning, it is likely that one of the first buildings to be erected by the Hospitallers would have been a new commandery church. The need for a large commandery church for the Ribe brethren would, however, have been limited around the year 1300, since the Hospitaller community must have been fairly small.

From 1371 there is a preserved letter mentioning that the brethren were complaining about the living conditions in their Ribe commandery. This was largely due to the fact that the plot was small and squeezed in among existing houses in the medieval city. The brethren were also afraid that the location of the commandery close to the sea increased the risk of flooding.¹⁸ There is evidence in the written material that the Hospitallers tried to trade the small plot in central Ribe for a larger site. For this reason the commandery was involved in a conflict with St Nikolai Benedictine monastery outside the town walls between the years 1479 and 1502. King Christian I (r. 1448–81) had granted the Hospitallers the right to take land from the monastery, but the nuns of the monastery opposed his

18 *Repertorium diplomaticum regni Danici mediaevalis*, Ser. I, vol. II, No. 2914.

decision (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984: I, 178). The Hospitallers were obviously not very successful in their claims, as they seem to have stayed in central Ribe until the Reformation.



Figure 6. Ribe Hospitaller commandery in the seventeenth century by Resen. Photo: Det Kgl. Bibliotek.

The area of the former Hospitaller commandery in Ribe has undergone a number of archaeological excavations in recent years. This makes it, from an archaeological point of view, one of the best known Scandinavian Hospitaller sites. A large excavation in 1987 made it possible to establish a number of activity phases within the former Hospitaller compound (Madsen 1999: 89). The first of these phases is characterised by the abandonment of the pre-Hospitaller settlement in this part of Ribe around 1300 (Madsen 1999: 92). The second phase c. 1300–20 is characterised by the previously mentioned fill being spread over the area (Andersen 1999: 31). The first brick building may have been erected during this phase, and could have consisted of the commandery church itself. The third phase, c. 1320–50, consisted of a slow growth of the occupation layers within the area, but with few signs of building activity (Madsen 1999: 104).

An east-west orientated building with buttresses obviously existed in phase four c. 1350–1410, and was seen resting on the occupation layers from phase three. In phase four the footings for a new building were also dug adjacent to the building with the buttresses (Madsen 1999: 95). This new building was about 15m long and 8m wide and was located just north of the building with the buttresses. The situation could be interpreted like this: Buttresses were being added to an existing brick building (possibly the church) and a new building was being erected at a 90-degree angle to this supposed church. It is also possible that the buttresses were added to an existing church in order to support the weight of new vaults.

A new activity phase was identified between the years c. 1410 and 1465. This phase was characterised by thick demolition layers being created in the area. These layers contained a large number of roof tiles, indicating that the upper parts of a building must have been altered during this period. One last phase of activity, phase six, indicated demolition and destruction in the area following the Reformation in the sixteenth century.

Another archaeological excavation was carried out in the northern parts of Ribe Hospitaller commandery between 1997 and 1998. This investigation indicated that remains of the pre-Hospitaller settlement had been preserved in the northern parts of the plot as well and that a well-defined border existed between the city and the Hospitaller compound in the north and west (Andersen 1999: 30). The thick fill of around 1300 could also be traced during this investigation and it was clear that this fill was covering an older domestic settlement. This gives further support to the assumption that the Hospitallers in Ribe planned their new commandery around 1300 (Andersen 1999: 31; ASR 1200, p. 22). Another interesting result of the 1997–98 investigation is that the northern wing of the commandery was discovered. This wing seems to have been parallel to the building with buttresses further to the south (the supposed church) and had the remains of a fireplace inside. The wing had been rebuilt and heavily altered during the course of the fifteenth century (fig. 6).

In the southern section of the 1997–98 investigation area yet another building showed up in the shape of floor layers and cuts for various foundation walls. This may be the remains of the eastern wing of the Hospitaller complex. If put together the two investigations of 1987

and 1997–98 indicate that the Hospitaller commandery in Ribe had an almost square shape towards the end of the Middle Ages, and that it is the fifteenth century that can be seen as the main period of expansion (Andersen 1999: 35; ASR 1200, p. 41).

Dueholm

The starting-point for Dueholm Hospitaller commandery was probably a donation around 1371 (Dueh. Dipl., p. 15) and later donations of *S:t Clements Church* and the *All-Saints House* in nearby *Nyköbing* around 1380.¹⁹ The commandery church was mentioned for the first time in 1420, when a new altar was being constructed (Dueh. Dipl., No. 106). In a preserved drawing of the complex from about 1670 the church is surrounded by a number of freestanding buildings to the north and east.²⁰ The area seems to have been divided into two distinct parts; a living block north of the church and an economy area to the northeast of the chapel. It is possible that this structure goes back to the Hospitaller period (fig. 7).

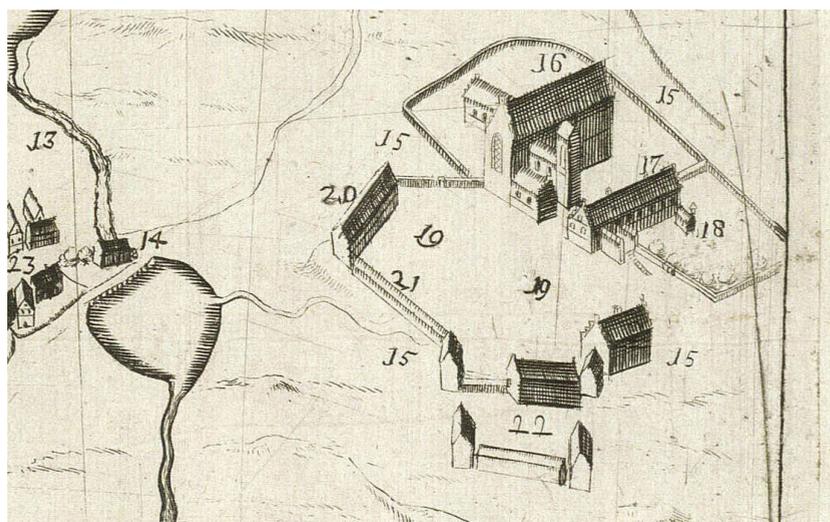


Figure 7. Dueholm Hospitaller commandery in the seventeenth century by Resen. Photo: Det Kgl. Bibliotek.

