

## Kirke Hyllinge and Snesere

### Romanesque Twin Towers Recently Excavated

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#### Introduction

Excavations and wall studies have provided new information on Romanesque church towers in Kirke Hyllinge and Snesere, Denmark (Fig. 1). As the layout of the tower in Kirke Hyllinge is very different from what was expected and the upper section of the tower in Snesere is unknown, it is relevant to ask two questions: is it likely that the Romanesque tower of Kirke Hyllinge church was at the same time much broader than the nave and was of twin tower -type? And is it possible to establish the design of the Romanesque tower of Snesere church? This paper presents the excavation results and an attempt to explain the original design of the towers by comparing them with presumably similar towers.

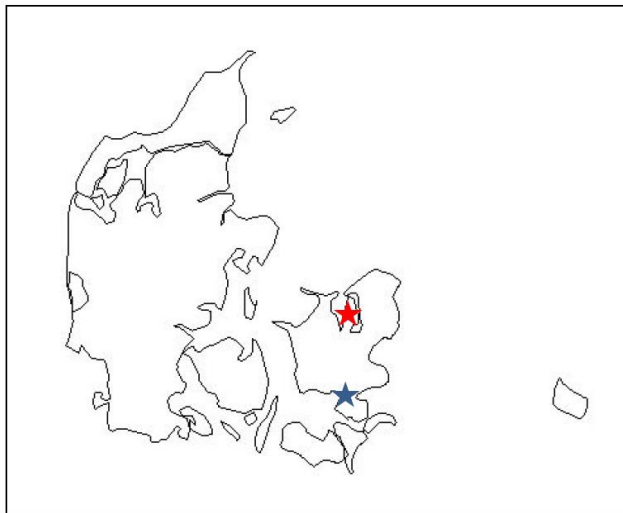


Fig. 1. Modern Denmark. The red star is the position of Kirke Hyllinge church and the blue star is the position of Snesere church.

#### Medieval Churches in Denmark

In present-day Denmark more than 1,700 medieval churches are still in use. Most of them were built in the twelfth century and the majority of the towers were added in the fifteenth century

or later. But Romanesque towers erected before 1250 are not as rare as once believed.<sup>1</sup>

Two-thirds of the Danish churches have been investigated and the results published in the book series *Danmarks Kirker* (Danish Churches).<sup>2</sup> The fact that church studies have been published for some parts of the country and not others (Fig. 2) undoubtedly influences the results of this paper.



Fig. 2. The progress of *Danmarks Kirker*. The green areas are fully published, the yellow areas are in process and the white areas have not been published yet. Drawn by Mogens Vedsø, 2014.

In 1898 Jakob Kornerup wrote a paper on twin towers in Danish village churches.<sup>3</sup> In 1926 William Anderson discussed the rectangular Romanesque church towers in Scania,<sup>4</sup> and compared them to the rest of medieval Denmark.<sup>5</sup> In 1935 C. G. Schultz was inspired by the archaeological

excavations of Olai church in Roskilde and Kirke Såby church to explain the architectural history of twin towers in medieval Denmark.<sup>6</sup> In 1993 Jes

<sup>1</sup> Henrik Jacobsen, *Romanske vesttårne, deres indretning og funktion. Vesttårne før 1300 i det middelalderlige Danmark øst for Storebælt*, Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm 1993.

<sup>2</sup> *Danmarks Kirker*, Nationalmuseet: København 1933–. English summaries, <http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/> (last consulted 14 December 2015).

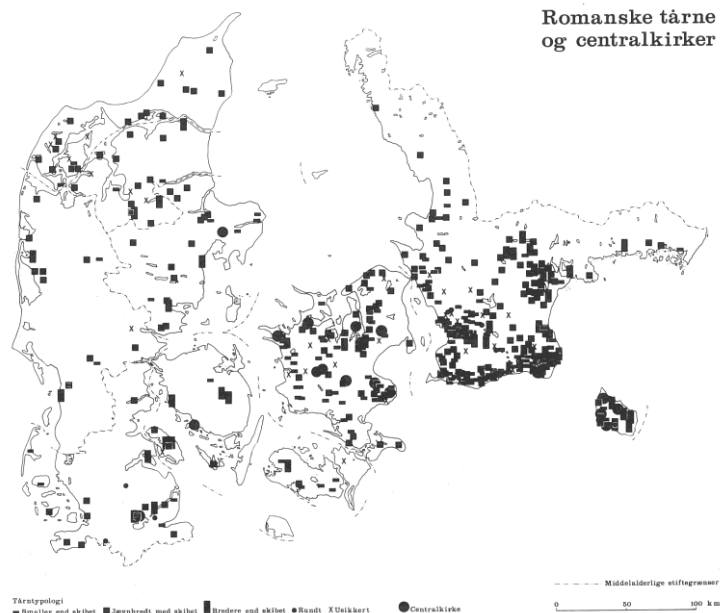
<sup>3</sup> Jacob Kornerup, 'Gamle danske Landsbykirker med Tvillingetårne', *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (1869), 13–34.

