CHAPTER 1

Jerusalem in Viken. An Introduction

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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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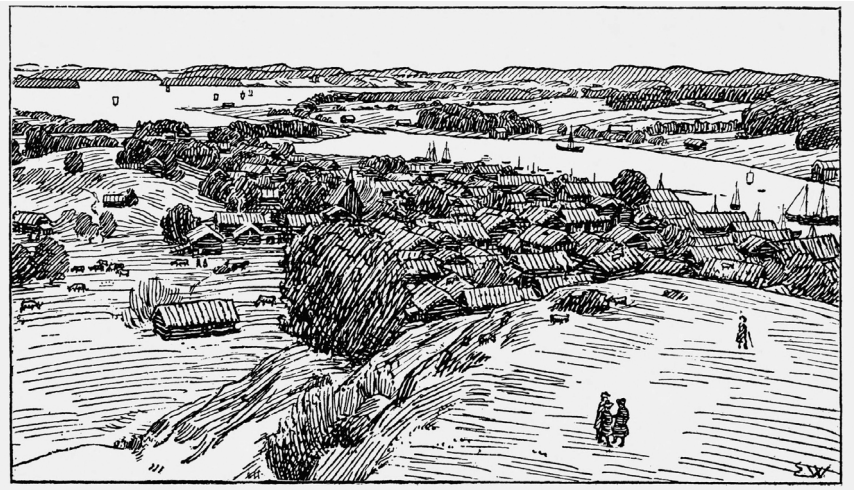

Figure 1. Medieval Tønsberg, seen from Slottsfjellet ('Castle Hill'). Drawing by Erik Werenskiold, 1899. Photo: Nasjonalmuseet.

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 prefigurate 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 'Croziers') 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 profectione 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

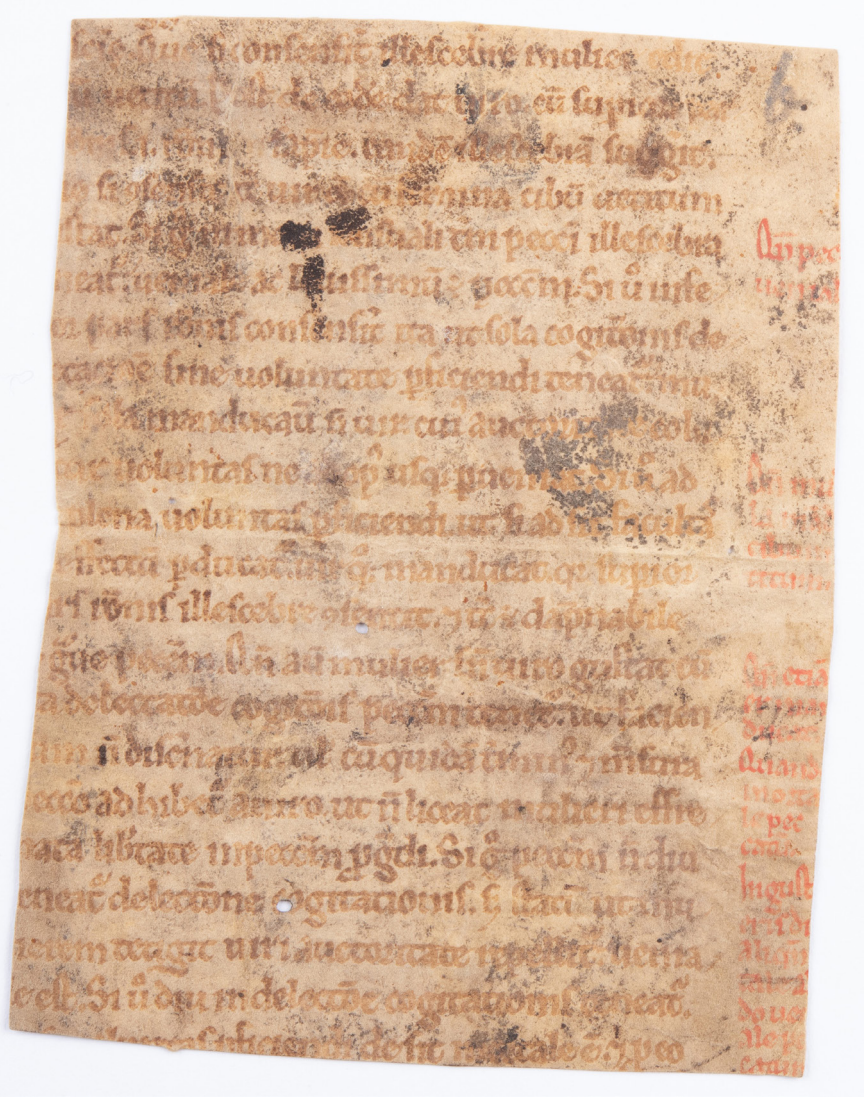

Figure 10. Fragment of a late twelfth-century French manuscript of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*. It was used in the bindings of account books for Tønsberg Len in 1637. It is not unlikely that it was used at the Latin school of St Lawrence's Church shortly after its production, considering the close connections 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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