

Resumés

This exhibition tells the story of Nyborg Castle's history between 1170 and 1560. At the same time, it focuses on medieval history in Denmark, for which Nyborg Castle will in the future be a research and education centre, under the title **“The Age of Chivalry in Denmark”**.

The artefacts exhibited here are primarily from the Middle Ages. They have been found in Eastern Funen and during the ongoing excavations at Nyborg Castle.

The big piece of wood on the floor is in fact a water pipe from the 1500's, when Nyborg got its water supply modernised.

The monkey is possibly the one that carried Christian II, when a baby, up onto the castle roof.

The chess pieces illustrate the struggle for power and are copies of pieces from Norway in the 12th and 13th centuries. The originals were made of walrus ivory and were found in England.

Panel 1: The history of the castle building, 1170 – 1250

Nyborg Castle, in its earliest part, is the oldest preserved royal castle from the time of the Valdemar kings (1150 – 1250). Knud Prislavsén, who was a close relative of the Danish kings, founded it between 1170 and 1176. When he died in the 1180's, the castle reverted to the king and remained royal property for the rest of the Middle Ages. Fortresses and siege machines became a part of making war in the 1100's; the royal fortresses built during this period reflect the strengthening of the kings' power. They functioned as defence structures but also were the starting point for crusades in the Baltic. The fortress at Nyborg Castle was expanded with a circular wall in the first half of the 13th century and a palace was built in the middle of that century.

Panel 2: The history of the castle building, 1250-1560

Nyborg Castle was, from the middle of the 1200's until 1413, the meeting place for the Danish parliament, called the Hof or Danehof (court of the Danes). The castle was regularly renovated and expanded, especially in two phases, in the decades around 1400 and later in the first half of the 1500's, when Nyborg was declared to be the capital of Denmark. In the earlier phase, a second story was added to the castle and it was extended towards the south. In the second phase, the castle was expanded to the north and the big banquet hall was built, the castle was modernized, the walls were painted in their characteristic pattern and the big windows were installed. In addition, new earthworks were built, water pipes were laid in the town, and the jousting tournament stadium was established (in front

of what is now the town hall.) In 1560, however, the king moved to northern Zealand, and Copenhagen became the capital city.

Panel 3: After the party – the archaeological examination

After 1560, the castle lost its military significance and fell into a period of decline that picked up speed in the 1600's. In 1722, the king ordered the remaining buildings to be torn down, with the exception of the palace and the east tower, which were then used as arsenal and powder magazine for the garrison at Nyborg. In 1913, restoration of the castle began so that it could be turned into a museum. There have only been a few archaeological excavations near the castle and they took place long ago. In 2009, museum personnel therefore began a large excavation project that already has divulged new, important information about the castle area, even though we still know very little about the original fortress. A spectacular find was a completely unknown tunnel that continued for at least 20 m. underground. Its interpretation is still murky, ranging from “sewer” to “part of the fortifications”. Some of the found objects, giving a glimpse of the castle's inhabitants, are shown here. To be continued!

Panel 4: The Age of Chivalry in Denmark

The Danish king led one of the strongest fighting forces in northern Europe. During the Middle Ages, warriors turned into knights. They developed a special code of conduct, including courtliness, which set up guidelines for good behaviour, also at court; it was a combination of discipline, honour, art and poetry, brotherhood and Christian values. The practice of kings knighting their loyal mounted warriors began in the 12th century; it was a sign that knighthood was becoming a part of the nobility.

Panel 5: Playing for Power

Medieval society was hierarchical. The king was at the top, just under him were the nobles, and at the bottom were the peasants. Gradually, the middle class or citizenry arose. The play for power was very complex and required constant repositioning and strategic thinking, just like in a game of chess. But unlike chess, here the playing pieces could suddenly change colour! Not just from black to white, but they could change to red, green or blue, depending on the way the game developed and the many different factors that came into play.

Panel 6: The playing pieces – the king and the knight

The king was the central piece, but he needed the other pieces to win the game, both in the offensive and defensively. The knight was in the king's service and was his extended arm. The knight enjoyed certain privileges in exchange for his duties in war. But he

could also turn against the king – especially if the other knights were doing the same. On the other hand, the king could play the knights off against each other.