19 The donation is known through a confirmation by the Pope on 3 April 1445. The letter is published in *Acta Pontificum Danica*, III, no. 1870.

20 Resen's Atlas from 1677 is today available in a new edition.

The commandery at Dueholm has been the subject of a number of archaeological investigations between the end of the nineteenth century and the present day. These investigations have contributed towards a much better understanding of the medieval complex.²¹ Among the structures that are left from the medieval period is the main building, which today contains Morslands Historiske Museum, and medieval masonry in a nearby building which until recently functioned as a dairy. Several other buildings were, however, most likely present in the medieval commandery.

The main building has been interpreted by some researchers as a former mill (Bugge Vegger 1996: 91), but this claim is doubtful for a number of reasons. The architecture of the building is far too sophisticated for a mill and its solid stone walls indicate that it was most likely built as a dwelling. This impression is further supported by the fact that another mill is clearly visible in a different location on Resen's picture of the complex from about 1670. In the same picture the building in question also has a chimney. The Danish researcher Lorenzen thought that the building might have been the Prior's lodgings, and that it may have been a parallel to the previously mentioned house at Antvorskov (Lorenzen 1927: 60, 82). The fact that the king's local man moved into the house during the Reformation around 1539 makes it highly likely that it was a comfortable house by the 1530s. The author of this article has suggested that the preserved building might have functioned as a freestanding hospital which belonged to the commandery (Carlsson 2010: 227–229).

Whatever the original purpose was of this beautiful medieval building in Dueholm, it is clear that it is once again the fifteenth century that stands out as the most expansive period of this former Hospitaller complex. A bell from the commandery church, possible cast as early as 1410, has been preserved in Resen Church, and in the church of the nearby city of Nyköbing there are a number of choir stalls that may come from Dueholm. These stalls have an inscription saying they were made for the new choir in Dueholm commandery church around the year 1500.²²

21 Per Bugge Vegger has concluded the archaeological investigations at Dueholm in an article from 1996.

22 Dueholm Klosterkirke. In *Danmarks Kirker* XII: Thisted Amt, I, p. 88.

Viborg

It is likely that the origin of Viborg commandery was the chapel which was given to the Hospitallers in 1284 (*Diplomatarium Danicum*, Ser. 2, vol. III, No. 108). The first archaeological studies of the area were made as early as 1817, and by the middle of the nineteenth century several ruins were uncovered by the local researcher Christian Gullev. He found several stonewalls and was able to reconstruct the central parts of the complex. It is obvious that the commandery had a squared shape towards the end of the Middle Ages and that the church constituted the northern wing (fig. 8).²³ In the church, worked stones from doors and windows were uncovered, together with glazed floor tiles (Lorenzen 1927: 51).

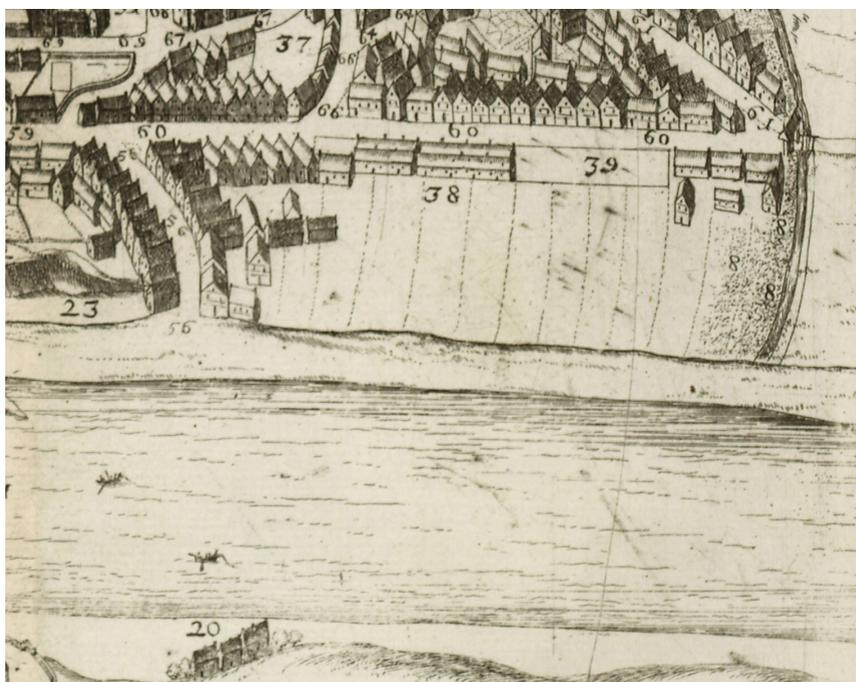


Figure 8. Viborg Hospitaller commandery in the seventeenth century by Resen. Photo: Det Kgl. Bibliotek.

23 Gullev's so-called 'Beretningar' are preserved in the collections of the National Museum in Copenhagen.

When new sewage pipes were put down in nearby St Ib's Street in 1970–71 further remains of the eastern parts of the complex were uncovered. The walls had partly rested on timber, which had been driven into the natural clay. As a result, it was possible to collect samples for dendrochronological dating. Five individual samples gave the collected result of 1282–1317 (NNU rapport, No. 40, 1999). It can be questioned, however, whether the squared layout of the complex goes back to the thirteenth century. It is more likely that this shape developed gradually, as was the case in the other Scandinavian houses of the order.²⁴

A fire hit the commandery church in 1501, and it is possible that the squared layout is the result of a redesign of the complex after the fire (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984: I, 168). The foundations of the commandery were unfortunately almost completely removed during the nineteenth century, something that makes further investigations of the site complicated. Just outside the actual commandery area there existed at least two other buildings that probably belonged to the complex; namely a hospital and a timber framed building of unknown purpose. The later of these structures might have contained dwellings with storage rooms attached, as indicated by the 1970s investigations. The artefacts from the building indicate that it was a late medieval construction, possibly used by the inmates of the commandery (Levin Nielsen 1970).

