//THE BODIL-FAMILY AND SAINT PETER'S ABBEY IN NÆSTVED: A CLOSE-UP ON POLITICS, KINSHIP AND RELIGION IN 12TH CENTURY DENMARK[1]//

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ABSTRACT: This study addresses issues of politics, kinship, property, inheritance, religion and gender. It seeks to show how the interplay of these elements shaped the social, political and religious landscapes of early medieval Denmark. At the core is one particular elite family, the Bodil-family, and their family-monastery, Saint Peter's Abbey in the town of Næstved in the southern part of the island of Zealand. As result the intricate relations between religion and politics are revealed, as well as the opportunities and challenges presented to elite women.

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1. Introduction

This study shall address the foundation of a monastery by a lordly family and the social and religious bond that followed between the founding family and the monks. I shall look into social, political and religious issues through the lens of one case-study, and thereby seek to treat these, too often separated, subjects as one, cohesive whole with all three elements entangled and bound inseparably to each other. Women only play a limited part in this story as a whole, but two women stick out as very special cases. These were both called Bodil, and were of the powerful lordly family, the Bodil-family. The first Bodil was the founding mother of the family and of Saint Peter's Abbey in the town of Næstved, while the other Bodil was the daughter of the first Bodil's son, Hemming, and was the first lay-person to move into said abbey to lead a religious life secluded from the outside world.

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It was indeed possible for men and women both to devote their life to Christ without having to live the strict life of a monk or a nun, and it was even possible to take on a religious life without necessarily staying in this position for the full span of one's existence. The motives for taking up such a semi-religious life at a monastic house could be diverse and range from personal devotion, to mundane needs or family politics. In this study I shall seek to shed some light on the possible reasons to take on such a life. My sources are drawn from one monastic house; the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter in the town of Næstved. Within this context I wish to propose some possible reasons why a woman of elite background would enter a monastic house as a servant of God and live in confinement, seclusion, and without property.

2. The Sources

A number of important documents have been preserved from the Abbey of Saint Peter on the basis of which this article has been written. Firstly a calendar, E don. var. 52 2º at the Royal Library of Copenhagen, has been preserved which contains several individual documents: annals (ending 1228, fol. 2-3), a necrology (c. 1265, fol. 12-42), a list of benefactors (c. 1400, fol. 8-11), a confraternity list, (c. 1200-1344, fol. 44), and some smaller notices (fol. 7). The calendar, moreover, contains five illuminated miniatures (c. 1265, fol. 1, 4, 5-6, 12, 43). Secondly, an obituary list has been preserved containing an original of 8 pages on parchment (1488), a translated transcription of 10 pages on paper (16th century), and 4 pages containing the abbey's right to grant indulgences and some liturgical texts (13th century). Lastly, a book of donors including deeds, privileges *et al.*, transcribed from charters (1528) and an account book (1468). Many aspects of the history of the Abbey of Saint Peter are thus quite well documented albeit only through small and not very informative notices. All of these documents have been put to use here except for the account book, the transcribed obituary and the rights to grant indulgences since these are irrelevant to this particular study. In addition to the sources from Saint Peter's Abbey, there are a few mentions of members of the Bodil-family in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (ca. 1208) and in *Chronicon Roskildense* (ca. 1138-43) produced for the Episcopal see of Roskilde by an anonymous writer that have been utilized here as well. On top of this a few charters of donation are of relevance for our topic. From this extensive but informatively sparse body of material, I hope to present a nuanced picture of the socio-political landscape in 12th century Denmark seen from the perspective of one family and their family-monastery.

3. Elite Patronage and Prayer confraternity

Clerical communities prayed for all faithful, living and dead. They did, however, also pray specifically for particular persons or groups with whom they had formed a special bond. Such a bond of friendship was the case between the Bodil-family and their family-monastery Saint Peter's Abbey in Næstved. This is revealed by several facts. Firstly, the monastery was founded by the Bodil-family, this happened in 1135. Secondly, the necrology[2], which was begun in the beginning of the 1260s, records a number of members of the Bodil-family who died a century before the necrology was begun. These are all, inscribed by the same hand except for Peder Bodilsen and his mother, Bodil, who are both recorded in red majuscules to emphasize their status[3]. This means that it is not possible to compare the hand of their scribe to that of the rest of the family. It is likely that it was indeed the same scribe who recorded the entire family, including Peder and Bodil. In

[2] E don. var. 52 2º: Fol. 12 verso - 43 recto.
[3] Ibid.: Fol. 23 verso and 21 verso.

consequence, the Bodil-family must have been inscribed retrospectively and the abbey must have put a lot of effort into reconstructing the listing of its founding family. In comparison, archbishop Eskil is found only in the list of benefactors, not in the necrology. This could suggest mean that he was consciously excluded. A conscious selection of who was included and who was excluded must thus have taken place. And since the Bodil-family was recorded by a single scribe, it must have been this scribe's designated assignment to record them.