<sup>4</sup> William Anderson, *Skånes Romanska Landsbykyrkor med brede Västtorn* (Atlas till Sveriges odlingshistoria, Tillägghäfte 3), Lund 1926.

<sup>5</sup> Scania is in modern Sweden, but was part of medieval Denmark.

<sup>6</sup> C. G. Schultz, 'Bidrag til de danske Tvillingtårnes Udviklingshistorie', *Fra Københavns Amt* (1935), 105–40.

Wienberg focused on Gothic architecture but also analysed the Romanesque predecessors (Fig.3).<sup>7</sup> In the same year Henrik Jacobsen's study of Romanesque church towers concentrated on the eastern part of medieval Denmark (Scania and Zealand).<sup>8</sup>



**Fig. 3. All Romanesque church towers in medieval Denmark. After Wienberg 1993, Fig. 90.**

These surveys all use different criteria for their selection of comparable towers. In this paper the church towers to be compared with Kirke Hyllinge and Snesere are situated within modern Denmark<sup>9</sup>, have

rectangular layouts, were presumably built before 1250 and belong to one-aisled village churches (see Table 1).

*Twin tower* (Danish *tvillingetårn*) is a broad term which is mainly used to describe two contemporary towers in the same building-part of a church. In this case when dealing with one-aisled village churches the twin towers most often consist of one tower with a rectangular layout and a two-part upper section (see Fig. 20 B).

## Recent Excavations

Archeology regarding churches still in use is carried out by the National Museum. Recently the following two village churches have been exposed to rescue excavations due to restoration.

<sup>7</sup> Jes Wienberg, *Den gotiske labyrint. Middelalderen og kirkerne i Danmark* (Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 11), Almqvist & Wiksell International : Stockholm 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Jacobsen 1993.

<sup>9</sup> The majority of rectangular church towers are situated in Scania. Unfortunately it is not possible to incorporate them within the limitations of this survey.



**Fig. 4. Kirke Hyllinge church seen from the south-east. Photo Nationalmuseet 1911.**

Kirke Hyllinge is situated on a peninsula in Roskilde Fjord. It is known for the excavated Iron Age craft settlement and manor dating from the sixth to the eleventh centuries and perhaps related to Lejre,<sup>10</sup> which is the predecessor of the medieval town of Roskilde. But the Iron Age settlement ceased to exist one or two centuries before the church tower discussed here was built, and the tower itself is the only indication of Kirke Hyllinge as an important place in the twelfth century.



**Fig. 5. Tveje Merløse church. Photo Nationalmuseet 2008.**

The Romanesque church was built of calcareous tufa. Only the chancel, the apse and the eastern part of the nave are considered to be original (Fig. 4). The present church tower was built in 1763 as a substitute for two towers which, according to a written source, collapsed in 1762 during a service and killed five churchgoers. It has always been assumed that the old towers resembled the existing twin towers in the nearby Tveje Merløse church<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 5), which

<sup>10</sup> Ole Thirup Kastholm, 'Vestervang at Kirke Hyllinge, Zealand: a late Iron Age settlement with rich stray finds', *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 1 (2012), 142–64.