The same area was included in a small investigation in 1988, which complemented the picture of the southern parts of the complex. During this investigation further buildings for potential inmates and more economy buildings with a possible link to the commandery were uncovered (Levin Nielsen 1988). Further to the south remains of a blacksmith's activities have been identified, but to link these finds to the commandery remains difficult (Hjermind, Iversen & Krongaard Kristensen 1998: 18). Adjacent to the previously named hospital there was also a cemetery, where several human burials have been found. The remains of the hospital itself have been identified through its solid stonewalls and pieces of window glass north of the commandery.

24 This development of the area has support in the archaeological material according to Jesper Hjermind at Viborg Stiftsmuseum.

In 1578 the Danish king decided to pull down the church and the commandery buildings and to reuse the stones in Viborg Cathedral and a new courthouse (*Kancelliets Brevbøger*, 17 Aug 1578). An excavation in 1985 found the remains of a possible barn that may have belonged to the commandery. Such Hospitaller storage units existed in many Scandinavian towns and were used to store products that were going to be sold at the local markets (Vedsø 1986: 2). In the years 1518–19 the Hospitallers in Viborg also controlled a brick kiln which was possibly linked to the expansion of the late medieval commandery (*Ældste Danske Archivregistraturer*, II, p. 391, No. 1–6). The large rebuilding program of the complex in the late-medieval period could have made it necessary for the brethren to produce their own bricks. Even in Viborg it is the late medieval period that stands out as being the most expansive.

Horsens

The commandery in Horsens has never been the subject of any extensive archaeological investigations and our knowledge of this complex is therefore rather limited. A number of preserved pictures of the area show the later Stjernholm Castle which was built on the plot shortly after the Reformation (fig. 9). It is possible that this castle contained masonry from the former commandery, but few remains from the castle exist today. If the pictures of the castle show parts of the original Hospitaller complex it seems to have consisted of a squared complex, where the church might have formed the northern wing, since a number of buttresses can be seen on that wall.²⁵ The commandery was located just to the east of the city of Horsens and next to a wide stream.²⁶ This location gave the Hospitallers an advantage in terms of transport and trading activities.

25 Vor Frue Kirke. In *Danmarks Kirker XVI: Århus Amt, Horsens*, p. 6140.

26 Resen's Atlas from 1677 is today available in a new edition from 1925 onwards.

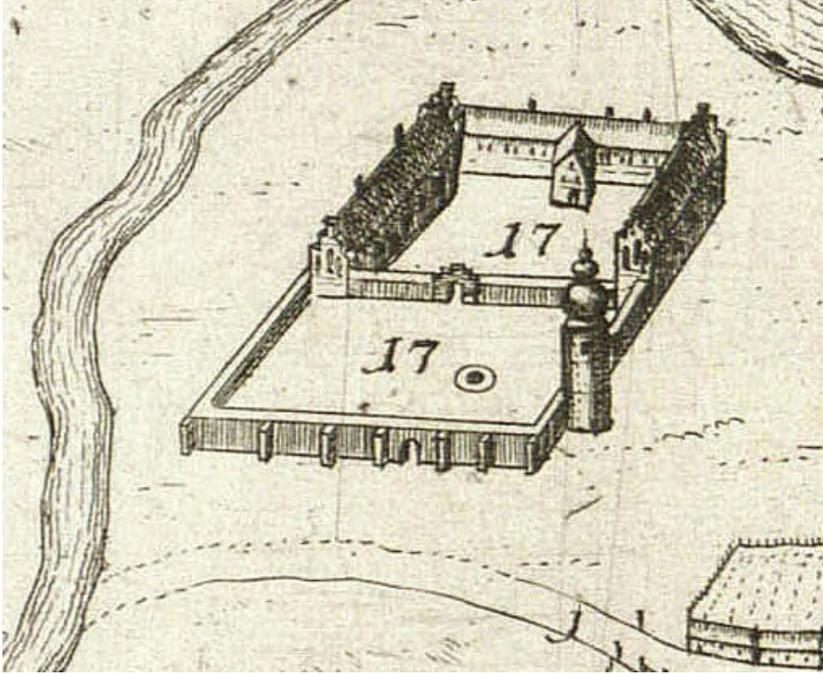


Figure 9. Horsens Hospitaller commandery in the seventeenth century by Resen. Photo: Det Kgl. Bibliotek.

In the year 1390 a *domus nostra* in Horsens is mentioned in a preserved letter written by the Prior of Antvorskov. This may be an indication that the commandery at this point was still fairly small, and that it did not expand into a larger complex until later in the Middle Ages (*Repertorium diplomaticum regni Danici mediaevalis*, Ser. I, vol. II, No. 3742). It is only in the year 1438 that we can confirm that members of the order actually lived in Horsens (*Ældste Danske Archivregistraturer*, I, p. 173). Further excavations of the area are therefore needed in order to establish a more comprehensive chronology of the development of the commandery.

A number of artefacts can nevertheless be linked to the complex. A stone container with a possible Hospitaller cross was found during ground works in the area in the nineteenth century.²⁷ A smaller archaeological investigation by Horsens Museum in the 1980s also uncovered human burials and thick layers of medieval demolition material in the

²⁷ Vor Frue Kirke. In *Danmarks Kirker XVI: Århus Amt, Horsens*, p. 614o.

area. Some of these remains may go back to the twelfth century and can therefore predate the Hospitaller compound. It is possible, however, that an older church was given to the Hospitallers in Horsens and that the older burials belong to this church (Kieffer-Olsen, Boldsen & Pentz 1986: 24). Such a development has been seen at many other Hospitaller sites, and the old church in Horsens may therefore be identical with the now lost Vor Frue parish church, which is known from written sources.²⁸

In a will from 1514 a donation was given to the brethren in Horsens to expand their commandery church, and it is clear from the letter that the church was under construction in this period.²⁹ Another preserved letter mentions that the Hospitaller church in Horsens was demolished in 1540 (*Kancelliets Brevbøger*, 28 June 1540), so it is possible that this new church only existed for some 30 years. During two smaller archaeological excavations at Wormsgade 8–10 and Wormsgade 12 further remains of the Hospitaller commandery were uncovered. During the first of these two investigations a large east-west orientated stone foundation with traces of a large buttress was discovered. This foundation may come from the former Hospitaller church, and close to the foundation about 60 human burials were uncovered (Klemensen 2002: 7).

