

Constructions in Space

Framing Similarities between Medieval Churchyards and Towns

Anna Hed Jakobsson

The symbolism present in medieval church buildings and church interiors has been extensively studied. The aim of this article is to draw attention to the less considered space surrounding the churches, that is the churchyards. The layout (architecture) of the churchyard must have been just as meaningful as the church itself. In the present interpretation it is suggested that the Scandinavian churchyard, due to its form, was associated with the town and its connotations. The churchyard is proposed to have been apprehended as a “piece of town” moved out into the rural landscape, representing some of the things that the town or city stood for: the ideal society, the centre of the world and a manifestation of power (and perhaps also contra-power). The point of departure is the observation that medieval churchyards in their layout resemble in some respects how the contemporaneous towns were spatially organised.

Anna Hed Jakobsson, Department of Archaeology, Stockholm University, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden.

Key words: churchyards, towns, architectural layout, regulated space, power, Viking Age, Middle Age.

ENTERING A CHURCHYARD

When you walk towards a medieval church in the Swedish countryside, you often find yourself walking upwards. A church should, if possible, be built on elevated ground. Sometimes when trying to get a full view you find you cannot see the building in its entirety, since its position on a height renders it partly hidden behind the stone walls and elaborate gates surrounding the cemetery. The church tower, the church roof with its adornments and perhaps a bell-tower are clearly visible, though. Does this remind you of anything? You find yourself cut off from the impressive stone buildings standing inside the churchyard wall. To enter you have to pass through the gate in the wall, sometimes by means of stairs. It is easy to feel how the wall encloses and divides off the Sacred. It has been said that the walls and gates surrounding the churches were erected as a defence, the church site thus acting as a stronghold for the community. But the gates also draw your attention to the crossing of the boundary, to the entering into the Holy. The message is clear: this is a different place, another space. You will sense it every time you visit the church.

If you move around the churchyard, you will notice the regular form of the wall. It may be of timber or stone, but it always has straight lines and right angles. The wall

stands in stark contrast to the irregular shapes of the surrounding landscape. When comparing the Christian cemetery to the Late Iron Age burial ground lying close by you may wonder at their difference, the burial ground being without boundaries and fitted into the landscape in a much more accommodating way. The difference demands an explanation. The right angles and symmetry of the medieval churchyard are, however, features not often noticed or discussed. A defence or a marking of a boundary could have taken any form. But not in this case. As a rule the medieval churchyard is rectangular.

CHURCHYARDS ARE RECTANGULAR, NOT ROUND

Archaeological structures that challenge us to interpret them have this effect, I believe, because we recognise something in them that once made them important and/or potent with meaning (cf. Miller 1985: 10f, Stig Sørensen 1997). Often this can be a certain “imageability”, that is, a form that gives the object a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer (cf. Lynch 1960). In the case of the churchyards there are a number of such intriguing features, but I shall concentrate on the one already mentioned. When surveying the shape of medieval churchyards, it is namely striking how stereotyped they are. As a rule they are rectangular (Figs. 1 and 2). Irregular and, especially, round or oval churchyards are very rare. In Sweden I know of only a few that have a more or less round shape: Skog in Hälsingland (Salvén 1927: 33); S:t Olof on the island of Fårö (Lithberg 1935: 4; Edle 1935: 15f); Elinghem on Gotland (Wollin 1935: 15, 87); Sântorp (Nilsson 1989: 128) and Härene (Mandelgren 1883-84, pl. 8:1) in Västergötland; Uppåkra in Scania (Riddersporre 1998: 174); and S:t Per in Sigtuna, Uppland (Mandelgren 1883-84, pl. 11:20). Several of these round or oval churchyards have been given this shape because they were built on top of or inside of older structures. For instance, the Gothic church in Elinghem was erected inside a prehistoric hill-fort,

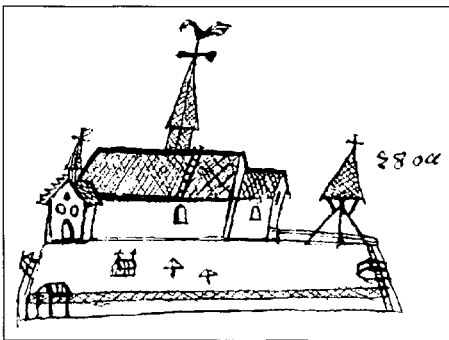


Fig. 1. Surveying the shape and history of churchyards means rummaging through archaeological reports, old travellers' accounts, drawings and maps. The picture acquired may not be representative of early medieval conditions. However, it is not until the 19th century that new customs make alterations and expansions of the churchyards more common. Archaeological investigations also show that rectangular churchyards clearly dominate from the time of the Christian mission and throughout the Middle Ages. Estuna Church, Uppland, drawn by J. H:son Rhezelius in 1635, Monumenta Uplandica. The map shows Torstuna Church, Uppland, in 1765, after Calissendorff 1986.

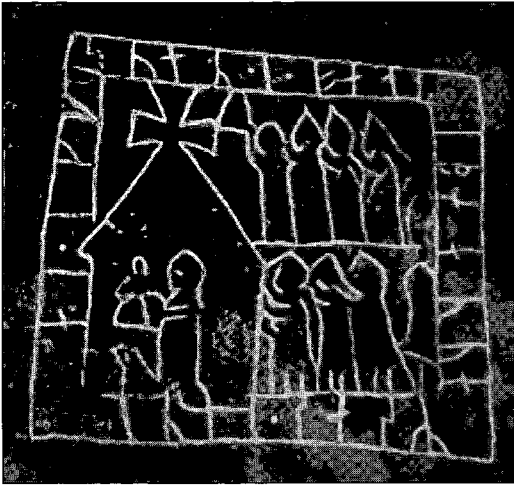


Fig. 2. The picture, carved into a solid rock in Sika, Frötuna parish, Uppland, is dated to the early 12th century (after Wessén & Jansson 1940-58). The picture probably shows a church where a service is being officiated. The "frame" with its runes (not forming any understandable text) can be understood as a churchyard, with the runes placed in the rectangular churchyard boundary. Cf. Fig. 5.

and the churchyard wall follows the wall of the old fort. Even if they are few, these churchyards show that it was possible to give a churchyard a shape other than the one with four corners. Thus, the frequent rectangular layout appears to be a custom rather than something commanded.

This seems to be confirmed by the written evidence. Neither the canonical laws nor the Nordic medieval laws contain any regulations for the design of the churchyards (Nilsson 1989: 122). If we go further back in time and look at Continental writings we find the same situation. The only statements regarding churchyards are the ones that regulate the ecclesiastical peace. Already in the sixth century there is evidence that the area around a church could be included in the ecclesiastical peace, that is, a space where people could seek asylum, immunity and reduction of penalties. The oldest known evidence of a specified size for an area like this is from Toledo in AD 681, where it is stated that anyone who seeks refuge in a church can walk thirty steps from the church doors and still be safe. Similar measures were repeated throughout the centuries. However, the regulations do not say anything about a particular shape for the areas (ibid: 124; Nilsson 1991: 478f).

