

Kaur Alttoa

HEAVENLY JERUSALEM – THE START OR THE FINISH?

Kersti Markus's book, in which she examines the visual rhetoric of the Denmark of the Baltic Crusades, was published in 2020.¹ The book is filled with various interesting ideas and interpretations. However, in the case of such a book or work, it is inevitable that every reader will totally agree not with the positions that are presented. Below is an examination of a few tiny details.

Through the ages, right up to the present day, attempts have been made to express ideology through, or with the help of, architecture.² This was especially prevalent in the Middle Ages, when structures that were significant for Christianity were often alluded to. During the Middle Ages, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was undoubtedly the most copied, imitated and cited structure. Occupying an important place next to it was the **Heavenly Jerusalem** – a city of gold, jewels and pearls which is described in the Book of Revelation (21, 9–27; 22,1–5). This was a place where the Christians who have lived decorous lives finally arrive – once they had been successfully appraised on the Day of Judgement.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/BJAH.2020.20.07>

1 Kersti Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region, 1100–1250*. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, vol. 63 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020).

2 Günter Bandmann, a prominent researcher of the iconology of medieval architecture, has provided an example from 1948: President Harry Truman thought that all the U.S. embassies around the world should be exact copies of the White House. Thus when visiting an embassy, American citizens would feel as if they were visiting the President's home. Günter Bandmann, *Mittelalterliche Architektur als Bedeutungsträger* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1985), 28.



FIG. 1. CHURCH OF OUR LADY IN KALUNDBORG (DENMARK). PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

K. Markus examines two architectural works in Denmark that are related to the theme of the Heavenly Jerusalem. First, the Church of Our Lady in Kalundborg, which was established by the Danish nobleman Esbern Snare. In this case, the focus is on an episode related to the news of the fall of Jerusalem arriving in. At the time, Esbern Snarre gave a speech with the following message: if the Danes had fought to defend their land and to conquer new lands in the name of honour, now was the time to start fighting for one's faith. The central structure of the church in Kalundborg is shaped like a Greek cross, with four arms reaching out at right angles from the square core. Five massive towers rise above this central core. Thus, from a distance, it is difficult to discern whether this is actually a church – the structure looks more like a fortified fortress or town. Several researchers have concluded that the builders were inspired by the Heavenly Jerusalem. A supporting argument is the corresponding measurements: the interior circumference of the central space is 144 feet – like the perimeter of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of



FIG. 2. THE TRIANGULAR RELIEF ON THE SOUTHERN PORTAL (SO-CALLED CAT'S HEAD DOOR, KATHOVEDDØREN IN DANISH) OF THE RIBE CATHEDRAL. PHOTO: CHRISTIAN REINBOTH, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

Revelations.³ K. Markus adds an even more concrete interpretation and associates the church with the Danish Crusades: Kalundborg was 'probably used as a departure port for the crusaders, with New Jerusalem towering over the harbour. It would be hard to read too much into this message: the powerful visualisation of the Heavenly City proclaimed and explained the Dane's leading role in the Baltic Crusades. With the City of God brought to the earth, moral support was offered to everyone embarking on the long journey.'⁴

K. Markus examines a section of the multi-figure relief on the so-called Cat's Head Door (Kathoveddøren in Danish)⁵ of the Ribe

3 Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region, 1100–1250*, 59. Actually, the unit of measurement in the Book of Revelations is a much longer cubit (444–529 mm) and this is usually translated into an 'elbow' (ca 54 cm).

4 Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region, 1100–1250*, 59.

5 The portal has been named for a bronze doorknocker. It depicts a lion's head, which is surrounded by small lizards. According to a tradition that dates back to the 16th century at the latest, a cat and mice are depicted.

Cathedral as another example related to the concept of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Here Christ and Mary are the central figures. And the text CIVITAS HIERVSALEM appearing above them designates the location. A man who is wearing a crown and is accompanied by numerous attendants is below the figure of Mary. Most earlier researchers have dated the relief to the second half of the 12th century.⁶ On the other hand, in 1972, Erich Moltke has convincingly demonstrated that this is a figure of King Valdemar II Victorious (1202–1241).⁷ K. Markus agrees. She believes that the relief was created when Valdemar was preparing for his campaign to Estonia, which resulted in the conquest of Tallinn in June 1219. And therefore, the relief was probably completed in the second half of 1218 or early 1219.⁸

However, this position raises some questions. It should be emphasised again that Heavenly Jerusalem is a place where blessed Christians arrive after completing their worldly activities. A royal crown or good intentions alone do not *in spe* guarantee a place among this select company. Of course, Heavenly Jerusalem is not a closed detention facility – the residents were free to travel around the world. However, no one left take a trip or tour. Using contemporary terms, one could say: Heavenly Jerusalem isn't a starting point but a finish. Thus, one cannot agree that the relief dates back to the time when Valdemar II was just planning the Tallinn campaign.

There's another detail on the Ribe relief that may help us determine when it was created. Namely, there is another important character, i.e. a youthful man next to Valdemar II sitting at Christ's feet., Christ is holding his hand making him a truly blessed and chosen character. According to E. Moltke, this is Valdemar the Young (also known as Valdemar III), Valdemar II's son who was born in 1209 and crowned as is father's co-king in 1209.⁹ K. Markus agrees.

