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THE REFORMATION, THE NOBILITY, AND THE PARISH CHURCH

PARISH CHURCH BURIALS OF THE DANISH HIGHER NOBILITY, c. 1536–1559

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between Danish nobles and their rural parish churches through the lens of their choice of burial church in the first decades after the Reformation, c. 1536–1559. Focusing on the choices made by members of the Council of the Realm and their relatives as representatives of the higher nobility, this study examines how common it was for a parish church to be used in the display of status that was part of elite funerary culture, and what this might tell us about nobles' perceptions of the local public sphere constituted by the space in and around the parish church. Drawing on the evidence of textual sources as well as extant funerary monuments, the article finds that the parish church, while not the only option, was an acceptable choice of burial even for the top aristocratic layer of the Danish nobility. Building on studies of funeral rituals and monuments of elite groups in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period from recent decades, the article concludes that the public character of noble burial and funerary practices means that we must consider the local community, with the parish church at its centre, an important arena for the public representation of Danish nobles, even in the decades immediately following the Reformation of 1536, during which the character of connections between manor and parish church can otherwise be more difficult to determine.

Keywords: Denmark, Reformation, nobility, parish church, funerary culture, representation, publicity

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INTRODUCTION

After his victory in the civil war known as the Count's Feud (1534–1536), King Christian III carried out a Lutheran Reformation in Denmark, which led to the deposition of bishops and the seizure of episcopal and monastic property. This marked the beginning of a period (1536–1660) traditionally referred to in Danish historiography as the 'Reign of the Nobility', as the nobility became the undisputed first estate of the kingdom, characterised by privileges and political influence that none of the other estates could rival.

The nobility constituted a legal unit, even if it was characterised by considerable internal differences in terms of wealth and influence, with a small group of magnate families dominating the seats on the Council of the Realm and the lucrative and influential major crown fiefs. The decades leading up to the Reformation had seen the nobility becoming more clearly defined and demarcated from other social groups. In the coronation charters of Frederick I (1523) and Christian III (1536), the estate's economic and legal privileges were expanded, and access to it from below was largely closed. At the same time, Frederick I's order that noble families must use family names (and corresponding coats of arms) from 1526 emphasised how ancestry was becoming more defining for noble status¹.

In this article, I explore the connection between Danish nobles and their parish churches in the decades immediately following the Reformation of 1536 through the lens of their choice of burial church, and the possible reasons why many nobles chose the parish church as a site of commemoration and representation on these occasions.

Over the last few decades, some Danish historians have highlighted the close connection between nobles and their parish churches during the decades leading up to the Reformation. Even if many preferred burial elsewhere, primarily in monastic churches, a picture of an increased noble interest in the

¹ For the effects of the Reformation on the nobility's economic, social, and political position, see Mikkel L. JESPERSEN, *Die Reformation in Dänemark und Schleswig-Holstein und ihre Bedeutung für den Adel*, [in:] *Ritterschaft und Reformation*, hrsg. v. Wolfgang BREUL, Kurt ANDERMANN (Geschichtliche Landeskunde, Bd. 75), Stuttgart 2019, pp. 241–253. Danish historians have noted the gradual 'closure' of the open society of the late Middle Ages in the decades surrounding the Reformation of 1536, see Agnes S. ARNÓRSDÓTTIR, Per INGESMAN, Bjørn POULSEN, *Mod en magtudredning for det danske samfund i senmiddelalderen. Afsluttende perspektivering*, [in:] *Konge, kirke og samfund. De to øvrighedsmagter i dansk senmiddelalder*, red. Agnes S. ARNÓRSDÓTTIR, Per INGESMAN, Bjørn POULSEN, Aarhus 2007, pp. 559, 578–580. For the ordinance regulating family names, see *Den danske rigsløvgivning 1523–1558*, udg. Aage ANDERSEN, København 2015, pp. 106–107. For the coronation charters, see *Danske Kongers Haandfæstninger og andre lignende Acter*, [in:] *Aarsberetninger fra det Kongelige Geheimearchiv*, Bd. 2, udg. Caspar F. WEGENER, Kjöbenhavn 1856–1860, pp. 1–150.

parish church in the later Middle Ages has most recently found some support in Tine Kondrup's 2019 doctoral dissertation on noble memorial strategies, in which she conducts a comprehensive analysis of Danish nobles' choices of burial churches in the period between 1400 and 1537. While the choices of burial sites in the preserved testaments show that monastic churches and other churches with many priests attached were the preferred option, the extant (or otherwise known) gravestones paint a picture of a relatively greater interest in parish church burials at the expense of monastic churches in the period 1500–1537. Even with the reservation that we do not know whether all gravestones are preserved *in situ*, it does suggest that nobles may increasingly have considered the parish church to be a worthy setting for burials in the decades leading up to the Reformation. Kondrup suggests that the popularity of parish churches can perhaps be explained by less competition from other high-status burials and by a desire to include the people who had known the deceased nobleman well during his lifetime in intercessory prayers for his soul².

Looking abroad, German historians have highlighted an aspect of continuity in the attention of nobles towards their rural parish churches in the later Middle Ages and the Reformation period. In a study of the memorial culture of the non-princely nobility of the Palatinate, Steffen Krieb has pointed to a shift in focus when it comes to the ecclesiastical institutions where the most important commemoration of the dead took place. Whereas monasteries had previously been the preferred choice, the growing importance of newly endowed churches under the control of noble donors, as well as the expansion of the manor's parish church, which was solely committed to the family's own *memoria*, becomes noticeable from the middle of the fifteenth century³.

In Denmark, too, historians have noticed a certain continuity in noble interest in the parish church across the Reformation. Ole Bay has argued that while the large monastery churches ceased to be the nobility's preferred burial places, the close relationship between the nobility and the parish church after

² Tine KONDRUP, *Repræsentation og mindestrategier hos den danske adel, 1400–1537* (PhD diss., Syddansk Universitet), Odense 2019, pp. 109–111, 279; see also Per SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Det adelige minde i sognekirken – om en messerstiftelse ved Skamby Kirke i 1410*, [in:] *Diplomatarium Danicum*, https://tekstnet.dk/resources/seesko-toennesen-p_det-adelige-minde-i-sognekirken/article.pdf [accessed online 15 April 2026].

³ Steffen KRIEB, *Jenseitsvorsorge, Herrschaftsrepräsentation und Familiengedächtnis. Zur Memorialpraxis des Niederadels im Pfälzer Raum zwischen Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, [in:] *Ritterschaft und Reformation*, hrsg. v. Wolfgang BREUL, Kurt ANDERMANN (Geschichtliche Landeskunde, Bd. 75), Stuttgart 2019, p. 13; see also Karl-Heinz SPIEß, *Liturgische Memoria und Herrschaftsrepräsentation im nichtfürstlichen Hochadel des Spätmittelalters*, [in:] *Adelige und bürgerliche Erinnerungskulturen des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, hrsg. v. Werner RÖSENER (Formen der Erinnerung, Bd. 8), Göttingen 2000, pp. 106–107; cf. T. KONDRUP, op.cit., p. 111 (with further references).

the Reformation was not something entirely new. It was rather a connection that took on new forms of expression⁴. Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen has also pointed to a tendency to perceive the parish church as an acceptable, and perhaps even attractive, burial place for nobles throughout the Reformation period, which then further strengthened the connection as a result of the dissolution of monasteries. Although cathedrals and other town churches remained desirable, he points out that the effort and money invested in burials in rural parish churches testify to the fact that they could be associated with high status. Burial places inside the church, which were reserved for a very few, came to function as clear demonstrations of status and hierarchy. If anything, the presence of nobles in the parish church space after the Reformation might have appeared even more significant and exclusive, as other parishioners – who had previously been able to participate in donations and endowments for the parish church as members of broader groups – likely became less visible as donors after the Reformation⁵.

As a whole, the period between the Reformation and Absolutism has been described as ‘the classic period’ of manorial investment in parish churches in Denmark⁶, characterised by building initiatives, adornments, furniture, and grave monuments that clearly indicate the connection between the church and the local lordship. Noble initiative and investment especially became noticeable during the second half of the sixteenth century, reflecting perhaps the general prosperity after the Northern Seven Years’ War with Sweden (1563–1570), as well as the expanding cultural ambitions, aims of self-representation, and claims to inherited influence of the estate⁷.

⁴ Ole BAY, *Den danske adel og kirken efter reformationen (1536–1660)*, [in:] *Riget, magten og æren. Den danske adel 1350–1660*, red. Per INGESMAN, Jens V. JENSEN, Aarhus 2001, pp. 293–294.

⁵ Martin W. JÜRGENSEN, *Ritual and Art across the Danish Reformation: Changing Interiors of Village Churches, 1450–1600* (Ritus et Artes, vol. 6), Turnhout 2018, pp. 200–203, 510–511.

⁶ Ebbe NYBORG, Birgitte B. JOHANSEN, *Herregård og kirke*, [in:] *Herregården. Menneske – samfund – landskab – bygninger*, Bd. 3: *Drift og landskab*, red. John ERICHSEN, Mikkel V. PEDERSEN, København 2005, p. 251.

⁷ Birgitte B. JOHANSEN, Hugo JOHANSEN, *Re-forming the Confessional Space: Early Lutheran Churches in Denmark, c. 1536–1660*, [in:] *Lutheran Churches in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew SPICER, Farnham–Burlington 2012, pp. 256, 266, 275; E. NYBORG, B. B. JOHANSEN, op.cit., p. 251. See also Hanne H. DE LICHTENBERG, *Tro, håb og forfølgelighed. Kunstneriske udtryksformer i 1500-tallets Danmark* (Renæssancestudier, vol. 3), København 1989, p. 21; Eva L. LILLIE, *Adelen og kirkekunsten ca. 1400–1660*, [in:] *Riget, magten og æren. Den danske adel 1350–1660*, red. Per INGESMAN, Jens V. JENSEN, Aarhus 2001, pp. 328–329; O. BAY, op.cit., p. 298; Christian A. JENSEN, *Danske adelige Gravsten. Fra Sengotikens og Renaissancens Tid. Studier over Værksteder og Kunstnere*, Bd. 1: *Tiden 1470–1570*, København 1951, p. 97. For Germany, cf. Inga BRINKMANN, *Grabdenkmäler, Grablegen und Begräbniswesen des lutherischen Adels. Adelige Funeralrepräsentation im Spannungsfeld von Kontinuität und Wandel im 16. und beginnenden 17. Jahrhundert* (Kunstwissenschaftliche Studien, Bd. 163), Berlin 2010, p. 82.