Thus, the available sources lack information on the layout of medieval churchyards. This does not mean that the observed structure, the stereotyped layout, was unimportant. But we will have to approach the question from another angle. We shall start by creating a context, using questions such as: What kind of meanings did the medieval churchyard possess? What associations could be evoked by a churchyard? Were there some that were forgotten when churches and churchyards in time were understood in new contexts?

CONTEXT: A PLACE SET APART

When medieval people walked through a gate or over a foot bridge into the demarcated churchyard, they entered a holy room. Inside the enclosures the ground was sacred, established as such in a ceremonial act conducted at one time by one of the holiest and mightiest persons in medieval society, the bishop (Hellström 1971: 260ff, Nilsson 1989: 70ff). The enclosures surrounding the churchyard, whether they were ditches, fences or stonewalls, emphasised that there was a decisive difference between the sacred ground consecrated by the bishop and the profane world outside (Hellström

ibid: 269; Nilsson ibid: 122). People would sense it every time they visited the church.

And people living in the Middle Ages would pass this boundary and enter this sacred room countless times during their lifetime. Some of the most decisive events of their lives were held here, for example important rituals and ceremonies such as weddings, *kyrktagningar* and *primsigningar*. The churchyard also played a vital part in the momentous processions led by priests, occasions when the participants and/or spectators could again sense the significance of the locality. And above all the churchyard was the place where the dead relatives and ancestors rested in consecrated ground – at least most of them. Unless baptised and regarded as honourable, one was not allowed to make the celestial journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, as it were. Actually the sacred ground became polluted if criminals or unchristened people were buried in it. If a horrific event like that should occur, as well as if crimes such as manslaughter, mutilation or theft were committed there, the churchyard became unfit for use and had to be purified and consecrated all over again. Thus, the enclosed cemetery was not only a public place where social, economic and political conditions in society were mirrored and staged (which, for instance, we can observe in the distribution of different burials; Nilsson 1989: 134ff; Kieffer-Olsen 1997; Jonsson 1999), but also a disciplining institution.

That the churchyard was a sacred place did not mean that people always entered it with the quiet, god-fearing devotional spirit required during and after the Reformation. On the contrary, the medieval churchyards could act as gathering places for activities which in modern eyes seem extremely worldly. Some churchyards could be put to use as strongholds. Plays, feasts, dances, *thing*-meetings and markets were often held in churchyards. In these respects the churchyard resembled other central places, for example the town. Thus, it is plausible that the boundary surrounding the churchyard had more meanings than that of separating the sacred from the profane.

A strict dichotomy of sacred – profane may on the whole be irrelevant to medieval thinking. It seems rather as if the space was ordered according to a sliding scale, with different spaces being regarded as more or less sacred. It is true that the regulations mentioned above regarding the ecclesiastical peace seem to be based on a dichotomy, and it has been proposed that one reason to put up a visible boundary around the churchyard was to remind people of the church peace. This might explain why churches that lacked burial rights could still be surrounded by a churchyard (Bøe 1963). However, ecclesiastical peace could be claimed also outside of the enclosed churchyard. The Swedish medieval peace laws are in this respect especially detailed, defining a number of so-called peace-zones (Sw. *fridszoner*) (Nilsson 1991: 492f). The greatest number of peace-zones are specified in the Hälsinge Law, which lists crimes committed on the farm, on the road between the farm and the church, at the churchyard enclosure, inside the enclosure, at the church door, at the baptismal font, at the entrance to the chancel and inside the chancel. The most severe crime, which rendered the harshest penalties, was a crime committed at the high altar (the Hälsinge Law 21 § 2). The fact that churchyard enclosures were built even if the church did not possess burial rights, together with the presence of several peace-zones, shows that the dichotomies of sacred – profane

and peace – not peace probably are too simple. And it makes it probable that the boundary had still more functions.

One such function may have been to define ownership. It was claimed by the Church that once the ground had been consecrated and turned into a sacred churchyard, it belonged to God. It was *patrimonium Dei* and could not be owned by any worldly person (Nilsson 1989: 59ff). It must have been important to demonstrate this in a valid way, and, as so often during the Middle Ages, this was done very concretely and physically with an enclosure. Of course the idea of *patrimonium Dei* was often at odds with how worldly landowners would have it, and in practice the latter would claim ownership and power also over churchyards. This is indicated by, for example, the Norwegian Frostating's Law, where it is stated that a church owner (a person who owned the ground where the church was built) could deny a person the right to be buried there (Nilsson 1989: 67f; Brendalsmo 1997: 109f).

Thus, the enclosures were important in many respects and had probably been so for a long time. We can conclude that from the Swedish word used to denote churchyard or cemetery: *kyrkogård*. The word was used already when the first churchyards were established, which is shown for instance by the carving on the rune-stone U 170 from the middle/second half of the eleventh century: "...*Ha [nn e] r grafinn í kirkjugarði...*" ("... He is buried in the churchyard...") (Fig. 3). The second element in the word *kirkjugarði* comes from the oldSwedish *gardher*, which denotes a fence or enclosure. Obviously the word *kirkjugarði* denoted both the surrounding enclosure and the space inside of it (Holmbäck & Wessén 1946: 18), but it is the enclosure that is emphasised. However, if we are to trust the medieval laws it does not seem as if the fence or wall was ascribed any particular significance. Unlike the space inside the walls, the laws did not define the enclosure as sacred (Hellström 1971: 269; Johansson 1993: 12). Of course, the written laws do not cover the whole range of functions or meanings that the enclosures could have, and in my view the enclosures did have a special meaning. The

boundary of a holy place (Christian or not) is often considered to have special qualities. Crossing a boundary involves an entry into a liminality, and it often requires