<sup>11</sup> Schultz 1935, 132.



have a rectangular layout and are as wide as the nave. But recent excavations show that this is not the case.<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 6. Kirke Hyllinge church, south side of the present tower, seen from the east. The red line indicates traces of mortar. The entrance door is situated in the present tower. Photo Nationalmuseet 2011.**

During 2011 and 2013 three excavations were carried out in connection with construction work in and outside the present tower. On the south side a new entrance suitable for handicapped persons was constructed by the entrance door in 2011. Just below the surface many tightly packed, large fieldstones (<120 cm) were revealed. According to the locals large stones were revealed and removed when in the 1960s a drainage ditch was constructed in the same area. Traces of mortar on top of the stones indicate that this is a stone foundation for a building, of which the south wall was protruding three metres from the south wall of the nave (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 7. Kirke Hyllinge church. Excavations on the north side of the present tower revealed two layers of stones of the foundation. The top of a third layer was seen in the bottom of the trench. Photo Nationalmuseet 2013.**

It was hard to believe that this building had

<sup>12</sup> *Danmarks Kirker* 1946, 3:2, 905–20

[http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/uploads/tx\\_tchurchsearch/kob\\_amt\\_905-920\\_01.pdf](http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/uploads/tx_tchurchsearch/kob_amt_905-920_01.pdf) (last consulted 14 December 2015).

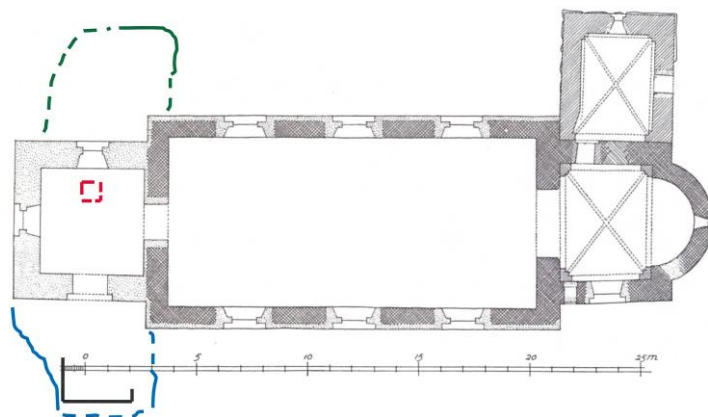
anything to do with the old tower. Instead, consideration was given to the possibility that it could be an unheard-of porch.<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 8. Kirke Hyllinge church. Inside the present tower, next to the west wall, is a corner of a building structure. Photo Nationalmuseet 2013.**

Two years later Kirke Hyllinge church underwent a comprehensive interior renovation, which included a new heating system with pipelines from a building north of the church to the present tower. The plans for this pipeline project would probably have been altered if the National Museum had had any idea that there was another huge foundation north of the present tower. Here there were no traces of mortar. But the extent of the fieldstone foundation to the north and to the east was seen to correspond with the foundation previously found south of the tower. Furthermore it was possible to observe that the foundation is made up of at least three layers of large stones (Fig. 7).

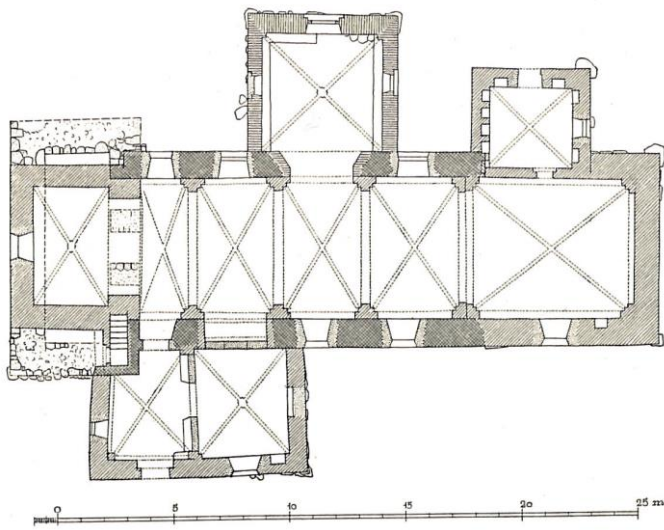
**Fig. 9. Kirke Hyllinge church. Excavation results 2011 and 2013. Blue indicates the foundation to the south of the present tower, black is the traces of mortar, green is the foundation to the north, and red is the corner of a structure inside the present tower. After**



**Danmarks Kirker. Measured by Elna Møller 1946. Supplemented 2013.**

<sup>13</sup> At the same time with the National Museum's investigation in the cemetery, the Museum of Roskilde excavated three medieval graves in the parking area outside the cemetery, see Jens Molter Ulriksen, 'Middelalderlige begravelser ved Kirke Hyllinge Kirke', *ROMU, Årskrift fra Roskilde Museum* (2011), <http://www.roskildemuseum.dk/vores-viden/forlag/-publikationer/artikler/romu/romu-2011.aspx> (last consulted 14 December 2015).