The second investigation revealed the foundation trench for a large medieval wall as well as several fragments of medieval roof tiles and further human remains (Kjærgaard 2004). An unpublished archaeological investigation was also carried out by Horsens Museum in the area in 2009.³⁰ Further investigations of the former Hospitaller commandery in Horsens will hopefully increase our knowledge of this complex. Any such investigations are unfortunately made difficult by a modern residential area covering parts of the site.

Smaller Hospitaller sites in medieval Scandinavia

There were also a number of smaller Hospitaller sites in medieval Scandinavia, which are less well known than the larger commanderies.

28 Kirkerne i Horsens. In *Danmarks Kirker XVI: Århus Amt, Horsens*, p. 5348.

29 Klevenfeldts saml. Pk. 26. Håndskriftsamlingen. The National Archives in Copenhagen.

30 Horsens Museum has not published the final report yet.

Many of these sites were located in, or adjacent to, important towns where the Hospitallers had economic interests and could benefit from trading activities or the local town markets. Such houses were located in Stockholm, Lund, and Köpinge in Sweden, and Nyborg and possibly Svenstrup in Denmark. These sites cannot, however, be covered by this article.

Summary

This study of the medieval Scandinavian Hospitaller commanderies has shown that small-scale Romanesque complexes were founded by the Hospitallers during the twelfth century in Antvorskov, Eskilstuna and Varna. These three commanderies represent the very beginning of Hospitaller activity in Scandinavia, and also fulfilled the functions as headquarters of the order in each one of the three Scandinavian countries. All other Hospitaller houses in medieval Scandinavia are likely to be of high medieval or even late medieval date.

The expansions of the Hospitaller complexes in Scandinavia is closely linked to the economic development of the order on a local as well as a more international level: events such as the loss of the Holy Land, the Trial of the Templars, the Black Death, several European wars and conflicts in the fourteenth century, and a general recovery of the European economy in the late medieval period, contributed towards a more stable flow of cash and donations to the Scandinavian Hospitallers from about 1400 onwards (Carlsson 2010). This economic development can be proven by written as well as archaeological sources.

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The Arrival of the Hospitallers in Norway

Trond Svandal

Arkiv Øst

In *ultimus finibus terris*. In this way the Grand Master Dieudonne de Gozon described the Scandinavian possessions of the Order of Knights of the Hospital of St John in Jerusalem in a letter from 1347. The northernmost establishment of the Hospitallers was situated in Norway. Here the order had received a donation of an old royal estate, and the centre of this estate was a farm called *Varna*, or *Værne*. It is situated on the eastern shore of the Oslo Fjord, approximately fifty kilometres south of Oslo and close to the modern town Moss. It lies in a district which has been well suited to agriculture since the Last Ice Age ended 12,000 years ago. Archaeological evidence shows that this was a regional cultural and political centre for centuries before the arrival of the order.

The Hospitallers never became a dominant religious order in medieval Norway. Only one house, or commandery, was founded in the country. By the late Middle Ages at least two houses had been established in Sweden, and eight in Denmark. The Norwegian branch of the order enjoyed its most prosperous period in the late fifteenth century.¹

The main topic of this article is the introduction of the order to Norway and the establishment of a Norwegian commandery. In spite of their long

¹ For a full discussion of the properties and development of Varna, see Svandal 2005.

presence, we have only a few written sources for their history here. What is left today mainly deals with economic issues and the estate, and some judicial matters. By interpreting what sources we have in the broader Scandinavian and European context, it may be possible to get a better understanding of the hospitallers' history in their northernmost outpost.



Figure 1. Remains of Varna Abbey Church. Photo: Mona Beate Buckholm Vattekar, Østfoldmuseene.

The arrival of the Hospitallers in Scandinavia

The establishment in Norway was closely linked to the spreading of the order in Scandinavia, and Denmark was the first country where the order established itself north of the German lands. They were granted a royal estate called Antvorskov in western Sjælland. A commandery was established here, and this would be the main Hospitaller house in Scandinavia throughout the Middle Ages. The later Scandinavian priory, called *Dacia*, which was established in the thirteenth century, would be administered from Antvorskov, and the ‘provincial prior’ of the Scandinavian province

resided here. This was thus the seat of the regular *provincial conventions* (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984–91, esp. vols. 1–2).

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries seven more houses of the order were established in Denmark: Viborg from before 1274, Odense before 1280, Ribe, Svenstrup and Lund mentioned in 1311 and Dueholm and Horsens in the late fourteenth century (see Carlsson, this volume). Written sources from this early period are scarce, and it is not possible to date the foundations precisely. What is clear, though, is the precedence of the house at Antvorskov, and the fact that it was founded decades earlier than all the other houses. Could the foundation of Antvorskov also have a direct link to the introductions of the hospitallers to Norway?

The traditional dating of the foundation of Antvorskov is the year 1170. The background for this is a note in an early sixteenth-century chronicle put together by a former Franciscan friar, Petrus Olai, or Peder Olsen. It states: *Fundatur Adourskog a Waldemaro I et Absalone, episcopo Roskildense (Annales danici medii ævi, p. 206)*. This says explicitly that Antvorskov was founded by King Valdemar I (1157–82), together with his close friend and ally, Bishop Absalon of Roskilde. But is Petrus Olai's chronicle to be trusted?

The chronicle was written down centuries later than the events it describes, and this has led some historians to question the value of the entire chronicle. The Danish historian Niels Skyum-Nielsen, however, suggested that the foundation could have been as early as the 1160s (Skyum-Nielsen 1971: 129). His source for this dating is a dubious letter from *Vor Frue Kloster* (Priory of Our Lady) in Roskilde. This letter is reputed to have been written by Bishop Absalon, stating that some hospitaller brethren witnessed it. They should also have signed the letter of foundation: *Fratres de hospitali Johannis in Hierusalem subscripserunt* (DD Ser. 1, vol. II: 163). Skyum-Nielsen stated that the letter must have been written sometime between 1164 and 1178, and based his dating of Antvorskov's foundation on this. There are two grounds for treating this view with a certain degree of caution. Firstly, a period of fourteen years does not alone really substantiate a claim that Antvorskov had been founded as early as the 1160s. Secondly, the letter from Roskilde only says that hospitaller brethren were present, not that they resided in a commandery in Denmark.