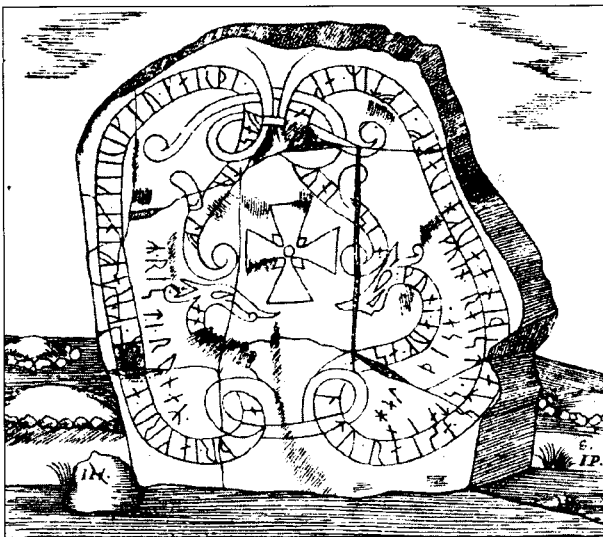


Fig. 3. The full text on the stone says "Gunni and Ása had this stone and the vault raised in memory of Eyndr; their son. He died in Eikrey (?). He is buried in the churchyard [kirkjugarði]. Fastulfr carved the runes. Gunni raised this/these stone rock-slab(s)." The rune-stone U 170 from Bogesund, Östra Ryd, Uppland. After Wessén & Jansson 1940-58.

dealing with supernatural powers or taboos. Raising a boundary also creates a division, between us and them, mine and yours. One thing that speaks in favour of the churchyard boundary as having particular significance is that rune-stones were placed in the ditches and walls of the churchyard. Especially in Scania it seems to have been rather common to erect rune-stones in or near the first churchyard boundaries (Anglert 1995: 41f). But also in other regions rune-stones were deliberately placed in churchyard boundaries. Between 11 and 21% of all rune-stones placed in and next to churches during medieval times (often consciously moved there from burial grounds and other significant places in the Viking Age landscape) were put into churchyard walls (Johansen 1997: 180 Tab. 3a, 205f).

However, none of the functions or meanings mentioned above need have affected the *shape* of the churchyard. Why were the churchyards given a rectangular form, and with such consistency?

One possibility could be that the churchyards were adapted to fit into regulated village settlements. The problem is that regulated villages divided into tofts and crofts, tenements and street are missing in most parts of Scandinavia during the early Middle Ages, and in many regions regulated villages were never introduced. Even in the southern parts of Scandinavia, regulated villages were probably not established until quite some time after the introduction of churches (Anglert 1995: 180; Riddersporre 1995). Rather, in Scania it seems as if the building of stone churches took place at approximately the same time as the regulation of villages, and that would be as late as in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Thomasson 1998: 82).

However – and this must be considered important – there did exist regulated settlements already when the first churches were erected. Not in villages, but in the earliest *towns*. In fact, the first time we hear of a church it is mentioned in connection with one of the earliest towns, Viking Age Birka. *Vita Ansgarii*, chapter 28, maintains that the king of the *Svear* donated a building-lot in the town for the purpose of erecting a church (or chapel) there.

CONTEXT: THE CHURCH AND THE TOWN

Christianity was from the beginning a city-religion within the Roman Empire. The Church had its roots in the cities. The holiest places to the Christians were cities such as Rome and of course Jerusalem, the centre of the world. Judging from the symbolic language and metaphors of the Christians, it is clear that the city also metaphysically was the obvious point of reference (Andrén 1998). The coming divine kingdom was described in the Book of Revelations as a symmetric and well-planned city, built of shining gold and precious stones: “And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth...” (21: 16). For the Christians the world seems to have consisted of holy places, connected with roads that ran through wild and dangerous regions. As mirrored in the itineraries of the pilgrims, many of the most important holy places were cities (Harrison 1998). To a Christian, a world without cities and towns would seem ungodly and undesirable.

Even in the non-urbanised Scandinavia the world-view and actions of the early

Christians seem to have been permeated with the idea of the Holy City. Knowledge of Jerusalem's importance existed already in the late Viking Age, as is shown in runic inscriptions. On one rune-stone, U 605 from Almarestäket in Uppland, the text declares that "Ingirún, Harðr's daughter, had the runes carved in memory of herself. She wants to travel to the east and abroad to Jerusalem..." On another Uplandic rune-stone, erected at Broby in Täby, it is stated that "Ástriðr had these stones raised in memory of Eysteinn, her husband, who attacked (*sótti*) Jerusalem and met his end in Greece" (U 136). Obviously people could have different aspirations concerning the Holy City, the interesting thing though being that the city was well known. Both these rune-stones belong to the middle of the eleventh century.

The concept of the town had a profound importance in the Christian culture, and one indication of this is the strong connection between the early churches and towns in Scandinavia. With regard to most medieval towns, among the earliest traces of them is one or more churches. There were of course regional differences, but towns or places with an urban character seem to have been innovative when it comes to Christian culture and the building of churches. In Scania the presence of early churches and churchyards has been noted in for example Löddeköpinge, Helsingborg and Tommarp, while they appear to have been built later in the rural areas (Anglert 1995). In the Mälar valley there is no doubt that Sigtuna was the innovative centre.

The early churches found in medieval towns are usually thought either to have been built in an already established central place, or to have been the first attraction on the spot and the reason for other agents to establish themselves in this particular place. But after the excavations in Sigtuna, founded ca. 970/980 (Tesch 1990, 1991, 1992), a third alternative has emerged. In Sigtuna it is evident that the town and the church were established simultaneously, as a concept. Snorri Sturluson's accounts, which repeatedly state that this or that king founded a town by building a royal manor, erecting a church, and dividing the ground into lots for people to build houses on, seem to be confirmed (cf. *Heimskringla*). This structure resembles the division into *bellatores*, *oratores* and *laboratores* (perhaps, though, more valid in the days of Snorri than in the time of early Sigtuna), a structure also recognisable in the tower, chancel and nave of the Romanesque churches (Anglert 1998). It indicates a striving to create places, towns included, that embodied the Christian ideology (cf. Frugoni 1991, ch. 1). Perhaps this can apply to Lund as well.

Lund is the place where the oldest known church in Scania was erected, in about the year 990. It was made of wood and around it lay a rectangular cemetery demarcated with ditches. The ditches are not quite as old as the earliest cemetery, but they appear to have followed an original regulation of the ground (Kriig 1987: 7). Probably it was the king Sven Haraldsson (Forkbeard) who commissioned the church, and he may have been buried in it (Cinthio 1997). The king's manor is likely to have been situated close by (Andrén 1980: 71f). The church, however, does not seem to have been built exclusively for the king. The high number of graves indicates rather that the churchyard was a central cemetery where people from a much wider area than the (future) town were brought to be buried (Kriig 1987: 30).

A street ran through the town and towards the royal and ecclesiastical structures, steeply uphill from the south (Andrén 1980, map 16). It seems as if this street was of central importance during the early phases in Lund (Magnusson Staaf *et al.* 1995). It enhanced the impression given by the buildings on the hill. The appearance of the late Viking Age buildings could hardly, with modern eyes, compare to the medieval stone houses and cathedral later built in this area. Still, in its initial phase the town to a high degree consisted of a royal-ecclesiastical concurrence or symbiosis manifested by the royal buildings, the church with its demarcated churchyard, and the dominating street. The construction of the cathedral and the paving of the main street would in time strengthen the impression. The well-kept street has for this period of time, the early twelfth century, been described as a monument dedicated to the heavenly Jerusalem and a holy king (*ibid.*: 50).