Panel 7: The playing pieces – the bishop and the rook

The bishop was both a religious leader and a worldly prince. The church gave the king legitimacy and the king protected the church. The bishop was, however, unhappy if the king got directly involved in church matters, since the bishop reported to the Pope in Rome. This caused not a little strife and conflicts of interest. The fortresses were gathering places for the exercise of power both militarily and administratively. It was therefore very important to be in control of the fortresses.

Panel 8: The playing pieces – pawns...and citizens

By far the greatest number of people in Denmark in the Middle Ages were peasants. They were under the protection of the lords of the manor, provided they paid in goods and services. If they thought the conditions were unfair, they could revolt or work very slowly. There were many peasant uprisings in Denmark. Craftsmen and tradesmen lived in the towns. During the Middle Ages, the town residents turned into citizens and became part of a new layer in the hierarchy of society. The market towns governed themselves by royal privilege in exchange for paying taxes.

Panel 9: The Danish Court

From the middle of the 1200's until 1413, the Danish parliament met in Nyborg. It was called Danehof, or Court of the Danes. It was a national meeting where, in theory at least, all levels of Danish society could take part in the running of the kingdom. The last Danehof was held in Nyborg in 1413; its functions were then taken over by new institutions like the Royal Council (mouthpiece for the nobility) and the Court of Law.

Panel 10: The Crown Princes' Nyborg

Even though the time of parliamentary meetings was over in Nyborg, the castle still played a major role as a royal residence. In the 1400's, the crown princes held court at the castle. When Prince Hans became king in 1481, he still lived in Nyborg quite a lot of the time. During that period, Nyborg and all of eastern Funen seemed to be a central playing field for a royal show of power: Queen Christine moved to Næsbyhoved Castle near Odense, and in the same town, the royal mausoleum was built at the Franciscan Monastery's church. It was embellished at that time with sculptor Claus Berg's famous altarpiece and grave monument over King Hans, Queen Christine and Prince Frans. This decoration was part of the stage setting of royal power.

Panel 11: King Christian II

He was the only Danish king born at Nyborg Castle. This fact has always given him a special place in Nyborg's history, even though he didn't manage to spend more time here than he did many other places in his adult life. He became king in 1513 but had to flee the country in 1523. In 1520 he was behind a drastic purge of his political rivals in Sweden. He had them convicted as heretics and thereafter executed; this was called the Stockholm Massacre. One story about him tells that he, as a baby, was taken by a monkey and carried around on the castle roof. Hence the monkey! Danish participants in the Portuguese crusades probably brought it back from Africa.

Panel 12: On the way to a new capital city

With the royal fortress in Nyborg, and the establishment of the kings' new mausoleum at the Franciscan Monastery church in Odense at the end of the 1400's and in the early 1500's, it looks like there was a plan to make Nyborg a more permanent place of residence for the Danish royal family. When the Royal Council offered the throne to Christian II's uncle, Frederik I, they also suggested that he make Nyborg Castle his primary residence. This became a reality when Frederik I's son, Christian III, won the struggle for the Danish kingdom in 1536.

Panel 13: Nyborg's greatness and fall

After securing his power, Christian III set out to modernise the central fortresses of the kingdom. The castle in Nyborg was expanded. A new, larger banquet hall was built, a residential area added and fortifications built up. A large earthworks was built to the north of the castle, the outer walls of the banquet hall were built very thick to resist canon balls, and the castle's defence was augmented with several new cannons. In addition, many improvements were made in the town, such as a new stadium for watching jousting tournaments, which is the town square today. Water lines were also installed. Christian III made Nyborg his residence and thus carried out the plan to make Nyborg the capital city of Denmark. That is, until 1560, when the royal residence moved to northern Zealand and Copenhagen became the new capital.

Panel A: A Knight's Bestiary – coats of arms in the Danish Middle Ages

A motley collection of animals flourishes in a certain type of picture in the Danish and European Middle Ages: the knights' coats of arms. There are lions, dogs, wolves, oxen, trolls, unicorns, herring and dragons. The symbols on shields came into play in the 1100's to represent certain (noble) persons or families. With the growth of jousting tournaments in France in the 1200's, a system or standard was established for creating coats of arms: today we call it heraldry. This display shows examples of the animals used on coats of arms.