

Summaries

Monastic Archaeology and Sorø studies

By Jes Wienberg

Monastic archaeology is an internationally established research field which need not be confined to the Middle Ages, to medieval archaeology alone, nor within the borders of nations.

Five themes can be identified in the research history of monastic archaeology since the 19th century: building history, burials and hospitals, economics and landscapes, techniques and crafts, and gender and nunneries. However, in three current research projects on monasteries in Sweden – Alvastra, Vreta and Dalby – other, more multidisciplinary themes appear.

The conditions for new studies on the Cistercian monastery of Sorø are excellent, taking into account the preserved church, the wall-paintings, inventories, burials and the known written sources on donations and the property of the monastery. The church and monastery are furthermore documented in several classic publications.

The focus of the conference on Sorø in 2011 was on the history and use of the church and monastery. The building history is a well-known theme, whereas the question of use is partly new. After the fall of the Berlin Wall we have seen a »religious turn« re-establishing the archaeology of religion,

and thereby bringing ritual and liturgy to the forefront of research. Their use and users are also in focus, in line with the last decade's interest in questions of agency.

Finally, several possible themes not presented at the conference are introduced here as suggestions for future research: an overview of the history and development of the island of Sorø from the unpublished excavations and investigations of the past few decades; places and agents from before the monastery, for example in the Iron Age; places and agents in the period of the monastery, especially the locations of Fjenneslev, Bjernede and Pedersborg; the property of the monastery in a landscape perspective from written sources combined with the wall-paintings; the building history and use of the parish churches belonging to the monastery; and the study of the Cistercian »family« of monasteries – as viewed in Clairvaux in France.

The earliest history of Sorø Abbey in the sources

By Michael Kræmmer

As a rule little is known about the founding and the early years of Danish monasteries. With the abbey of Sorø we are lucky to have some descriptions –

neither many nor lengthy, but still a lot more than is usually the case. We have a description of the foundation at the beginning of *Sorø klostets gavebog*, a list of the abbots from the foundation to the Reformation, and a description of the medieval sepulchres in the abbey's church.

The written evidence partly proves but mostly just suggests the following outline of the construction history of the abbey of Sorø – a Benedictine monastery was planned in the 1140s or a little earlier. We do not know when it was founded, but around 1150 the first stone church was consecrated. The abbey was soon reformed and became Cistercian in 1161, on 13th June. The building of a new brick church began and it was probably consecrated and perhaps also finished early in the 1180s. In the first decennium of the 13th century the work with the so-called »Mølledige« began (described later in this book). On 13th May 1247 there was a great fire, and apparently most of the church and the rest of the abbey were destroyed. However, later evidence suggests that the church was not as damaged as the chroniclers wanted us to believe. The rebuilt church was reconsecrated in 1285 and many burials were moved to certain parts of the church from »the old church«, a phrase which must refer to the stone church from the 12th century. A medieval frieze with a coat of arms (»Skjoldefrisen«) may have been painted in connection with the reconsecration, as is normally believed, but this is uncertain. This is as far as we can go with the material from written sources. However, it must be remembered that the conclusions of this article should be confronted with the results of the archaeologists.

The Mill Dam in Sorø

By Aage P. Ravnsgaard

In 1161 a Cistercian monastery was founded in the midst of Zealand on the ruins of an only twenty-year-old Benedictine monastery. The founder was a young man named Absalon, who belonged to one of the most influential families in Denmark. He was sworn brother to the Danish king and had just returned from Paris, where he had studied for ten years. A few years later he became a bishop and later an archbishop, and is now regarded as the founder of Copenhagen. His idea was that the abbey church should serve as a chapel for himself and his family.

The layout for a Cistercian monastery was very standardized and in general involved running water as a source of energy for the different workshops and for washing away waste. In order to establish such a stream it was necessary to dig a channel between the two neighbouring lakes Sorø Sø and Tuelsø, which were only two kilometres apart, and to raise the water level in Sorø Sø a couple of metres. Because of disputes with neighbours the whole channel project was delayed 40 years but finally succeeded around 1200. The monastery functioned until the Reformation in 1536 and served for about another fifty years as a retirement home for all Danish monks. After 1586 the monastery was transformed into a boarding school and academy which is still in function, but has been rebuilt several times.

For most of the stretch outside the monastery wall the channel is still visible, but not so inside the wall. Only archaeological excavations can reveal the course and construction of the channel inside the monastery

wall, but such excavations have only been carried out for a section of the channel fifty years ago, and what is worse, the results have neither been evaluated nor published in any scholarly journal. However, the course of the channel has recently been struck by chance twice when the sewage system was being renovated.

