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A team of Polish and Danish archaeologists have discovered over 200 artefacts from the thirteenth-century castle of Hammershus. A cannon ball, crossbow bolts and numerous coins were found in the fortress, which sits on the Danish island of Bornholm.

The research was carried out in the summer of 2013. The team found Swedish coins in the oldest part of the castle, known as tinghuset ('the judge’s house'). The discovery confirms that the Swedish bishop of Lund had authority over Bornholm at that time and commissioned the construction of the castle in order to collect taxes from the inhabitants of the island. Another coin found on the site dates to the time of King Frederick I of Denmark (1523-1533).

"The artefacts found give us a better understanding of the history of the castle and its inhabitants", said Marta Bura, an archaeologist from the University of Warsaw and co-leader of the archaeological dig. "A medieval padlock can confirm the thesis that valuables had been stored in the castle. Dice, a decorated bone plate and a fragment of a tile stove with an interesting picture of a face, clearly imported from the area of present-day Germany, are undoubtedly proof of affluence and the refined taste of the castle’s inhabitants."

Furthermore, specialists from the 3D Scanners Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw scanned sections of the castle walls.

Hammershus, northern Europe’s largest medieval fortification, was built around 1200 by the Archbishop of Lund in collaboration with King Valdemar II. Occupying a strategic position at the northern tip of Bornholm, it saw much conflict between Denmark and Sweden during the Middle Ages. The fortress’ walls are over 750m long (2460 ft).

In 2012, Polish and Danish archaeologists explored other parts of the island, finding prehistoric rock engravings, remnants of houses from the early Middle Ages, and perfectly preserved tools.

Erratum

One of our observant readers has notified us of an error on page 7 of Medieval Warfare III-6 (theme: ‘Myths and legends in the medieval world’). In the caption to the picture of the round table, it says that the table is displayed in the Great Hall at Winchester Cathedral. However, the Great Hall of Winchester is not part of the Cathedral. In fact, the Hall originally belonged to Winchester Castle, which was located farther to the west, and it still exists in its early thirteenth-century form.

Dirk van Gorp
Editor, Medieval Warfare magazine

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