**Fig. 10.** Kirke Såby church's Romanesque rectangular tower was excavated in 1935. After *Danmarks Kirker*. Measured by C. G. Schultz 1935.

Also in 2013 a small hole was excavated inside the present tower where the pipeline entered the

church building by the north wall. A north-west corner of a structure made of a fieldstone foundation and a wall of calcareous tufa was uncovered (Fig. 8). This corner might belong to a building part, for example a square pillar or a doorway inside a vestibule flanked by towers. The entire west section measures 16 metres from south to north (Fig. 9). The nave itself is 10 metres wide. This is a layout much different from the tower of Tveje Merløse church and even from the tower of Kirke Såby a few kilometres to the south (Fig. 10). Thus it is established that there are foundations sufficient for towers on both sides of the present tower. But is it likely that the Romanesque tower section of Kirke Hyllinge church was so much broader than the nave and consisted of a vestibule flanked by two towers? This is indeed an unusual design for a one-aisled village church.



**Fig. 11.** Snesere church, seen from the northeast. Photo Nationalmuseet 1931.

Snesere church is one of Denmark's longest village churches (Fig. 11). It has been extended and rebuilt more times than is usual for a village

church.<sup>14</sup> The Romanesque building of fieldstone and limestone consisted of a nave, a narrower chancel, and to the west a rectangular tower. The top of this tower was pulled down and replaced by a Gothic tower to the west. Before 1600 the chancel was rebuilt to become broader and around 1600 it was enlarged to the east (Fig. 12).

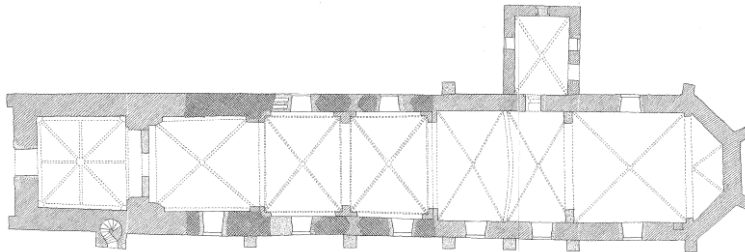


Fig. 12. Snesere church. After *Danmarks Kirker*. Measured by Søren Lemche 1901. Drawn by Aage Roussell 1934.

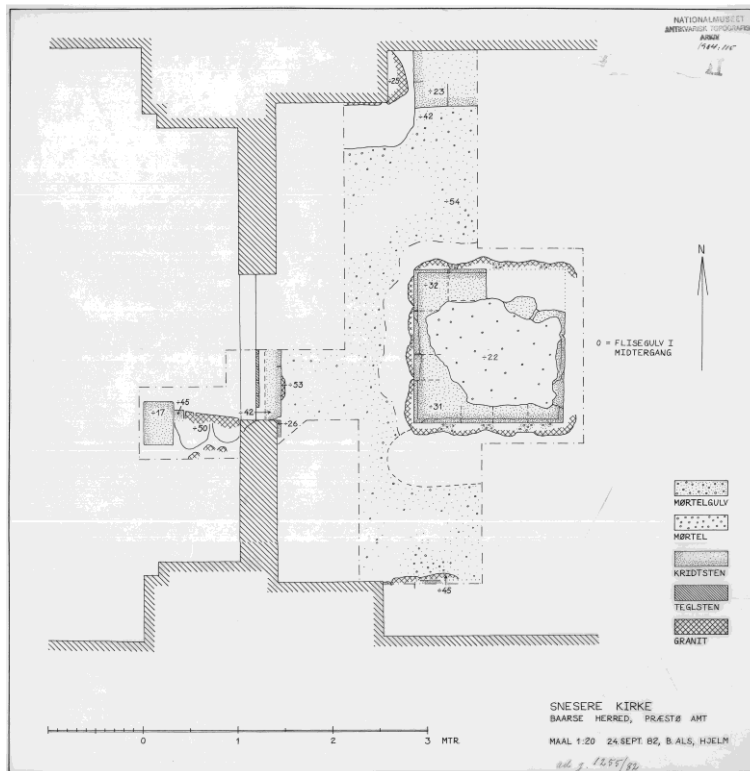


Fig 13. Snesere church. The westernmost part of the present nave and the west entrance at the same place as the present doorway to the Gothic tower. Excavation plan Nationalmuseet. Drawn by Birgit Als Hansen 1982.