On the other hand, it can be more difficult to get a clear impression of the relationship between Danish nobles and their parish churches in the decades immediately following the Reformation. The main focus during this period seems to have been on the adaptation of existing medieval church buildings to meet the demands of liturgical change, rather than on new building activity⁸. An understanding of the connection between manor and parish church is further complicated by the fact that written sources documenting local church administration, such as churchwardens' accounts, are sparsely preserved.

The commemoration of the dead, however, offers an opportunity to approach the relationship between manors and parish churches in the decades immediately after the Reformation, during which our knowledge of noble donations, building activity, and related practices is limited. In contrast to other forms of church inventory, funerary monuments in the form of tombstones are preserved in relatively large numbers from this period, and in these, as well as in textual evidence of noble funerary practices, the contours of how local lordships could be present in their parish churches during these decades become visible. Because of the relative abundance of source material, the study of noble funerary culture has formed an important part of both older and more recent broader studies of burial and memorial culture in Denmark and Norway in the period after the Reformation⁹. However, the question of what the parish church, as opposed to other kinds of churches, could offer in connection with noble burials has not been central to these studies.

In recent decades, numerous studies of the funeral rituals and monuments of elite groups in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period have demonstrated how these – adapted to the abilities, desires, and ideas regarding the afterlife of groups and individuals – could serve to stage and legitimise power, status, and social position¹⁰. As emphasised by Arne Bugge Amundsen, the commemoration of prominent deceased persons – as it found expression

⁸ Martin W. JÜRGENSEN, *Between New Ideals and Conservatism: The Early Lutheran Church Interior in Sixteenth-Century Denmark*, Church History, vol. 86: 2017, no. 4, pp. 1044–1048.

⁹ Most recently, in *Å minnes de døde. Døden og de døde i Norge etter reformasjonen*, red. Tarald RASMUSSEN, Oslo 2019. A classic treatment of sixteenth-century funeral customs is Troels TROELS-LUND, *Dagligt Liv i Norden i det sekstende Aarhundrede*, Bd. 4, Bog 14, København 1929–1931. For noble funeral sermons, see Grethe JACOBSEN, *Danske ligprædikener 1565–1610. Køn, stand og embede i en litterær genre*, Historisk Tidsskrift, Bd. 115: 2015, H. 1, pp. 1–36; Rasmus S. JAKOBSEN, *Adel mellem Gud og folk efter reformationen. Adelsvældens øvrighedsideologi belyst gennem de publicerede ligprædikener* (PhD diss., Aarhus Universitet), Aarhus 2019 (with further references).

¹⁰ Phillip BOOTH, Elizabeth TINGLE, *Introduction: Dying, Death, and Commemoration, 1350–1700*, [in:] *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300–1700*, ed. Philip BOOTH, Elizabeth TINGLE (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, vol. 94), Leiden 2021, pp. 14–16, 24–26 (with further references).

in funeral processions, ceremonies, monuments, and other forms – in Danish-Norwegian society after the Reformation, was characterised by what Jürgen Habermas has termed a ‘publicness of representation’¹¹. Within it, the status of a manorial lord, for example, had to be publicly represented. Through the public presence of the person of the lord, he displayed himself as an embodiment of some ‘higher’ power that became visible in personal attributes, such as insignia, dress, demeanour, and rhetoric¹². As Howard Kaminsky has emphasised for the late Middle Ages, status could be maintained only by being publicly exhibited. To be noble, too, was to show that one was so¹³. This applied in death as well. A conspicuous sepulchral monument could indicate noble status and social position to other parishioners as well as to visitors from outside, and the installation of such a permanent memorial was preceded by a funeral ceremony, which also had the potential to make an impression on those present.

What did the parish church have to offer on these occasions? After all, as landowners and office holders, many members of the higher nobility regularly found themselves in public spheres beyond the parish borders, for example, at the royal court or in towns of regional or national importance. During the period between Christian III’s death in 1559 and Frederick II’s legislation on noble burials in 1576, we can observe an orientation towards Copenhagen among some prominent members of the estate, and in the period that followed, towns of regional importance, such as the cathedral town of Odense, were much-used settings for the public spectacle associated with noble weddings and funerals¹⁴.

Nevertheless, during the period between the Reformation of 1536 and the death of Christian III in 1559, even high-ranking members of the nobility fairly often chose parish church burials. Even if they were not the only option, local churches must have been perceived as an acceptable setting for the commemoration of the deceased, even by those nobles who had the opportunity to choose burial churches exposed to a wider public.

Even though sources are rarely explicit about the reasons behind the individuals’ choices of burial place, in what follows, I will attempt to point to some possible factors that might have played a part in attracting Danish nobles to their parish churches. In doing so, I hope to contribute to our understanding

¹¹ *Å minnes de døde*, pp. 66–67.

¹² Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas BURGER, collab. Frederick LAWRENCE (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought), Cambridge 1989, pp. 5–14.

¹³ Howard KAMINSKY, *Estate, Nobility, and the Exhibition of Estate in the Later Middle Ages*, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, vol. 68: 1993, no. 3, pp. 695–696.

¹⁴ See, e.g., H. H. DE LICHTENBERG, op.cit., pp. 72–73; Per SEESKO, ”...med adelig proces...”. *Odense som centralt orienteringspunkt belyst gennem adelige bryllupper og begravelser ca. 1560–1670*, *Kulturstudier*, Årg. 8: 2017, Nr. 1, pp. 5–38.

of the character of the relationship between this aristocratic group and their rural parish churches, and of how it was affected by the Reformation.

As a point of departure, I will take the choice of burial church among noble members of the Council of the Realm, c. 1536–1559. I will then turn to expectations about the connection between nobles and their churches that found expression in legislation and in the writings of theologians of the new evangelical Church immediately after the Reformation. Next, I will take a closer look at some cases in which reasons for choosing a particular church are actually clearly expressed, and in doing so highlight some of the more practical issues that could affect the choice. I will then consider how personal or family connections to the church in question, as well as the experience of engagement with the parish church and its clergy – even before the Reformation – might have affected individual nobles' choices. Finally, in a discussion of how notions of nobility could be expressed in the funeral ceremony and in the permanent grave monument, I will point to some of the opportunities and demands associated with representation in the local public sphere of the parish church.

BURIALS OF NOBLE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE REALM

In slightly more than half of the cases for which we have sources shedding light on the choice of burial church of noble members of the Council of the Realm from the Reformation of 1536 until the death of the Reformation king, Christian III, in 1559, they were buried in a parish church in the countryside. Among the total of 40 burial places, 21 were in parish churches¹⁵, 7 were in monastic churches¹⁶, 10 were in cathedrals or other urban churches¹⁷, and 2 remain unknown¹⁸.

¹⁵ Johan Urne (d. 1537), Mads Bølle (d. 1539), Ove Lunge (d. 1540), Niels Bild (d. 1540), Axel Urup (d. 1540), Tyge Krabbe (d. 1541), Hans Bille (d. 1542), Knud Bille (d. 1543), Knud Urne (d. 1543), Mogens Gøye (d. 1544), Jørgen Quitzow (d. 1544), Oluf Rosenkrantz (d. 1545), Peder Galt (d. 1548), Niels Lunge (d. 1552), Peder Svave (d. 1552), Erik Banner (d. 1554), Knud Rud (d. 1554), Gabriel Gyldenstjerne (d. 1555), Anders Bille (d. 1555), Mogens Munk (d. 1558), and Claus Bille (d. 1558).

¹⁶ Henrik Tornekrands (d. 1538), Jacob Hardenberg (d. 1542), Joachim Rønnow (d. 1542), Stygge Krumpen (d. 1551), Axel Brahe (d. 1551), Eske Bille (d. 1552), and Ove Bille (d. 1555).

¹⁷ Iver Munk (d. 1539), Jacob Lykke (d. 1541), Aage Sparre (d. 1541), Holger Ulfstand (d. 1542), Truid Ulfstand (d. 1545), Knud Gyldenstjerne (d. 1552), and Torben Bille (d. 1552). These include Mogens Bille (d. 1538), who in his testament (1537) intended the church of the Hospitaller monastery in Odense as his burial place, but was in fact buried in Aarhus Cathedral. Also included is Claus Podebusk (d. 1540), who was initially buried in his parish church in Anderslöv but was moved to Lund Cathedral in 1557. Finally, a gravestone for Predbjørn Podebusk (d. 1544) and his two wives (d. 1506 and 1545, respectively) was placed in the Hospitaller church in Odense, but he was ultimately buried under the same gravestone as his daughter and son-in-law (d. 1573 and 1561, respectively) in Aarhus Cathedral.

¹⁸ Erik Krummedige (d. 1541) and Jørgen Friis (d. 1547).

Included in these numbers are all nobles admitted to the Council before the Reformation or during the reign of Christian III, who died between the Reformation's introduction in 1536 and Christian III's death in 1559¹⁹. While some who lost their seats in the wake of the Reformation and the Count's Feud were soon able to rejoin, others do not seem to have regained their seats²⁰, but have nevertheless been included in this survey as representatives of the higher nobility.

The Council, which, after the Reformation, was purely noble in its membership, usually consisted of around 15–20 members who governed the country in cooperation with the king²¹. Despite their differences, the members of the Council of the Realm constituted an aristocratic upper tier within the estate, which can be assumed to have set an example for the estate as a whole in terms of representation²².

Our knowledge of their burial churches, as mentioned, comes from both material and written sources. Whereas wooden epitaphs are generally not known for the councillors discussed here²³, we have knowledge of grave monuments in the form of tombstones for almost all of them²⁴. In addition, textual

¹⁹ Basing on the information in Pernille U. KNUDSEN, Anders SODE-PEDERSEN, *Rigsrådet 1536–1660. Biografi af medlemmerne af rigsrådet*, [in:] *Kongens Retterting 1537–1660*, Bd. 1: *Indledning*, red. Ditlev TAMM, København 2003, pp. 131–222; and Lars MIKKELSEN, Anders TOXVÆRD, *Det danske rigsråd 1448–1570. En prosopografisk analyse af det danske rigsråd i perioden 1. september 1448 – 26. februar 1570 med særligt henblik på rådernes geografiske, økonomiske, slægts- og familiemæssige samt uddannelsesmæssige baggrund* (Master's thesis, Odense Universitet), Odense 1982. Included are also those who owed their admission to the Council to holding a clerical office before the Reformation but who remained or were re-admitted as secular members after it. Excluded are the non-noble clerical members of the pre-Reformation Council who died during the period considered here. Included, however, is Knud Urne (d. 1543), who resigned voluntarily in 1527, but not Hans Barnekow, Christoffer Huitfeldt, or Erik Podebusk, all of whom died in 1559, after the death and burial of Christian III.