There are other sources that can lead us to a more precise dating, while also confirming the king's role in the foundation. There exist two royal letters of protection of Antvorskov from 1231, issued by Valdemar's son and grandson (the later kings Valdemar II and Valdemar III). The letters state that Valdemar I and his son Knud gave gifts to Antvorskov:

Let it be known to present and future (people) that all benefices that our venerable father (...), Valdemar the First (...) and king Knud, our brother, gave to the hospital at Antvorskov, and also other hospital churches within our realm ...²

Valdemar's role is also confirmed in a note in *Kong Valdemars jordebok*, a registry of royal lands in Denmark. It is dated to around the same time as the letters from 1231. The registry states that royal land was given to the hospital at Antvorskov (*Kong Valdemars jordebok*, I.2: 28). Another source that confirms the royal involvement in Antvorskov's foundation, is the so-called *huspenning*. This was a tax put on every household in Denmark, to be paid to the Hospitallers for their involvement in the fighting in the Holy Land (DD Ser 1, vol. 8: 156). This is a very strong indication of strong royal support.

Other people than the king might have played roles in bringing the Hospitallers to Antvorskov. One of them is Archbishop Eskil of Lund (1137–77) (Lorenzen 1927: 6; Nyberg 1991: 172–173). He is known for introducing other religious orders to Denmark, among them the Cistercians and Premonstratensians. Eskil might have come into contact with Hospitallers in France, during his exile between 1161 and 1167, or during a visit to Jerusalem in 1164. A source tells us that Eskil donated a parish church in Lund to the order. Still, there can be little doubt that the king surpassed the archbishop as a benefactor to the order.

The main ecclesiastical ally of the Hospitallers in Denmark was Bishop Absalon of Roskilde. His involvement is explicitly stated in Petrus Olai's chronicle. Absalon was a childhood friend of King Valdemar and was born into one of the most powerful families in Denmark. He became a

² DD Ser. 1, vol. VI: 120–121: *Notum sit presntibus et futuris quod omnia bona que felicis recordationis uenerabilis pater [avus] noster, rex Waldemarum Primus, et que pie memorie domunus rex Kanutus frater [patruus] noster, hospitalis in Andworescogh contulerunt et quecunque etiam alii ecclesie hospitalis infra terminus regni nostril erogauerunt.*

close supporter of Valdemar during the latter's rise to power in Denmark, and also of the king's crusading activities in the Baltics. The connection to the crusading movement and its ideology can be an important clue to understanding why Valdemar wanted to introduce the Hospitallers to Denmark and Scandinavia in the first place.

Danes went on crusades to the Holy Land, but Danish crusading activities focused mainly on the pagan lands in the Baltic. Some of these lands even bordered on the Danish kingdom. By the twelfth century the main opponents were the Vends, a Slavic people living just south of the Danish border. Later in the Middle Ages Danish crusading activities in the Baltics brought them as far east as Estonia.

Crusading ideas were well known and may have been integrated in society and culture in Denmark by the late twelfth century. Denmark may have been looked upon as a 'border land' to the pagan east. Danish historian Thomas Riis has even claimed that the Danish king put his realm under the protection of the Order of St John, like kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula. This is probably reading too much into the meagre source material, and there is no evidence that the Hospitallers ever took a direct military role in the Danish crusading adventures in the eastern Baltics. But the status the order had in the Christian west, its connection to the crusades, and the ideology they brought with them, may themselves have been reasons for King Valdemar to support and donate a royal estate to them.

The main role of the Hospitallers in Scandinavia throughout the Middle Ages would be to recruit new members, propagate the order's cause to the local population, collect money and gain resources for their main activities in the east. The ideological effect of having one of the main military orders present in his kingdom may have been important to Valdemar and Bishop Absalon. To introduce an order which had the support of both the Pope and European kings and nobility may have given prestige to a new, strong 'Valdemarian' kingdom.

The firm support from King Valdemar and Bishop Absalon, and the establishment of the commandery at Antvorskov in 1170, do not seem to have sparked a sudden growth of the Hospitallers in Denmark. Not until the second half of the thirteenth century can we see a new wave of

foundations, those houses, mentioned above, which were founded from the 1270s until the late 1300s.

But even though the order did not seem to spread more in Denmark in the twelfth century, it established itself in Sweden in the late 1100s. The first brethren probably came and established a hospitaller commandery in the Swedish town of Eskilstuna. The order was given an old parish church, which had briefly served as a cathedral, and housed the remain of Eskil, a local saint. We cannot say exactly when the hospitallers came to Eskilstuna, but a thirteenth-century source dates it between 1174 and 1185 (Reitzel-Nielsen 1984–91, I: 206).

As in Denmark, the Hospitallers were introduced to Sweden as a result of royal support. The crusading ideas were well known also here. A special privilege was granted to the order in Sweden, just like the *huspenning* i Denmark. One twelfth of the so-called *Peterspenning* ('St Peter's Penny') from the diocese of Strängnäs was given to the order. As in Denmark, there is no indication that the order played any military role in Sweden, but rather had the same ideological role for the king as for King Valdemar in Denmark.

The development of the order in Sweden differs to the situation in Denmark, as there was no new wave of foundations in the late thirteenth century. Not until the late fifteenth century, just decades before the Reformation, was a new house founded in Kronobeck in the province of Småland. A possible third house was founded in Stockholm in 1491, but the status of this remains very uncertain.

What may be concluded from this? The order was introduced to Scandinavia with the foundation of the commandery of Antvorskov in 1170. The order established itself a few years later in Sweden, sometime between 1174 and 1185. The way the order was able to establish itself in Scandinavia is comparable to the situation elsewhere in Europe. It happened through royal support, and donations, and a strong will to grant lands and rights to the order.

Before the establishment of a Scandinavian province, the *Priory of Dacia*, in the thirteenth century, the houses in all three countries were linked to the German priory. This pattern of establishment broadly matches the development in the German lands. The order established

itself in Duisburg in 1152, came to Brandenburg in 1158, Bohemia in 1162 and Pomerania by 1182.