In 1982 the church bought a new organ to be placed in the west end of the present nave. Prior to the construction of a foundation an excavation was carried out by the late Birgit

Als Hansen.<sup>15</sup> She was able to demonstrate that in Romanesque time the church was extended one or two times, as the western third of the nave was built later and consists of two rectangular building parts, of which the

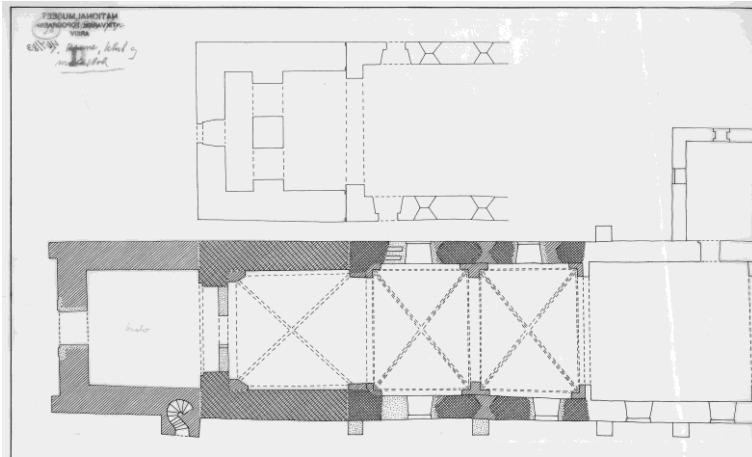
<sup>14</sup> *Danmarks Kirker* 1933–35, 6:2, 852–860.

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<sup>15</sup> Birgit Als Hansen (1937–2010) was a pioneer of modern church archaeology in Denmark and one of the founders of *Nordiske Kirkearkæologiske symposier* (The Nordic Conferences on Church Archaeology) 1981–2007, published in *Hikuin* 9, 12, 17, 20, 22, 24, 30, 33 and 36. See also Jørgen Steen Jensen, *Biografier. Danmarks Middelalder og Renæssance*, Nationalmuseet: København, 2011, 15.



westernmost had an entrance door in the west (Fig. 13). Between the two parts was a square pillar, which was presumably a part of a double arch opening (Fig. 14).



**Fig. 14. Reconstruction of the supposed Romanesque layout of the west end of Snesere church. Nationalmuseet. Drawn by Birgit Als Hansen 1982.**

In 2013 the interior of the church was renovated and due to the wrong choice of repair materials in the past some of the plastering had to be taken down (Fig. 15). This enabled a closer investigation of the walls, though not as close as we would have liked. It is obvious that there have been many alterations to the church, especially at the west end. The original west wall was narrowed while constructing the brick vaults (Fig. 16).



**Fig. 15. Snesere church. Masons worked for weeks chipping down the wall plaster. Photo Nationalmuseet 2013.**

To the west of this, the inner surfaces of the north and south walls were at some stage chopped off so that the fieldstones are protruding in parts of the walls. Other parts have been roughly repaired using limestone and bricks. From a clear vertical crack in the north wall, it is evident that the two rectangular building parts in the west were not built at the same time, as it must be differences in foundations and wall material that cause the crack (Fig. 17).



**Fig. 16.** Interior of the south wall of Snesere church. The original west wall of the nave (to the right) has been modified into a vault pillar in the south-east corner of the present west end of the nave. Photo Nationalmuseet 2013.

The south wall is less well preserved but a crack was observed above a huge window. The top of the crack was seen in 1908 and it was previously interpreted as the west end of an original rectangular tower, of which both the east and the west walls have been completely demolished.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to the excavation in 1982 we now know that the west wall and the entrance door of the Romanesque rectangular tower were situated further to the west. And by looking at the west side of the east wall of the present Gothic tower in 2013 it was possible to see that this wall includes portions of Romanesque masonry of field stones (Fig. 18). Thus it is in several ways established that few years after the erection of the church an extension of the nave and a tower with a rectangular layout was added to the building.