²⁰ William MOLLERUP, *Bille-Ættens Historie*, Bd. 1, København 1893, pp. 624–628.

²¹ For an introduction to the post-Reformation Council, see Leon JESPERSEN, *Danmarks riges råd. Rigsrådsinstitutionen 1536–1660*, [in:] *Kongens Retterting 1537–1660*, Bd. 1: *Indledning*, red. Ditlev TAMM, København 2003, pp. 91–106. See also M. L. JESPERSEN, op.cit., pp. 38–41.

²² Cf. O. BAY, op.cit., p. 307.

²³ One, now lost, was placed over Eske Bille in the choir of Copenhagen's Church of the Holy Spirit, where his grave was also marked by a stone, see Peder H. RESEN, *Inscriptiones haffnienses latinæ, danicæ et germanicæ*, København 1668, pp. 120, 124.

²⁴ Apart from Erik Krummedige (d. 1541) and Jørgen Friis (d. 1547), whose burial places are not known, exceptions include Mogens Bille (d. 1538), Aage Sparre (d. 1541), and Joachim Rønnow (d. 1542), for whom burial places are known but no monuments. A catalogue of the gravestones of the Danish nobility, 1470–1600, is available in Christian A. JENSEN, *Danske adelige Gravsten. Fra Sengotikens og Renaissancens Tid. Studier over Værksteder og Kunstnere*, Bd. 1–2, København 1951–1953.

evidence, such as testaments and historical records written by relatives or descendants, mentions burials or the choice of burial place for quite a few²⁵. In one case, we know that the deceased was later moved to another church²⁶, and there are several notable examples of tombstones being relocated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in connection with the establishment of family mausoleums at a family's main seat²⁷. With the caveat that some relocations may have occurred without our knowledge, it is assumed here that, unless explicitly noted otherwise, the tombstones have remained in the churches where they were originally placed.

²⁵ Peter F. SUHM, *Samlinger til den Danske Historie*, Bd. 2, H. 3, København 1784, pp. 25 (Claus Podebusk), 27 (Anders Bille), 28 (Hans Bille), 32 (Claus Podebusk, Tyge Krabbe, and Axel Brahe), 33 (Holger Ulfstand and Truid Ulfstand); Mogens Gøye's testament (1514), Rigsarkivet, København, Håndskriftsamlingen, I. Individuelle samlinger af blandet indhold, Terkel Klevenfeldt (1030–1777), package 26 (Mogens Gøye); Ch. A. JENSEN, op.cit., Bd. 1, pp. 235–236 (Mogens Gøye); Bertel Ch. SANDVIG, *Christopher Gyldenstierns, Niels Friises og Fleres Optegnelser om sig og sin Slægt*, Magazin til den danske Adels Historie, Bd. 1: 1824, p. 60 (Erik Banner and Gabriel Gyldenstjerne); Johan GRUNDTVIG, *Ejler Brokkenhuses historiske Kalenderantegnelser for 16de Aarhundrede*, Samlinger til Fyens Historie og Topographie, Bd. 6: 1873, p. 313 (Gabriel Gyldenstjerne); Klaus LYSKANDER, *Billeslægtens Rimkrønike*, udg. Holger F. RØRDAM, København 1888, pp. 9–11 (Claus Bille); Christian WEEKE, *Claus Bille's Kalenderoptegnelser*, Danske Samlinger, Rk. 2, Bd. 5: 1876–1877, p. 60 (Joachim Rønnow); *Hr. Eske Billes Testament. 1551*, Danske Magazin, Rk. 1, Bd. 4: 1750, pp. 239–243 (Eske Bille); *Skrifter af Peder Palladius. Hidtil utrykte latinske skrifter*, red. Martin S. LAUSTEN, København 1968, p. 120 (Eske Bille); *Slutningen af Samlede Efterretninger om Biskop Ove Bilde af Aarhus, Nye Danske Magazin*, Bd. 1: 1794, pp. 241–248 (Ove Bille); *Hr. Mogens Billes Testament. 1537*, Danske Magazin, Rk. 1, Bd. 6: 1752, pp. 49–54 (Mogens Bille); *Monumenta historiae Danicæ. Historiske Kildeskrifter og Bearbejdelser af dansk Historie især fra det 16. Aarhundrede*, Bd. 1, udg. Holger F. RØRDAM, København 1873, pp. 479–480 (Mogens Bille); Aage Sparre's testament, Rigsarkivet, København, Mogens Henriksen Gyldenstjerne og hustru Anne Sparre, Originale dokumenter (1500–1569), package 9; *Udvalg af Gamle Danske Domme, afsagte paa Kongens Retterting og paa Landsting*, Bd. 1, udg. Janus L.A. KOLDERUP-ROSENVINGE, København 1842, pp. 159–163 (Truid Ulfstand); *Civitatum quarundam Schanix brevis descriptio. Autore Magno Matthiæ, Th. Lectore et Canonico Lundensi*, [in:] *Monumenta historiae Danicæ. Historiske Kildeskrifter og Bearbejdelser af dansk Historie især fra det 16. Aarhundrede*, Rk. 2, Bd. 2, udg. Holger F. RØRDAM, København 1885, p. 274 (Holger Ulfstand and Truid Ulfstand).

²⁶ Claus Podebusk, see footnote 17.

²⁷ Rasmus AGERTOFT, *Stones and Bones at Large: Post-Reformation Use of Sepulchral Monuments and Remains from the Danish Monastery Churches*, [in:] *The Dissolution of Monasteries: The Case of Denmark in a Regional Perspective*, ed. Per SEESKO, Louise N. KALLESTRUP, Lars BISGAARD (Studies in History and Social Sciences, vol. 580), Odense 2019, pp. 297–326; Laura K. SKINNEBACH, *Materialitet mellem kontinuitet og forandring. Materiel genbrug og agens i Hornslet Kirke efter Reformationen*, [in:] *Reformation i två riken. Reformationens historia och historiografi i Sverige och Danmark*, red. Kajsa BRILKMAN, Morten FINK-JENSEN, Hanne SANDERS, Göteborg 2019, pp. 264–288.

EXPECTATIONS

In the wake of the Reformation of 1536, the ties between nobles and their parish churches were on the agenda of legislators as well as theologians, with a noble audience in mind. In the Church Ordinance of 1537/1539, despite the appeals of theologians, nobles were exempted from paying tithes. They were nevertheless strongly reminded by the king that since they could not bring themselves to pay what they rightfully owed their parish priests, as the shepherds who provided them with spiritual care, they should – as Christians – voluntarily give to Christ's servants, his preachers, what they might themselves find appropriate²⁸. Existing noble rights of patronage were confirmed. While such rights were not very commonly held by nobles by the Reformation, a number of royal grants in the following decades indicate that they were sought after²⁹. In some parishes, this meant that nobles would have a deciding hand in administering the parish church's economy, as well as in appointing the priest. Where no such rights had been granted, the local lordship may still have been able to influence the election of a candidate whom the superintendent would subsequently examine, as the election was left to a group of the oldest and most respected men of the parish³⁰. Nobles could also, however, be called upon if the priest did not live up to expectations. If neither the rural dean nor the superintendent could correct a priest's conduct, he was to be brought before the local lordship or magistrate (*herskab, magistratus*), or the king's crown fief holder (*lensmand, praefectus*)³¹.

Expectations regarding the relationship between the parish church, its congregation and clergy, and the nobility could also be conveyed during parish visitations by the evangelical superintendents who had succeeded the deposed bishops. In his account (1543) of how he carried out visitations, Zealand's first evangelical superintendent, Peder Palladius, reminded his listeners of their duty to be obedient to their noble landlords as their housefathers in accordance

²⁸ '[...] betencke seg at wære Christne og sielffuillige giffue Christi tienere, som ere hans predickere, huad dennom sielffue got siunes'; *Kirkeordinansen 1537/1539*, red. Martin S. LAUSTEN, København 1989, p. 214; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 82–83, 126. See also the coronation charter of Christian III (1536) and the Copenhagen Recess of 1547, *Danske Kirkelove, samt Udvalg af andre Bestemmelser vedrørende Kirken, Skolen og de fattiges Forsørgelse fra Reformationen indtil Christian V's Danske Lov, 1536–1683*, Bd. 1, udg. Holger F. RØRDAM, Kjøbenhavn 1883, pp. 1, 274.

²⁹ Troels DAHLERUP, *Danmark [Patronatsrätt]*, [in:] *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*, Bd. 13, red. Georg RONA, Allan KARKER, København 1968, pp. 138–139; Erik SCHALLING, *Kyrkogodset i Skåne, Halland och Blekinge under dansk tid* (Statens offentliga utredningar, 1936: 28), Stockholm 1936, pp. 244–245; R. S. JAKOBSEN, *op.cit.*, pp. 237–241.

³⁰ *Kirkeordinansen 1537/1539*, pp. 112, 188–189; *Danske Kirkelove*, pp. 196–197.

³¹ *Kirkeordinansen 1537/1539*, p. 226; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 133–134; cf. R. S. JAKOBSEN, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

with the Fourth Commandment³². Nobles, on the other hand, were admonished not to keep their poor subordinates from attending church – ‘from the Holy Gospel and their souls’ salvation on Sundays’ – without serious reasons³³. The lordship’s authority, as Palladius explained in another context, came with responsibilities too. In his preface to a text published in 1544 and dedicated to the noble Eline Godov, widow of the Councillor Henrik Gøye (d. 1533), Palladius recounts how he had known an unnamed nobleman from Zealand who, having come to the right faith, had never neglected his parish church when he was well, but had gladly frequented it with his entire household. Palladius expressed his hope that other noblemen would follow this example, ‘in the praise of God, for their own salvation, and for the edification of others in faith’³⁴.

Such expectations may have contributed to shaping perceptions of a nobleman or noblewoman’s role as a local authority and a role model in matters of religion. The expectation that members of the estate should set a pious example to others is expressed in the biographical portrayals of individual nobles in the genre of the printed Lutheran funeral sermon, describing the exemplary life and death of the deceased. As pointed out by Rasmus Skovgaard Jakobsen, nobles were not only portrayed as pious, but sometimes also as generous benefactors of churches and clergy, whom they were to honour, respect and listen to in questions of religion³⁵. The genre, which developed in Germany in the mid-sixteenth century, had the potential to reach a wide audience and became what Craig Koslofsky has described as a culmination of the Lutheran death ritual’s staging of the deceased’s ‘faith, life and ancestry’³⁶. In Denmark,

³² Peder Palladius’ *Visitatsbog*, udg. Lis JACOBSEN, København 1925, pp. 40–41.