A person travelling to Sigtuna in the first half of the eleventh century would more or less have encountered the same kind of structure. Although close proximity to the lake Mälaren clearly sets Sigtuna off from the inland town of Lund, it appears as if a long, straight street accompanied by house-lots was a main feature also of this place. The houses were facing the centrally running street rather than the waterfront (Tesch 1990, 1991, 1992). In the middle of the street, in the midst of the town and on the highest point, there was a plot considerably larger than the rest. It is assumed to have belonged to the king and hosted the king's manor (*ibid.*). The placement of the large plot and its royal manor underlines the unity of king and town, and it is obvious that the royal initiator was anxious to manifest his authority in a grand way. The Christian element is also clear. In the later half of the eleventh century, when Sigtuna became an Episcopal see, it seems as if the king donated his plot to the bishop (Tesch 1998). A stone church (later called S:t Gertrud) was then erected on the plot. The church was probably the first stone church in the Mälär valley, and also plausibly one of the first churches on the whole to be erected in Uppland during this time of mission and Christianisation. Prior to these events, however, a wooden church seems to have been present on the same plot. This is indicated by graves with a deviating direction from the stone church. The wooden church was probably the first church to be built in the town, and it was erected next to the king's manor (Tesch *ibid.*, Tesch & Pettersson 1995). Whether this church was exclusively built for the king is not known. The fragmentary text on the rune-stone U 395, "Svein ... carved the stone ... who brought her to Sigtúnir", has been interpreted to mean that a woman was brought to the town for burial in a churchyard (Jansson 1977: 119). If this was the case, we may suspect that the churchyard on the king's plot was a parallel to the central cemetery in Lund (although probably smaller and/or more exclusive). But since we do not know which churchyard the woman was brought to, nor for that matter how the contemporaneous burial grounds and groups of graves with Christian burials that existed just outside of the town related to the centrally placed churchyard inside it, there is no sure evidence for such a conclusion.

Ingirún, who wanted to go to Jerusalem, raised her stone not far from Sigtuna. The reasons behind the foundation of the town were probably manifold, but one of them

was certainly to create a Christian place and milieu in Uppland. As in Lund, it seems as if the layout of the town was intended to monumentally display the central authority as well as to express a new ideology. Is it too farfetched to assume that the first ruler of Sigtuna planned the town with the image of the Christian cosmology or the heavenly Jerusalem in mind? In Denmark a contemporaneous effort was perhaps made by the Danish king Harald Gormsson, who commissioned the so-called Trelleborg fortresses (Andrén 1998). The symmetrical architecture of the fortresses, with perfectly round walls that surround straight-axis streets crossing each other at right angles, is unique, and the fortresses may have been built in the image of the heavenly Jerusalem (ibid.: 156ff). The ruler of Sigtuna would surely have known of the fortresses, since there were strong links between the Danish power and Sigtuna in the end of the tenth century (e.g. Duczko 1995). And even if an intellectual construction of this kind seems strained when it comes to the Viking Age culture in Uppland, we know that the royalty of the time surrounded themselves with bishops and clergy, that is men of great learning, who certainly had an influence on both the societal organisation and culture. Was, perhaps, the layout of Sigtuna inspired by the Book of Revelations: “In the midst of the street...was there the tree of life...” (Fig. 4)?

CHURCHYARDS AND TOWNS – EARLY SIGNS OF REGULATED SPACE

It is fairly difficult to grasp the early layout or topography of Lund. However, it looks as if the areas mentioned above, along the main street (next to the present-day *Stortorget* and *Stora Södergatan*), were planned and settled at least before 1020. From the beginning equally large blocks, plots and house-lots seem to have been laid out along the central axis of the town, that is the main street. The house-lots had been marked by shallow trenches (Andrén 1980; Magnusson Staaf *et al.* 1995). An early regulation also existed further south along the same street (Mårtensson 1981: 50f). Around the year 1050 one of the plots in this area was granted for the building of a stave church, S:t Stefan, and the churchyard was in the same way as the plot demarcated with ditches, running parallel to the old ones (Fig. 5). The churchyard ditches had been lined with wicker and planks and were probably kept open and clean. A rune-stone with the text “Toki had the church built and...” is thought to have been raised at the church (ibid.: 45). Where exactly we do not know, but perhaps it was raised next to one of the churchyard ditches. S:t Stefan was not the only church built in the town at this time. If there was an original planned layout, focusing on the first church, it seems likely that it

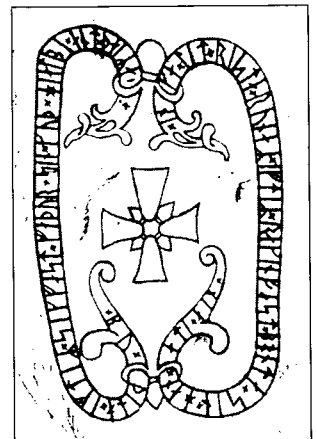


Fig. 4. The rune-stone dragons carrying the texts were accompanied by such Christian symbols as the cross and possibly also the tree of life in the form of a palmette (Zachrisson 1998: 138ff). Often the dragons form a boundary around the Christian cross, cf. Fig. 3. The runestone U 331 says: “Inga had the runes carved in memory of Ragnfastr; her husband. He alone owned this estate [bý] after Sigfastr; his father. May God help their spirits.” (Wessén & Jansson 1940-58).

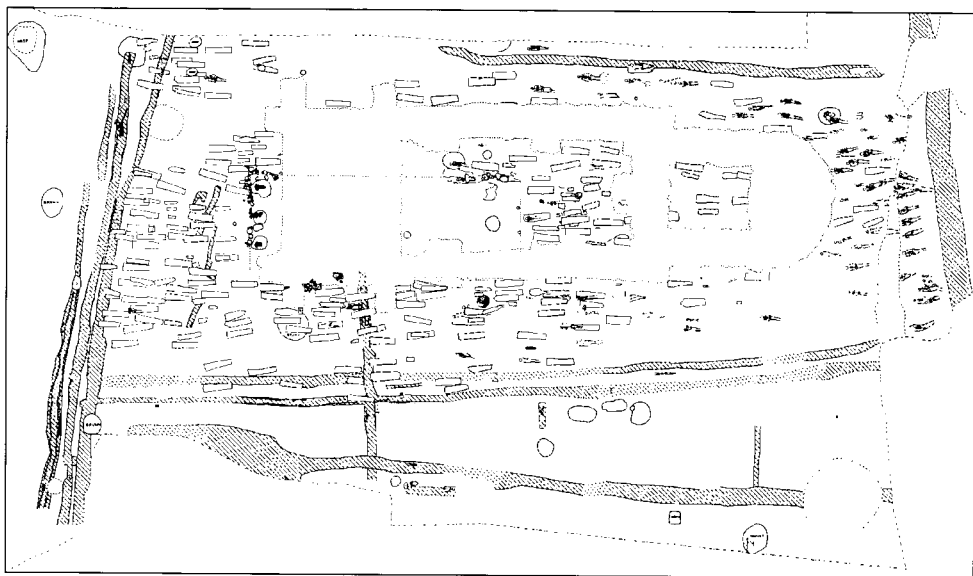


Fig. 5. The churchyard of S:t Stefan, built ca. 1050, was delimited with ditches running parallel to previous plot-boundaries, also in the shape of ditches. After Mårtensson 1981, Pl. I.

