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CHAPTER 4

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. Frölén 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 profectione 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; *Krøniker*, 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.

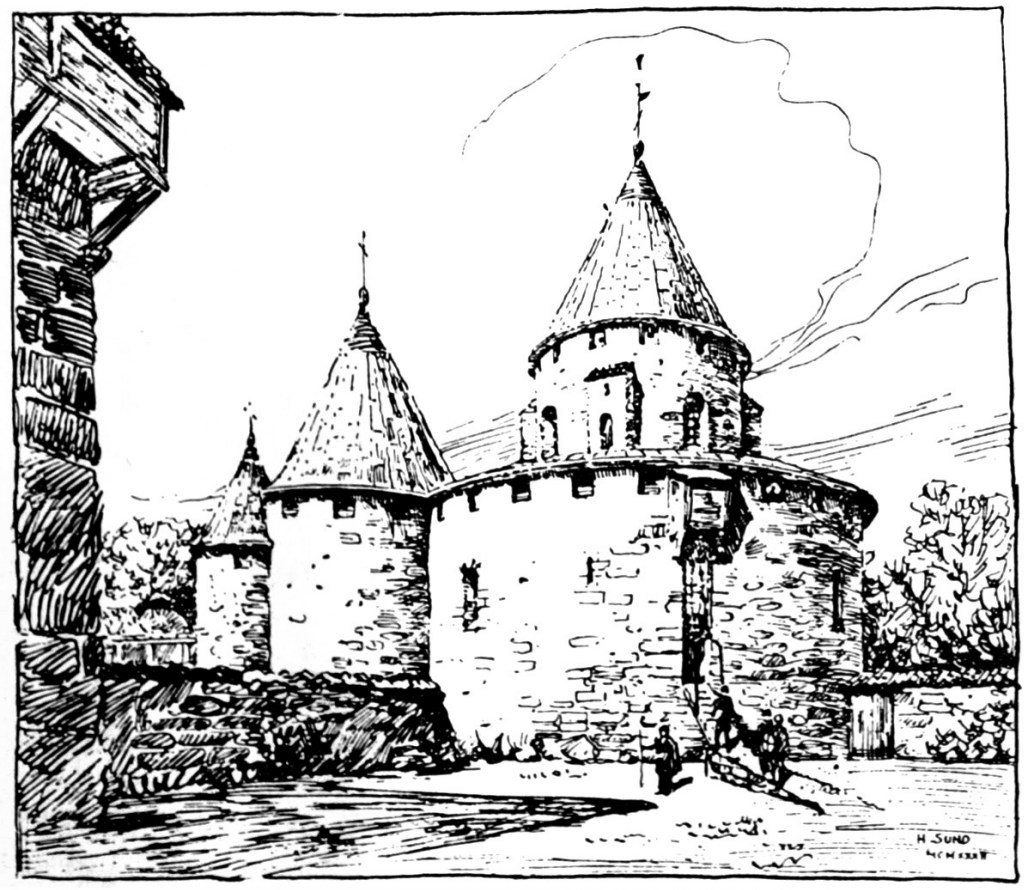

Figure 2. Reconstruction of Saint Olav's in Tønsberg as a fortified church by Harald Sund. Illustration: Harald Sund.

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. (Frölén 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 Haagensen 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.

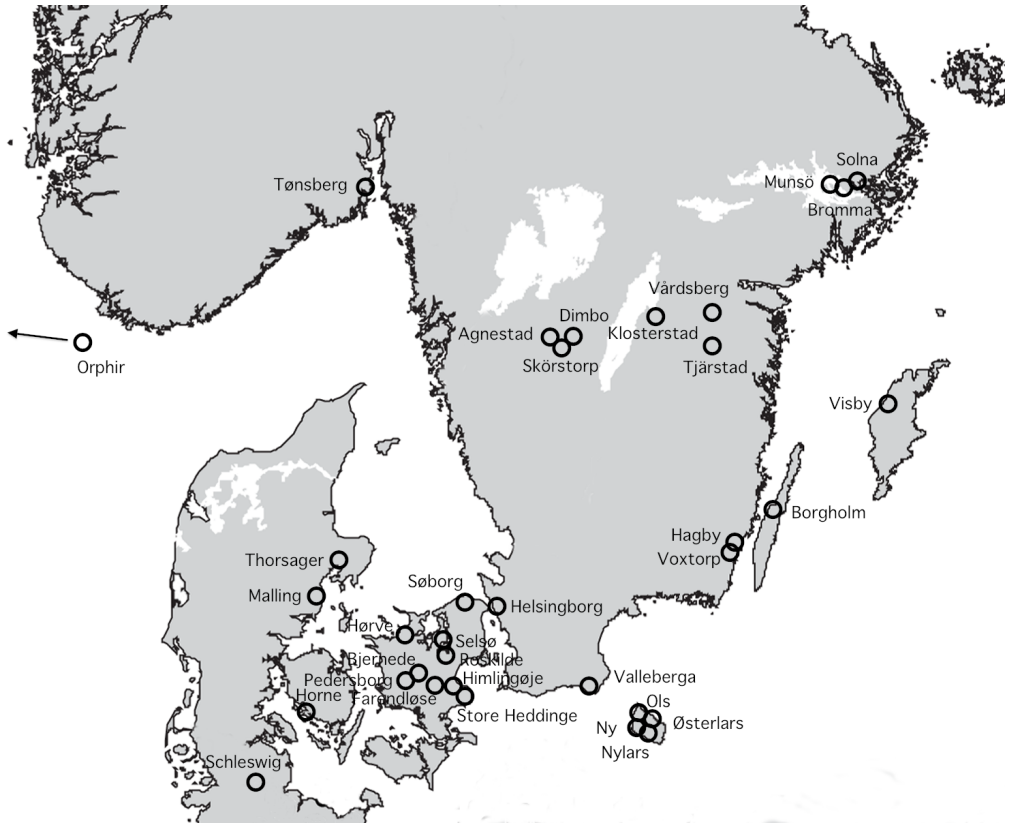

Figure 8. Overview of the medieval round churches of Scandinavia. Map: Jes Wienberg.

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?

Conspicious 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) (Brendalsmo, *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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