³³ ‘Och den christen adel schal her vare paa at de icke aff lætt aarsag forhindrer deris fatige undersaathe om søndage och andre hellige dage, fra det hellige evangelium och deris sielss salighed, [...]’; *ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁴ ‘Jeg kende en ædelmand, ipperlig nock her vdi Siælland, [...] han haffde saa mectige stoer wilie, at søge til hans Sognekircke met hans børn tiund oc howfolck, Ja, pleyede end gierne selff at siunge met degnen, oc forsømde ingen tid sin Sognekircke, naar han wor helbrede, huilcket wel er beuseligt, forhobendes at det maa end ocsaa beuege andre vdaff Adelen, at efterfølge dette eksempel, Gud til loff, dem selffue til salighed, oc andre til en opbyggelse vdi troen’; Urbanus RHEGIUS, *Siælens Lægedom, for de karske oc sywge, i disse farlige tider, oc i dødz nød*, oversat af Matthias PARVUS ROSÆFONTANUS, København 1544, [unpaginated introduction]; cf. *Å minnes de døde*, p. 125.

³⁵ R. S. JAKOBSEN, *op.cit.*, pp. 243–284. Examples concerning parish churches and clergy are found in the sermons for Holger Rosenkrantz (1517–1575), in *Den danske Adel i det 16de og 17de Aarhundrede*, Bd. 1, udg. Carl F. BRICKA, Sophus M. GJELLERUP, Kjøbenhavn 1874–1875, pp. 83–84; Predbjørn Bild (1556–1602), *ibid.*, p. 404; Jacob Bjørn (1561–1596), *ibid.*, p. 528; and Anne Knob (1531–1580), *ibid.*, pp. 535, 538.

³⁶ Craig KOSLOFSKY, *From Presence to Remembrance: The Transformation of Memory in the German Reformation*, [in:] *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, ed. Alon CONFINO, Peter FRITZSCHE, Urbana–Chicago 2002, pp. 30–31; *idem*, *The*

printed sermons gradually became common for nobles during the second half of the sixteenth century, the earliest known being published after the death of the Councillor and Admiral Herluf Trolle in 1565³⁷.

Not only was the lord expected to remember his responsibilities toward his parish church, its congregation and clergy, but he was also expected, when possible, to be present there for the edification of others. The fact that a nobleman could occupy a prominent place in the parish church in death thus corresponded to the prominent place he was expected to occupy in life as a role model and local authority, along with the associated responsibilities towards the community's church, its congregation, and its clergy.

Even if the Church Ordinance does not mention the burials of nobles specifically, the leading theologians of the new Church did show an interest in them. Peder Palladius wrote a short treatise on the phenomenon, which was also addressed at a diocesan synod in 1561 by the Odense superintendent Niels Jespersen, who later treated it in instructions issued in 1566, to which we shall return.

CHOICES

Although there was an expectation that nobles should have an affiliation with the parish church, the Ordinance's brief provisions on funerals do not address the possibility of choosing one's own burial church. In practice, however, we can observe that nobles had the option of choosing, for example, a monastic church or cathedral rather than their own parish church.

As mentioned, our sources rarely supply an explanation of the individual's choice of burial place. In most cases, it is not even clear *who* decided on the place of burial. However, judging from the few preserved testaments of councillors from this period, it seems that the individual nobleman would normally have considered the matter himself³⁸. Many of the councillors must have had several options. Quite apart from the option of choosing an urban or monastic church, they owned manors in several places throughout the realm. In very few cases, though, do we know which alternatives were considered.

One of these cases concerns the *hofmester* Eske Bille (d. 1552), who drew up his testament a year before his death³⁹. He could then look back on a long

Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450–1700, Basingstoke 2000, p. 81.

³⁷ G. JACOBSEN, *Danske ligprædikener*, pp. 1–36.

³⁸ *Hr. Mogens Bildes Testament*, pp. 49–54; Aage Sparre's testament, Rigsarkivet, København, Mogens Henriksen Gyldenstjerne og hustru Anne Sparre, Originale dokumenter (1500–1569), package 9; *Hr. Eske Bildes Testament*, pp. 239–243; *Slutningen af Samlede Efterretninger om Biskop Ove Bilde af Aarhus*, pp. 241–248.

³⁹ *Hr. Eske Bildes Testament*, pp. 239–243.

career in the service of four Danish kings, and by all accounts belonged to the highest aristocratic echelon of the nobility. The first point he addressed was the choice of burial place. If God were to call him while he was in Scania, he was to be buried in Lund Cathedral. Should it happen in Copenhagen, he wished to be buried in the town's Church of the Holy Spirit, a former monastery church now serving as a parish church, and if he died elsewhere on Zealand, he was to be taken to Roskilde Cathedral. If, however, it were to happen in the province of Halland, he wished to be buried in his parish church alongside his wife, Sophie Krummedige (d. 1538), that is, in the parish church of his manor Vallen in Våxtorp parish. This seems to have been his preferred choice. The inscription on the stone he had placed over Sophie there in 1543 testifies to his desire 'to rest here with her and be found with her and all Christians in the kingdom of God'⁴⁰. In his testament, he stipulated that if the church in Våxtorp were nevertheless deprived of the payment of 100 marks intended for the burial church, it should, like each of the parish churches at his other principal estates in Zealand and Scania (which were apparently not considered for his burial), receive a gift of 20 marks. However, fate would have it that a few months later, in February 1552, he died in Copenhagen and was buried in the Church of the Holy Spirit – a church which he would have known well⁴¹. In his funeral sermon, the above-mentioned superintendent Peder Palladius stated that although Bille had not immediately or easily changed his religion, he had not been a persecutor of the Word, but had diligently listened to it in his burial church⁴².

That it was not a given which type of church members of the nobility should be buried in is further illustrated by the burial places of three of Eske Bille's brothers, all of whom were also members of the Council of the Realm. Mogens Bille died in 1538 as the first among them. In his last will, drawn up the previous year, he had chosen burial in the Hospitallers' Church of St John in Odense, where their mother had founded an altar and was buried herself. However, when he died on a ship in Ebeltoft Vig, he was instead laid to rest in nearby Aarhus Cathedral⁴³, where another brother, Ove Bille (d. 1555), had

⁴⁰ '[...] gerne begerindis af Gvd at han oc mve hvilis her hves oc findis met hiinne oc alle chreste i Gvds rige'; Ch. A. JENSEN, *op.cit.*, Bd. 1, p. 143, figure XV.

⁴¹ P. H. RESEN, *op.cit.*, pp. 120, 124.

⁴² 'Postquam autem renouatum et reuocatum est apud nos Euangelii lumen, sicut fuit grauis vir in consiliis, ita non facile nec statim mutauit religionem multis impedimentis, vt sit reuocatus longo post tempore venit, tandem non fuit persecutor verbi, sed sedulus auditor etiam in hoc ipso templo ad Spiritum Sanctum hic Haffniæ, donec ad verbum crux accessit, et poenitus verbo et voluntati se Dei subiecit [...]'; *Skifter af Peder Palladius*, p. 120.

⁴³ *Hr. Mogens Billes Testament*, pp. 49–54; W. MOLLERUP, *op.cit.*, pp. 643–645.

served as bishop until 1536. Still respected and esteemed after his release from the imprisonment that, like the other bishops, he had endured, he was granted the rich Skovkloster monastery on Zealand as a fief by the king. For his burial place, however, he chose to rest with his father and grandfather in the nearby Hospitaller priory of Antvorskov, together with a brother who had already died in 1518⁴⁴. The fourth brother, Councillor Knud Bille (d. 1543), was buried in the parish church of Gladsax in Scania, where he had resided at the castle of the crown fief he administered and where his wife was already buried⁴⁵. Within the same group of siblings, it could be an option either to continue the family tradition of monastic burials or to choose a burial site in a rural parish church.

In the vast majority of cases, parish church burials took place where the deceased had one of their manors, with a few being buried where they held crown fiefs⁴⁶. This was, in many cases, also where they had died, and for Axel Urup (d. 1541), for example, the burial in the parish church followed only a few days later⁴⁷. Others, however, were buried at some distance from the place of death and not necessarily soon thereafter. Peder Ebbesen Galt (d. 1548) died at his manor, Palsgaard, but was buried several weeks later in the parish church of his other estate, Tyrrestrup. When his wife died at Tyrrestrup in 1551, she was not laid to rest with him until almost two months had passed⁴⁸.

However, the slightly later case of Johan Friis of Hesselagergård (d. 1570), Christian III's enormously influential and wealthy chancellor, demonstrates that the place of death could be a deciding factor. In 1540, he erected a monument to his ancestors spanning four generations in Odense's Greyfriars Church, where he also decided to be buried himself, and he later had pews with his ancestral coats of arms installed⁴⁹. Nevertheless, his funeral sermon tells us that he had prepared his grave and epitaph in his rural parish church in Hesselager (on Funen). Shortly before his death on Zealand in 1570, he finally decided to be buried in Copenhagen's Church of Our Lady, with which he was also associated as chancellor of the university and where a niece and a nephew were already buried. Although his attention had already been directed to the preparations made in the parish church, he specifically stated that he did not wish his body to be transported to a burial place far from the place of death, and warned that God might one day punish Denmark, and especially the nobility and the wealthy, for the useless and haughty splendour that characterised

⁴⁴ *Slutningen af Samlede Efterretninger om Biskop Ove Bilde af Aarhus*, pp. 241–248.

⁴⁵ W. MOLLERUP, *op.cit.*, p. 664.

⁴⁶ Apart from Knud Bille, this also applies to Mads Bølle (d. 1539).

⁴⁷ Carl G. G. HILFELING, *Hilfelings skaanske tegninger*, København 1977, p. 36.

⁴⁸ *Søvind Kirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. XVI: 9, København 1996–2002, p. 5026.