Moreover, we see a clear tendency towards grouping the Bodil-family together in the list of benefactors[4]. The Bodil-family group is broken in the list by Archbishop Eskil (who was bishop of Roskilde by the time he was inscribed), who was a close associate of Peder Bodilsen. The bishops on the list of benefactors are generally grouped together with the Bodil-family members, even though many of them died a century after the Bodil-family members they were recorded next to. This suspension of chronology was possibly meant to show the high rank of both, and to emphasize the connection between the Bodil-family and the ecclesiastical elite. The other elite families in the list of benefactors; the families of Grubbe, Huitfeldt, Saltensee, White, Bjørn and Lunge, are grouped together, though not entirely systematically. In general the chronological order of the list is often broken in favor of other, social and hierarchical systems of order. The list of benefactors states explicitly at its end, with its listed groups mentioned in hierarchical order, that these were the people who were to be commemorated in the prayers of the abbey in return for their pious bequests[5]. The list of benefactors includes 249 names, while the confraternity list includes 93 names[6]. This means that there are probably many confraternity charters that have not survived.

This particular kind of relationship has been described as a "prayer confraternity" or *societas*, the latter being used by writers of the early Christian communities to refer to the elect and to associate the Christian community with the saints through the relics (Duval, 1988: 145-154). Saint Augustine, for example, used the word to signify those of the Christian community who had died and for whom prayers were to be said (*PL* vol. 40 : 631). This meaning changed during the early Christian period and scholars agree that the medieval understanding of the word was the clerical community and all who were associated with it. Many people entered into formal relationships with a clerical institution which allowed them to participate (vicariously) in the spiritual activities of the clerical community[7]. As can be seen from the numbers above, a religious house could have many *confratres*.

By entering a *prayer confraternity* with a religious community, lay people and clerics from other religious houses became full members of the congregation and were entitled to many of the same privileges as the clerics of the house. Members of the Danish aristocracy would sometimes make arrangements to live at the institution as pensioners upon reaching old age. Although it could be for practical reasons, living the last part of one's life in a pious way at an ecclesiastical institution may also have been part of the preparations before death, which was of great importance for medieval people (Nørlund, 1923: 78, 80). This shall be addressed further below. There are several examples from medieval Denmark

[4] Ibid.: Fol. 8 recto- 11 verso.
[5] Ibid.: Fol. 11 recto.
[6] Ibid.: Fol. 44 recto - 44verso
[7] See Schmid & Oexle, (1974: 80-81) for a discussion of the medieval vocabulary of *societas* and their meanings. The first modern scholar to study prayer confraternities was Adalbert Ebner who believed them to be of British origin and then spread to the continent by Anglo-Saxon monks, see Ebner, 1890: 32-33, 35-42. Ebner's theory has since been dismissed. According to Schmid & Oexle, the prayer confraternities bore resemblance to the quasi-religious fraternities of craft and merchant guilds and similar medieval institutions and he has suggested that the development of prayer confraternities was connected to the development of such institutions. In England Susan Reynolds has made similar points.

where elite benefactors were granted membership in the "prayer confraternity" of a religious house; documents have primarily been preserved from the late Middle Ages. There were probably many more, but evidence cannot be provided due to the available sources[8].

Joining a "prayer confraternity" was seen as the most secure way to obtain salvation (Lawrence, 1989: 99). A "prayer confraternity" was a merging of monks, nuns or canons from different monasteries, convents and churches, where they would aid each other spiritually by praying for each other and celebrate the *anniversaries* of each others' dead. Saint Peter's Abbey had this sort of friendship-bond with three monasteries that all had Saint Peter as patron; these were Cluny, Saint Peter's at Petersburg, Erfurt, and Ringsted Abbey, Zealand Denmark (Helms, 1940: 42). Members of religious houses that had formed a "prayer confraternity" together could enjoy the hospitality of the other religious house and could participate in the liturgy of the hours, the mass, including Holy Communion, and the chapter meetings. Like with other types of social relationships, the "prayer confraternity" reflected the social status among its members; often one part wished to join the "prayer confraternity" to let the sacred power of the higher renowned institution reflect on the lesser renowned one (Cowdrey, 1956: 115). The "prayer confraternity" bound people and religious institutions to each other and created associations across the communities of social estate, family and region. The social importance of the prayer confraternity should therefore not be ignored, even though Tsurishima probably went too far when stating that it is "impossible to exaggerate the importance of the religious fraternity" (Tsurushima, 1999: 133). It is moreover important to emphasize that the "prayer confraternity" had far reaching social implications (McLaughlin, 1994: 89) and existed as a practice and a notion firmly embedded in the "feudal" society of the Middle Ages (Barthelémy, 1993: 435). Again, the social bond between the Bodil-family and Saint Peter's Abbey testifies to this.

Giving a simple definition of the "prayer confraternity" has, however, proved complicated; the phenomenon encompasses too much variance and too much ambiguity to be defined in simple terms, though several scholars have tried. Iogna-Pratt described the "prayer confraternity" as "a kind of corporation, which could take the form of a political union, *amicitia*, which guaranteed its members both fraternity here below and memory in the beyond" (Iogna-Pratt, 1990: 346) while Tsurushima described it as "a covenant (*conventio*) between a monastery and another monastery, monk, priest, gild, or lay person, for the salvation of one´s soul through the monks' prayer" (Tsurushima, 1999: 133). While none of the above definitions are necessarily wrong, they do not come close to grasping the phenomenon in its fullness; with all its social, cultural and religious implications. I therefore have to side with Kim Esmark who stated that the phenomenon is best investigated place for place, period for period and case for case (Esmark, 2002: 103). This is what I have sought to do here with one house as my case-study.

