

Sten Tesch

Holy stones and portable altars

Early medieval altar stones made of green porphyry, their cultural and religious background and their importance for the introduction of Christianity in the Mälars region, Sweden

National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavik
28th of August 2012



Holy stones and portable altars

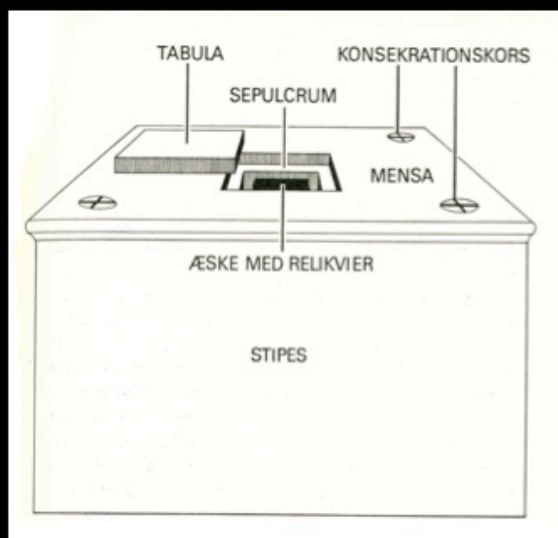
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"From imperial luxury to Christian cult objects"



The altar – a shrine in miniature

Altare fixus



Altare portatle



A portable altar with room for a small relic

Hvammskirkje, Iceland



Altar stones found in Sigtuna

Green porphyry

Serpentine

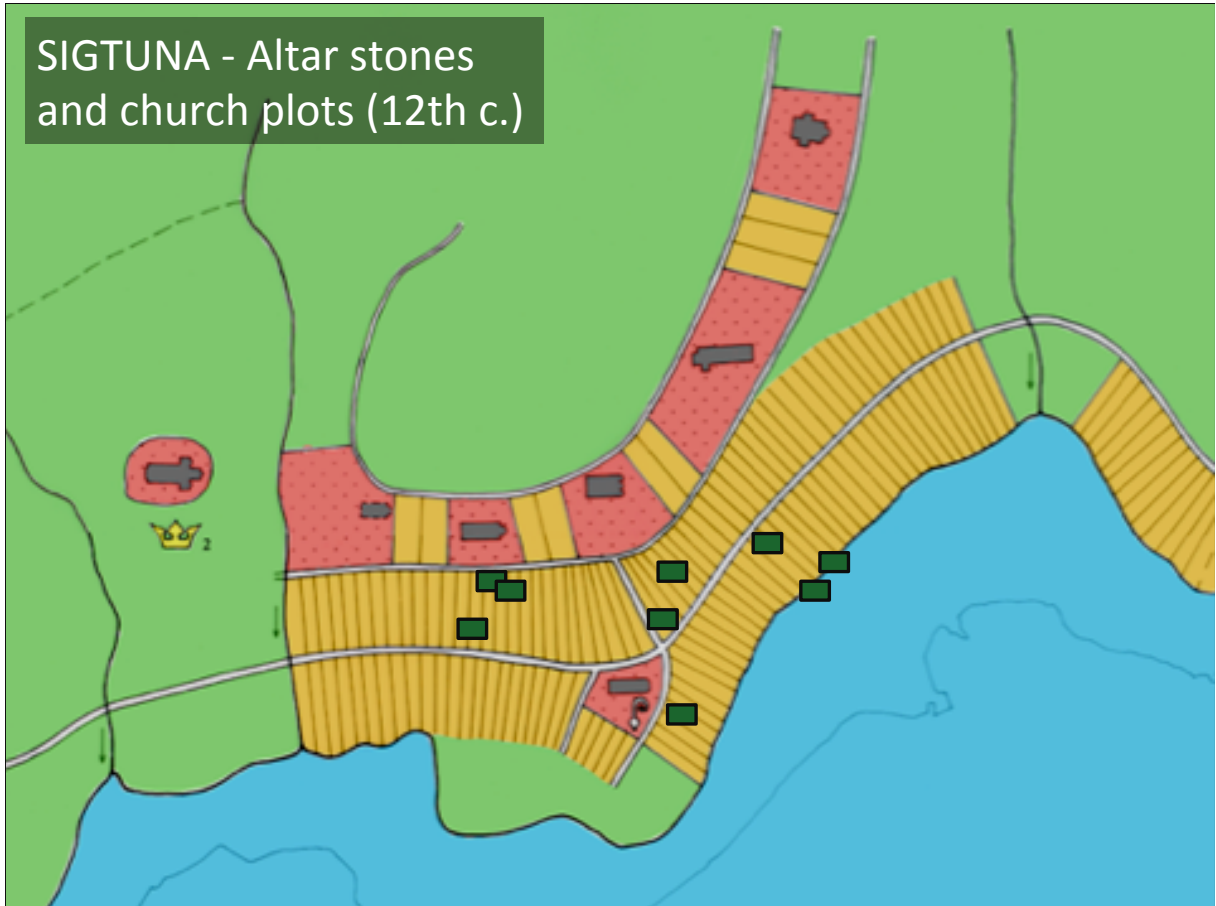
Door from a Byzantine portable altar (Sigtuna)



Sigtuna
Connections
with the Eastern
church?



SIGTUNA - Altar stones
and church plots (12th c.)



THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND



Egypt



Egypt



Greece



Çemberlitas, the ancient column that once had a statue of emperor Constantine at the top.



Imperial sarcophagi outside the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul
The sarcophagus of Constantine the Great in the middle

Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos baptizes
Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (905-959)
Byzantine Emperor



"Porphyrogenetos" i.e. "born-in-purple".