was soon broken up when other people than the king started to erect churches.

The late tenth- and eleventh-century Lund has been described as “congested countryside” (Andrén 1985: 41). Not much separated the town from the rural settlements in the surrounding area. The building structure shows clear rural traits, and the many churches that soon were built can be seen as the rural nobility’s own churches concentrated to one place. The density of the building structure, with demarcated house-lots linked to a grid of streets, does however represent something new and different. The same sight would have met the traveller visiting Sigtuna. The significance of Sigtuna, and what really made it a town, was the street with its many narrow, rectangular plots, originally marked out with ditches (Tesch 1990). This kind of topography would have affected the way people moved around and how they came to apprehend such a place. It is likely that the encounter with these unique settlements made people regard them as something other than the ones in the countryside, namely as towns (cf. Magnusson Staaf *et al.* 1995: 41ff). A significant part of this encounter would be the experience of the regulated, enclosed space.

A “PIECE OF TOWN” MOVED OUT INTO THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

Regulated plot-structures in the late Viking Age and early Middle Ages seem to have been restricted to towns. This fact has even led to the claim that a place needs to have a plot-structure in order to be regarded as a town (Brendalsmo 1994: 33). This archaeological criterion is perhaps validated by the choice of words in the Danish king Knut the Holy’s letter of donation to the church S:t Laurentius in Lund, issued in 1085. In the charter the word *mansus* is used when rural land is spoken of (translated to Sw.

bol), but in urban contexts the word *areis* “plots” is used (Sw. *tomter*) (Skansjö & Sundström 1985).

I would argue that the more or less rectangular shape of the churchyards was the result of an adjustment to house-lots and street-grids in the early towns. There are several examples of plots being reshaped into churchyards, for instance the above mentioned S:t Stefan in Lund. The experience of the unique town structure could well have had the effect that, when people encountered a rectangular, demarcated churchyard in the rural landscape, they apprehended it as a “piece of town” moved out into their own setting. Was this intentional? And if so, what was the purpose?

The town or city on the whole must have been a rather abstract place to most people during the late Viking Age and early Middle Ages. Missionaries and priests who told the story of the heavenly Jerusalem certainly faced difficulties when explaining what the Holy City was supposed to be. It is understandable that the Church made efforts to actualise the myth right there in the common peoples’ own surroundings, using the architecture and adornments in every church to express the vision. Probably we should include the churchyard in that concept, the enclosed area having affinities with the walled city of Jerusalem. However, in early medieval maps Jerusalem is regularly depicted as round (cf. Index of Early Medieval Maps), a fact that may put a question-mark to this interpretation (Fig. 6). Like most medieval features, however, the church site was filled with layers of symbolism. It was not only an image of a heavenly place, but it was also shaped according to worldly pretensions. Although few, the towns that did exist during this period may actually have contributed to some of the meanings the churchyard was given. If the rectangular shape of the churchyards was a result of an

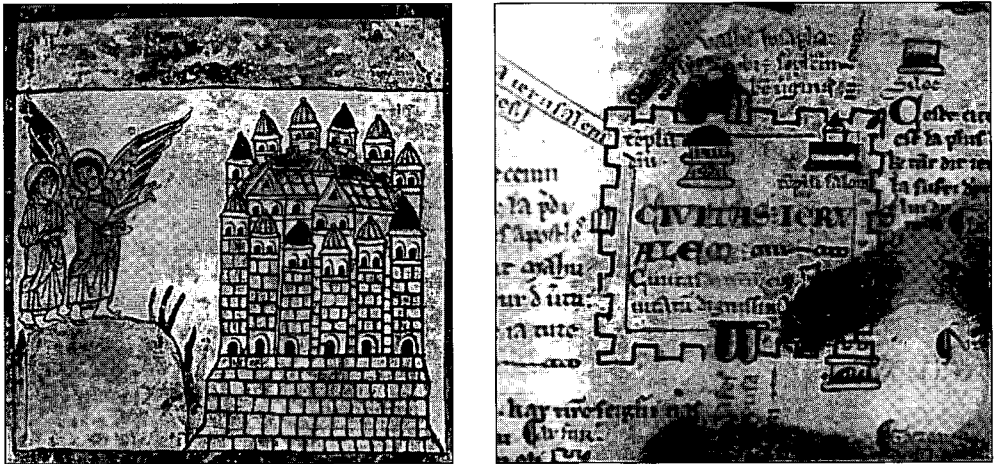


Fig. 6. According to medieval comprehension, the shape that best expressed the perfection of the New Kingdom was the circle. But in this picture the illuminator has tried to reconcile this mental outlook with respect for the sacred text, which actually speaks of a city built in a quadrangle. A careful look reveals that four of the towers have been coloured differently from the others and arranged so as to permit the construction of an ideal square. After Frugoni 1991. Cf. Jerusalem on a map drawn by Matthew Paris (ca. 1200-1259). After Gaudio 2000.

adjustment to house-lots and street-grids in the early towns, this would have influenced the connotations of the churchyard.

WHY PLOTS?

Why plots are found in the towns is commonly explained as a result of the introduction of new social and economical ideas and modes, the change designated as a feudalisation of Scandinavia. The town would in this scenario function as a place where the king and nobility could convert the surplus extracted from their subordinates. The plots were hence distributed among chieftains and wealthy farmers who were now able or forced to convert their agrarian surplus into prestige objects in the town (prestige objects were required in order to partake in the essential conspicuous consumption of the élite) (Brendalmo 1994; Saunders 1995; cf. Andrén 1985). Using a high or late medieval analogy, it has also been put forward that the size of the plots determined the size of the taxes or tributes that the owner/user of the plot had to pay. This has been proposed for quite different places, such as early medieval Trondheim (Christophersen 1994) as well as seventh-century Ribe (Jensen 1991). The economical aspects are not as important in Tesch's explanation of the plots in Sigtuna. Tesch rather stresses the plot as a gift or prestige object *in itself*, which made it possible for the plot owner to reside within the range of power (Tesch 1990).