Judging on the Danish material, there is no clear norm for when membership in the "prayer confraternity" was granted and what one could expect from such membership. The

[8] In 1482 Christiern Torkildsen, Prior of the Holy Spirit Hospital in Copenhagen and *generalis vicarius* of the order in Denmark granted Lady Birgitte Christiernsdatter (Vasa) membership in the "prayer confraternity" of the Holy Spirit Hospital in Copenhagen (Rørdam, Tillæg no. 64), Barner 1874 no. 74, 79, Cod. Esrom. No. 264 (appendix to orig. codex), Kirkehist. Saml. 1, rk. II, p. 387, In 1424 Bent Jonsen (Bille) and his wife, Inger Torbensdatter (tre Bjelkar) were granted membership in the *prayer confraternity* of the Birgitine Convent of Vadstena (Dipl.dioec.Lund. vol. 3: 35.) and in 1427 Arnold Madsen (quitzov) of Häckeberga and his wife Ingeborg (Hak) were granted membership in the *prayer confraternity* of the Carmelite Priory of Landskrona by its prior, Hans Conradsen (73-74.). In 1454 the knight David Arnoldsen (Quizov) and his wife Sophie were granted membership in the "prayer confraternity" of the Greyfriars' in Lund (364), ibid. IV: 34, 364, D.M. 1. rk. VI: 72, Anders Jakobsen of Stenalt and his wife, Anne Lauridsdatter were granted societas at the Brigidttine Convent in Mariager (112.).

variance in terms of who was granted membership has led Tabuteau to suggest that all donors were granted membership in the "prayer confraternity" (Tabuteau, 1988: 30), but this does not mix well with the fact that so few grants have come down to us. Why would specific documents be produced if all donors were granted membership in the "prayer confraternity"? In most of the cases known from medieval Denmark, the benefits seem to be primarily of a spiritual character, though it has been suggested otherwise by Nørlund (1923: 23). Furthermore, as Bathelemy has shown for the Frankish area, the alliance between the laity and the Church could also be of a political nature in medieval Denmark (Barthelémy, 1993: 690-91). I suggest that the relationship between Saint Peter's Abbey and the Bodil-family was both social, political and religious and that these categorizations make little sense, overall, when speaking of the medieval period. The bonds between elite families and monasteries were always ambiguous and religion, politics and social relationships between monasteries and elite families were always intrinsically connected to one another.

4. The Bodil-family

As Erik Ulsig has firmly established, the importance of the landed elite in the early medieval society cannot be underestimated[9]. This class could raise their own armies, and their donations played a central role for the power and prosperity of the Church. They were therefore indispensible allies, whose support was crucial for both king and Church. For early medieval Denmark the scarcity of the sources only allows us to see the contours of a few of these landed elite families, of which the Bodil-family seems to be the most illusive. In consequence, the two other major elite families the dynasty of Skjalm the White and the Thrugot family have attracted much more scholarly attention than the Bodil family (Ulsig 2012: 52). These two elite families have mainly attracted scholarly interest because of their church-political significance; the two first archbishops of Denmark, Asser and Eskil, were of the Thrugot family, while bishop Absalon, who played a significant role in the Baltic efforts was of the White family —a family which had close ties to the Valdemarian kings throughout their period of regency (Ibid.)—. Although the Bodil-family has attracted much less attention than the two other major elite families in early medieval Denmark, it seems to have been the most powerful one during the first half of the 12th century. The material described above allows us to follow the Bodil-family for 4 generations, and it is clear that their decline happened already during the 12th century.

The ancestral mother of the family, Bodil, was according to Suhm the concubine of King Eric I Evergood and gave birth to Harold Kejsa around 1080. She then married and had three sons, Peder, Jørgen and Hemming (SRD vol. 5, 1772-92: 115). The father of Peder Bodilsen is unknown, but his family was undoubtedly very powerful. At least his son, Peder Bodilsen, played a vital part in several key events in Danish history. Peder Bodilsen is a known figure on the political stage from 1123 when he, encouraged by his chaplain called Nothold, who would later become bishop of Ribe, rose against priests unwilling to live in celibacy. *Chronicon Roskildense* lets us know that many of the clerics were killed or mutilated and that only few of them kept their possessions (*Roskildekrøniken* 1979: 24). The fact that Peder Bodilsen was able to have a house chaplain underlines his high social rank. Peder Bodilsen was also among the engineers behind the uprising against Magnus, son of king Niels, after the murder of Cnut Lavard in 1131. The Bodil-sons' supposed half brother Harold Kejsa and 11 of his sons were killed in 1135 by King Eric II the Memorable as revenge for the murder of the later sainted Duke Cnut Lavard in 1131. Suhm's hypothesis thus explains why Peder Bodilsen started a rebellion against King Eric II the Memorable whom he had supported faithfully until 1136.