⁴⁹ † *Gråbrødre Klosterkirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. IX: 3, København 1998–2001, pp. 1820, 1841–1842.

their weddings and funerals⁵⁰. Although he was not ultimately buried there, his parish church in Hesselager nevertheless stands as an example of the importance that a leading nobleman could attach to the church of his manor. Through extensive building projects, as well as epitaphs and other inscriptions within the church interior, he transformed it into a magnificent monument to himself and his family, and emphasised its connections to Hesselagergård, which he had elevated to an entailed estate in 1548, the first of its kind in Denmark⁵¹. In this way, the parish church helped demarcate the area around the manor as his domain⁵².

CONNECTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

A choice of burial in the parish church, as we have seen, does not necessarily mean that alternatives were not considered, and in some cases other churches were preferred. For some, the possibility of burial in the same place as earlier generations of their family may have been a reason for choosing former monastic or mendicant churches. As a consequence of the Reformation, monastic and mendicant houses – which in some cases had been the focus of family attention for generations – faced eventual closure. In some places, this meant the continued use of monastery churches by parish congregations, while in others such churches were demolished as they fell into disuse⁵³.

We cannot rule out that uncertainty regarding the fate of monasteries and the donations made to them may have led to some caution in choosing burials in these churches immediately after the Reformation. However, although traditional monastic life and its liturgical practices were attacked, the monastery churches themselves do not generally seem to have been perceived as controversial. In 1559, the Reformation king himself, Christian III, was buried in Odense Cathedral, which housed the bones of King Canute the Holy and was linked to the local Benedictine monastery, still administered on behalf of the king by its prior. We should be careful not to assume in hindsight that all exist-

⁵⁰ Anders Sørensen Vedels ligprædiken over Johan Friis, [in:] *Danske Taler – den levende talesamling*, <https://www.dansketaler.dk/tale/anders-sorensen-vedels-ligpraediken-over-johan-friis> [accessed online 15 April 2026].

⁵¹ Christian T. ENGELSTOFT, *Det første Forsøg paa at oprette et Stamhuus i Danmark*, Samlinger til Fyens Historie og Topographie, Bd. 3: 1865, pp. 146–152; Olaf OLSEN, *Hesselager Sogn*, [in:] *Trap Danmark*, <https://trap5.lex.dk/sogn/hesselager-sogn-gudme-herred/> [accessed online 15 April 2026]; cf. *Biskop Jacob Madsens visitatsbog 1588–1604*, udg. Jens RASMUSSEN, Anne RIISING, Odense 1995, p. 184.

⁵² Cf. E. NYBORG, B. B. JOHANSEN, op.cit., p. 252.

⁵³ Per SEESKO, *Between King and Congregation: Monastery Churches and Parish Organization in the Kingdom of Denmark after the Reformation*, [in:] *The Dissolution of Monasteries: The Case of Denmark in a Regional Perspective*, ed. idem, Louise N. KALLESTRUP, Lars BISGAARD (Studies in History and Social Sciences, vol. 580), Odense 2019, pp. 273–296.

ing ties to monasteries were abruptly severed at the Reformation of 1536. As we have seen, the brothers Mogens and Ove Bille, who were both sons of Peder Bille (d. 1508), chose monasteries for their burial places. Sometime after the Reformation, Peder Bille's children were involved in a dispute with members of the Gyldenstjerne family, to which his wife had belonged, regarding the donations made by their common ancestors to churches and monasteries. On that occasion, Peder Bille's children stated that if the old ways should be restored, regarding churches, monasteries, and services, they would be willing to let the property endowed by their parents support its original purpose again⁵⁴.

Noble burials still occurred in the churches of monasteries and mendicant houses, which by this point had been transformed into urban parish churches, as well as in those monasteries where monks had been allowed to remain if they did not wish to leave⁵⁵. For some, this can be interpreted as a family tradition and a wish to be buried near their relatives. Apart from Mogens and Ove Bille, this is the case for Axel Brahe (d. 1551) and Stygge Krumpen (d. 1551), who were both buried in monastic churches with chapels and altars connected to their families. The same could also apply to cathedral burials. The brothers Holger (d. 1542) and Truid Ulfstand (d. 1545) were buried in Lund Cathedral, like their father.

Looking at the 21 parish church burials, however, relatively few took place in a church where one or both parents of the deceased already rested. This applies to Knud Urne (d. 1543), Erik Banner (d. 1554), and Claus Bille (d. 1558), who were buried alongside their fathers in the parish churches of Nørre Søby, Torslev, and Norra Vram, respectively. It is possible, of course, that better knowledge of the burial places of the parents' generation could reveal more such connections. Yet some may have made deliberate choices in favour of their parish churches over their families' traditional burial places.

One example of a change of mind, which might have been affected by the Reformation, is the case of the knight and councillor, marshal and later *hofmester* Mogens Gøye (d. 1544). When he drew up his testament in 1514, he did not forget the parish churches at his various manors, but they were

⁵⁴ W. MOLLERUP, op.cit., p. 563; cf. Per SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Iversnæs – en herregård og dens kirker i senmiddelalderen*, [forthcoming]. In his testament, Aage Sparre (d. 1541), former *electus* of Lund, bequeathed his chalice to the altar in the cathedral before which he chose his burial place, although it was to remain in the custody of the executors of his testament 'until a better reformation comes' ('[...] oc hand at bliffue hoess my[n]e testame[n]tarios ssaa lenge her kom[m]er en beyr[e] reformatz'); Aage Sparre's testament, Rigsarkivet, København, Mogens Henriksen Gyldenstjerne og hustru Anne Sparre, Originale dokumenter (1500–1569), package 9.

⁵⁵ For the general fate of monasteries in Denmark after the Reformation, see *The Dissolution of Monasteries: The Case of Denmark in a Regional Perspective*, ed. Per SEESKO, Louise N. KALLESTRUP, Lars BISGAARD (Studies in History and Social Sciences, vol. 580), Odense 2019.

overshadowed by the many gifts to monasteries and religious houses across the realm, including a large chantry foundation at the Franciscan church in Randers near his estate Clausholm in Jutland. His burial, however, was to be with the Franciscans in Næstved on Zealand, who were in return to receive a considerable sum of money and his best armour and horse, which he himself used to ride⁵⁶. It has been assumed that this was also where his first wife, Mette Bydelsbak (d. 1512), was buried⁵⁷. However, Gøye would live for many years after 1514, becoming not only a champion of the Reformation in Denmark but also a fierce enemy of the Greyfriars, to whom he had previously been so well disposed. In an anonymous Franciscan chronicle describing the abuses that the order's houses in Denmark were subjected to in the years prior to the official implementation of the Reformation, his active role in the expulsion of the friars from their houses in several towns, including Randers and Næstved, is described, as he is referred to as 'that most impious heretic'⁵⁸. In Næstved, the Franciscan friars had to leave their convent house in 1532. When Gøye died twelve years later, the dispositions in his testament from 1514 were no longer relevant. Instead, the parish church in Voldum near Clausholm was to become the setting for an extensive commemoration of the Gøye family. The driving force seems to have been Gøye's daughter Birgitte (d. 1574). In 1543, she had a tombstone placed in the church over her brother Axel (d. 1537), and in 1560 a monumental gravestone was installed in memory of her father and his two wives⁵⁹. In addition, the church contains monuments dedicated to another of Mogens Gøye's sons and one of his other daughters, along with their respective spouses. Birgitte Gøye, who set new standards for noble tomb sculpture in Denmark with monuments for herself and her husband in the church at Herlufsholm, a former Benedictine monastery⁶⁰, apparently considered the church

⁵⁶ Mogens Gøye's testament (1514), Rigsarkivet, København, Håndskriftsamlingen, I. Individuelle samlinger af blandet indhold, Terkel Klevenfeldt (1030–1777), package 26.

⁵⁷ An anonymous Franciscan chronicle states that this was also the burial place of his grandfather and his wife; however, the 1505 testament of Gøye's father, Eskil Gøye, indicates that he was buried with the Birgittines in Maribo, see *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii ævi*, vol. 2, ed. Martin C. GERTZ, København 1922, p. 364; *Diplomatarium dioecesis Lundensis. Lunds ärkestifts urkundsbok*, Bd. 6, utg. Lauritz WEIBULL, Lund 1939, p. 193. For the assumption that Mogens' wife was buried in Næstved, although her gravestone is now located in the nearby parish church of Gunderslev, see Grethe JACOBSEN, *Birgitte Gøye. En biografi*, København 2024, pp. 186–187.

⁵⁸ 'impiissimus ille hereticus'; *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae*, pp. 334–336, 352–354, 364–366.

⁵⁹ Ch. A. JENSEN, op.cit., Bd. 1, pp. 235–236; cf. H. H. DE LICHTENBERG, op.cit., pp. 126–127; G. JACOBSEN, *Birgitte Gøye*, pp. 187–188.

⁶⁰ The importance of her commemorative initiatives has most recently been emphasised in G. JACOBSEN, *Birgitte Gøye*, pp. 180–205.

in Voldum appropriate for her efforts to preserve the memory of her famous father and as a stage for the representation of the Gøye family.

A church not formerly used for burials could become the focus of the family's commemorative efforts. Not being buried in the same place as one's ancestors did not necessarily signify a lack of interest in family history. The nobleman (though not councillor) Iver Juel (d. 1556), in his records of family history, was able to account for the burial churches and monuments of his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, along with other family members, even though their burial places were in many different churches, and he himself chose a new location – his parish church in Sevel⁶¹.

In any case, many of the councillors who chose 'new' burial sites must have been familiar with parish church burials as such. As mentioned, the gravestone of Eske Bille's wife Sophie Krummedige in the couple's own parish church reveals his desire to rest alongside her, but he might also have looked to his father-in-law, Henrik Krummedige (d. 1530), who, at his own request, had been buried in his parish church (Västra Ingelstad), where he received, in the presence of good and honest noblemen, clergy, and others, 'as honest and Christian an end to his life as I have heard of in a long time'⁶². As several parish church burials occurred already during the first years after the Reformation, even councillors who had no family tradition of parish church burials must have noticed that it was regarded as appropriate by some of their peers. Iver Juel's funeral in 1556 took place in the presence of three councillors, who would all since be buried in their parish churches⁶³.

In the late Middle Ages, the net could be cast widely in an effort to involve more clergy and institutions in intercession for the souls of the deceased⁶⁴. The parish church could be included in these efforts as well. An example is found in the donations and endowments made by the lords of Iversnæs to churches and monasteries on the island of Funen. Maintaining traditional ties to the Hospitalers' church in the island's main town of Odense, where they were buried,

⁶¹ Oluf NIELSEN, *Familieoptegnelser af Iver Juel til Stubbergård og hans søn Kjeld Juel*, Danske Samlinger, Bd. 1: 1865–1866, pp. 48, 51–54; cf. T. KONDRUP, op.cit., p. 64.