Both explanations, the plot as a means of calculating fees and duties and the plot as a gift, would mean that the plots communicated a kind of contract, and a subjection. The impression is underlined by the topographical distribution of the plots. In early towns there is always the same characteristic division, with a lot of small plots in connection to but separated from dominating royal or aristocratic residences. Regarding the subjugation that the plots may have communicated, it seems reasonable to imagine that, by giving the churchyard a "town-plot"-shape, it was underlined that the landowner had given or invited/commanded the Church and the congregation to this particular place.

The first churches were erected in a period before the formation of parishes (Brink 1990, 1991, 1998). During this time personal relations with the founder of the church were vital. The cemeteries were probably used by people who in one way or another were dependent on those in power (who were also the patrons or church owners). Visiting the churchyard regularly meant that one was constantly reminded of the fact that the landowner was the prerequisite for and the warrantor of the church site's presence and continued existence (for the dependent role of the Church in the early Middle Ages, see Breengard 1982).

Of course, not everyone buried their dead in churchyards. Well into the twelfth century there were people who, even if they regarded themselves as Christians, preferred to use the traditional burial grounds. This was the case especially in Gotland and Uppland (where the famous heathen temple in Uppsala was active until ca. 1100). Is it possible to interpret this as a rejection of the churchyard and its layout, and, if so, of the town and the socio-political conditions the town represented? Perhaps the same reasoning can explain why in some special cases churchyards were given a deviating round or

oval shape. This was, for example, the case in S:t Per in Sigtuna. This church was built next to what was probably the royal manor in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, a manor that, contrary to the older one, was now placed in a majestic position *outside* of the town (Tesch 1998: 260). Was this a way to emphasise that the town and the king no longer were a unity? Another special case is the medieval churchyard in Uppåkra, a village not far from Lund. This churchyard was, according to older maps and reports, oval (Riddersporre 1998: 175; Larsson 1998: 106). Perhaps this has something to do with older structures, such as mounds situated on the same high point in the landscape as where the church was erected. But it could perhaps also be seen as a statement. Uppåkra is a known central place of the Iron Age that was surpassed by Lund in the end of the tenth century. A conflict between these central places is likely to have been played out in different ways. It has, for instance, been proposed that important estates could be confiscated by the Crown and split up in several smaller farms and tofts and that, hypothetically, this may have happened in Uppåkra (Riddersporre 1998: 175). Constructing a deviating churchyard may have been a way to mark a distance to the city of Lund.

MOULDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY: DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CHURCHYARD ENCLOSURE

While a town may be stable in its general outline for long periods of time, it is constantly changing in detail. In this respect, too, there are similarities between churchyards and towns. While the rectangular form of the churchyard prevails, other features change. One such feature is the design of the churchyard enclosures. Existing churchyard enclosures are difficult to date, but it seems as if there are some grounds for sketching a development or typology of their design over time. On the whole the development goes from simple ditches to more manifest fences and walls (Johansson 1993; cf. Engberg & Kieffer-Olsen 1992). Thus, at first the churchyard boundary was not a monumental element in the landscape. From a distance one would hardly have noticed it (Fig. 7). As time went by it seems as if the boundary became more important to mark, sometimes with strikingly high and mighty walls. This change is not restricted to churches, however. In the high and late Middle Ages the bounding of space seems to have been a vital part of the production and reproduction of feudal social relationships (Larsson & Saunders 1996). The walled churchyard had several parallels: cathedrals, fortified manors, castles and towns, which developed from “congested countryside” without boundaries to high medieval towns with city walls. (Even if only a few towns in Sweden had city walls, the walled town was a known concept at the time, exploited and expressed in different ways, Fig. 8.) There is a striking correspondence in time here. For example, the building of the grand wall around Visby began in the middle of the thirteenth century, and at the same time the Gotlandic churchyard walls were furnished with house- and tower-shaped gates. Still existing gates (Sw. *stigluckor*) on the mainland are generally somewhat later, from the fifteenth century (Johansson 1993, app. 3). In the Uppland and Hälsinge Laws (ca. 1296 and the first part of the 14th century), however, it is taken for granted that the churchyards are enclosed and furnished

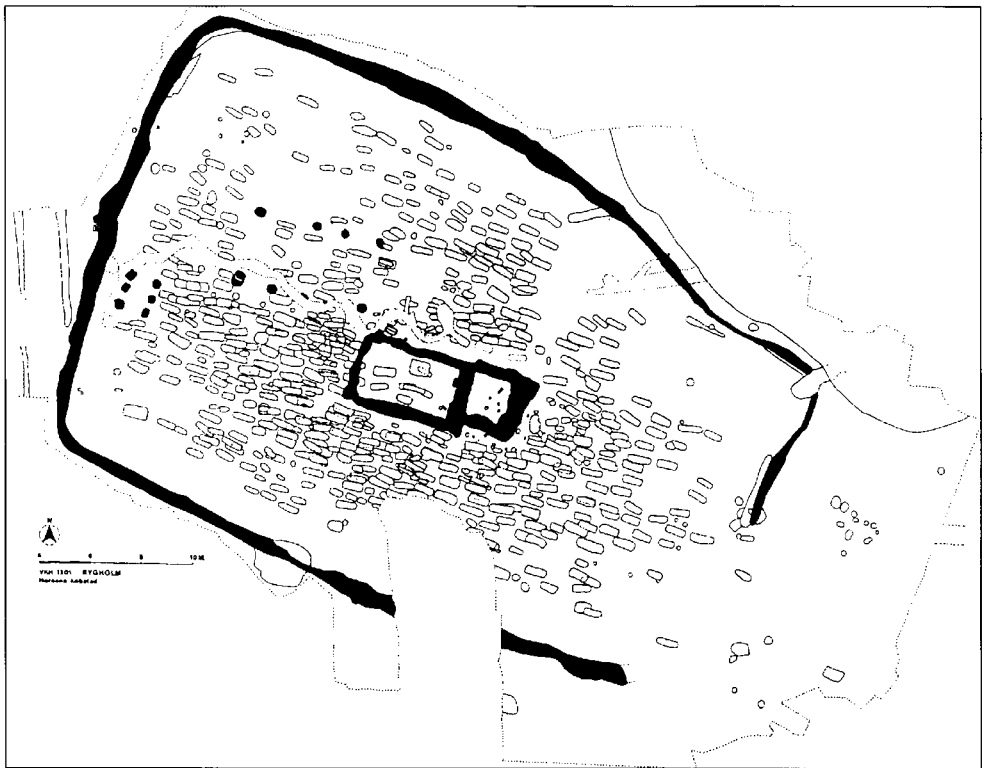


Fig. 7. There is ample evidence that ditches as churchyard boundaries were common in the late Viking Age and early Middle Ages, especially in Denmark and Scania. Tirup Church. After Wienberg 1993.

with *stigluckor*, so the dating is somewhat unclear.

