

The First Cathedral

In 1896 Carl M. Kjellberg began excavations under the present day Old Uppsala parish church grounds in order to determine the extent of the structure of the previous cathedral (Nordahl 1996, 11-13). He showed that the cathedral consisted of a chancel with apse and a central tower, all of which now constitute the present parish church, but also included apsed transepts to the north and south. Furthermore he unearthed the foundations to a westerly extended broad three aisled nave, which extended out under the present churchyard wall. This nave was divided into a broad central aisle flanked by two smaller aisles (Figure 10).

Reconstructing the shape of the cathedral from the remaining parish church and Kjellberg's unearthed foundations has been problematic (Figure 11). For one thing the western foundations may not be fully excavated and the whole cathedral may not have been completed before it was damaged by fire sometime before 1245. The cathedral was probably about 60 meters long. It was a simple granite church in the Romanesque style which could not really compare with other cathedrals in Europe at that time. It is thought that a flat wooden ceiling covered the interior space with stone vaults covering the apse alters and the aisles. A high central roof was flanked by lower roofs covering the smaller aisles. The central nave had small windows, some of which can be seen walled up on north wall of the chancel. The nave may have ended in one or two towers at the western extremity of the cathedral.

The rituals performed in the cathedral included mass which was celebrated every day of the week at one of at least four different alters. Besides the high alter there was an alter to Mary in the north cross-arm. In the south cross-arm there was an alter dedicated to Saint Lawrence (St. Lars), the patron saint of the cathedral. These alters were in the part of the church reserved for the clergy. In the eastern part of the nave was a fourth alter, dedicated to the Holy Cross. Masses for the congregation were celebrated here. The church was a stage for the Catholic service. The chancel was divided from the nave by gates which were opened only for processions. At the north wall of the chancel stood the archbishop's chair. The holy receptacles for the mass were stored in the tabernacle beside it. The priests who conducted the mass had their own pew to the south of the high alter. Other clergy had to use the stalls attached to the chancel wall. Between the chancel and the nave was the lectorium, a lecturn from which the day's biblical passages could be read.

The cathedral was probably started in 1138 by King Sverker and completed in 1150 by King Erik Jedvardsson the Holy. Finally in 1164 the Pope decided to make Uppsala the seat of the archbishop of Sweden. The reasons for the choice of Uppsala are not known as there was already a modern cathedral in Linköping at that time. One can guess that the old pagan site in Uppsala had for centuries been a powerful religious symbol of the ancient tradition of Svea kingly power. Another more mercenary reason could be that around 1150AD, after iron extraction began to gain some importance, Uppsala had become the gateway to the mining district of Bergslagen. In Uppsala too