⁶² See the private letter from his widow to their daughter, Sophie Krummedige: '[...] thin kiære Ffader bleff lagt her i Sognekircken effter hans egen Begier; [...] Ock vor her gode erlige Mendt neruerendes ofuer hans Begræuelse, bode aff Ridderskab ock gode erlige Prestemendt ock andre Dannemendt; och sigger iegh tigh i Sandhed, at handt fick saa erliggt ock cristeliggt jett Endeliggt, som iegh haffuer hørdt i lang Tiidt'; Lauritz S. VEDEL-SIMONSEN, *Familie-efterretninger om de danske Ruders for 200 Aar siden uddøde Adelsslægt*, Odense 1845, pp. 173–174.

⁶³ O. NIELSEN, op.cit., p. 58; Christian A. JENSEN, *Danske adelige Gravsten. Fra Sengotikens og Renaissancens Tid. Studier over Værksteder og Kunstnere*, Bd. 2: *Tiden 1570–1600*, København 1953, pp. 248–249, 261–262; *Hunderup Kirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. XIX: 5, København 1994–2003, pp. 3186–3193.

⁶⁴ K.-H. SPIEß, op.cit., pp. 109–110.

they also showed their generosity towards local clergy and institutions, including the manor's parish church in Husby. Dating back to 1446, the family maintained an anniversary foundation involving all the parish priests of the Vends district, where the manor was located. While the last lord of Iversnæs to die before the Reformation, Henrik Gyldenstierne (d. 1517), was buried with the Hospitallers in Odense, his son, Christoffer (d. 1562), was laid to rest in the parish church in Husby. The latter's interest in the parish church was also evident in his exercise of patronage rights at Husby and several other local churches⁶⁵.

By the time of the Reformation, even those whose ancestors were buried elsewhere could be familiar with the use of parish churches for commemorative and representative purposes, and could have already established a connection to the church in question. While Oluf Rosenkrantz (d. 1545) had parents who were buried elsewhere – in the parish church of Skjern and the Franciscan church in Randers, respectively – in the parish church of his manor, Vallø on Zealand, he could see a fine retable featuring the image of a kneeling member of his mother's family in prayer. The owners of Vallø held patronage rights to the church, and a rhymed chronicle from around 1600 mentions that Oluf Rosenkrantz loved the church in Valløby, which his parents had built and where they had established 'a Christian community with a priest and other such matters', and that he had wished to rest there with his wife (d. 1586)⁶⁶. In Jutland, the parish church of Tirstrup, near the family seat of Bjørnholm, also exemplifies how the local church could be used for the commemoration and representation of the family. In 1535, Oluf's brother, Henrik (d. 1537), who himself was eventually buried in Visby on Gotland, commissioned four memorial *tondi* representing himself and three generations of his ancestors for the church in Tirstrup⁶⁷.

REPRESENTATIONS

In the final section of this article, we shall turn to the question of what the local church might have had to offer in terms of the important public display of status connected with funerals and the subsequent commemoration of the dead – even for the aristocratic councillors, who were accustomed to operating in public spheres beyond parish boundaries.

⁶⁵ P. SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Iversnæs*, [forthcoming].

⁶⁶ '[...] en Christen samfund Med Prest og anden slig sage [...]'; K. LYSKANDER, op.cit., pp. 87–88; *Valløby Kirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. VI: 1, København 1933–1935, pp. 294, 301–302.

⁶⁷ Stig HOLSTING, *Tirstrup kirke og Rosenkrantz'erne på Bjørnholm*, Grenaa 1981, pp. 24–28, 39; R. AGERTOFT, op.cit., pp. 310–311; Ch. A. JENSEN, op.cit., Bd. 1, pp. 107–109.

FUNERAL CEREMONY AND PROCESSION

Before we turn to the sepulchral monument, we should first consider the funeral ceremony that preceded it. In his study *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany*, Craig Koslofsky describes how Lutheran reformers, while denying that the living could aid the dead through intercession, nevertheless maintained the need for an honourable burial. The resulting funeral ritual, which – as we shall see – continued certain established practices in its noble form in Denmark, could in its concrete execution and scale clearly make the deceased's social status visible to members of the local community, who were encouraged to follow the body on its way, and demonstrate, in front of invited family and friends, their ability to live up to expectations. A key component in the ceremony was, of course, the funeral sermon. But even prior to the proliferation of printed funeral sermons in Denmark after 1565, the noble funeral provided plenty of opportunities to display status and lordship, along with piety and other noble virtues⁶⁸.

The Church Ordinance only briefly describes a funeral ceremony consisting of a procession with hymns and bell ringing, the actual lowering of the body, and possibly an admonition from the priest to those present, without elaborating on what differences there might be in these practices between different social groups⁶⁹. But we can get an impression of how the funeral ceremony and the preceding procession to the church unfolded through a brief 'advice and consideration' on noble funerals by Odense's second evangelical superintendent, Niels Jespersen, from 1566, which expands on the instructions regarding singing at noble funerals that he had put forward at a diocesan synod in 1561⁷⁰. These new instructions, which were to apply to the entire diocese, were drawn up at the request of the nobleman Frans Brockenhuus (d. 1569), with the king's approval and at the 'grave command' of his Chancellor Johan Friis⁷¹.

Jespersen's instructions describe several specific noble funeral customs and present a picture of noble funerary practice characterised by its public

⁶⁸ C. KOSLOFSKY, *The Reformation of the Dead*, pp. 81–114, especially p. 105; cf. I. BRINKMANN, op.cit., pp. 47–80. For the importance of community participation in the funeral procession, see C. KOSLOFSKY, *The Reformation of the Dead*, p. 97.

⁶⁹ *Kirkeordinansen 1537/1539*, pp. 117–118, 197–198; cf. *Å minnes de døde*, pp. 49–51. For Germany, cf. I. BRINKMANN, op.cit., p. 52.

⁷⁰ Synodalia (1561), Rigsarkivet, Odense, Det Fyenske Landemode, Synodalia (1560–1767), package 6a. I thank Emilie Luther Valentin, University of Southern Denmark, for pointing me in the direction of this material. Peder Palladius also wrote a short treatise on noble funerals, see O. BAY, op.cit., p. 29.

⁷¹ Published in Holger F. RØRDAM, *Jordefærdsskikke i Fortiden*, Kirkehistoriske Samlinger, Rk. 3, Bd. 5: 1884–1886, pp. 627–635.

character and by the ample opportunity it provided to display the deceased's piety, status, and position. Here, one could demonstrate the ability to meet expectations of appropriate appearance and behaviour, and express specifically noble forms of conduct before a wider public, in whose presence the events unfolded⁷². Initially, it is stated that it is 'appropriate' that everyone who dies in the true faith and confession of Jesus Christ should receive a 'decent and honourable' burial, 'according to the circumstances of their person and life', and in accordance with the accepted customs of the country and the Holy Church. This is followed by a discussion of customs relating both to the funeral procession and to the ceremony inside the church⁷³. Jespersen emphasises the duty to demonstrate one's faith in the resurrection and love for the deceased at the funeral, and explains how this should be carried out in practice, so that unnecessary expense, ostentation, pomp, and display of honour do not overshadow the true piety that should characterise the event⁷⁴. Nevertheless, the instructions show how noble funerary practice could continue certain pre-Reformation traditions which served, among other things, to emphasise status and ancestry, even though, from the superintendent's perspective, certain aspects of them should be prohibited or at least limited.

Regarding the custom of carrying candles in the procession, the superintendent explains that it originally arose from the mistaken belief that it could benefit the soul of the deceased. Since nobles nevertheless 'wanted to stick to the old customs and traditions of their ancestors with many candles', it could be allowed as an 'honourable adornment', as long as moderation was observed⁷⁵. A custom which could not be accepted, on the other hand, was the leading of the deceased's horse into the church. If, 'according to an old knightly custom', the deceased's armour, coat of arms, and sword were to be carried in the procession to the church, the person bearing this armour had to dismount and

⁷² Cf. P. SEESKO, "...med adelig proces...", p. 3.

⁷³ 'Da er det udi Sandhed tilbørligt, at vore salige Jevnchristne, som udi Jesu Christi sande Tro og Bekjendelse hedensover, maa hver efter sin Persons og Levnedes Vilkaar tilstedes en sømmelig og hæderlig Jordefærd efter den hellige Kirkes Skik og Lands Sædvane'; H. F. RØRDAM, *Jordefærdsskikke i Fortiden*, pp. 628–629.

⁷⁴ '[...] saa det næsten er did hen kommet, at man udi saadan Færd tragter mere efter den forgjængelige Verdenss Pral, Stads og Ære, end sand Gudelighed, som bør at staa udi den dødes christelige Begjængelse, med hvilke vi vor Opstandelses Tro for Gud og vor Kjærlighed imod den døde og afgangne pligtige ere at bevise [...]'; *ibid.*, p. 629.

⁷⁵ 'Efterdi Adelsfolk "jo for ent" ville blive ved deres gamle Forfædres Skik og Sædvane med mange Lys at lade optænde og bære for den dødes Lig [...] at man saadanne Lys aleneste bruger til en hæderlig Siring udi de dødes Begravelse: da kan samme vel tilstedes, saalænge de ikke misbruges. Allereneste er det dog raadeligt, at gode Folk vilde herudi ramme tilhørlig Maade, at samme Lys ikke blive for mange, eller og gøres paa Kap og Ros til nogen sønderlig og forfængelig Ære, hvoraf Gud ogsaa fortørnes kan'; *ibid.*, p. 630.

carry it either before or after the body⁷⁶. As late as 1537, Mogens Bille had bequeathed his cuirass, with all its accessories, and his horse with bridle and saddle to the Hospitaller monastery in Odense. However, although the custom was criticised, and although it was no longer a question of gifts to the Church, the custom of leading horse, armour, weapons, and heraldic insignia in the funeral procession to the church – where the helmet or shield could sometimes find a permanent place at the grave – continued after the Reformation⁷⁷.

Once inside the church, the preacher was to interpret a suitable biblical text and speak briefly about the deceased's life and death, without flattery, as a comfort to his surviving friends and an example to others. The reading of the last will, following the lowering of the body into the grave, offered a further opportunity to display the deceased's generosity, capability, and connections. While offerings in connection with the funeral were to be abolished as a relic of 'the old papacy and hypocrisy', this did not mean that the deceased should not, out of 'true Christian love', have the opportunity to provide for not only family and friends, schools and the poor, but also his 'parish priest, parish church, where one chooses burial place', with a gift, as befitted those whom God had endowed with temporal goods in this world⁷⁸.