In the basilica of S. Peter, Rome
The huge red porphyry circle is
the spot where Charlemagne was
crowned by the Pope
in the year 800



The sarcophagus, in red porphyry.
The Holy Roman emperor Friedrich II
dead 1250,
(in Palermo Cathedral, Italy)

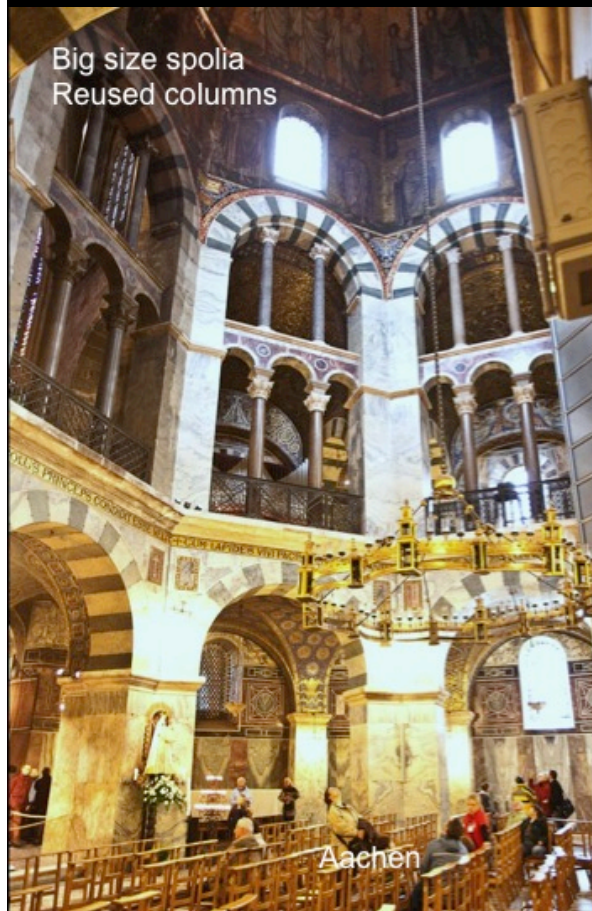
19th century imperial and royal sarcophagi



Napoleon I



Umberto I




Big size spolia
Reused columns

Aachen



S. Clemente, Rome



Porfido verde antico
Lapis lacedemonius krokeai





Mount Taygetos 2404 m asl

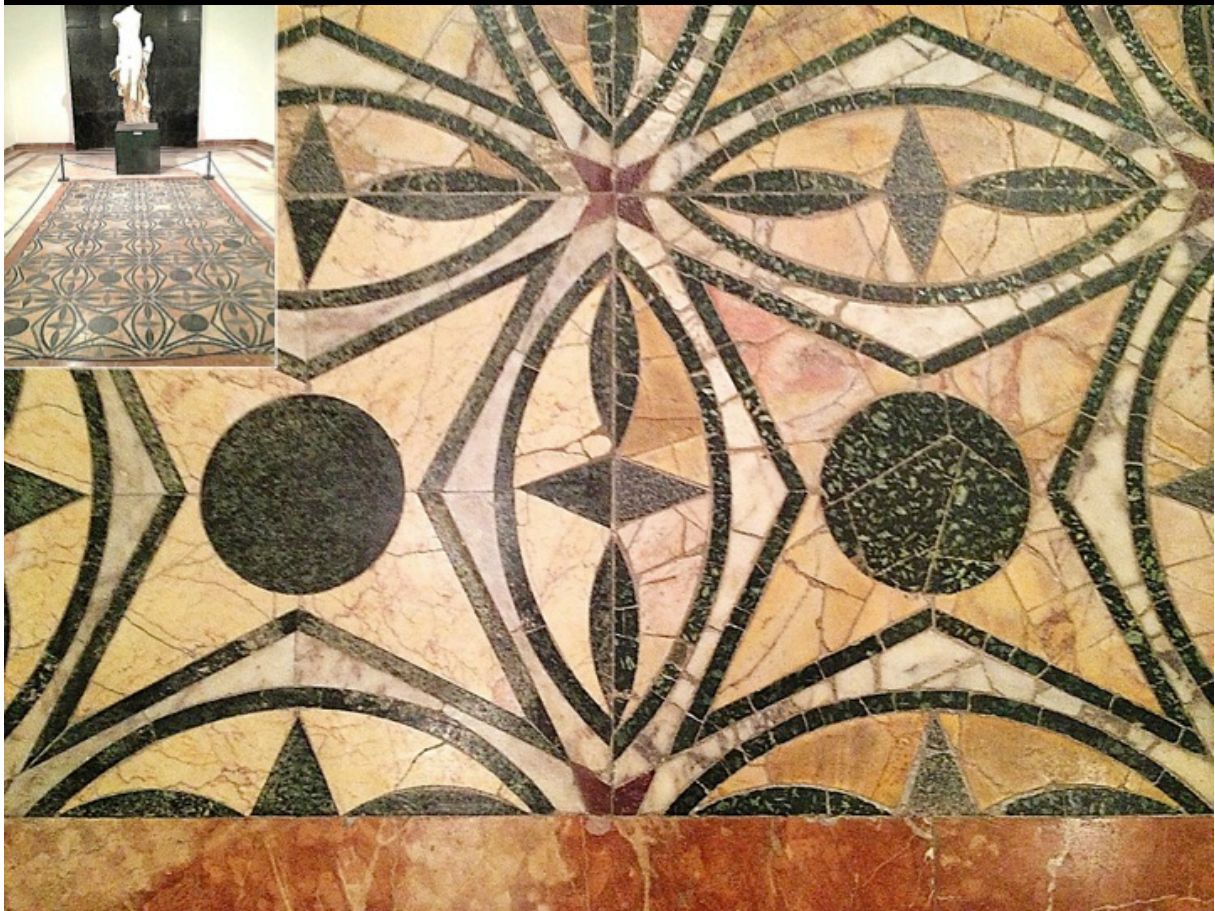
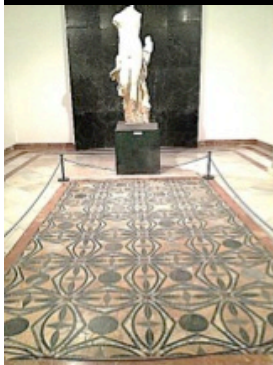
Not a quarry in the common sense





Mycenae 1600-1100 BC

Roman imperial period c. AD 200



"Marmorwand"

Römisch-Germanisches Museum
Köln – Colonia Agrippinensis AD 50



Decorative ribbons
from Roman palaces?