The establishment in Scandinavia must be closely linked to the crusades. The function of the early hospitallers here was not military, but rather to act as money collectors and to propagate the order's crusading activities in the Holy Land. The particular privileges granted to them in Denmark and Sweden, granting them a slice of taxation income, clearly show this. It does not seem like the hospitallers ever played a military role in the northern crusades in the Baltics, as their fellow brethren did in the *reconquista* on the Iberian peninsula. Even if Valdemar had hoped the order could play such a role, it is unlikely that the hospitallers had either the will or the economic strength to do so.

The arrival of the Hospitallers in Varna - previous theories

When and how did the hospitallers reach Norwegian shores? Historical research on the order's history in Norway has been scarce. Only a handful of articles and studies exist. Among these the most discussed topic has been the arrival of the order, and the foundation of the house at Varna.

The earliest serious study dates from 1847. Historian Christian Lange wrote a book on the history of monasteries and religious orders in medieval Norway (Lange 1856: 462). Lange referred to Varna's status as a former royal estate. He concluded that a king had to be the founder. This was the usual way a religious institution was founded in medieval Norway. Lange concluded also that the foundation had taken place later than the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63), and thought that his son, Magnus Håkonsson (1263–80), was the most likely founder. There were two written sources in particular that Lange relied on for his dating. First, a note in the will of King Magnus dating from 1277. Second, Varna is mentioned in the *Hirdskrå*, a collection of laws regulating aspects of the king's retainers and court, the *hird*. The *Hirdskrå* dates from the 1270s, and it stipulated that the king's men should give one third of their pay to the 'hospital at Varna'.

Lange thought the reason for the foundation of Varna was that it should function as a hospital, or a home for old men in the king's guard. Thus the institution would have a very strong connection to the king. Elsewhere in the *Hirdskrå* it says that old men of the *hird* should be helped *till klaustrs* ('to a monastery'). Lange interpreted this to be a rule that the old and sick royal guardsmen should be sent to Varna in their old age.

The second theory was that another important medieval king, Sverre Sigurdsson (1177–1202), was the royal founder. This theory was originally put forward by Peter Andreas Munch in the 1850s, yet he offered no new arguments for his view (Munch 1858: 609). The theory was picked up by historian Gustav Storm, another leading Norwegian historian of the nineteenth century, a generation later. Storm had access to more sources than Lange in the 1840s, not least a more complete manuscript from a registry of letters from the Hospitallers' medieval archive at Varna (*Akershusregisteret af 1622*). Storm upheld Lange's view that Varna was planned as a place where old retainers (*hirdmenn*) could live in their old age, but pointed to King Sverre as a more likely king to have established this tradition. Two issues that did not interest Storm were the role of the Hospitallers in the crusades and the possible link to Denmark. His interpretation is marked by a strong tendency to write the foundation of Varna into the national historiography of the late nineteenth century.

Storm's argument dominated most discussions of Varna for over a century, until church historian Erik Gunnes revisited the sources and arguments (Gunnes 1997). Rather than linking the arrival of the Hospitallers to King Sverre, who was after all an opponent to the archbishopric and a papal excommunicate, Gunnes pointed to his rivals, Earl Erling Skakke ('Wry-neck') and Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson, as more likely founders of Varna. This suggestion is interesting, especially the fact that Erling Skakke had a strong political influence over south-east Norway. The Norwegian church organization was strong in the late twelfth century, not least following the establishment of a separate Norwegian church province in 1152/53. But there does not seem to be any evidence of a direct link between the archbishop in Trondheim and the Hospitallers, nor is Archbishop Eystein mentioned in any of the sources dealing with political events in the Viken era in the 1160s and 1170s. Erling Skakke, who

had been a crusader in the 1150s and a promoter of his son's claim to the throne, is, on the other hand, mentioned frequently.

A Norwegian commandery

These theories put the foundation of the Norwegian Hospitaller commandery within a hundred-year period. The foundation of Antvorskov in 1170 is the *terminus post quem*, while the royal letter of protection from King Magnus Håkonsson, dated 1270, is the *terminus ante quem*. But is it possible to get any more out of the few written sources available to us, and can more be read out of them than former historians achieved?

Let us begin with the important law book, the *Hirdskrá*. All previous theories have been based heavily on two passages from this text. One is the text concerning the tithes to the hird, supposedly given to Varna. The origin of these *hird tithes* is also important, as it can give a vital clue. The other passage is the supposed the role of Varna as a hospital, or retirement home for old hird men. In ch. 16 of the *Hirdskrá* we read:

It is ancient custom among the Birchlegs (*birkibeinar*) and retainers (*hird-manna*) and guests (*gestir*) to give tithes of their pay, and it shall be divided in three, one evenly divided among the bishops (...), the second is taken by the priests, the third goes to the hospital at Varna.³

This is the only passage in the text where Varna is explicitly mentioned. The members of the hird were to give one third of their pay to the hospital. First of all, this tells us the Hospitallers must have had a particular status among the king's men. But what was the reason for this particular role? Was it, as Gustav Storm thought, because Varna functioned as a retirement home for the old members of the hird? The background for his view is found in ch. 51:

3 *Hirdskráen*, p. 96: *En þat er forn siðr oc hæit birkibæina. at gera skal tivnð af mala sinum. bæðe hirdmanna oc gesta oc skipta .i. þriðunnga aller biskopar aller jamnt. Oc oðlazt. konongs menn þar .i. staðen græpt .i. þeim stoðin sem forn er vane a. Annan taka hirdprestar firir sina sýslu. Þriðia spitallenn .a. Varnu.*

Thus is agreed among us liege men, that if one of us becomes so poor that he cannot help himself in old age, or because of ill health, then shall the king and his lawful friends help him to a monastery (*til klaustrs*), half the provent paid for by the king, the other half by his friends.

...

But another penny (*aure*) is necessary that they pay for the need of their fellow retainers (*hirdmanna*). So that they who earlier have paid when someone had to be helped to a monastery, do not need to add so much.⁴

The question is whether these passages can be linked to the *hird tithes* mentioned in ch. 16. What we clearly see is that Varna is only mentioned in ch. 16. The second text does not say that old *hirdmen* should be brought to Varna, only that they should be helped to a monastery. The use of the term *klaustr* (Old Norse for monastery) is noteworthy. By the late 1200s a Hospitaller house like Varna would not be called a monastery, but rather commandery or *commendata*, or hospital (*spitall* in Old Norse). It is the latter that is used in ch. 16.