But is it possible to establish the design of the Romanesque tower of Snesere church?

**Fig. 17.** Snesere church. The crack in the north wall of the west end of the present nave. Photo Nationalmuseet 2013.

<sup>16</sup> *Danmarks Kirker* 1933–35, 6:2, 853.



**Fig. 18. Snesere church. The east wall of the Gothic tower, seen from the west. This was originally the west wall of the Romanesque tower. Only the far north (seen in the photo) and the far south ends of the fieldstone wall are preserved to one metre above present floor level, as parts of the vault pillars. The foundation of the demolished parts of the wall is preserved under the floor and could be seen during the renovation. Photo Nationalmuseet 2013.**

### **Romanesque Rectangular Towers of Village Churches in Denmark**

The presentation of information on 42 rectangular west towers in Table 1 is an attempt to find the best material for a comparison with the towers of Kirke Hyllinge and Snesere churches. The intention is not to claim that this is a complete survey of rectangular west towers, but to present both well-known and less known examples of Romanesque rectangular west sections which are, have been, were planned to be, or might have been towers. All the towers are thought to be older than 1250. Some of the most significant patterns in the table are discussed in order to answer the two main questions. Excluded from this survey are churches with more than one aisle, west sections which are certainly not towers, and very uncertain examples.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> A tower is regarded as very uncertain, if the only indication that there might be one is that the south and north entrances of the church in question are located far to the east, for example in the churches of Ugerløse and Gerlev. see Jacobsen 1993, 96 and 103.

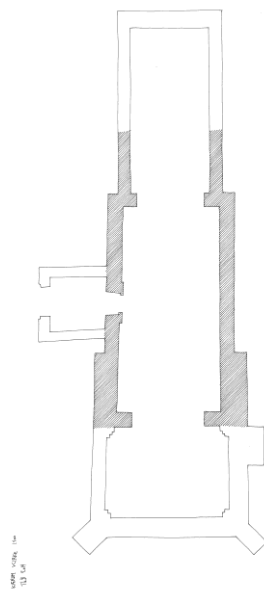




	Fyn	080211															
Kærum					x										x		
Ove		120406			x										x		
Bjerring		130701	x		x									x			
Hvilsom		130905				x				x				x			
Asferg		140601			x									x			
Hansted	Jutland/ West	160502	x				x							x			
Stouby		170111	x		x											x	
Vrigsted		170113	x				x			x	x	x		x	x		
Hee		180403		x			x	x								x	
Nordborg		230103		x			x			x	x				x		
Ketting		230205		x		x				x				÷	x		
Notmark		230207		x		x				x						x	
Broager		230301		x		x				x							x
Total: 42				18	18	16	12	7	7	2	17	8	5		2 9	10	3

In Table 1 few of the towers can be dated with certainty and it is in most cases not known whether the towers are contemporary with the nave or were added later. It is possible that in some cases the west section is not a tower but a single-storey vestibule, but in the following they are all called ‘towers’. A west section with wider walls than the walls of the nave is regarded as an indication of a tower. On the other hand narrower walls are not an indication of the absence of a tower. Tveje Merløse church is a good

example of this, as the walls of the tower are as narrow as the rest of the building (Fig. 5). There is only one recognized Romanesque church tower with a rectangular layout in Fyn in the middle of Denmark. This is an area where *Danmarks Kirker* has just begun the work of investigation and publishing. The one known church is Kærum on the west coast of Fyn (Fig. 19).



**Fig. 19. Kærum church in Fyn in the middle of present-day Denmark. Nationalmuseet. Measured by Aage Mathiesen 1897. Drawn by Thomas Bertelsen 2014.**

16 towers have no information of the design of the top section. Traditionally the rectangular towers have been grouped by the shape of the top storeys, as shown in Fig. 20: (A) rectangular top section, (B) twin tower and (C) one small square top section.<sup>18</sup> The rectangular top is mainly seen on the islands of Bornholm (four) and Als (four).