This hypothesis was argued against by Hans Jørgen Helms who saw no sign of a family relation between Peder Bodilsen and Harold Kejsa. Since Peder did not support Harold when he in 1132 chose to side with Niels instead of Eric II the Memorable, it is not likely, Helms argued, that the two were related. Moreover, Helms continued, Peder was still a retainer of Eric II the Memorable after the murder of Harold and his sons in 1135. The same year he co-sealed a donation charter to Ringsted Benedictine Abbey, and even in 1136 he was serving on the side of Eric II on the island of Rügen. Helms argued that Peder Bodilsen probably turned against King Eric II after being reprimanded at the siege of Arkona and by instigation of Eskil, Bishop of Roskilde, who by support of Peder Bodilsen became archbishop of Lund the following year (Helms 1940: 111-12). The writer of *Chronicon Roskildense* seems rather content with this procedure, except for the fact that the see of Roskilde had to suffer the incompetence of the contender Bishop Rico of Schelswig, who took the Episcopal seat after Eskil (34) This shows that the Gregorian reform-movements' objections to lay elites choosing bishops were not a particular concern among the clerical elite in Denmark at this point. According to Helms, the reason why the Bodil-family is known by their matrilineal descent can be explained by their mother's royal lineage; Helms thus presented the hypothesis that Bodil was royalty but does not specify by which king (112-13). Peder Bodilsen's alliances during the uprising against Eric II the Memorable, however, put him in opposition to the kindred of Skjalm the White, and Saxo lets us know that Peder Bodilsen had tried in vein to have the Whites' landed properties confiscated by law (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, vol. 2: 981)— That Saxo mentions Peder Bodilsen before the Whites means that the Bodil-family was probably the more powerful of the two.

Peder Bodilsen's Brothers, Jørgen and Hemming, are less known than their brother. Jørgen Bodilsen is titled *comes* in the donation charter by King Eric III the Lamb to the family monastery Saint Peter's 21st of March 1140 (SRD vol. 5: 112); a title that is previously known from the son in law of King Niels, Ubbe Esbernsen, who was made *comes* of the islands of Lolland-Falster, Møn and some smaller islands as well and was executed by hanging on command of Eric II the Memorable in 1133 (Helms 1940: 113-14). It is thus not unreasonable to suggest that Jørgen Bodilsen had overtaken Ubbe Esbernsen's office after his death, which is supported by the fact that the donations made by Jørgen in the foundation charter of Saint Peter's Abbey all consists of landed property located on these particular islands (transcribed, 102-4). The title of *comes* supports the royal link, as titles such as *comes, dux* and *praefectus* were frequent among those connected to the royal house (Pajung & Liljenfalk 2013: 52). No children are known of from Jørgen Bodilsen, but Hemming Bodilsen had a daughter called Bodil. She was probably the one in custody of Sophia of Minsk who was betrothed to King Valdemar I the Great and thought too young to move in with him at her arrival (SRD vol., 4: 289). Bodil is listed among the witnesses in the donation charter of 7th December 1141 by King Eric III the Lamb to Saint Cnut's Church in Odense, together with the daughters of Duke Cnut Lavard. Bodil Hemmingsdatter moved into Saint Peter's Abbey around 1191 together with her son Ingmar, to which we shall return. She had another son, Niels (or Nicholaus), from whom she inherited properties in Rettestrup and Svendstrup (Helms 1940: 114). Members of the Bodil-family frequently co-signed royal charters. Among them the donation charter of King Eric III the Lamb to the family monastery Saint Peter's 21st of March 1140 and the same king's donation charter to Saint Cnut's Church in Odense 26th of April 1142 (SRD vol. 5: 112; vol. I: 274).

We know of 30 individuals of the Bodil-family, most of who are only known from the confraternity list and the necrology and obituary. The necrology only lists ten members of the Bodil-family. Bodil, the ancestral mother and co-founder of Saint Peter's Abbey and her son Peder Bodilsen are written in the same hand and their elevated status is emphasized by the use of majuscules and red ink. The rest are inscribed in brownish-black minuscules.

Only Hemming Bodilsen is highlighted by slightly bigger and more firmly written minuscules in black ink. Strangely, Jørgen, titled *comes* is entirely absent in the necrology, which is probably because he was inscribed in the second half of May or in June which are missing from the necrology. This is a more likely explanation for his exclusion than negligence on the scribe's part[10]. The brothers Peder, Hemming and Jørgen probably fell in battle, either in Scania or on Zealand in the war between Eric III the Lamb and Harold Kejsa's son Oluf Haraldsen during 1142-43, where they ought to have fought for the king due to their status and prominent position among the elite on Zealand. Peder and Hemming are inscribed in the necrology on different dates, so they probably fell in different battles. Of the next generation of the family very little is known, but they are all titled as *domini*. A Jørgen, son of Peder makes an appearance among the witnesses in 3 charters issued by Bishop Absalon of the White-family and King Valdemar I the Great in 1174 and 1176 (DD, rk. 1, vol. 3, no. 45, 46, 1174, no. 55, 1176). This was probably a son of Peder Bodilsen. All this information conveys that we are indeed dealing with a powerful and very central family in 12th century Denmark.