The paragraph stating that old retainers should be helped to a monastery should therefore be interpreted in more general terms. It cannot be used as an argument that all retainers should be brought explicitly to Varna. If this is accepted, there is no longer an argument for seeing Varna as being founded by a king as a kind of *hird* hospital.

But could the text in ch. 16 rather be linked to crusading ideology? Could it be that the *hird* men gave one third of their tithes to Varna, and the hospitallers, for their engagement in the crusades? If we look at it this way, the payment may be compared to similar gifts to the order elsewhere in Scandinavia. We have already seen the examples of the *huspenning* in Denmark and the so called *peterspenning* from the diocese of Strängnes in Sweden. The tithe of the Norwegian *hird* should, in my view,

4 *Hirdskráen*, pp. 176 and 178: *Sua er oc mælt með os handgengnom monnum at ef ein huer værdar firi sua mikilli fatøkt at han gerez hilplaus firi ælli saker eða vanheilssu. Þa skal konongr oc hans logunautar hialpa þeim manne til klaustrs. Geve halva prouenðo. Konongr. en halva loghunautar [...] En annann øyri þurfandinn logunautum sinum. At þui minna þurfui þæir til at leggja sem aðr hava greitt. þan tima sem þufandom skal til klaustars hialpa.*

be interpreted in this way, and be seen in a broader tradition, rather than as a peculiarly Norwegian institution linked to the king's hird.

Can we also date these passages in the *Hirdskrå*? The use of the term *birkibeinar* as a reference to the king's men could give us a clue. This term is usually linked to King Sverre Sigurdsson (1177–1202) and was used as an important argument by Gustav Storm. However, this term was still in use decades after Sverre's death in 1202. By itself it cannot be used as an argument for the dating of Varna.

However, the custom of giving a third of the tithes to Varna could lead us one step further. This arrangement may be dated to the reign of Magnus Håkonsson (1263–80), but it could have been introduced much earlier, perhaps as early as Magnus Erlingsson (1163–77) and his father Erling Skakke. The kings' sagas say that Magnus Erlingsson ordered his retainers to give tithes. Could it be king Magnus, and his father Erling, who initiated the regulation that a part of the hird's tithes should be granted to the Hospitallers?

The registry of letters from the archive at Varna, the so-called *Akershusregisteret*, contains short notes of documents from the hospitallers' archive at Varna, still in existence in 1622. The letters and documents were later destroyed in a fire, yet the registry does give us some vital information. As mentioned earlier, this registry was available to historian Gustav Storm when he published his study in 1892. Some papal letters from the twelfth century are mentioned in the registry made in 1622, but, unfortunately, it is not made clear if these were sent to Varna.

The Danish influence

The cultural and political connection between Denmark and south-eastern Norway (Viken) had been strong for centuries, and this continued until the early thirteenth century. Could the introduction of the Hospitallers to Norway have something to do with this long-standing Danish influence on Viken? Were the first Hospitallers even sent to Norway as a result of Danish aspirations to control this part of Norway?

An important written source from the late twelfth century is the *Gesta Danorum* by a Danish chronicler, Saxo Grammaticus. Saxo does not

write explicitly of Varna, or the Hospitallers in Norway, but we can read of important political events in the 1160s that may have been relevant. In particular, there were two Danish military expeditions to the Oslo Fjord region in the 1160s, and both expeditions were led by King Valdemar himself.

Saxo's descriptions of the military expeditions in the 1160s are of great interest. The same events are also mentioned in two sagas, *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*. The events are described somewhat differently here than in Saxo's version, but there is every reason to believe in the importance of the expeditions. A problem is the 'national' tendency in the various texts. Saxo is inclined to side with the Danish king, while the Norwegian sagas are more positive to the Norwegian side.

Saxo's chronicle is considered a relatively trustworthy source (Gathorne-Hardy 1946–53: 328). Saxo knew Bishop Absalon, Valdemar's close friend and ally, well, and the text was written shortly after the events he describes. The Norwegian sagas, on the other hand, may contain local traditions that the Danish chronicler did not have any knowledge of.

The main character in the Norwegian accounts of the events was Erling Skakke, earl and father of the king, Magnus Erlingsson, who was still a young boy at this time. Erling was thus *de facto* ruler of Norway during most of the 1160s. The first contact between him and Valdemar was in 1161. As a result of events during a period of civil war in Norway, Erling was forced to flee the country with his young son for a short period. He sought refuge with Valdemar in Denmark. According to *Heimskringla*, Erling promised king Valdemar the control of the region called Viken, if Valdemar would support Erling and Magnus in the attempt to regain control of Norway. Erling's plan was to make young Magnus the sole ruler of Norway.

Their next contact was in 1164. This year King Valdemar led his first military campaign to Norway. This is mentioned in both the sagas and in Saxo's text, but the reason for the expedition is unclear. The sagas tell us it took place because Erling had not fulfilled his promise to Valdemar from 1161. Saxo on the other hand has another explanation. He writes that Valdemar was hailed as a king on his arrival in Østfold, east of the Oslo Fjord, and was even proclaimed king at the regional assembly

Borgarthing. He also went west across the fjord to Tønsberg. Here he was met by Erling's men, ready for battle against the Danes. Valdemar did not engage the Norwegians and left for Denmark shortly after.

The Danish king may also have led an expedition to Norway in 1168, but it is solely Saxo who mentions this, not the sagas (Saxo, 14.38.1–9). Saxo writes that Bishop Absalon accompanied him on this expedition. Again, the reception from the local population is supposed to have been good.

For us the most interesting aspect of these events is their result: a truce, or even peace, between the Danes and Norwegians in 1170. According to Saxo, the bishops of both Oslo and Uppsala were present at an important meeting (*riksmøte*) between the king and the most prominent men of his realm. This took place in Ringsted on the island of Zealand that year. The two bishops' main mission here is said to have been to make peace between Valdemar and Erling.

