

Abstracts 6th Conference on Towers in Medieval Europe – Lund 2019

The real “donjon”. A contribution to castle terminology

Bas Aarts (The Netherlands)

The term “donjon” is frequently used in castle literature to refer to “the main tower” of a castle as the strongest element of the fortification. It is therefore often seen also as a “last refuge”.

Jean Mesqui pointed out briefly that in France this “main tower concept” is a romantic idea, which arose in the 19th century. For Mesqui the “donjon”, as it occurs in medieval sources, refers to the lordly core of an elaborate castle complex. More specifically, it includes the inner nucleus formed by the hall, the living quarters of the noble family and the “*turris*” or “*la Grosse Tour*”. These elements were not necessarily concentrated in one building. For the “*turris*” or keep itself, Mesqui prefers the term “*tour maîtresse*”.

This paper presents three 16th-century examples from the Low Countries (Wouw, Breda, Hoogstraten), where the term used in documentary sources is “donjon” (“*dongeon*”) and it corresponds with this new interpretation. To underline this vision further the paper concludes by adding comparative examples from Belgium and France, dating from the Middle Ages onwards, including the famous Château Gaillard in Normandy.

Towers of strength and confinement: Saint Andrews and Lochleven castles as prisons

Penelope Dransart (University of Aberdeen)

If towers had the capacity to convey the idea of military might, then the ability of constables and sheriffs to detain prisoners or hostages inside castles against their will is likely to have added to that impression of strength. While some towers were apparently provided with designated spaces to house prisoners, other areas within might also be expeditiously adapted when the need arose. The paper discusses concepts of confinement through a focus on the Sea Tower at St Andrews Castle (which served as the palace of the bishops of the eponymous diocese), and Lochleven Castle, as constructed by Robert I of Scotland and his successors on an island in Loch Leven. Historical circumstances, from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, connecting the two castles are examined, as well as arrangements made to prevent prisoners from leaving of their own volition. Medieval monarchs, their close family members and bishops were often vulnerable to being captured. Lochleven provides an example of the use of a Scottish castle to confine a prisoner of the highest social rank. The imprisonment in and escape from Lochleven of Mary Queen of Scots in 1567-58 is discussed in the light of the architectural arrangements made to detain the monarch.

Recognizing a tower when you find one

Øystein Ekroll, (Nidaros Cathedral Restoration Workshop, Trondheim)

Norway traditionally presents very few stone towers, even in churches. The towns as well as the countryside had an almost exclusively wooden building culture. Due to the concurring urban fires, only a few medieval urban churches have survived and no private stone houses.

Only a few royal and episcopal stone-built residences remain. In archeology, it almost became a maxim that no private stone-built defences existed in Norway. Consequently, excavated remains of small, but solidly built stone buildings have often been variously interpreted as stone cellars, chapels, crypts, dwelling houses, etc. The lack of castles and stone-built urban defence works has also helped detract interest among archeologists from interpreting such stone constructions as possible towers rather than cellars. In both urban and rural contexts, however, the remains of a number of stone buildings have been excavated which may be interpreted as towers rather than as cellars under a wooden house. But were they really towers? And if so, what was their function or symbolic meaning? In my paper, I will present a number of these hitherto unpublished or overlooked urban and rural structures and try to reinterpret them and place them in a historical context.

The revival of the keep in the Danish Castles of the 14th century

Vivian Etting, (The National Museum of Denmark)

Evidently a big tower was a central element in the larger medieval castles. During the 14th century we find a revival of the keep/donjon in castle architecture, where the main towers not only served defensive purposes. They were used for high-class habitation as well, combined with various other functions. Among the most significant keeps in the Danish castles are the tower Kärnan in Helsingborg, the Mantel tower on Hammershus, the keep on the castle of Gurre, and the great tower of Folen in Kalundborg, which housed the royal treasury and the national archives. This paper will present the most significant examples of these towers in medieval Denmark, which no doubt were inspired by a new European trend reflected in the royal castle of Vincennes in France, the emperor Karl IV's castle of Karlstein near Prague and the Papal Tour des Anges in Avignon.

Tower houses in medieval Scanian towns

Kent Hansen (Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University).

Towers in medieval towns is something normally connected to southern Europe. In Scandinavia, towers are seen as something belonging to castles and residences in the countryside, not to urban milieus. However, they are to be found even in Scandinavian towns. In this paper the existence of private urban tower houses in medieval Scania will be presented and discussed, and a hypothesis about a previously unknown tower house in Lund will be introduced.

The early medieval towers on Gotland

Martin Hansson, (Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University).

The island of Gotland in the Baltic has an extremely rich history from the Viking and Middle Ages. Among the medieval heritage are a number of freestanding towers dating to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The towers can be found both in the countryside, often in connection with churches, but also at harbor sites. Surprisingly little scholarly attention has been directed towards these interesting towers. This paper will present the towers from Gotland and summarize the scholarly interpretations of their functions. Despite sometimes large similarities, the function between these different towers seems to have been divided between

defense, storage and living quarters. Many seems to have been connected to the rural elite on the island. This is interesting since the island never developed an internal noble class.

The second generation great towers

Taco Hermans, (The Netherlands)

In the 12th century a few castles were built in the Netherlands which consisted of a great tower. These were solitary buildings. From then on for decades no great towers were built. In the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century again some great towers were built. These were now mostly added to existing castles and one of them was even built over a gate tower, which was demolished. The towers looked almost the same with a @@@ on each corner. It looks like these towers had no real function.