The evidence we have of how funerals actually unfolded also suggests that processions involving candles or torches and a mounted retinue could be part of them. When the Scanian nobleman Gregers Ulfstand died in Copenhagen in December 1544, the funeral took place as early as the next evening. Nevertheless, his body was accompanied to the church by the ringing of bells and by twelve of the school's disciples, who carried torches illuminating the winter-dark town. The preserved accounts of the expenses also mention candles, alms

⁷⁶ 'Hvor som og nogensteds efter gammel Ridderskik skal føres den dodes "Kyrritz", Vaaben og Sværd til Begravelse, da skal ikke Hesten indrides i Kirken, men den, som saadan Rustning fører, maa afsidde og bære det ind for eller efter Liget, som det sig bekvemme kan, og lade Kirken, som er vort Bedehus, nyde sin tilbørlige "Førm" uden slig Urenhed og Besmittelse'; *ibid.*, p. 632.

⁷⁷ *Hr. Mogens Billes Testament*, p. 50; P. SEESKO, "...med adelig proces...", pp. 24–25. For a European perspective, see Mikhail A. BOYTSOV, *Ghostly Knights: Kings' Funerals in 14th Century Europe and the Emergence of an International Style*, [in:] *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*, ed. Joëlle ROLLO-KOSTER, London–New York 2017, pp. 149–163.

⁷⁸ 'Offer udi de dodes Begravelse skal herefter være aflagt aldeles, efterdi den er dog en Levning af den gamle Pavedom og Hyklari, som udi den ugudelige Sjælemesse med flere saadanne vederstyggelige og utilbørlige Ceremonier plejede at bruges [...] Hermed dog ingenlunde aflægges den dodes christelige Sjælegave og yderste Vilje, udi hvilken gode christne Folk, som Gud haver med det timelige Gode her i Verden forlenet, pleje deraf ikke aleneste sin Slægt og Venner, men og sønderlig sin Sjælesørger og Sognepræst, sin Sognekirke, hvor man sin Lejersted udvælger, item Børneskoler og de rette Almissehoveder og fattige husarme udi saa Maade christeligen at betænke [...]'; H. F. RØRDAM, *Jordefærdsskikke i Fortiden*, pp. 631–632.

distributed to the poor who attended the funeral, and a woman who was paid to invite people to follow the deceased to church⁷⁹. Even at short notice, a funeral could be arranged in a way that could attract attention. Ideally, many of the deceased's relatives and peers would be present to accompany him on his way to the church. A record of the death of the knight Mourids Olufsen Krognos at Skjoldenæs on Zealand in 1550 lists the names of the prominent men and women who followed him on the way to the funeral in Ringsted, as well as those who met the retinue outside the town⁸⁰. Such a retinue would have left no doubt that a member of the elevated noble estate was passing. Observers were able to appreciate a well executed funeral. When Krognos's daughter was buried in her parish church in Uth in 1558, it was described by her mother as a *statelig* (i.e. 'imposing', 'dignified') funeral⁸¹.

The noble funeral could be a public spectacle in which both peers and fellow parishioners participated, even at the rural parish church. When Iver Juel of Stubbergaard was buried in his parish church in Sevel in 1556, it happened 'with great honour', and in the presence of family and other nobles, as well as 'so many commoners that there was no room in the church, and everyone mourned and cried over his death'⁸².

As mentioned, Niels Jespersen's instructions were to apply to the entire diocese. In the period that followed, it became more common to hold noble funerals with grand processions in regionally important towns, before the body was either buried there or returned to the parish church⁸³. However, there is nothing to suggest that the display of noble status, evident in the funeral he describes, could not have been present at noble funerals in the countryside. Indeed, in 1576, legislation about funeral ceremonies mentions the black cloth covering the horses in the procession to the *parish* church⁸⁴.

⁷⁹ Account of the burial of Gregers Ulfstand (20 December 1544), Rigsarkivet, København, Knud Pedersen Gyldenstjerne og hustru Sidsel Ulfstand, *Diverse Optegnelser* (1544–1560), package 3.

⁸⁰ *Optegnelser vedr. Mourids Olufsen Krognos' død og begravelse* (1550), Rigsarkivet, København, Mourids Olufsen Krognos og hustru Elline Mogensdatter Gøye, package 1.

⁸¹ Letter from Eline Gøye to Oluf Mouridsen Krognos (undated [1558]), Rigsarkivet, København, Oluf Mouridsen Krognos og hustru Anne Corfitzdatter Hardenberg, *Privatarkiv* (1558–1579), package 41.

⁸² '[...] med stor Ære, hos var Niels Juel til Astrup, hans Broder, Oluf Munk, Niels Lange, Iver Krabbe, Danmarks Riges Råd, med mange Adelfruer og Jomfruer, så megen stor Almue, som ikke kunde få Rum i Kirken, og alle sørgede og begræd hans Død'; O. NIELSEN, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

⁸³ P. SEESKO, "...med adelig proces...", pp. 5–38.

⁸⁴ *Corpus constitutionum Daniae. Forordninger, Recesser og andre kongelige Breve, Danmarks Lovgivning vedkommende, 1558–1660*, Bd. 2, udg. Vilhelm A. SECHER, København 1889–1890, p. 36. Even the participation of pupils from the school of a local market town is attested in a description of a noble funeral at a parish church some decades later, in 1588, see Holger F. RØR-

PERMANENT REPRESENTATION IN THE CHURCH

At some point after the funeral ceremony – perhaps years later – a permanent monument to the memory of the deceased was set up in the burial church, typically in the form of a large stone depicting the deceased alone or together with his wife (or wives), accompanied by an inscription and symbolic markers displaying the status and position of those buried beneath it. In contrast to the funeral ceremony, this permanent monument – sometimes prominently placed in the choir – was able to convey its message to people attending the church year after year.

Apart from expressions of faith or piety and the mutual affection of spouses buried together, the dominant features of the gravestones are those that showcase noble status, as well as the titles and offices held by the deceased. This was expressed in the stone's inscription – typically referring to high birth, knightly status, and similar distinctions – and in the customary depiction of the deceased in full armour or, in the case of women, in distinguished clothing. Noble status was further emphasised through heraldic displays of ancestral coats of arms⁸⁵. While most gravestones in the 1540s still displayed only a limited number of such heraldic markers, the monumental gravestone of Anders Bille (d. 1555) in Magleby, dated to approximately 1537–1540, features 24 coats of arms representing himself and both of his wives⁸⁶. On the monument of his brother, Hans Bille (d. 1542), located 20 km away in Øster Egede and likely produced after his wife's death in 1548, there are 8 coats of arms for each of them. On Mogens Gøye's stone in Voldum from 1560, the number has risen to 16 for himself and 8 for each of his wives.

The representation of the local nobility, through commemoration in the shared space of the parish church, could help make the family's local position manifest. By demonstrating a long and distinguished lineage, visible in various expressions of *memoria*, their capacity to rule could likewise be affirmed⁸⁷.

DAM, *Præsten Christiern Bruns Optegnelser*, Samlinger til Fyens Historie og Topographie, Bd. 7: 1878, pp. 279–281.

⁸⁵ For the iconography of tombstones and other monuments in Denmark during the Renaissance, see H. H. DE LICHTENBERG, *op.cit.*, *passim*. For a broader Lutheran perspective on noble grave monuments, see I. BRINKMANN, *op.cit.*, *passim*.

⁸⁶ *Magleby Kirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. VI: 1, København 1933–1935, p. 381.

⁸⁷ Otto G. OEXLE, *Adel, Memoria und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Bemerkungen zur Memorial-Kapelle der Fugger in Augsburg*, [in:] *Les princes et l'histoire du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle. Actes du colloque organisé par l'Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin et l'Institut Historique Allemand, Paris/Versailles, 13–16 mars 1996*, dir. Chantal GRELL, Werner PARAVICINI, Jürgen VOSS, Bonn 1998, pp. 339–340; cf. P. SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Det adelige minde i sognekirken*, https://tekstnet.dk/resources/seesko-toennesen-p_det-adelige-minde-i-sognekirken/article.pdf [accessed online 15 April 2026].

Members of the higher nobility often owned multiple manors and properties in towns. Whether privately or by virtue of their offices, they were accustomed to operating in different public spheres. A funerary monument in the rural parish church of one of their manors did not preclude representational efforts in other public spaces⁸⁸. However, burial in a parish church offered an advantage over urban or monastic churches, where attention had to be shared with other elite burials, in that it made it possible to involve the entire church – or at least its most prominent spaces – in the commemoration of the deceased.

The gravestone could form part of a broader staging of noble ancestry. In the churches where several councillors – who all died in the 1550s – were buried, the walls are adorned with fresco paintings depicting family lineage. This is the case in Ruds Vedby Church, where Knud Rud (d. 1554) was buried; in Torslev, where Erik Banner (d. 1554) was buried; in Sønderholm, the parish church of Gabriel Gyldenstierne (d. 1555); and in Hjern, where Mogens Munk (d. 1558) was buried⁸⁹.

Sønderholm Church demonstrates how magnificently noble representation could go hand in hand with expressions of faith and piety. The decoration of the choir vault, dated 1556, features scenes from the Old and New Testaments – including the Crucifixion and Resurrection and their prefigurations – as well as a heraldic frieze displaying the 16 coats of arms of both Gabriel Gyldenstierne and his wife Kirsten Friis (d. 1565)⁹⁰. Built into the north wall of the choir, though originally placed in the floor, the tombstone depicts both spouses. He is shown in armour, his hands folded in prayer, and between them is a carved tablet bearing the letters 'IHS'. Unusually for Denmark, the stone is set within a wide bronze frame containing a versified epitaph and 8 coats of arms for each. The church also contains a tombstone for Kirsten Friis's parents, which, according to the inscription, was commissioned by their son-in-law. With the couple's heraldry also featured on the church's pulpit, the spaces central to the Lutheran service in the church were thus incorporated into a broader representation of the piety and noble lineage of the local lordship – one that would have been difficult for the rest of the congregation to overlook.

The placement of tomb monuments in the choir appears to have been common for noble burials, although we often lack contemporary sources that confirm their original location⁹¹. There – or in other prominent places within

⁸⁸ T. TROELS-LUND, *op.cit.*, pp. 174–176.