The topology meant that it was not easy to plan and construct the channel, since the monks were left with few choices when the work had to be curtailed. In particular, there was very little space for the gradient of the channel, which was as little as 3 cm per 100 m, and comparable to what the Romans could master. Furthermore, the volume of water was insufficient during the summer, and this had implications for the design of the water mill close to the inlet of the channel.

This paper seeks to combine the latest findings with older source material in order to construct an overall picture of how the channel was laid out and constructed. And a proposal is put forward for the design of the water mill, based on the excavated remains. However, allowance must be made for the fact that the author is by no means an archaeologist, but has an engineering approach to the subject.

The Dormitory Stairs in Sorø Abbey Church

By Mogens Vedsø

The dormitory stairs in the medieval Danish monasteries that attract the most attention are the stairs in Sorø Abbey Church in the south transept. On the one hand they are regarded as a prototype of such stairs, on the other they are considered well preserved and safely dated. These statements call for further examination.

The staircase has two flights along the west wall and south gable of the transept leading up to a landing in front of the door to the dormitory about 3.5 m above the floor. The staircase has one thick stone parapet and at its free northeastern corner has a brick column with an almost egg-shaped ball on top.

The stairs seem well preserved, but the construction of chapels associated with the two barrel vaults of the upper flights may have caused some changes?. The Danish art historian N.L. Høyen concluded in his description of the church from 1869 that the original design of the stairs was uncertain. The current design is therefore partly due to the church restorations carried out after the middle of the 19th century.

The dating of the staircase has long been closely associated with the fire in the church and the convent in 1241. Before construction of the east wing, of which some remains are still preserved, there was a significantly lower wing linked to the southern transept. Access to its upper story was through a door that was somewhat lower than its successor and therefore was supposedly not used with the younger monastery wing. The staircase should therefore be of the same age as the former door. The wing is generally dated to the time after the fire, but the shape of its vaults suggests that it may be older.

However, the observations in the vaults of the vestry and the adjacent library – to the west – show that the older staircase could have been used even after the construction of the new east wing. The staircase dating can therefore be linked neither to the construction of the east wing nor to the monastery fire of 1241. Details of the staircase itself suggest a dating to the mid-13th century.

It remains to consider whether the staircase design is consistent with the general picture of similar steps in other abbeys.

The large Cistercian abbey churches in Herrevad and Løgum had related stairs (respectively from the second half of the 12th century and from the mid-13th century).

No example of a staircase designed like the old staircase in Sorø is known in Denmark, but similar remains are known from the Swedish Cistercian abbey church in Alvastra (consecrated around 1185).

Stairs from the 14th and 15th century, which once ascended from the chancel floor, are known for example from Elsinore St. Mary, Holbæk and Faaborg.

From the later part of the Middle Ages a new type is known, where the stairs are located in the east wing of the monastery in close proximity to the church. Such stairs are known for example from Kalundborg, Odense St. Knud and Nykøbing Falster.

Another type is the stairs that were reached via a connecting room. Examples include Aalborg and Ystad.

Further examples of dormitory stairs may have been built, but those cited here already show a clear trend. First of all, it must be concluded that the stairs in Sorø, if not an isolated occurrence, were at least a rarity. Most of the previous types of stairs are far more unostentatious. The old stairs in general seem, at least in the case of the stair flight, to have been placed inside the church. On the other hand, most of the younger medieval stairs have been removed from the church and instead placed in or adjacent to the east wing.

The purpose of this article has been to provide an overview; for most stairs we still lack a closer examination of the exact construction and dating in the sources. The core of this review indicates that the picture is somewhat more complex than expected, and future studies will undoubtedly make it more nuanced.

The east wing at Sorø Abbey and other Danish Cistercian abbeys

By Hans Krongaard Kristensen

Although the east wing in Sorø has nearly disappeared we can reconstruct the building fairly well from traces and old measurements. The wing was vaulted on both storeys – the only example of this in Denmark.

Among the other Danish Cistercian abbeys the east wing is more or less known in Herrevad, Esrum, Vitskøl, Øm, Løgum, Tvis, Ryd, Holme and Ås. There are some similarities among the monasteries and they all have a dormitory on the second floor and a group of rooms at the bottom: sacristy, armarium, chapterhouse, stairs to the dormitory, parlour and monks' common-room. But the order and the layout of the rooms differ from abbey to abbey. Nor are such rooms peculiar to the Cistercians; they have been used by other orders too.