Thorarinstadir, Iceland



**THE CHRISTIAN MISSION
& PORTABLE ALTARS**

Relic transfers
&
Portable altars
9th to 11th c.



The introduction of Christianity in northern and eastern Europe during the 9th to 12th centuries



Official Christianization:

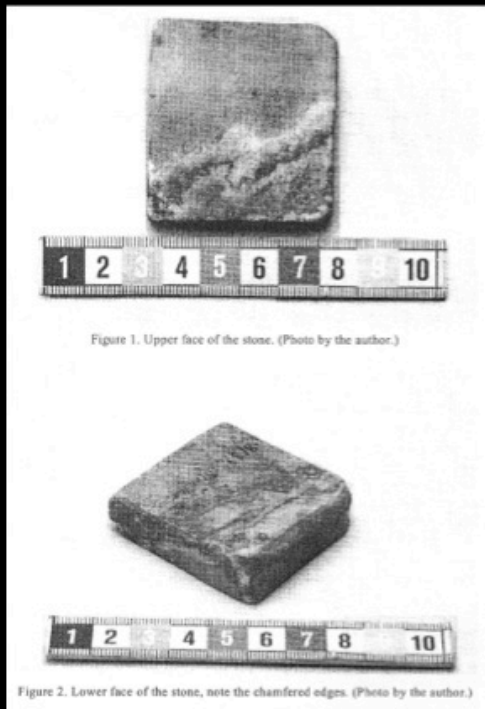
Denmark c. 960

Kievan Rus 988

Iceland Alltinget
999/1000

Norway 1020

Sweden ???



Marble altar
stone from
Birka

Ansgar's
church?

Any house!

From an Early Christian grave in Varnhem, Västergötland
Early 11th century – A missionary grave?



Tragaltar, Bamberg/Fulda(?) Germany, before AD 1025
now in Musée National du Moyen Age in Paris



Gregorius tragaltar, Cologne c. 1140
Now in St. Servatius church in Siegburg





10 small
bundles
with relics

Portable Altar of Countess Gertrude
Braunschweig Germany c. 1045, red porphyry

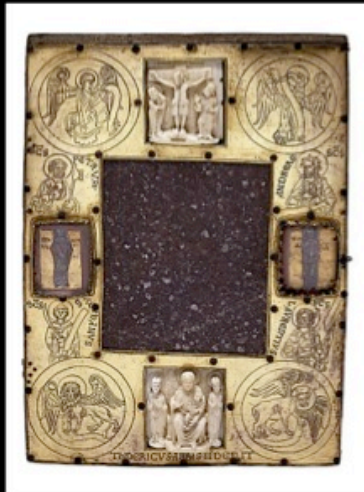




10 small
bundles
with relics

Portable altar c. 1200

From Hildesheim, Lower Saxony, Germany
(British Museum)