⁸⁹ For photographs of the fresco paintings at Torslev, see Nationalmuseet, Antikvarisk Topografisk Arkiv, København, Torslev Kirke.

⁹⁰ Eva L. LILLIE, *Katolsk inspiration? Sønderholm Kirke 1556*, [in:] *Danske Kalkmalerier. Efter reformationen 1536–1700*, red. eadem, København 1992, pp. 112–113.

⁹¹ The inscription on the tombstone of Anders Bille and his two wives in Magleby Church states that it was located in front of the high altar; *Magleby Kirke*, p. 381. For information on the

the churches – parish priests and congregations, as well as visiting nobles and higher clergy, would have encountered the monuments' message about the deceased's status and ancestry, highlighting the prominent position he and his family occupied in the local community. The very ability to commission such monumental tombstones and to secure a prominent location within the church was, of course, itself a statement of status and means.

Gabriel Gyldenstiernes ancestors at Restrup had claimed patronage rights to the church since at least the mid-fifteenth century⁹². Such rights may have been an incentive for visually representing the position of lordship within the parish in the shared space of its church. However, how control over parish finances and responsibility for maintaining the building – both included in some grants of patronage rights after the Reformation – affected the use of the church for representation is a question that would benefit from further research⁹³. Even if such rights do not appear to have been a prerequisite for Danish councillors choosing the parish church as a setting for grave monuments, it is worth noting that, in a few cases where the parish church was used for more extensive commemoration of the deceased and his family, they do seem to have held rights of patronage. Apart from Sønderholm, this applies to Voldum and possibly also to Ruds Vedby⁹⁴.

LOCAL PUBLICNESS

It was not only at the royal court or in urban centres that nobles of the pre-modern period needed to appear in ways perceived as appropriate to their status and position. Pre-modern societies were characterised by what has been called a 'permanent publicness' (in the sense of being constantly present in people's everyday lives), in which an individual's position depended on reputation and honour within the local community, making everyday life a public arena where, for example, speech and visual appearance functioned as important social markers⁹⁵. In other words, individuals had to present themselves in

location of most tombstones in the eighteenth century, see Poul GRINDER-HANSEN, *Søren Abildgaard (1718–1791). Fortiden på tegnebrættet*, København 2010; and C. G. G. HILFELING, op.cit., passim. In the visitation reports of the superintendent Jacob Madsen from the island of Funen at the end of the sixteenth century, tombstones located in church choirs are mentioned on several occasions, see, e.g., *Biskop Jacob Madsens visitatsbog*, pp. 185, 226, 242, 245, 261.

⁹² P. SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Iversnæs*, [forthcoming].

⁹³ E. SCHALLING, op.cit., p. 245; cf. E. L. LILLIE, *Adelen og kirkekunsten*, p. 330. It has been emphasised that in Germany the possession of patronage rights improved the capacity to integrate church spaces into wider representational strategies, see I. BRINKMANN, op.cit., pp. 82–85.

⁹⁴ *Sjællands Stifts Landebog 1567*, udg. Svend GISSEL (Kilder til kirke- og præstegodsets historie), København 1956, p. 126.

⁹⁵ Leif RUNEFELT, Oskar SJÖSTRÖM, *Förmoderna offentligheter. En introduktion*, [in:] *Förmoderna offentligheter. Arenor och uttryck för politisk debatt 1550–1830*, red. Leif RUNEFELT, Oskar

ways appropriate to their status, or at least strive to appear in accordance with what they themselves considered appropriate for their social standing. This was no less true for the nobility, and no less true within the church⁹⁶.

The Swedish historian Jan Samuelsson has emphasised the importance of noble representation in the local public sphere surrounding the manor. He argues that it was important for the lordship to display its position to the local community, and he highlights both the manor house and its parish church as key sites where this could take place, for example, through invitations to baptisms and funerals. What was represented here was the lordship itself: its own status and position *vis-à-vis* the surrounding society. Even in cases where the lordship was effectively absent, symbolic presence remained essential⁹⁷. The Danish cultural historian Mikkel Venborg Pedersen has similarly pointed out that although the 'estate landscape' surrounding a manor house could function as a stage for the symbolic presence of its lordship, 'arena' is probably a more accurate metaphor. The lordship's narrative was not necessarily uncontested; it could be challenged by counter-narratives from both local and external actors. The estate landscape is thus understood as a space characterised by a form of publicness that continually placed demands on the manor owner's ability to assert his position through actions and presence⁹⁸.

In the monuments of the parish church, the buried nobleman and his family could be presented in their capacity as local lordship. Inscriptions often identify the deceased as lord of a specific manor⁹⁹, and many members of the congregation will have known him in that role, as will the parish priest, perhaps as his patron and employer. Whether or not all members of the congregation were able to read and understand the inscription, the depiction of the deceased

SJÖSTRÖM, Lund 2014, pp. 10–11; Erling SANDMO, *Voldssamfunnets undergang. Om disiplineringen av Norge på 1600-tallet* (Det blå bibliotek), Oslo 1999, p. 151.

⁹⁶ Cf. Per SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Herskabets plads – Herregård, sognekirke og lokal offentlighed, ca. 1580–1660*, Herregårdshistorie, Bd. 20: 2024, pp. 49–81.

⁹⁷ Jan SAMUELSON, *Om adelns symboliska representation i kyrkorna*, [in:] *Blickar bakåt. Elva uppsatser om et förgånget nu*, red. Christina KJELLSON, Sven OLOFSSON, Per SÖRLIN (Institutionen för humaniora, Mitthögskolan. Rapport, vol. 15), Härnösand 2004, pp. 92–98. For the manor itself as a stage for representation, see idem, *1500-talets sätesgård som centrum för bygdens offentliga liv*, [in:] "...och fram träder landsbygdens människor...". *Studier i nordisk och småländsk historia tillägnade Lars-Olof Larsson på 60-årsdagen den 15 november 1994*, red. Peter ARONSSON, Börje BJÖRKMAN, Lennart JOHANSSON, Växjö 1994, pp. 162–173.

⁹⁸ Mikkel V. PEDERSEN, *Hertuger. At synes og at være i Augustenborg 1700–1850* (Etnologiske Studier, vol. 12), København 2005, pp. 40–45; see also P. SEESKO-TØNNESEN, *Herskabets plads*, p. 51.

⁹⁹ An exception is the gravestone of Mogens Gøye in Voldum, which does not mention his local manor, Clausholm, but instead Krenkerup on the island of Lolland; likewise, the gravestone of Claus Bille omits the local Lyngsgård and instead refers to Allinde on Zealand, see H. H. DE LICHTENBERG, op.cit., p. 214.

in full armour, with a sword at his side and his high birth emphasised through heraldic display, would have made his noble status immediately legible.

Such manifestations of lordship may have been particularly important where the family was newly established, or where the character of lordship had changed. In Hjerme Church, an undated heraldic frieze shows eight ancestors for both Mogens Munk (d. 1558) and his wife, Karen Rosenkrantz (d. 1535). Located in the church's crossing, the decoration constitutes, as stated in the Danish National Museum's description, 'a prominent element in the staging of the eastern part of the church as a veritable memorial hall for the Munk family'¹⁰⁰. Munk had received the manor of Volstrup in the parish as a fief from his uncle, Bishop Iver Munk of Ribe, c. 1500, and had taken up residence there. Although he did not own the manor himself, he is referred to as 'of Volstrup' on his tombstone, and in 1542 his son, Oluf Munk (d. 1568), purchased the manor from the Crown for his father's use¹⁰¹.

Representation in the church may also have been particularly important where more than one manor existed within the same parish. In Nørre Sandager Church, where one finds a tombstone for Councillor Jørgen Quitzow of Sandager (d. 1544), there is also a stone for the owner of the parish's other manor, Enggaard, Jesper Daa (d. 1562). Both stones were still placed in the choir in the eighteenth century, with the Quitzow stone positioned in front of the altar¹⁰². Perhaps Jesper Daa, whose father was buried in the Hospitaller church in Odense, felt the need to assert his family's presence in the church after observing his neighbour's example.

Before a monument was placed in a church, the funeral itself, as we have seen, also provided an opportunity to publicly display the status and elevated position of lordship. Those lower in the social hierarchy among the spectators likewise played an important role in the narrative of lordship. The distribution of alms, as appears from the aforementioned account of funeral expenses from 1541 and from the few preserved testaments, seems to have remained a feature of funerals even after the Reformation. If Eske Bille's decision to excuse some of his tenants from their customary fees for two years after his death is anything to go by, the reading of the testament in church also provided an opportunity to demonstrate the local lord's generosity¹⁰³.

¹⁰⁰ *Hjerme Kirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. XVIII: 21–22, København 2015, pp. 2027–2031, 2083.

¹⁰¹ 'til Olstrup'; Ch. A. JENSEN, op.cit., Bd. 2, p. 261, no. 623; Astrid FRIIS, *Oluf Munk*, [in:] *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, https://biografiskeksikon.lex.dk/Oluf_Munk [accessed online 21 August 2025].

¹⁰² *Nørre Sandager Kirke*, [in:] *Danmarks Kirker*, Bd. IX: 50–51, København 2020, pp. 5805–5806.

¹⁰³ *Hr. Eske Billes Testament*, p. 242; cf. Lars BISGAARD, *Tjenesteideal og fromhedsideal. Studier i adelens tænke måde i dansk senmiddelalder* (Arusia – Historiske Skrifter, vol. 7), Århus 1988, p. 61.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Expectations expressed by legislators and theologians in the years after the Reformation regarding the ties between nobles and their parish churches emphasised the importance of their presence and their responsibilities towards the church, its clergy, and its congregation. As we have seen, however, the use of the local church for the commemoration of the dead and for the public representation of lordship must already have been familiar to many nobles by the time of the Reformation.

In the decades immediately following the Reformation, the parish church was clearly regarded as a suitable place for the burial of members of the Danish aristocracy and for the commemoration and representation that accompanied it. The number of councillors buried in parish churches, along with the public character of funeral ceremonies and the presence of permanent memorials in churches, indicates that nobles were already aware of the representational possibilities offered by the local church, even before their presence there became more visible in the second half of the sixteenth century.

In some cases, practical considerations and a desire for burial near the place of death were clearly important, and the parish church was not the only option: cathedrals and other urban churches, as well as the remaining monastic churches, also remained in use. However, the number of noble councillors buried in their parish churches, together with the efforts invested in preserving their memory and displaying their status there, indicates the importance attributed to the parish church during this period, as well as the possibilities it offered the local lordship in terms of public representation.

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