5. Saint Peter's Abbey

The Benedictine Abbey of Saint Peter was founded in 1135 by Peder Bodilsen, his two brothers, Hemming and Jørgen and their mother Bodil and was the first monastery in Denmark to be founded by non-royal lay-people. The Abbey was placed by Saint Peter's Church in the town of Næstved but was later moved out of the town. The foundation of the abbey was attached to the donation of substantial quantities of landed properties in Lille and Store Næstved, the church building in Næstved town itself, to which the Bodil-family claimed the right to appoint priests, and properties far and near including lands on the islands of Falster and Møn. The most important of the abbey's properties, however, were in and around the town of Næstved (Kristensen 2013: 68). The original foundation charter of the abbey has not survived, but the founders and the nature of their donations are known from a confirmation charter where Bishop Eskil of Roskilde, the Episcopal see where the abbey was to belong administratively, confirms its foundation and the properties on the basis of which it was founded. This charter is dated to November 29th 1135 (DD rk. 1, vol. 2, no. 64).

It has been eagerly discussed when and why the abbey moved from the town to its later placement in the woods outside town. It has even been discussed whether the abbey was indeed ever placed in the town centre by Saint Peter's Church. The current scholarly consensus is that it was originally placed in town and then moved out around the year 1200. Another argument has been that it was moved after it, burned down in 1261 as the annals tell us, but this argument was shut down as early as 1915 by Carl Neergaard who could show archaeologically that the oldest fragments at the current location dated to around 1200 and that it was thus the first abbey located outside of town that burned down in 1261 (92, with reference to Neergaard 1915: 9-24, 57).

Since King Eric III the Lamb in his grant of privileges of March 21st 1140, symbolically dated on the *dies natalis* of Saint Benedict, assumed that the abbey was functioning normally, we can suggest that the monastery was fully operational almost immediately after its foundation. This was possible due to its abundant seed capital, which of about three times the size of that of the contemporary abbey in Sorø, which founded by the kindred of Skjalm the White in 1151(Pajung & Liljenfalk 2013: 51, Hill 1992: 206-12; Ulsig 2012: 36). Internationally the Abbey of Saint Peter in Næstved entered into prayer confraternity with two highly prestigious abbeys dedicated to the same patron saint: the famous Cluny for whom they prayed every March 1st and Erfurt for whom they prayed

[10] E don. var. 52 2º: Bodil: 21 verso, Peder: 23 verso, Hemming: 33 recto.

every March 15th (SRD vol. 4: 301-302). Other than praying for each other, the abbeys would give each other notice when a brother had died so he could be entered into the necrologies of the other abbeys (Helms 1940: 245).

Saint Peter's Abbey flourished during the first decades, due to its abundant properties, and as the book of donations lets us know the flow of donations was steady until the Reformation. The totality of soul-masses to be carried out per year by the monks at Saint Peter's Abbey was 5264 and 18 anniversaries, so the monks certainly had work to do for the souls of their benefactors (288). The abbey received privileges from all regents throughout the medieval period, but only very few donations of property (123-205).

6. Lay Residents at the Abbey

Lay people could enter the monastic community without taking the monastic vow, to live there and benefit from the good works of the liturgical community. There were essentially three ways lay-people could enter the community at the abbey; all of them involved bequests of movable or landed property: 1: one could either live at the monastic house together with family and servants, 2: be given one of the properties belonging to the abbey outside of the actual monastery, or 3: rent one of the abbey's properties. At times people probably stayed at their own property that they had bequeathed to the abbey. These residents outside the actual monastic house were called *prebendarii*, while the brothers living at the monastery were called *donati*, many of whom would become laybrothers (*laici*) (291). For women, these denominations may not hold up.

Looking at charter evidence, the book of donations, and the various memorial books, we come up with a total of 27 instances of people living at the monastery or its properties, which amounts to 35 individuals spread over a period of over 300 years. These individuals were of variable gender and age and came from different social backgrounds. There is a small overrepresentation of men, 21 men to 14 women. Out of the total of 14 women, 8 of them were widows, 3 were wives, 2 were wives whose husbands died while they were there as *prebendarii*, and 2 were daughters, one of whom was there with both parents and one of whom was there only with her widowed mother. 7 of the women living as *prebendarii* were of the aristocracy, out of them 5 were widows, 1 was a wife and 1 entered together with her husband and then became a widow. The last one, Margrethe Snubbe, widow after Bo Jensen (Liljensparre), remarried to a man below her social rank. This is known from 2 charters where she is referred to as the wife of "Jens Michelss i Skowcloster" (Rep., 2. rk. 4, no. 7102, 7103). There are 10 aristocratic men known to have lived at Saint Peter's Abbey as *prebendarii* or *donati*, and 11 of bourgeoisie or peasant status. The information about most of them is rather sparse, but they were probably primarily of the bourgeoisie.