6 For example, Armin Tuulse, *Scandinavia Romanica. Die hohe Kunst der romanischen Epoche in Dänemark, Norwegwn und Schweden* (Wien-München: Anton Schroll & Co, 1968), 240–241; Aron Andresson, *L'art Scandinave. II. La nuit des temps* (La Pierre-qui-Vire: Zodiaque, 1968), 54–55.

7 Erik Moltke, “Trekantrelieffet over Ribe domkirkes kathoveddør”, *Ikonografiske Studier. Kungl. Vitterhetsakademien handlingar*. Antikvariska serien 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1972), 63ff.

8 Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region*, 107–108.

9 Moltke, “Trekantrelieffet over Ribe domkirkes kathoveddør”, 68. It has also been assumed that the relief features Archbishop Anders Sunnessen. K. Markus has refuted this argument: a young man with a mustache and a beard is depicted here, whereas the archbishop was older than Valdemar II. Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea Region, 1100–1250*, 104.

Unlike his father, Valdemar the Young had a rather mediocre career. He has mostly gone down in history for a single event, i.e. he was accidentally shot and died in 1231. There is no reason to assume that the royal crown on the head of this ten-year-old boy would guarantee him a place in Heavenly Jerusalem in the future. Only after his unfortunate death did this possibility arise. Thus, I would venture to assume that the relief was not completed until 1231 *post quem*. Actually E. Moltke reached the same conclusion based on totally different criteria, i.e. this is a royal epitaph that Valdemar II erected in memory of his killed/dead son. And it was probably completed before the king's death, i.e. between 1231 and 1241.¹⁰

Let's take another look at Kalundborg. However, even here it is unlikely that the Church, alias the Heavenly Jerusalem, marks the starting position of the Danish conquerors-missionaries. If the church were intended to visualise the Danish Crusades, it would rather commemorate the return of the victorious warriors. However, we should not discount the suggestion that Esbern Snare built the church as his own tomb church.¹¹ In any case, there is no better resting place than Heavenly Jerusalem.

What visual sign in medieval architecture could represent departure? Apparently, most likely it could be the galilee – a spacious porch in front of a church portal. The Cluny Abbey¹² had especially grandiose galilees – large halls with three naves on the western side of the church that were 65 feet long. At the same time, there was an atrium where the laity could stand without interfering with the monks' processions.¹³ The corresponding hall on the west side in the Cluny III Church was even larger – ca 35 × 25 metres. These vestibules have sometimes been called bridal portals, because weddings were held here in *conspectu ecclesiae*, i.e. before the church.¹⁴ But only the first part of the wedding, when the ring was place on bride's finger,

10 Moltke, “Trekantrelieffet over Ribe domkirkes kathoveddør”, 68.

11 Tuulse, *Scandinavia Romanica*, 246.

12 A manuscript from the 40s in the 11th century describes the Farva Monastery. Researchers agree that this actually a description of the Cluny II monastery is actually described. Published: Wolfgang Braunfels, *Abendländische Klosterbaukunst* (Köln: DuMont, 1976), 289–292.

13 *Ibidem*, 290.

14 Wilhelm Tack, “Die Paradies-Vorhalle des Paderborner Domes und die Wallfahrt nach Santiago de Compostela”, *Alte und neue Kunst im Erzbistum Paderborn*. 6. Jahresgabe, ed. by W. Tack (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1956), 39.

could take place there. The ceremony then continued inside the church.¹⁵ These halls were primarily used during processions, most of which took place outside the church.¹⁶ The most important of these recalled Christ's Way of Suffering (Via Dolorosa). The hall was the last station of the procession before entering the church.¹⁷ Where Galilee, which signified the end of the Way of Suffering, was located. But it also signified a new beginning – the resurrected Christ met with his apostles there and said, 'Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). From there the apostles were sent on their missionary trips.

Thus, galilees were gathering places from which people, who were planning noble deeds, set out on their missions. And after completing their earthly deeds, those who are worthy would arrive in Heavenly Jerusalem, where they could peacefully enjoy ambrosia with angels singing and playing instruments in the background.

KAUR ALTTOA: HEAVENLY JERUSALEM – THE START OR THE FINISH?
KEYWORDS: DANISH CRUSADES; KALUNDBORG CHURCH; RIBE CATHEDRAL; HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

CV

Kaur Alttoa (b. 1947) has been a long-time scholar and teacher of art history at the University of Tartu and he is one of the foremost specialists of the history of medieval architecture in the Baltic region. His objects of interest have included both medieval fortresses and sacral buildings. Among his major contributions stands out the restoration and study of the St John's Church in Tartu, which was also published as a monograph in 2011. In 2020 he received a lifetime achievement award from the Estonian National Heritage Board.

15 Stephen Friar, *The Sutton Companion to Churches* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003), 356.

16 On the processions, for example, Frank Bottomley, *The Abbey Explorer's Guide. A Guide to Abbeys and other Religious Houses* (Otley: Smith Settle Ltd, 1995), 275–276.

17 Tack, "Die Paradies-Vorhalle des Paderborner Domes und die Wallfahrt nach Santiago de Compostela", 38.