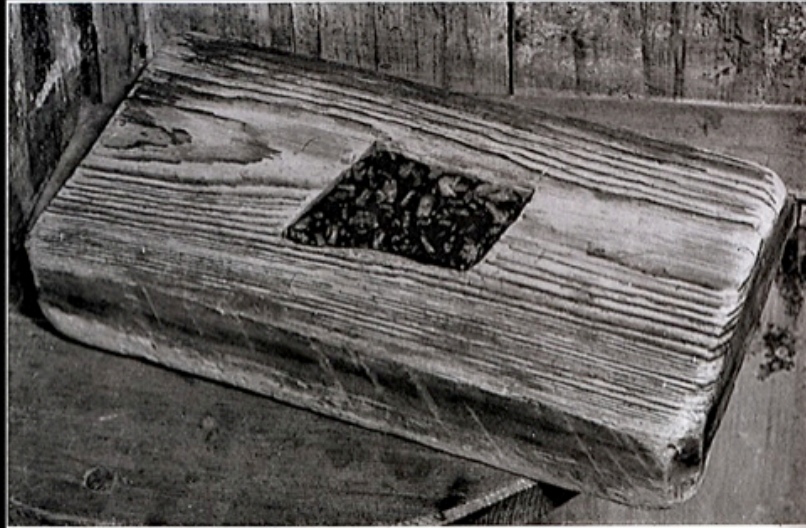
Purbeck Marble



Relics from 39 saints mentioned by name



Portable altar from Hedared stave church, Västergötland



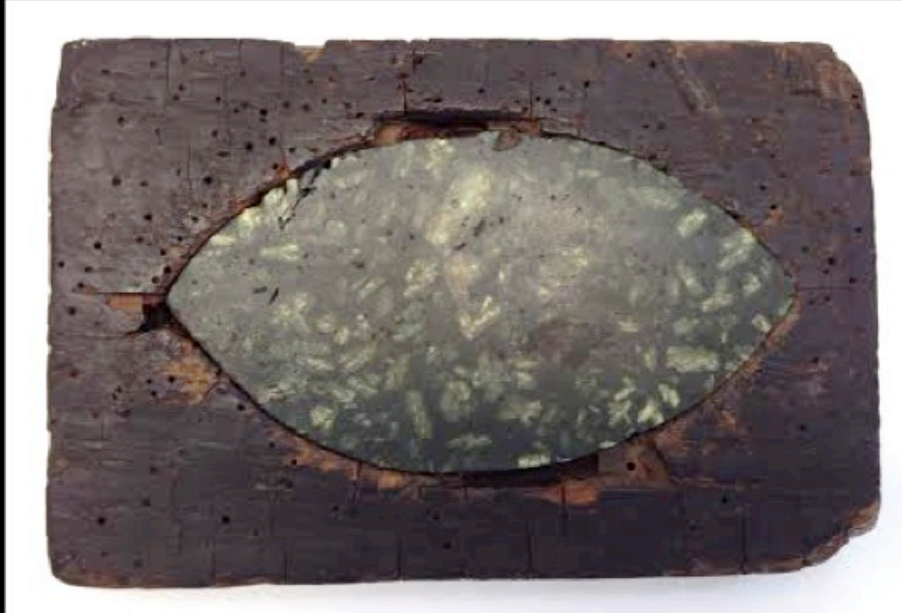
Portable altar from Lom church, Norway

Now in Kulturhistorisk museum, Oslo





Portable altar from Hvammskirkja, Iceland
18,4 x 12,1 x 2,4 cm

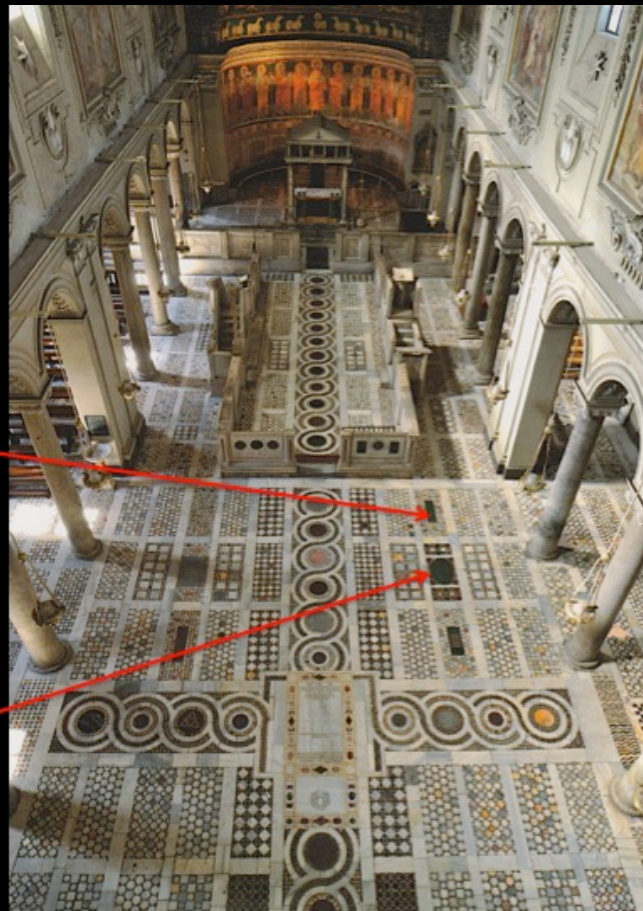
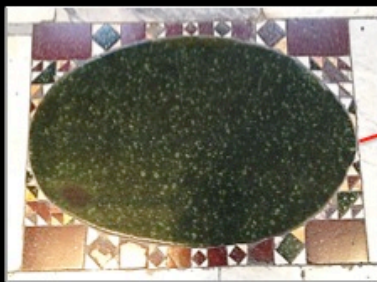
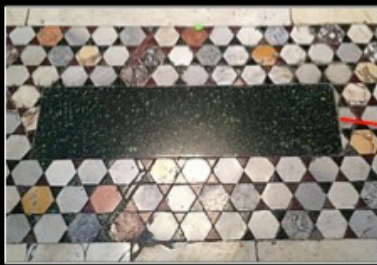