How are we to interpret the manifest churchyard walls? I believe it is possible to link the walls to the building of stone churches, and to the formation of parishes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The formation of parishes was part of a strategy of the Church to further its independence (Brink 1991: 119f). The introduction of parishes marked in fact a revolutionary change of the medieval society. Instead of belonging to a Christian community held together by personal bonds, one was supposed to be part of a parish that was impersonal and geographically defined. The change probably met with resistance. Leif Gren has viewed the stone church as a monument that was equated with the intention of introducing and promoting a new ideological, social and territorial unit, the parish, in a symbolic form (Gren 1989). The churchyard walls may be seen in a similar way. They appear to have been erected at the same time as the stone churches, a dating that is supported by the rune-stones that were incorporated into the wall. An active moving of rune-stones to the church and the churchyard wall was probably a way to deal with the radical change brought about by the formation of parishes (Johansen 1997; Zachrisson 1998: 162). The churchyard enclosure was also a concrete reminder of the parish as an organiser, since responsibility for its maintenance – just as with the streets and quays in towns and the fences around the village infields – had to be

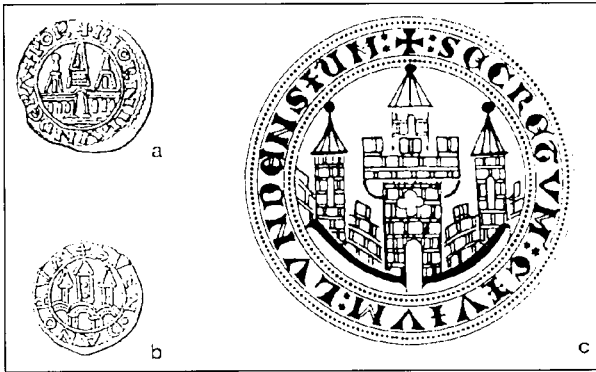


Fig. 8. The town as a castle. The church as a town. The town, the castle and the church site were connected in several ways. Medieval architecture, pictures and language gave directions to the associations. Coins and seals from Lund, after Andréén 1993-94: 14.

distributed among the plot-owners or farms that were part of the collective structure. Like the street which both visually and as a common passageway connected the plots and their owners and made them part of the same structure, and the fences around the infields which represented the village community, the churchyard fences and walls must have symbolized the church community.

The churchyard with its town-like monumentality may have signalled a new affiliation, namely that people now belonged to (or were expected to belong to) the Church, the papacy and Jerusalem, rather than to rich farm-owners and other worldly magnates. The introduction of tithes was a prerequisite for the formation of parishes but also for a corporate building of churches by the farmers and congregations of settlement districts (Brink 1990:119f, 1998). It is plausible that the emphasising of the commonly maintained enclosures was a way to make a statement on behalf of these congregations. To do this people used the same material language as that of the burghers in the towns: manifest boundaries, walls and gates to assert independence and a sense of community.

English revised by Laura Wrang.

REFERENCES

- Andrén, A. 1980. Lund. *Medeltidsstaden 26*. Riksantikvarieämbetet och Statens historiska museer. Rapport. Stockholm.
- 1985. *Den urbana scenen. Städer och samhälle i det medeltida Danmark*. Acta Archaeologica Lundensia. Series in 8°. Nr 13. Malmö.
- 1993-94. Signs of Communities. The Iconography of Early Towns in Denmark. *Meddelanden från Lunds universitets historiska museum 1993-1994*. New Series. Vol. 10. Lund. Pp. 9-20.
- 1998. Från antiken till antiken. Stadsvisioner i Skandinavien före 1700. *Staden – himmel eller helvete. Tankar om människan i staden*. Informationsförlaget. Pp. 142-186.
- Anglert, M. 1995. *Kyrkor och herravälde. Från kristnande till sockenbildning i Skåne*. Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 16. Lund.
- 1998. Från gårdskyrka till sockenkyrka: Bjäresjö i Skåne. In: B. Nilsson (Ed). *Sveriges kyrkohistoria. 1: Missionstid och tidig medeltid*. Verbum. Stockholm. Pp. 208-215.
- Breengaard, C. 1982. *Muren om Israels hus. Regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170*. København.
- Brendalsmo, A. J. 1994. *Tønsberg før år 1000. Fra gård til by*. Varia 28. Universitetets Oldsaksamling. Oslo.
- 1997. Trøndelags middelalderse kirkesteder. Hvor aristokratisk var landskapet? *Hikuin 24. Kirkearkæologi i Norden 6*. Højbjerg. Pp. 99-112.
- Brink, S. 1991. Sockenbildningen i Sverige. *Kyrka och socken i medeltidens Sverige*. Studier till Det medeltida Sverige 5. Riksantikvarieämbetet. Stockholm. Pp. 113-142.
- 1998. The Formation of the Scandinavian Parish, with some Remarks Regarding the English Impact on the Process. In: J. Hill & M. Swan (Eds). *The Community, the Family and the Saint. Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*. International Medieval Research, 4. Turnhout, Brepols. Pp. 19-44.
- Bøe, A. 1963. Kirkegård. *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid 8*.
- Calissendorff, K. 1986. *Ortnamn i Uppland*. Stockholm.
- Cinthio, M. 1997. Trinitatiskyrkan i Lund – med engelsk prägel. *Hikuin 24. Kirkearkæologi i Norden 6*. Højbjerg. Pp. 113-134.
- Christophersen, A. & Nordeide, S. 1994. *Kaupangen ved Nidelva*. Riksantikvarens Skrifter Nr 7. Trondheim.
- Drejfer, M. 1949. Signildskärs kapell. *Åländsk odling*.
- Duczko, W. 1995. Kungar, thegnar, Tegnebyar, juveler och silverskatter. Om danskt inflytande i Sverige under sen vikingatid. *Tor 27*. Uppsala. Pp. 625-662.
- Edle, A. 1935 Stockholm. S. Äulas körka (S. Olofs kyrka) i Fårö socken. *Sveriges Kyrkor*. Gotland, bd 2. Stockholm.
- Engberg, N. & Kieffer-Olsen, J. 1992. Kirkegårdens grøft. Om den ældste inhegning af Danmarks kirkegårde. *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark*.
- Frugoni, C. 1991. *A Distant City. Images of Urban Experience in the Medieval World*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Gaudio, M. 2000. Matthew Paris and the Cartography of the Margins. *Gesta*. Vol. XXXIX/1. Stanford.
- Green, L. 1989. Platon mitt i byn. Kyrksöcknens uppkomst från monumentologisk synpunkt. *Mänsklighet genom millennier. En vänbok till Åke Hyenstrand*. Stockholm. Pp. 63-72.
- Hellström, J. A. 1971. *Biskop och landskapssamhälle i tidig svensk medeltid*. Stockholm.
- Holmbäck, Å. & Wessén, E. 1946. *Svenska landskapslagar. Tolkade och förklarade för nutidens svenskar*. Femte serien: Äldre västgötalagen, Yngre västgötalagen, Smålandslagens kyrkobalk och Bjärköarätten. Stockholm.
- Index of Early Medieval Maps*. <http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/EMwebpages/EML.html>
- Jansson, S. B. F. 1977. *Runinskrifter i Sverige*. Uppsala.
- Jensen, S. 1991. *Ribes Vikinger*. Den antikvariske Samling. Ribe.
- Johansen, B. 1997. *Ormalur. Aspekter av tillvaro och landskap*. Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 14. Stockholm.
- Jonsson, K. 1999. Bland barnaföderskor, spädbarn och "vuxna barn" – social och religiös kontroll speglad i gravmaterialet från Västerhus. *Meta* nr 4, 1999. Lund. Pp. 12-35.