7. Exchange, Inheritance and Enclosure: The Case of Bodil Hemmingsdatter

Before we put the case of Bodil Hemmingsdatter under scrutiny, we shall come to a closer understanding of the nature of property transfer and the standing of aristocratic women in medieval Denmark. Firstly, we must understand that property was, and is, closely related to the set of relations in which it was composed. Property was thus connected to concepts of ownership, which we should understand as a *social field* composed of all the "rights, claims, duties and obligations between people with regard to things" that others essentially had to respect (Sabean 1990: 184). Rights of ownership were related to both legal rights and religious belief. The distribution of property between generations was related to marriage, so was the legitimacy of the children who were to inherit. These were factors influenced by ecclesiastical ideology, which informed the practices of religious gift-giving.

Patterns of inheritance and consequently of reproduction of family-name and identity were thus influenced by the Church. On this basis, Jack Goody has suggested that kinship ties were loosened during the Middle Ages (Goody 1988: 221). This postulate is dubious, to say the least, and for the Scandinavian Middle Ages the direct opposite has been suggested (Gelting 1999: 118-19, Arnórsdóttir 2010: 34). Jack Goody's highly structuralist approach seems to not only simplify his notion of medieval kinship ties, it seems to be rooted in evolutionist ideology, where society has evolved from a tribal society where kinship structures were tightly knit towards the modern day nuclear families where kinship ties are only loose beyond grandparents on the vertical line and cousins on the horizontal line. The ecclesiastical ideology of kinship meant that transfer of property to others, including ecclesiastical institutions, was a matter of family policy. This is probably why the women who lived at Saint Peter's Abbey were either widows or married.

As Agnes Arnórsdóttir has shown, marriage was equally an economic and political agreement (Arnórsdóttir, 2010: 21) which was understood differently by secular and ecclesiastical authorities. The ecclesiastical model prioritized consent between the parties and a strict sexual morality which banished adultery. The lay model, on the other hand, focused on the consent of the parents, and saw marriage as an alliance between families (Duby, 1991: 1-22). The sanctification of marriage happened as a slow process, which was characterized by assimilation rather than a struggle between lay and ecclesiastical elites (Arnórsdóttir, 2010: 22). Marriage and property were closely related, which meant that political alliances and inheritance strategies were closely related to marriage as well. This is particularly important when addressing the status of an elite woman like Bodil who took residence at Saint Peter's Abbey; for she had bequeathed herself and her property to a monastic house and had thus alienated herself and her property from secular society. She was therefore less interesting for family policies of political alliances through marriage. Gender, then, as a concept was influenced by ecclesiastical ideology both symbolically and politically. The set of social relations that played a part in constructing the social identities of the women enclosed at the monastery were re-shaped as they had given themselves to a religious life. They were thus removed from strategies of marriage since they no longer had property to offer, and symbolically, proposing to marry someone who had essentially given herself to God would probably be seen as problematic. Moreover, she was the last of her line of the family who was able to marry as her son Niels had died and the other son, Ingmar, had become a priest. This made her able to give up her belongings and move into a monastery without trouble with relatives who wished her to remarry.

The Nordic notion of kinship has been described as a "bilateral kindred with a weak tendency towards patrilineal organization". This means that both men and women received inheritance from their parents, or in some cases, women were given a one-time dowry from their parents if they were not to inherit (31). This rather flexible mode of property-transfer in the Nordic countries means that lineages were also rather complex. Although there was a patrilineal ideology, the individual was entangled in a large web of family members, who were, in multifarious ways, politically and economically related.

Bodil Hemmingsdatter lived at Saint Peter's Abbey after she was widowed. On April 12th around the year 1191, she lodged herself into the abbey to live as a "servant" (*prebendaria*), to live there as a religious woman and partake in the daily *cursus* of prayer and good works. For this purpose she bequeathed all her properties to the abbey. These provisions were carried out with the consent of Lady Bodil's son, Ingmar, who was provost on the island of Lolland and with the approval of Peder Sunesen, bishop of Roskilde and both abbot and prior of Saint Peter's Abbey who all hung their seal on the charter (Rep.,1. rk. Vol. 1, no. 69: 394-95 (12/4 1191-1225))[11]. Lady Bodil was, as has already been

[11] Bodil's son, Ingmar also joined the monastic community around the same time and he also gave rich gifts upon his inclusion (SRD. Vol. 4: 403).

established, born into the absolute elite of Zealand by her natal family, the Bodilsen family, so it may seem strange to the modern spectator that a lady of lordly descent would choose to leave the secular life behind in favour of joining a monastic community. But for women who wished to live a religious life the palette of options was not necessarily overly diverse and Lady Bodil's decision probably made a lot of sense to her contemporaries.

The charter of Bodil's entrance as *prebendaria* at Saint Peter's Abbey begins with an *invocation* to let us know that she entered her religious life in the name of the Trinity. She gave up all her property, located primarily on the islands of Lolland and Zealand, to take on this new life of hers. She was, however, not to live at the abbey by herself and she was not to live in poverty like the monks were. Her demands were many and very specific. Firstly she would have a maid accompany her in her life at the monastery, so she could keep up a standard of living which reflected her rank. She, moreover, were to receive three times as much food as a monk. She also had very specific demands concerning the clothes she was to wear. She was to at least receive three skins of lamb that, it is specified, had to be white. The skins of lamb were to be taken off in the spring, which means that they were probably meant as bed linen. She had to have one overdress, two chemises and a so called "vile". Moreover, it was specified, she was to have a new leather overdress every second year, both of them had to be coloured "persbrunatisk" and of good fabric quality. She, moreover, was to receive two pairs of slippers every year and also a new veil every year.