Cosmati pavement
in Basilica
S. Clemente
Rome
12th century

The Cosmati family
12th c – 13th century

Cosmatesque work,
Cosmati style



Basilica S. Maria
in Trastevere, Rome



Basilica S. Maria in Aracoeli,
Capitoline Hill, Rome

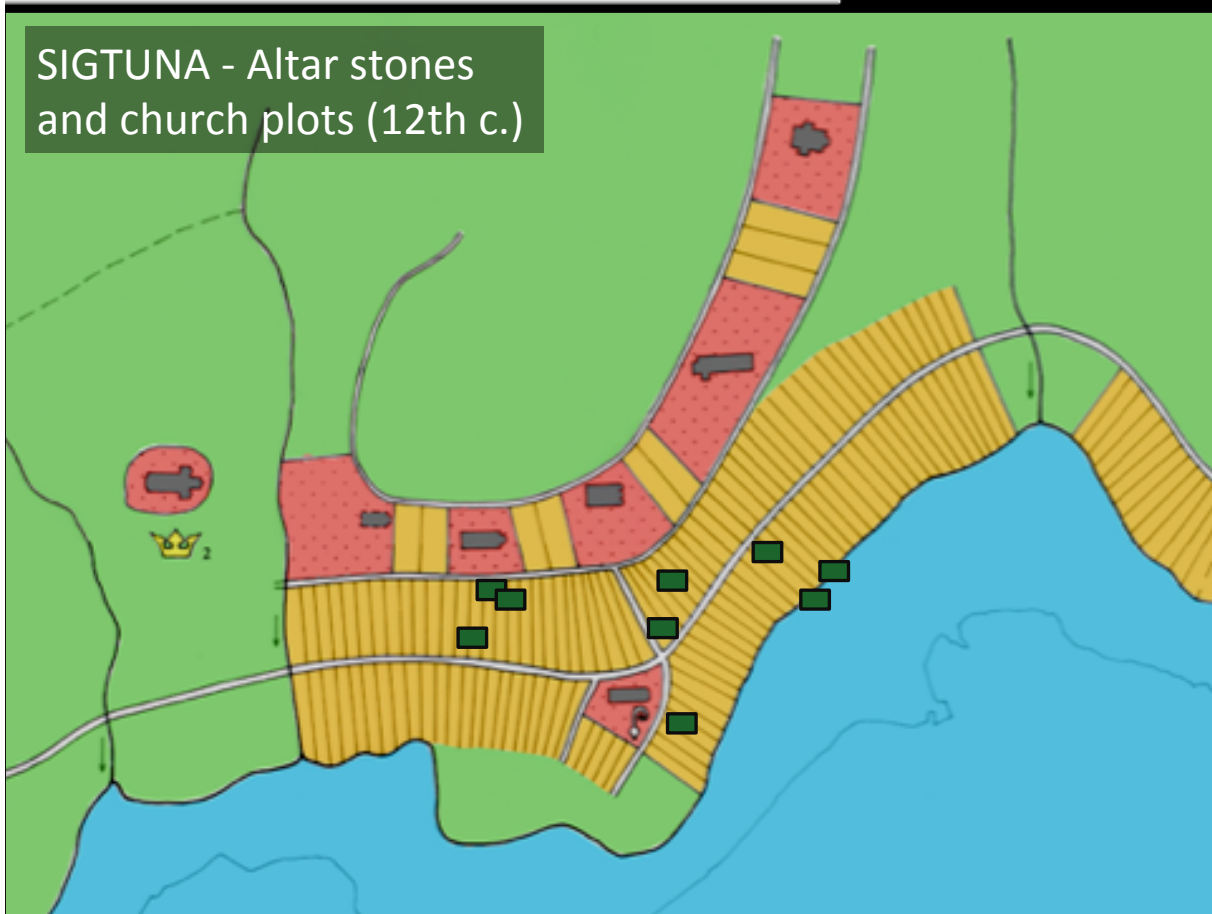
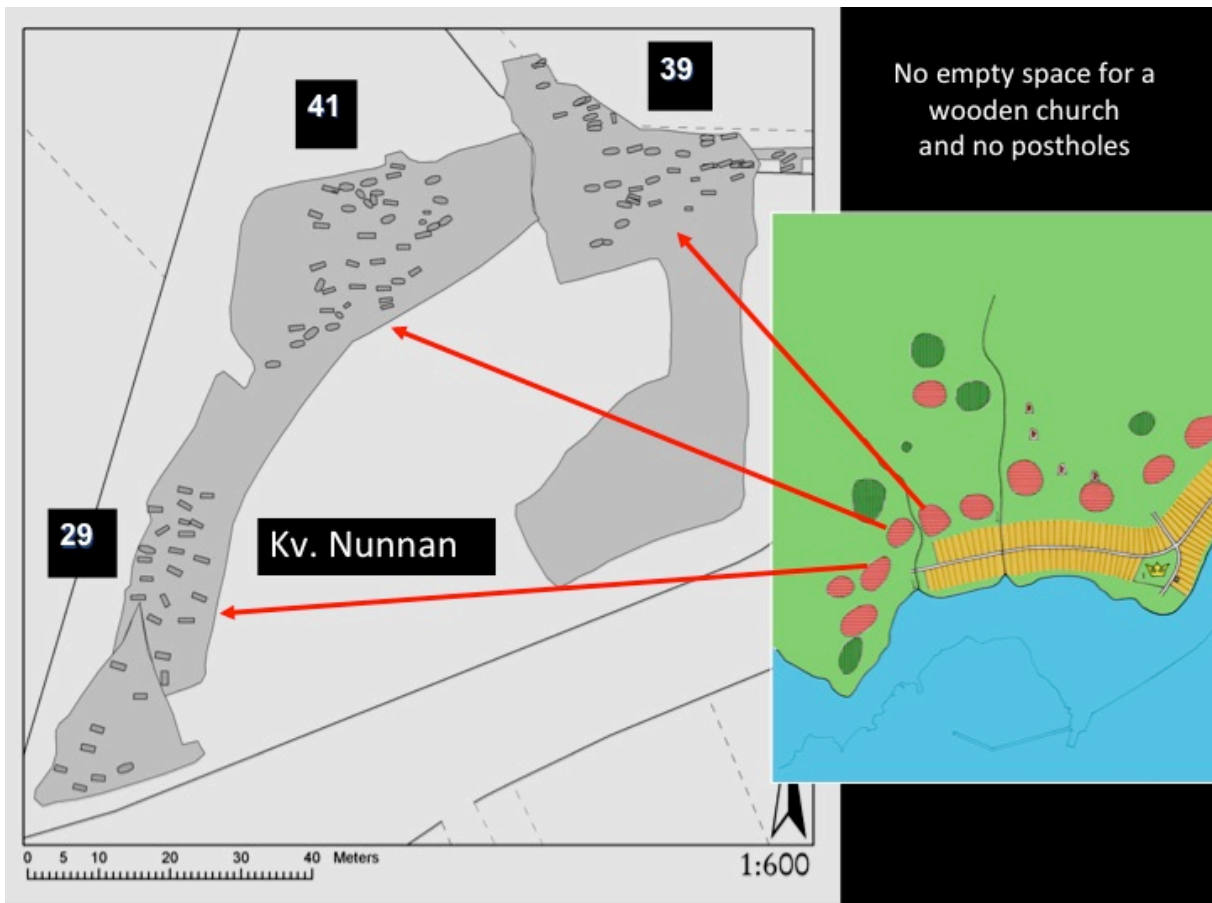


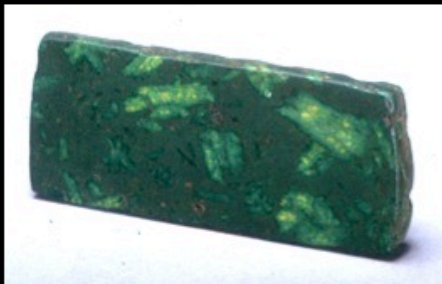
Sigtuna a thousand years ago



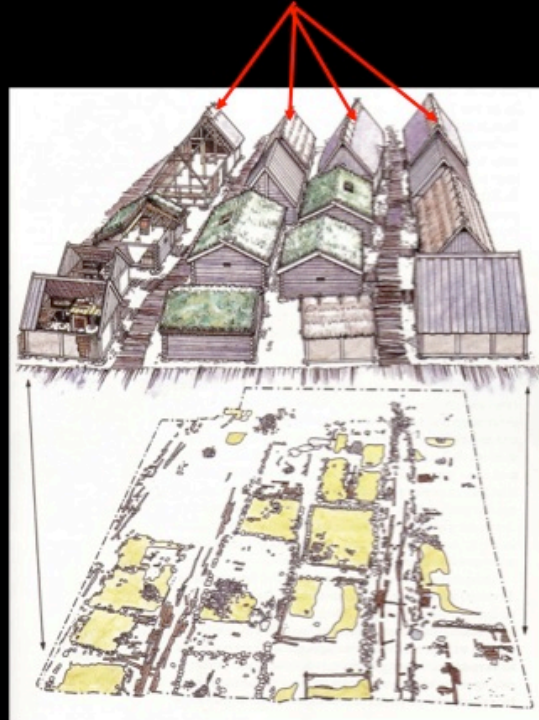
Christians but no churches
Early Christian burial grounds
c. 980 - 1060