- Kieffer-Olsen, J. 1997. Byen, kirken og kirkestrukturen. Nogle overvejelser. *Hikuin 24. Kirkearkæologi i Norden 6*. Højbjerg. Pp. 45-54.
- Kriig, S. 1987. *Lunds äldsta kyrkogård*. Lunds universitet.
- Larsson, L. 1998. Gjort och ogjort i Uppåkra. Larsson, L. & Hårdh, B. (Eds). *Centrala platser – Centrala frågor. Samhällsstrukturen under järnåldern*. Acta Archaeologica Lundensia. Series in 8°. Nr 28. Malmö. Pp. 95-112.
- Lithberg, N. 1935. Inledning till Rute ting. *Sveriges Kyrkor*. Gotland, bd 2. Stockholm.
- Lynch, K. 1960. *The Image of the City*. The M.I.T. Press. Cambridge, Mass. & London.
- Mandelgren, N. M. 1883-84. *Atlas till Sveriges odlingshistoria*. Afdelning 11: Helgedomar. Stockholm.
- Miller, D. 1985. *Artefacts as categories*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mårtensson, A. W. (Ed). 1976. *Uppgrävt förflutet för PKbanken i Lund. En investering i arkeologi*. Lund. – 1981. *S:t Stefan i Lund: ett monument ur tiden*. Lund.
- Nilsson, B. 1989. *De Sepulturis. Gravrätten i Corpus Iuris Canonici och i medeltida nordisk lagstiftning*. Stockholm.
- 1991. Frids- och asylföreskrifter rörande den medeltida sockenkyrkan. *Kyrka och socken i medeltidens Sverige*. Studier till Det medeltida Sverige 5. Riksantikvarieämbetet. Pp. 473-504.
- Rhezelius, J. H. 1917. Monumenta Uplandica. In: Stenbock, C. M. & Lundberg, O. (Eds). *Upplands förminnesförenings tidskrift*. Uppsala.
- Riddersporre, M. 1995. *Bymarker i backspegel. Odlingslandskapet före kartornas tid*. Meddelanden från Lunds universitets geografiska institutioner, avhandlingar 124. Trelleborg.
- 1998. Ravlunda och Uppåkra. Två exempel på försvunna storgårdar? L. Larsson & B. Hårdh (Eds). *Centrala platser – Centrala frågor. Samhällsstrukturen under järnåldern*. Acta Archaeologica Lundensia. Series in 8°. Nr 28. Malmö. Pp. 165-178.
- Saunders, T. 1995. Trade, Towns and States: A Reconsideration of Early Medieval Economics. *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1. Pp. 31-53.
- Salvén, E. 1927. Från utgrävningen av Skogs kyrkoruin. *Formvannen* 22.
- Skansjö, S. & Sundström, H. (Eds). 1985. *Gävobrevet 1085. Föredrag och diskussioner vid Symposium kring Knut den Heliges gåvobrev 1085 och den tidiga medeltidens nordiska samhälle*. Lund University Press.
- Sørensen, M. L. S. 1997. Material Culture and Typology. *Current Swedish Archaeology*. Vol. 5. Stockholm. Pp. 179-192.
- Tesch, S. 1990. Stad och stadsplan. S. Tesch (Ed). *Makt och människor i kungens Sigtuna. Sigtuna-utgrävningen 1988-90*. Sigtuna museer. Sigtuna. Pp. 23-37.
- 1991. Sigtuna omkring år 1000. *Kung Olofs mynthus i kvarteret Urmakaren, Sigtuna*. Sigtuna museers skriftserie 3. Sigtuna. Pp. 5-7.
- 1992. Sigtuna: The Townplan – A Key to Urbanization and Formation of State in Sweden. *Medieval Europe. Urbanism*. Preprinted papers. Vol. 1. York.
- 1998. Maktpolitik och kyrkobygge. Sigtuna vid tiden för dominikankonventets grundläggning. S. Tesch (Ed). *Mariakyrkan i Sigtuna: dominikankonvent och församlingskyrka 1247-1997: minnesskrift med anledning av 750-årsjubileet*. Sigtuna museers skriftserie, 7. Sigtuna. Pp. 9-20.
- Tesch, S. & Pettersson, B. 1995. Kungen gav, hövdingar byggde. *Populär arkeologi* 1995, nr 3. Pp. 27-30.
- Thomasson, J. 1998. Dominus terrae Scania. Om den vandrande byn och maktens territorialisering. L. Larsson & B. Hårdh (Eds). *Centrala platser – Centrala frågor. Samhällsstrukturen under järnåldern*. Acta Archaeologica Lundensia. Series in 8°. Nr 28. Malmö. Pp. 73-94.
- Wessén, E. & Jansson, S. B. F. 1940-58. *Upplands runinskrifter. Sveriges runinskrifter 6-9*. KVHAA. Stockholm.
- Wienberg, J. 1993. *Den gotiske labyrint. Middelalderen og kirkerne i Danmark*. Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 11. Stockholm.
- Wollin, N. G. 1935. Elinghems ödekyrka. *Sveriges Kyrkor*. Gotland, bd 2. Stockholm.
- Zachrisson, T. 1998. *Gård, gräns, gravfält. Sammanhang kring ädelmetalldepåer och runstenar från vikingatid och tidigmedeltid i Uppland och Gästrikland*. Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 15. Stockholm.