The abbot's roof construction

– Dendrochronology in the Abbey Church of Sorø

By Thomas Bertelsen

In 2011 the National Museum carried out a dendrochronological survey of the medieval oak roof construction of the nave and northern transept of the Abbey Church of Sorø (fig. 1). It was established that the roof construction of the nave originated from about 1515-25 (figs. 5-7), while the roof construction of the transept was built about 1540-50 (fig. 8). The roof construction of the nave must have been initiated by the last Catholic abbot of the abbey, Henrik Tornekrands, who also donated rich furnishings to

the church, including the large crucifix from 1527 by Claus Berg's workshop and the tombstone of Absalon from 1536 (fig. 12). Furthermore, the dendrochronological survey has proven that Henrik Tornekrannds was also responsible for the renovation of the church building, which at this time probably got its stepped gables and large Gothic chancel windows. These features, which still existed in 1749, were erased by a Neo-Romanesque restoration in the second part of the 19th century (fig. 4).

Faculty surveys of bricks in Sorø Abbey – sorting of bricks

*By Kaare Lund Rasmussen, Christina Andersen
and Thomas Bertelsen*

Small samples have been procured with hammer and chisel from the bricks in the crowns of the walls in the medieval church of the Cistercian monastery of Sorø, Denmark. The samples have been subjected to three types of analyses: magnetic susceptibility, thermoluminescence sensitivity, and for the first time colour measurements. The colour measurements were performed with a handheld Minolta CM-2600d photo spectrometer yielding very precise colours in the 1976 CIE colour system (L*,a*,b*).

Extensive sorting of bricks according to colour seems to have been a common feature in the vast group of Danish late medieval building projects where the varying colours of bricks were used as decoration. Genuine patterns seem to be a phenomenon of eastern Denmark with Roskilde Cathedral's Chapel of the Three Kings from about 1460 as the noblest representative (fig. 13). Masonry with belts of bricks of contrasting colours also occurs, while arches of al-

ternating red and dark bricks appear across the country (fig. 14). The most common type of decoration, however, was red façades with evenly spread dark bricks. This might seem coincidental but the absence of this feature in the interior walls underlines its role as a deliberate facade décor.

Possibly, bricks were also sorted by colour when the building of the Abbey Church of Sorø was commenced shortly after the founding of the abbey in 1161. Only small parts of the original façade of the church have been preserved, for example the gable of the northern transept, which is a well-balanced blend of red and dark bricks (see fig. 15, p. 118). In contrast, the interior walls above the vaulting are built of much more monochrome bricks, which points to a deliberate wish for polychrome façades.

Sorø Church and Abbey in function.

A liturgical view of the western portal of the southern aisle

By Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen

In the portal of the lay brethren in Sorø Abbey Church a strange circular hole is found in the eastern capital. The capital was clearly produced in the early 13th century with this hole. It is a puzzling feature which has been left undiscussed in the numerous works on the church. In this article the small hole is interpreted as something intentional and something desired. It is suggested that the hole was used to fasten some sort of lighting arrangement, a lantern or candle, in the doorway. This position of a light source is presented here as a feature used ceremonially. In particular the liturgy of Christmas Night is discussed as a possible motivation. However, the article only suggests this as one of many possible situations where such a use of light could be relevant. The article con-

cludes that a liturgical perspective is necessary if one wants to move beyond the mere recording of building history and descriptions of the architecture.

Sorø Abbey's Cemetery for Laymen.

The 2006 Archaeological Excavation of Burials outside the north Transept.

By Henriette Rensbro

Prior to the construction of a new extension on the north side of the church the National Museum excavated 24 square metres. 25 graves were discovered and 15 of them excavated. 9 skeletons were examined at the University of Copenhagen; they turned out to be five men, two women and two children. There were 6 stone-coffin graves made of brick and roofed with tiles. In one of these brick graves a woman was buried. Dating the graves was difficult: At least 8 of the graves are medieval, as brick coffins are commonly dated from the late 12th to the 14th century and two other graves are older. According to the Cistercian rule monks were buried without coffins and from what we know about the location of the monastery cemeteries, it was usually the cemetery of the laymen which was located on the north side of the church. One grave, without a coffin and older than the brick graves, had a different orientation from all the rest of the graves. Perhaps this is an indication of the location and orientation of the church's predecessor from the abbey's Benedictine period.