"Town halls"



The regulated

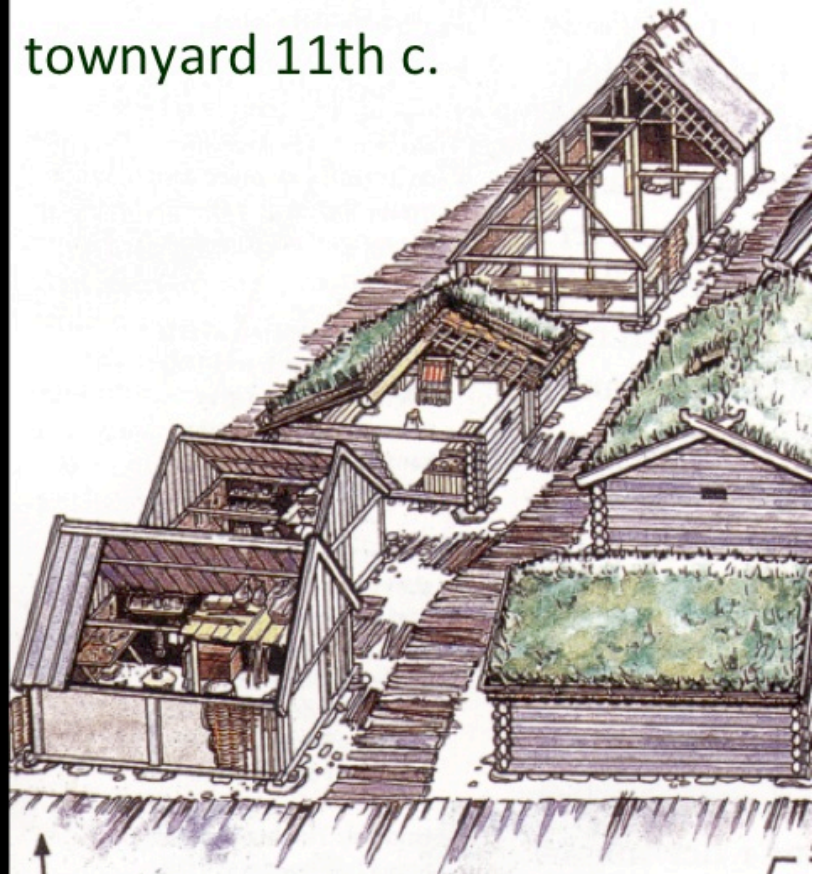
Zone 4 the "hall" / social building

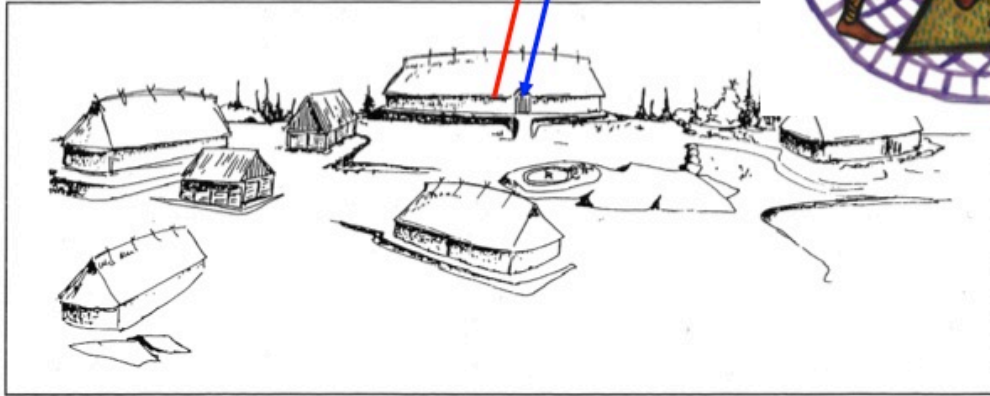
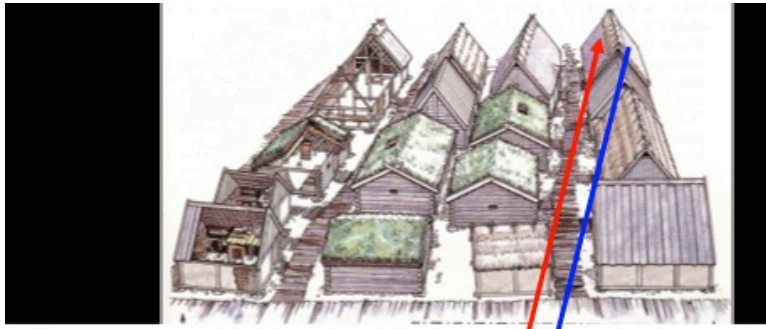
Zone 3 dwelling day & night

Zone 2 storehouse, multipurpose

Zone 1 workshop

townyard 11th c.