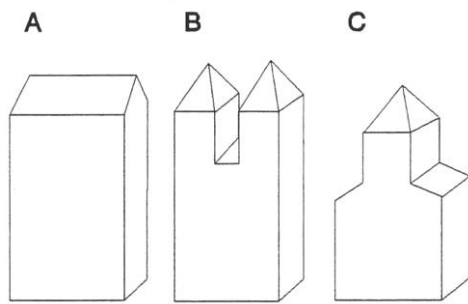


Fig. 20. Three different types of top sections. After Jacobsen 1993.

Bornholm is in many ways culturally different from the rest of modern Denmark and in this case probably closely connected to Scania, where Romanesque rectangular towers with a rectangular top section are widespread.<sup>19</sup> Three out of four towers in Bornholm are wider than the nave, one of which is Rø church (Fig. 21).

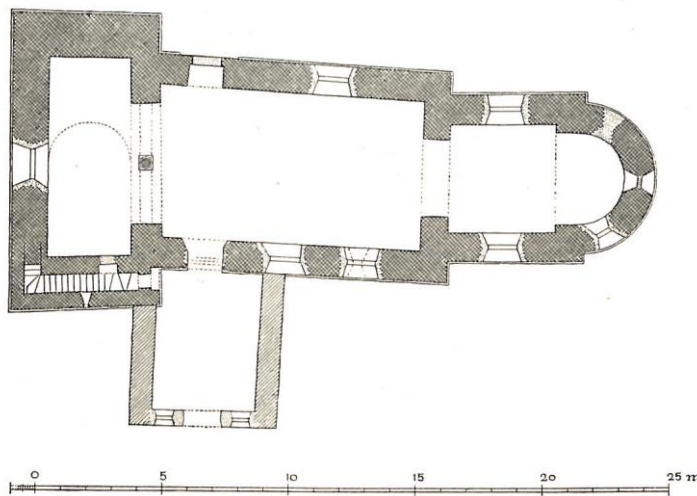


Fig. 21. Rø church on the island of Bornholm. After *Danmarks Kirker*. Drawn by C. G. Schultz 1956.

The island of Als, on the other hand, is situated at the coast of south-east Jutland and it is not obvious why the tower of Ketting church and three other Romanesque towers with rectangular top sections are preserved in this small island (Fig. 22). Three of the four identified towers with rectangular top in East Denmark are situated in the south, Lyderslev church only 30 km east of Snesere.

<sup>18</sup> Jacobsen 1993, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson 1926.





**Fig. 22. Ketting church in the island of Als. After *Danmarks Kirker*. Measured by John Petersen 1958. Drawn by Holger Schmidt 1961.**

Seven of the 13 towers in the east of present-day Denmark (except Bornholm) are recognized as of the twin tower-type. One of the most famous is Fjenneslev church,

which belonged to the manor of Archbishop Absalon's family (Fig. 23). Two of the twin towers are situated in the South East 40 km from Snese. In present-day West Denmark no Romanesque church towers are of twin tower-type. However, Hviding church is the best match with Kirke Hyllinge. Hviding is a special case: the nave was planned to be three-aisled, and as each tower is placed in relation to a side aisle, they do not form one tower of the village twin tower-type (Fig. 24).<sup>20</sup>



**Fig. 23. Fjenneslev church. Photo Nationalmuseet 1928.**

There are eight Rectangular west sections with one square tower on the top spread throughout the country. Hårlev in the South East is 40 km from Snese. This type of Romanesque tower is apparently often contemporary with the nave and some (five) have a tripartite opening between the nave and the tower. In these cases the middle arch is as wide as the inner space between the tower's east and west walls to enable a square tower on the top. Such a tripartite opening is always connected to a

<sup>20</sup> Knud Krogh, 'De faldt ned midt udi sommeren', *Skalk* 3/1964, 14–20.

small square tower, probably because the existence of a wider central arch is the reason for the interpretation of a square tower on the top.