The *riksmøte* in Ringsted in 1170 was an important event in Valdemar's reign. At this meeting his son Knud was crowned co-king, and his father, Knud Lavard, was sanctified. Valdemar made it clear to the world, and all his potential adversaries, that he was the most powerful man in Denmark. At the same meeting a conflict with the church was also laid to rest, as he acknowledged Pope Alexander III. Taking this stance, Valdemar showed his opposition to the German emperor, who supported the rival pope. Valdemar must at this time have felt strong enough to show his resistance to his powerful German neighbour.

The sagas tell us that Erling went to Denmark and Ringsted, and here he was met by Bishop Absalon. Acting as a mediator, the bishop supported a peace treaty between the Norwegian earl and *de facto* ruler Erling Skakke and Valdemar. The fact that Erling went at all to Ringsted in 1170 must have been carefully planned in advance.

One last detail can be read in another saga text, the *Orkneyinga saga*. According to the saga, Erling received his title of earl from Valdemar himself, and it thus seems that a crucial condition of the peace treaty was that Erling became vassal of the Danish king (ch. 89). Valdemar showed that he refused to give up his claims to Viken, the region promised to him by Erling in 1161. Erling gave this to Valdemar, yet in return was made a vassal, and given the title of earl, with a degree of control over these lands.

He also promised to give military support to Valdemar. A rather peculiar political situation arose, with the *de facto* ruler of Norway being made the Danish king's vassal in a part of what had previously been his realm.

What does all of this have to do with the Hospitallers? Could these important political events in Scandinavia have played a role in the arrival of the first brethren to Norway in the 1170s? The fact that the two main benefactors of the order in Denmark, King Valdemar himself and Bishop Absalon, were present in Viken in the 1160s, is interesting. The same area became part of Erling's 'earldom', under *de jure* Danish control, in 1170. Even though we have no written sources telling us explicitly of a direct connection between the events of the 1160s and 1170 and the arrival of the Hospitallers in Norway, these events may have provided the background situation that made Norway attractive to the Hospitallers, or that encouraged benefactors to sponsor their arrival.

If we follow a possible Danish connection, two possible benefactors, or even founders, of a Norwegian Hospitaller's house may be put forward. The first 'candidate' is Valdemar, possibly under influence of the powerful Bishop Absalon, and the second is Erling Skakke. Let us look at each candidate in turn.

First, Valdemar. The Order of St John had enjoyed royal support in Denmark, and their new commandery at Antvorskov was donated by Valdemar. There could have been both a political and an ideological reason for Valdemar to support the Hospitallers in Norway. Valdemar was himself strongly engaged in the crusading movement, in particular against the Wends, a Slavic people living in the border areas between Denmark and Germany.

Second, Erling Skakke. We know from other sources that he founded other monasteries and religious institutions in Norway. One of these was the Augustinian abbey of Halsnøy in south-western Norway, in connection with the coronation of his son Magnus in 1163. Another institution possibly founded by Erling was the Premonstratensian St Olav's Abbey in Tønsberg. This was also an order which had strong connections to Denmark during the medieval period. This institution was most likely founded in the 1160s or 1170s (see Bandlien, this volume). With its round church the connotations to the crusading movement are made visible.

The other main character was Erling Skakke. We know from other sources that he founded other monasteries and religious institutions in Norway. One of these was the Augustinian abbey of Halsnøy in south-western Norway, in connection with the coronation of his son Magnus in 1163. Another institution possibly founded by Erling Skakke was the Premonstratensian St Olav's Abbey in Tønsberg. This was also an order which had strong connections to Denmark during the medieval period. This institution was most likely founded in the 1160s or 1170s (see Bandlien, this volume). With its round church the connotations to the crusading movement are made visible.

Erling was himself strongly associated with the crusading movement and familiar with crusading ideology. According to both the *Heimskringla* and the *Orkneyinga saga* he participated in an expedition to the Holy Land in the 1150s. He in fact shared this connection to the crusading movement with the Danish king, even though Valdemar's main focus was the Baltics while Erling's was the Mediterranean and Palestine.

There could have been several reasons for Erling to introduce the Hospitallers to Norway. First, it could have been a tactical political measure. By granting a royal estate to the order, which enjoyed the support of Valdemar, Erling may have hoped to please the powerful Danish king. Second, there may have been a religious and ideological aspect to the foundation. Erling must have been familiar with the order, both from his stay in the Holy Land, and through the general political culture of Northern Europe in the 1160s. He must also have known the role the Knights of St John, as well as the other religious military orders, played in the crusades. Even though we have no sources explicitly stating this, his enthusiasm for the order may have been a strong factor in encouraging him to grant support to them by giving them lands and privileges in Norway.

So both Valdemar and Erling may have had their own personal, political and ideological reasons to support the Hospitallers in Denmark and Norway. Valdemar may have wanted to bring a friendly order to his 'new' lands in Norway, and thereby strengthen his political position. Erling, on the other hand, may have introduced the hospitallers to Varna as a friendly act as the vassal of the Danish king in Viken. At the same time,

they both supported an important international order fighting for the faith in the crusades, which itself would have been a reason for them to give support to the Hospitallers. It is, of course, possible that these two strong personalities cooperated on this project.

Conclusion

The main interest in the somewhat meagre historiography of the Norwegian hospitallers has centred around the question of the foundation of the house at Varna. Earlier historians have launched various main theories of when and who introduced the order to Norway, based on a few written sources available at the time of their research, or more or less nationalistic historiography. The most influential theory was launched by Gustav Storm in 1892, putting forward King Sverre Sigurdsson as the most likely founder. His lack of political control of the areas east of the Oslo Fjord and difficult interpretation of the passages in the *Hirdskrå* cast doubt on this theory. In the 1990s Erik Gunnes put forward Erling Skakke and Archbishop Eystein as the two likely founders of Varna.

No written sources can tell us exactly when Varna was founded, nor who the royal donator was, but as argued in this article there are reasons to believe that the conflicts and negotiations between Erling Skakke and Valdemar concerning the control of Viken played a more important role in the introduction of the Hospitallers to Norway than traditionally believed. While Gunnes' dating is supported by the present study, the foundation of Varna should also be considered as part of a broader Scandinavian context. The peace treaty of Ringsted in 1170 between Erling Skakke and Valdemar seems to be the likely backdrop of the introduction of the Hospitallers to Norway. This means that the establishment of the Hospitallers in Norway should be seen in relation to the establishment of the order in the rest of Scandinavia.

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