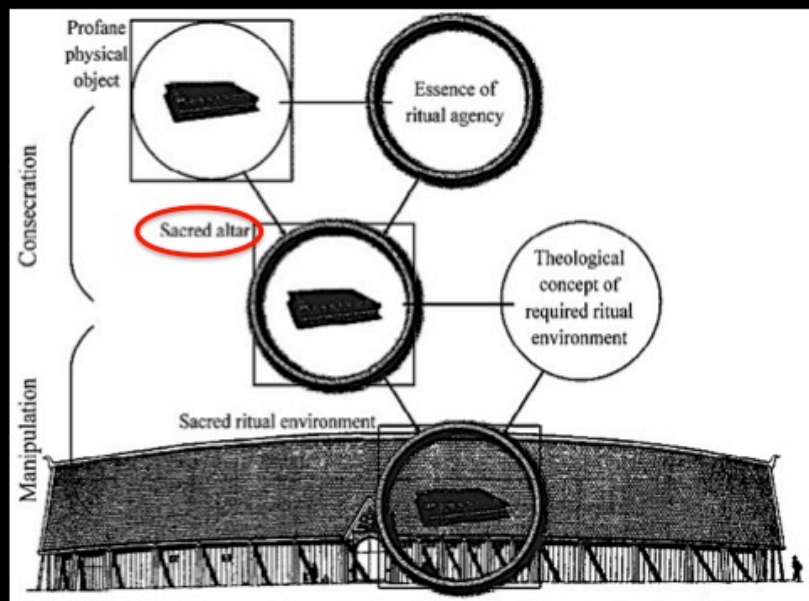




To be in the town, but live in the countryside
Interaction

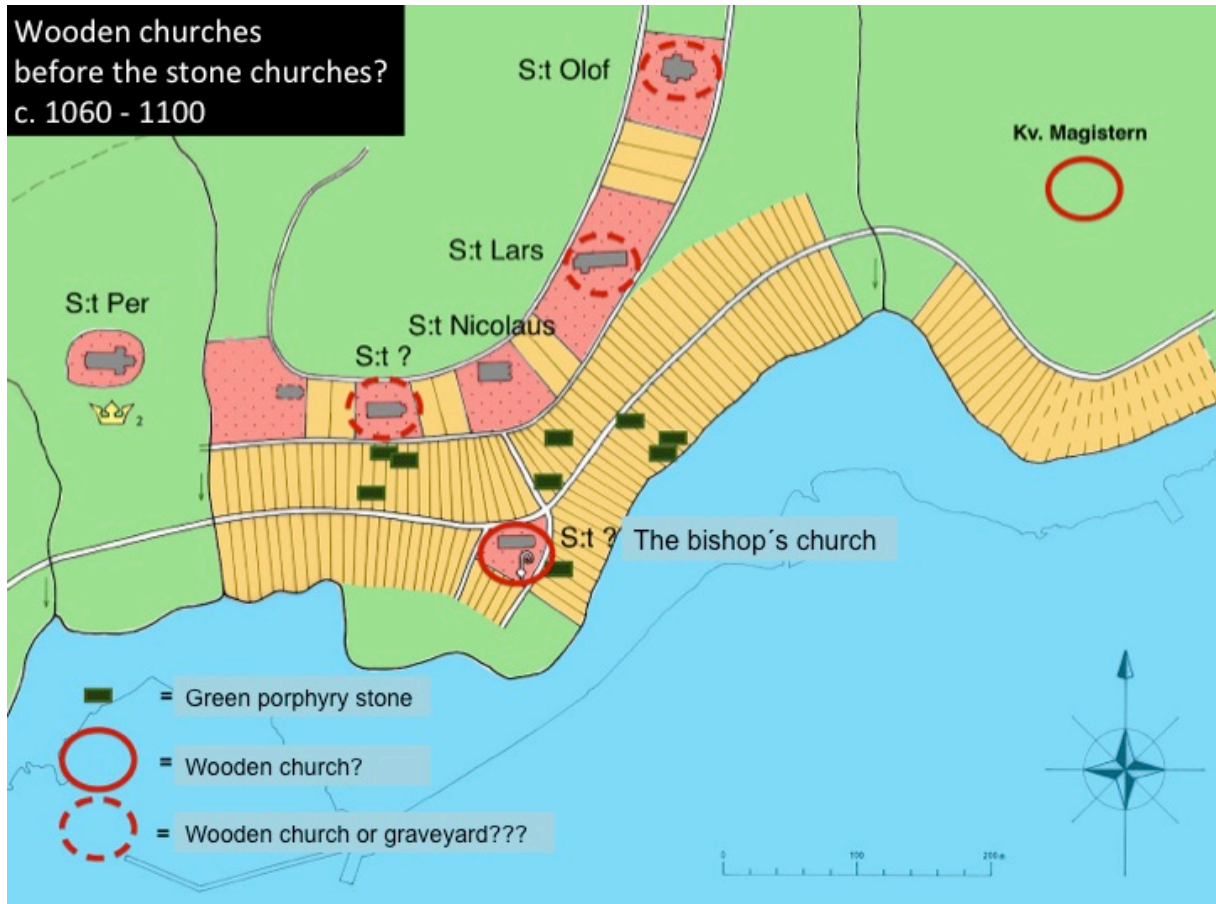
The aristocratic hall

a prechristian cultroom transformed to a room with both Christ and saints present

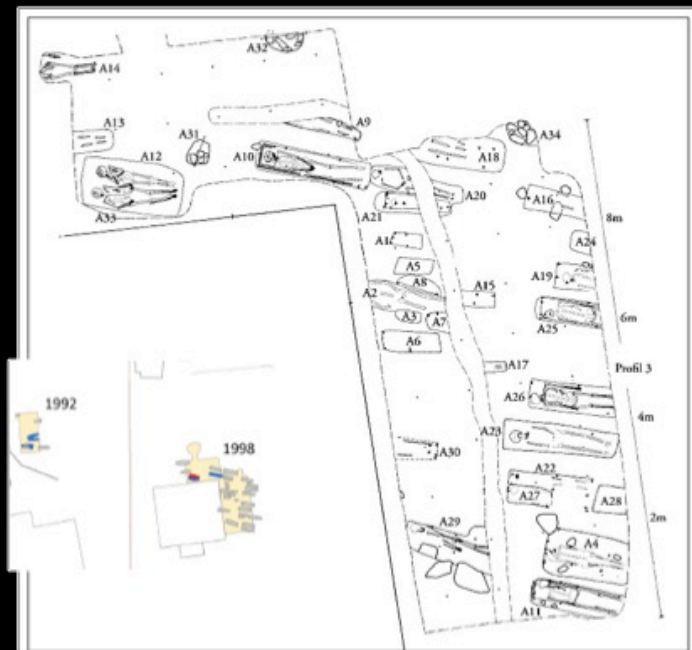
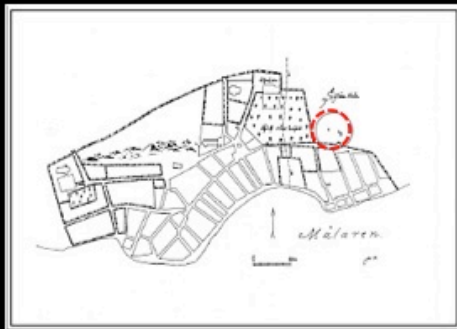


After Dengsø Jessen, Mads, 2010: Altars and the Sacred Space.