There is a tradition concerning Romanesque twin towers that the oldest type has a tripartite opening between nave and tower, while the younger type has a double arch opening. But the types can perhaps also be explained by geographical differences. Of the 18 towers regarded as contemporary with the nave only six have tripartite openings and only eleven of the 19 towers which are younger than the naves have double arches openings. Dating of towers by the number of openings between tower and nave is also questioned by the existence of similar decorations on column bases in the towers of Fjenneslev and Vordingborg, having respectively three and two openings.<sup>21</sup>

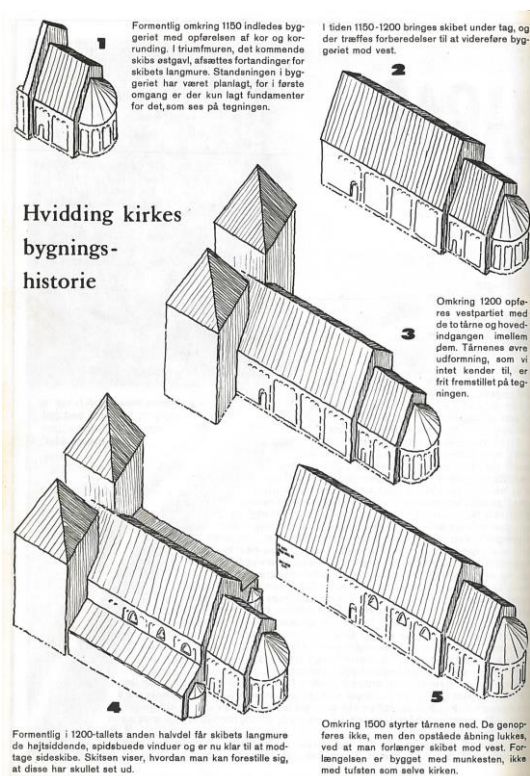


Fig. 24. Hviding church. After Krogh 1964.

The vast majority of Romanesque rectangular towers are as wide as the nave. There is no apparent correlation between width and the contemporaneity of nave and tower. Only three of the towers are so wide as to protrude from the nave by more than a wall's width. In Scania, however, this is more common.<sup>22</sup>

Eleven out of the 43 towers are known to have had a second-storey gallery or certainly not to have had one, and eleven towers are known to have had an entrance door or certainly not to have had one. It is therefore

difficult to deduce the functions of the Romanesque rectangular towers. How many of them were primarily vestibules? Which of the towers were built and used by a nobleman as his private part of a church? How many of them were planned as belfries? Was the main purpose of the towers to be seen from a distance? To what degree was the building of a Romanesque

<sup>21</sup> *Danmarks Kirker* 1936, 5:1, 326 and 1933-35, 6:1, 198. See also a column base in Roskilde Cathedral in *Danmarks Kirker* 1951, 3:3, 1473-74 and the font in Kalundborg church in *Danmarks Kirker* 1994, 4:5, 3160.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson 1926.

church tower an act in God's honour? This survey produces no straight answers.

The influence of larger three-aisled town churches with vestibules and towers on the more humble village churches is obvious. In the century between 1150 and 1250, in some areas and probably in some social classes, a rectangular west tower must have been an architectural expression which was seen as a signal of social ambitions which varied in time and place. For a better understanding of the functions of these towers it is crucial to get a better picture of their dispersion and more precise datings. More Romanesque rectangular towers will undoubtedly be found and some hopefully dated quite precisely as the editors of *Danmarks Kirker* work their way through the country.

## Conclusions

Hviding church in the other end of the country (Fig. 24) is the closest parallel to the layout of the Romanesque church tower in Kirke Hyllinge. But although the layout of the tower in Kirke Hyllinge is highly unconventional it seems unrealistic to suggest that the church was once intended to have added side-aisles like in Hviding. And the tower in Kirke Hyllinge is not quite wide enough for this kind of layout. On the other hand, it is too wide to be a traditional village church twin tower. It is most likely that Kirke Hyllinge church was inspired by the widest of the Romanesque towers in Scania, and perhaps the builders in Kirke Hyllinge were directly influenced by the nearby Roskilde Cathedral.

Snesere church is situated close to towers with three different kinds of top sections (A–C, see Fig. 20). While the other towers are built of bricks or limestone, Snesere church and the Romanesque tower are built of fieldstones of granite and in this respect the more distant Tveje Merløse is the closest parallel. In other respects the tower in Tveje Merløse is different from Snesere, as it is contemporary with the nave and has a tripartite opening between tower and nave. Furthermore, the use of materials might not have been a free choice for either of the churches, but a matter of access and means. The nearby twin towers in Magleby and Stege are both younger than the nave like Snesere, while another close tower in Lyderslev church is contemporary with the nave and has a rectangular top section. It is not possible to determine the design of the top section of the tower in Snesere church, but the double arch opening between tower and nave suggest that it was not a small square top.



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