This paper presents 4 or 5 five of these towers and tries to find an answer to where the ideas of these towers came from, if they had any function besides being just status, etc. If possible examples from Belgium or Germany will be added.

Late Viking defensive towers in Waterford, Ireland

Ben Murtagh, Ireland

The origins of the port city of Waterford in south-eastern Ireland can be traced back to at least the early 10th century, when the Vikings founded a defended settlement there at confluence of two tidal rivers. In time these Scandinavian (Ostman) settlers had transformed and expanded the settlement. By the 12th century it had become a thriving and strongly defended port town. In 1170, when Anglo-Normans from Britain besieged and captured the town, it was defended by a stone wall, together with at least two towers. Near contemporary and later accounts of the siege and later revolt of the Ostmen against their new rulers refer to these towers. They apparently belonged to and were occupied by leading Ostman citizens of the town.

Today, Waterford has the finest and most extensive medieval town or city walls, with defensive towers, to survive in Ireland. The largest of these towers, according to local tradition, was built by 'Reginald the Dane' in 1003, while the adjoining inner or older part of the city was enclosed and defended by the 'Danish' wall. Work by this writer however would indicate that the present structure is a later replacement in the same vicinity of its earlier namesake. Another tower along with the adjoining early stone wall, were allowed to fall into decay and eventual disappearance. This followed the construction of a new and outer defensive wall by the English monarchy, which gained ownership of Waterford soon after its capture in 1170.

Where do the Bergfrieds come from? Appearance and evolution of cylindrical towers in Central Europe

Przemysław Nocuń (Institute of Archaeology Jagiellonian University)

The 12th century is recognized as time of important alterations of donjons in France. Their form started to evolve – from an angular (square) to a cylindrical one. Later on, this model of

dwelling towers was being implemented in Western and Northern Germany. Almost a century later interesting changes could be observed also more to the east – in Central Europe. On the territories of present Central and Eastern Germany as well as Czechia, Moravia, Southern Poland and – a bit less – in Slovakia, Hungary and Lower Austria, at the end of 12th and in the 13th century we can see the implementation of cylindrical towers (at the same time in southern part of Central Europe the typical form of towers was angular).

At the beginning the cylindrical towers in Central Europe had still functions of donjons, but later the new types of castles were introduced on this area and in short time they became very popular (consisting of residential buildings of horizontal disposition and separated towers of rather more defensive functions – often recognized as towers of last defence). The German term Bergfried, defining this type of towers, in last decades was also adopted by Central European researchers.

The evolution of the form (to cylindrical) but – first of all – of the function of castle towers in Central Europe (to the Bergfrieds), in the late 12th and in the 13th century, will be presented in the paper. The castles of the Teutonic Order from the late 13th and the 14th century (situated in north-eastern part of Poland) will be also analysed in the field of the presence of cylindrical Bergfrieds.

The Örtofta tower house

Anders Ödman (Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University).

During the building of the Cathedral at Lund, 1080–1165, the sandstone was transported from the quarries to the building site. The journey took four days. Two of the county's biggest rivers had to be crossed. The first crossing is 8-9 km north of Lund over the Kävlinge river. There was a wooden bridge at around 1500 and very likely also during the stone transportation period.

East of the bridge is the manor house Örtofta situated. The ownership length goes down to the early 12th century with men in contact with the archbishops court and during the 14–15th century some of the king's nearest men were castle lords. Their mission might have been to keep an eye with the important and vulnerable passage over the river. The mansion is to a large extent rebuilt in the 19th century, but medieval parts are remaining. By a brief preliminary examination the house is found to have had 4-5 floors and a cellar that is filled up to a great extent. The top floors are removed. Originally the house was 7,8 x 10,7 meter, built in medieval brick masonry from 14–15th centuries and with similarities to the other local tower houses from the period. At the end of the 16th century, the tower was modernised, built longer and made lower to follow the architectural fashion of the time. A survey of the tower house will be presented at the conference.

Defence on the Anglo-Scottish Border in the 16th Century

Richard Oram (University of Stirling)

Recent trends in the discussion of late medieval fortification in Britain has focused on the symbolic projection of status and power which they represented and has down-played the defensive and military function which they still held in specific regional contexts. This paper

explores towers in the borderlands between Scotland and England, where raid and low-level violence was endemic and where occasional - albeit brief - episodes of major military campaigning saw the systematic devastation of the agricultural systems and settlements. Legislation from the reign of King James V (1513-42) saw the empowerment of the lesser nobles of the region to build towers and fortified enclosures without any requirement to obtain permission and this act supposedly led to the proliferation of towers throughout the region. Starting with an examination of the defences of the region in the pre-1500 period, discussion will move to the first phase of new fortification down to the so-called wars of the Rough Wooing in the 1540s before examining the rapid spread of tower-building in the 1550s and 1560s, after the end of the last major episode of conflict. Discussion will focus on the distinction between the major towers controlled by the crown and its greater lords and the lesser buildings erected by the minor nobility, questioning whether the latter possessed any significant defensive capability in the age of gunpowder.

The tower of 16th century Skarhult

Anders Reisnert, Sweden

According to the sign over the main entrance of Skarhult, the now standing castle was built by Sten Rosensparre in 1562. He fell in the battle of Axtorna in 1565 and the castle was completed by his widow Mette Rosencrantz in the following years. There are however several building phases in the castle. The tower is 30 meters high, built in brick in at least two phases. The walls are two meters thick in the basement and one and a half meter in the top floor. The three upper floors are furnished as shooting galleries. The cellar is vaulted and there are a staircase inside the wall to the first floor.