Lady Bodil was not to sleep in the ordinary bed linen offered to the monks and lay brothers; she was to receive new good quality bed linen and nice new pillows on an annual basis, and when she received new clothes, bed linen or other of the listed commodities, her maid was to take over the used ones. This series of demands let us know that she certainly intended to keep up her standard of living regardless of her new status as a woman religious, but regardless of that, she was to follow the monks *cursus* of prayer and live in celibacy and generally devote her time to prayer and meditation just like the monks. Interestingly, the charter ends with a malediction clause that stated that, if anyone tried to disrupt these provisions he was doomed to be a cursed man. The malediction clause is rare in a Danish context, but in a broader Benedictine context rather usual, which shows that Saint Peter's Abbey and its residents were part of the larger community of Benedictine monasteries.

Hans Jørgen Helms was certain that Bodil Hemmingsdatter and the other women did not live at the actual monastery together with the monks, but probably lived on the lands of the monastery and in its nearness (Helms, 1940: 297). It might have been so, but the charter of entrance suggests that she was to participate in and benefit from all the good works done by the monks. Of course, following Roberta Gilchrist, there might have been some physical boundaries that kept up the idealized division between the secular and religious domains (Gilchrist, 1994: 152). Space certainly was used to regulate encounters between different groups, walls around monasteries, fences around church yards, moats and walls around castles or towns all attest to that. At medieval monasteries many such spatial means of division were employed: lectionaries separated the nave of the monastic church from the choir which was sometimes shut off by barred gates. It has even been suggested that lay-people had their own altars within the church (Kristensen, 2013: 147-49). It is thus possible that mass was celebrated in the nave in front of the choir-entrance. In support of Helms's notion, it might be argued that the presence of lay-women at a male monastery may have been experienced as subversive to the sharp division between the male and the female domain and the religious and lay domain both. This may perhaps be further supported by the architectural evidence from Saint Peter's Abbey, where archaeologists have suggested that the buildings were separated and understood hierarchically (106).

These structures, male and female, religious and lay, were expressed in many different ways; spatially in the church room where women were situated on the north side during mass (Jürgensen, 2009: 7-28), possibly also on the cemetery (Nilsson, 1994: 27-49),

and in the (faulty) axiom of the home being a female domain, while the public sphere being a male domain (LoPrete, 2008: 13). It might be argued that such understandings of spatial-ideological divisions would have been compromised by the presence of lay women in the sacred space of the monastery. We may further argue, that it is of great importance for our understanding of medieval religious mentalities whether or not lay-women were allowed to live together with monks or had to live in separate buildings. Since the shared cultural knowledge was transmitted and expressed in both the liturgy and the spatial divisions at the monastery, we must, given the number of women living at the monastery and the wording of Bodil Hemmingsdatter's charter of entrance, assume that at least some openness can be traced concerning women's access to the sacred male domain.

We must, moreover, assume that the attitude towards this access to the sacred was dependent on the nature of the social relationship between the monastery and the lay-person. As already established, the social bonds between the Bodil-family and Saint Peter's Abbey were quite far reaching, so it may not be too farfetched to suggest that the attitude towards members of this family would have been rather inclusive, also towards women. Since the social bonds were strong between the monks and the Bodil-family, we may speculate that including members into the monastic brotherhood would not threaten the religious identity of the monks, quite the contrary. Since Bodil Hemmingsdatter and her son Ingmar had taken on a life of religious devotion and seclusion from the outside world, their presence may have confirmed the spiritual connection between the *confratres/sorores* and the monks and thereby underlined, possibly even enhanced the extent of the spiritual bond between the monastery and its founders.

Assuming that this was the case, we may elaborate that the effect of the prayers and good works of the monks was confirmed by the assuming of a life of devotion by their benefactors. The spiritual bonds were thus reaffirmed by the very presence of the lay benefactors, who as a result of the prayers of the monks, had been spiritually moved to live a life of religious devotion. This way, we may argue that the presence of devoted lay-persons, male and female both, within the monastic enclosure could work as positive reminders, confirming the effect of the spiritual labour of the monks. It is, however, a problem that the sources remain silent. We learn of no actual contact between laity and monks, simply because the diplomatic and liturgical sources are comprised of short notices while the narrative sources deal with the political roles played by the people in question, not their secluded life behind the walls of the monastic house.

