

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

Oddbjørn Baardsen and Toril Kjellberg spent almost the entire afternoon in Hadersrup's library, mainly behind the old microfiche reader.

"So the oldest we have been able to find about this little church is from 1931. The year of this photo. Nothing on the Internet, nothing in Hadersrup itself," Toril concludes. She looks desperate.

"Yes - lots from after 1931. But nothing from before. As if that church never existed before that time. Nonetheless it must be centuries old. A year is engraved on a floor stone: 1349."

"Are you going to finish that publication?"

"Yes. What else am I going to do? Start over, after all this time?"

"That won't be good for your reputation. 'Oddbjørn Baardsen knows all about every stone and object in that church. Except for the first six centuries, about which he knows nothing.' I can already imagine how your colleagues will react."

"Still, I'm going to do it. And I'll add that nothing whatsoever is known about its past, until 1931. Mysterious! That will hopefully do at least as well as a thorough history study."

*Four months later*

"Toril, look at this mail. About that church again."

"What did you get this time? Hopefully it's more fun than that deadly serious mail that the church was planted by aliens. Including proof of their arrival, in 1931. Those aliens must have taken that picture," Toril snorts.

"Ok, there was a load of nonsense in there anyway. Although I've never received so many responses to a publication. Suddenly everyone wanted to help solve the mystery of the 'church without a history.' Not that I have made any progress yet. But this could be something. Read it. It is all about 'The Ban,' according to this writer."

"Ah, the Norwegian government has forbidden this church?"

"Could you be serious for a moment? One or two earlier emails were about a mysterious spell. Mystical forces supposedly kept everyone out of the church. Nonsense, of course, so I emailed my standard response."

"Just like to that alien-mail writer, I suppose? 'Thanks for your useful response - we'll look into it.' And I have to be serious," Toril replied somewhat aggrieved.

"Well, this is different anyway. He seems to have some documentation about the church which he can't read. We can go there to look into the documents. And you are an expert on ancient writings."

"A waste of time. If you want to drive all the way there, go ahead. If you read something there that you think is worthwhile, take a picture of it. Just make sure it is a clear one please. Then I'll look at it here. Yes, that word means 'the ban'". The rest is unreadable."

"Come on now. I can't even read my own shopping list. And it's a beautiful drive, too, to Laugafoss, on a small island."

The drive was indeed beautiful. After a 2.5 hour drive and a whopping 369 crowns in ferry fees, they drive into Laugafoss. It takes effort, and several enquiries, before they find Hallvard Engebretsen's house. The island is a blind spot for their navigation.

"Would he have electricity? Then I could ask if our car can be plugged in for a while. According to you, you can't drive for long anywhere in Norway without encountering a charging station, with over a quarter of the cars being electric. Well, I don't think I've seen a charging station for 100 kilometres."

"I have. And we'll make that, on the way back. I think."

After a long wait at the beautifully carved wooden door, a man opens. Hallvard Engebretsen somewhat resembles the illustrations you see in children's books on trolls and gnomes, Toril reflects.

"Glad you wanted to meet us. My name is Oddbjørn Baardsen, I wrote the article. My wife, Toril Kjellberg, is an expert in ancient scripts."

"What I am going to show you is very old: late 14th century. I know roughly what happened from family lore. You can put on these gloves."

"From family lore? Over 675 years?" ask Toril incredulously.

"Yes. Over 675 years. When I read your article I thought it was time to take the documents out of their lead box. I don't understand much of it. But this word I could translate. This is the whole story that supports the stories from the family, I expect. Which you wouldn't have believed anyway otherwise."

Soon Toril is engrossed in the fragile, parchment pages. She takes many pictures and constantly consults her laptop. To her astonishment, mobile Internet does exist on the island. She then carefully puts the documents back in the lead box.

"And?" Oddbjørn asks impatiently.

"Of course I haven't been able to decipher everything; the most important I have. If you had hoped for aliens as an explanation, prepare for a disappointment. Still, something has happened that I have never heard of."

Toril reads from her laptop:

"In 1349, Magnus Eriksson was king of Norway and Sweden. He asked the people to pray and to pay him a token because 'God had cruelly cast a great plague on the world' Svartedauden - the plague."

"That's what it says there?"

"No, that's on the Internet. That's what this document is all about. In that year the newly built church in Haedeersruppe, which is called Hadersrup in these documents, was consecrated. Shortly thereafter, the first churchgoers died. Eventually, three-quarters of the population died. This isolated community, of course, knew little or nothing about what was happening in the world around them. And so they drew the conclusion that in building the church, they had in some way displeased God. For which they were severely punished. Eventually they decreed that no one was allowed to enter the church anymore. And that this should be passed down and continued from generation to generation. Which apparently did happen. Unbelievable! Does this match your account, Mr. Engebretsen?"

"Indeed. Not about the plague. But that a ban had been placed on the church. And that no one was allowed to use it, otherwise higher powers would again severely punish the population."

"How could this possibly have continued up to the early 20th century? In the Middle Ages you could make believe people anything. But not the last one or two centuries, right?" Toril wonders in amazement.

"Oh, I can explain that. Until well into the 1920s, that the area around the church was swampy and difficult to access. I think hardly anyone came there for centuries. Thank you so much for emailing me! You are definitely going to read about it soon," says Oddbjørn, who already has the next publication in mind.

Oddbjørn's publication about the successful enforcement of a ban for more than six centuries, resulting from medieval superstition, made headlines worldwide. The university reimbursed the ferry costs. And the cost of towing the car to the next charging station that actually did work!

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