Wooden churches
before the stone churches?
c. 1060 - 1100



An indirect proof of a wooden church Kv. Magistern, Sigtuna



Thorarinstadir church, Iceland

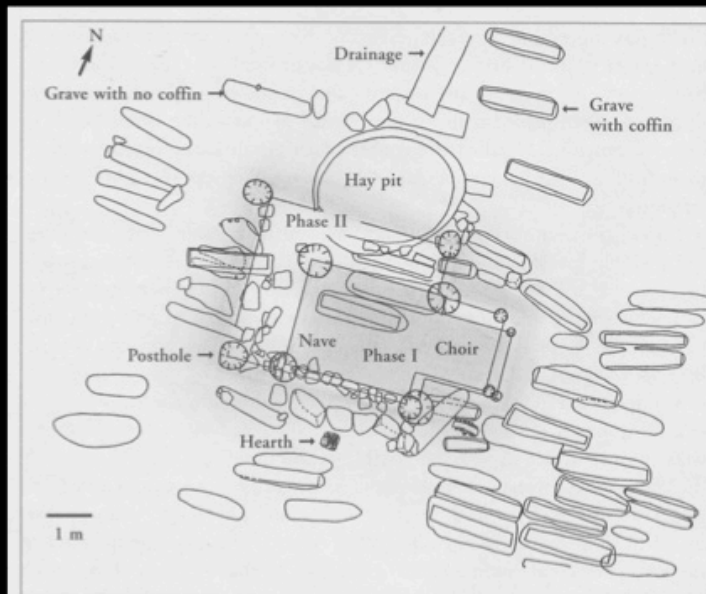
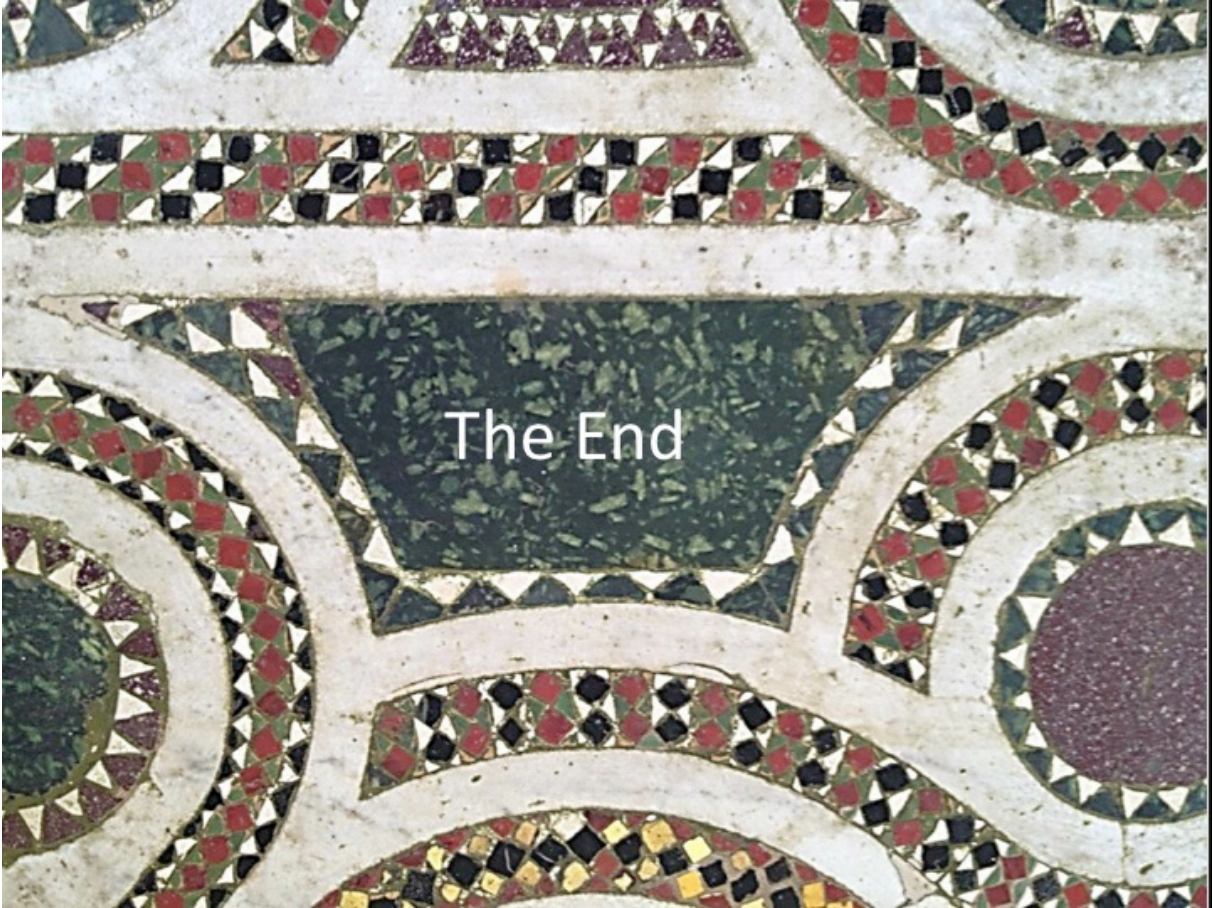


Figure 6. The Þórarinstaðir church (both phases) and the surrounding graveyard, which included 58 graves.

Some Icelandic altar stones





The End