We must, because of the silence of the sources, remain open to the possibility of the contact between the *prebendarii* and the monks being manipulated or regulated spatially by them living in separate buildings, by them using separate routes or having separate access to particular places at particular times. It is entirely plausible that the *prebendarii*, like the rest of the laity only had access to the chapter room, and were only to go there at particular times (KlNM, vol. 8, col. 270-71). In support of this is the fact that some people evidently had their home at a place separate from the monastery. A building is referred to in the book of donors as the house of Tygæ Dwe (Tyge Due). It is described as a very fine and elaborate, located at the corner of the cemetery (SRD, vol. 4: 369, 372)[12]. This means that we have some, although minimal, support for the idea of *prebendarii* living outside of the actual monastic building and thus for a spatial separation between monks and lay-people. We may therefore, with reference to the smallest of evidence, speculate that Bodil Hemmingsdatter and her son lived outside the monastic house. The before mentioned shred of evidence, is, however, from the 15th century, while Lady Bodil and her son lived at the monastery during the late 12th and early 13th century, so taking this notice of a house on the corner of the cemetery to be evidence of a spatial separation between lay and religious

[12] Today the remains of the house is part of a hotel. Its arched ceilings in the cellar are part of the original construction.

domains in the 12th to 13th centuries would imply an unjustly static view on the period in between. To argue against such separation, we should take into consideration that the early Middle Ages saw a greater fluidity between male and female domains within religious communities, and some degree of informality which was gone by the late Middle Ages (Gilchrist, 1994: 25-36, 188). This can be seen in, for example, the decline of double monasteries during the early Middle Ages (Ranft, 1998: 120).

But why did Bodil Hemmingsdatter and her son choose to spend the last part of her life devoted to religious introspection? Firstly we must consider the possibility of her entrance to the monastic life was motivated by the burden of old age; that her stay there was meant as an arrangement of care. This would turn the abbey into a kind of combined monastery and nursing home for the old and sick. While we know that certain monasteries practiced medicine and had specific buildings designated for care, this interpretation is probably faulty (Kristensen, 2013: 256-57, 399-407). A lady as wealthy as Bodil Hemmingsdatter would have been able to afford all the care she needed in her own home without facing any financial troubles, so it is unlikely that she chose to live an enclosed religious life solely to get physical care. So what else did the abbey provide? One possibility is protection. Bodil Hemmingsdatter was on her own except for her son, whose priestly life did not make him a powerful protector. In the years before her entrance to the monastery, there was civil war and many feuds and rivalries which had cost the men of her father's generation their lives. It is possible that she felt the need to be protected against violence and therefore chose to live protected against the outside world behind the walls of the monastery. This possibility cannot be ruled out, but nor can it be confirmed. The charter mentions nothing about care or protection, and the Danish realm was relatively peaceful towards the end of the 12th century.

What the charter does mention, however, was the spiritual merits she would gain from taking on this life of religious devotion. She would have full benefit of the prayers of the monks and would devote her life to prayer and introspection; she even had to live in celibacy. All this does not point towards worldly concerns, but rather to concerns about death and the possibility of salvation. We must, moreover, remember that for the medieval mind, care for the body and care for the soul were not two contradicting things. Hospitals, for instance, took as much care of the souls of the sick as of their bodies and they were religious institutions (Rasmussen, 2000: 79-80). I believe that the spiritual benefits were the reason why Bodil Hemmingsdatter, at the age of ca. 60 years old, chose to enter a monastery and devote herself to seclusion from the world and religious meditation. She had thus chosen to spend the winter of her life in penitent seclusion and thus she hoped that her outer gesture of leading a religious life would urge the saints to intercede on her behalf, so that she could be adopted into the Heavenly order at the hour of her death.

8. Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have witnessed the rise and fall of one of the most powerful families of early medieval Denmark. The Bodil-family rose to fame during the 1120s and especially Peder Bodilsen played a central role on the political scene during the civil war period. In the political side of this story, two women, both called Bodil, played a particularly interesting role. These women had ties to the royal family and we must assume that their role were of some consequence, at least indirectly. Bodil Hemmingsdatter would for instance have played an active role in the upbringing of Queen Sophia of Minsk. The Bodil-family, moreover, had a central position in the church-politics during the 12th century. Not only did they support ecclesiastical reforms, they were also the first lay-family to found a monastery. Throughout the 12th century, the Bodil-family kindled the social and spiritual ties to their family-monastery, Saint Peter's Abbey in the town of Næstved. We are

thus witness to a symbiosis between the lordly family and the monastic community, where they aided each other in worldly as well as spiritual matters.

During the mid-12th century, the key-members of the Bodil-family died, probably in battle, and the family declined. Bodil Hemmingsdatter, daughter of the co-founder of the monastery, Hemming Bodilsen, and her son Ingmar, were the last of their family line when they entered Saint Peter's Abbey in the late 12th century. The reasons for their entry into the secluded monastic life could have been many. Arguably, Bodil Hemmingsdatter had been a powerful matron, used to have certain privileges and access to power. When she entered the monastery to live a life of seclusion and religious devotion, she embraced a very different kind of life. Even though she was to keep a certain standard of living, fit for a woman of her status, she would now focus on the spiritual side of things while preparing to depart for the afterlife. To do this she gave up all her belongings. This, she was only able to do because she was a widow whose only direct heir had taken the priestly vow. Although she had given up her wealth and prestige, she added, one might argue, another layer to the family foundation for the glory of herself and her family. In this way, she secured for herself a prestigious memory, and kept the family foundation alive at the same time. In return, as the necrology shows, she was kept alive in the memory of the monks.

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