It is far from the first time stone-coffin graves have been discovered and excavated at the site of Sorø Abbey. The first record in *Antikvarisk-Topografisk Arkiv* is from 1826. The stone coffins are made of brick, travertine or fieldstones. The grave of the archbishop

and founder of the Cistercian convent in Sorø, Absalon (†1201) has been opened and examined three times – in 1536, 1827 and 1947.

Cult of the Past, Status and Identity at Sorø

The Cistercian Monastery as a Collective Site of Memory during the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

By Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen

In recent decades the paradigmatic concept of *lieu de mémoire*, elaborated by the French historian Pierre Nora in his monumental work, *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992) has proven inspirational to almost all branches of the cultural sciences. The article takes its point of departure in Nora's definition of a site of memory, referring partly to an actual locality (i.e. Sorø Abbey) and a complex of monuments (funeral memorials to the founder, Absalon, his kin and members of the royal family from Christoffer II (†1332) to Margrete (†1412)). In a figurative sense, the concept is also used in relation to incidents, persons, institutions or activities whose values are regularly renegotiated or reinterpreted, in particular during discourses on national or collective identity, values or symbols. The article focuses upon a discussion of both meanings of the word, with reference to the targeted production of memory in Sorø during the late 15th and the 16th centuries, materialized in various texts and monuments written or erected at the instigation of the Catholic and Post-Reformation abbots, principals or readers at the monastery (Henrik Christiensen Tornekrannds, Morten Pedersen, Ivar Bertelsen and Christiern Macchabæus). Using a term coined by the German historian Oluf B. Rader (2003, 2007) the recycling of memory, in particular as concretized in funeral monuments (or the re-

gistration of tombs) is to be considered as a ‘generator of legitimacy’, creating meaning, status and identity, not least during moments of crisis or times of political and religious upheaval. In cases like these, the cult of past glory and venerable traditions would be explored as a safe haven of stability and power. This agenda appears most relevant at the famous centre of learning at Sorø Abbey, which looked back during the period in question to former days of glory in order to confront a changed, still unclarified future.

Vita Bulla

Thoughts concerning a tombstone from Soroe Church

By Knud Holm

The article describes a tombstone laid over a five-day-old boy back in 1632. It can be seen in the church – the old monastery church – in Soer or Soroe in the western part of Zealand (Sjælland in Danish). The stone, which is in Øland limestone and 107 x 53 cm in size, bears a circular relief showing a boy blowing soap bubbles as an allegorical symbol of the extreme brevity of life experienced in this case.

The boy, Jacob, was the son of the couple Wichmann Hasebart and Maren Brod, and he was their firstborn child. They were married the year before. The family only lived in Soroe for a few years. The father had been appointed tutor to Prince Valdemar Christian, son of King Christian IV and Kirsten Munk. The prince, then about 11 years old, besides the tutoring by Hasebart, attended the school in Soroe, the »Soroe Academy«, where boys, primarily of the nobility, were taught.

A possible model for the boy depicted in the relief might well have been the engraving in the illus-

tration, made by Hendrick Goltzius, the Dutch artist (1558-1617).

Other *Vanitas* symbols are incorporated in this engraving. The large skull is obvious, but along with the soap bubbles we also see the flower and the smoke, both symbols immediately readable at the time by the educated – and further elaborated on in the verse lines below the picture.

This has served as an invitation to seek examples of the use not only of the bubbles but also of some of the other symbols on tombstones and sepulchral tablets from the 16th to the 19th century. A single literary allusion to the flower/death connection is mentioned in Madame Sabran’s poem to her daughter, 1794.

The bubble motif is also exemplified in the painting by Karel Dujardin from the 17th century showing the boy standing on a shell in the sea. While Goltzius shows the boy and the skull, Dujardin reverses the sequence, so to speak, and refers to the birth of the boy? – then the bubble.

After the article was completed, a few further examples of the boy blowing soap-bubbles found in Danish churches were added. The tombstone from Ubbø Church is unusual, since four *Vanitas* symbols are shown on shields at the corners of the stone – a place normally occupied by the four evangelists or their symbols, or in some cases rosettes or even shields with the arms of the deceased nobleman.

To the more common *Vanitas* symbols a peculiar addition is the unusual variant of the ‘hourglass symbol’ that occurs on some 16th and 17th century tombstones – in the form of references to mechanical clocks – either the face of a clock or a *foliot* (a sort of balance used to regulate the running of the clock, before the introduction of the pendulum by Huygens in about 1660).