



Hylestad Church



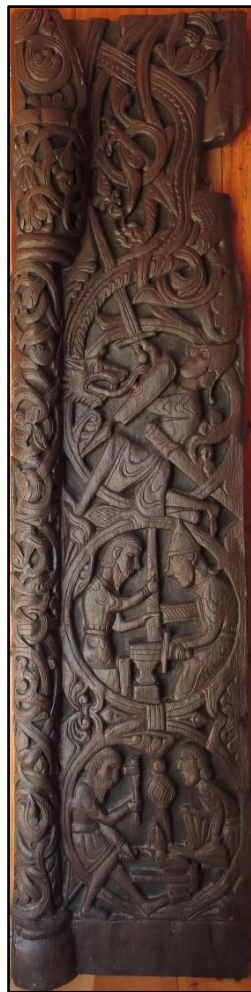
DEN NORSKE KYRKJA
Valle og Hylestad sokn

Hylestad Church in Rysstad was consecrated in 1839. The church is octagonal, a symbol of eternity and of the eighth day, on which Jesus will return. The church consists of porch, nave, choir and sacristy. There are galleries on either side. The church is a log building, but the tower is made by regular timber framework.

As far as we know, this is the third church in Hylestad. The first church was a stave church located at Bjørgum, on the eastern side of the river Otra. The widely known Portals of Hylestad origin from this church and are now located at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. They are unique in Medieval arts.



There are two portals. The most famous is the figural one with an elaborate rendering of the legend of Sigurd Fåvnesbane fighting the dragon called Fåvne. On the right panel Sigurd and the blacksmith Regin are forging and testing the sword that they will use to kill the dragon Fåvne. Above, the artist has portayed how the sword is piercing the winding serpent. On the other panel, Sigurd is roasting the dragon's heart. He burns himself when he wants to check if it is done, and therefore he puts his fingers into his mouth. Then he understands what the birds sitting in the tree above are saying: Regin will betray Sigurd and take all of Fåvne's golden treasure for himself. Then Sigurd stabs the sword through Regin, and the blood squirts from his mouth. Then the artist made a leap in the legend. On top of the panel we see the manly Gunnar Gjukesson lying bound in the Garden of the Serpents, playing his harp to make the serpents fall asleep. All these symbols are heathen, but the fighting may be interpreted as a battle between the evil forces and the victorious Christ. The heathen Ragnarok is transformed into the Christian Day of Judgement.



The other portal is ornamental with motives of plants and animals. This mode of expression on the portals leads back to around year 1200. When the stave church at Bjørgum was demolished in 1664, the portals were reused in the new church. When the second church was demolished in 1838, the portals were sold. The figural one was sold to Rike in Valle, and the ornamental one was sold to Straume. Eventually, they were sent to The Museum of Cultural History in Oslo in 1867 and 1876. There is a replica of the figural portal by the entrance door at Hylestad Church.

The second church at Bjørgum was a log building. As time went by, the church was in a bad condition, and the congregation needed a new and bigger church building. In 1838, the church at Bjørgum was demolished and the present church at Rysstad was built. The church site was then moved to the western side of the river Otra because a carriage road was to be built up the valley, and this road was going to be located on the western side, where most of the people lived. Anders Torsson Syrtveit and his son were the master builders. The churchyard wall at Bjørgum was moved to Rysstad. It was transported across the ice during the winter. The old gate from Bjørgum was also moved, and now it serves as entrance along the main road.

The old altarpiece from the church at Bjørgum was transferred to the new church at Rysstad. It is painted in 1780 by the painter Ole Chr. Neuwert (1746-1808) in Kristiansand. The painting consists of two parts. The lower part depicts the Holy Communion in a way very similar to the altarpieces in Risør and Dypvåg. A copper engraving made by Boëtius à Bolswert was used as model. Bolswert,



however, has copied a painting from 1632 by the famous Flemish painter Rubens. The upper part of the altarpiece depicts the crucifixion and seems to be inspired by van Dyck. The altarpiece is one of the things that characterizes the church. The frame of the altarpiece was renewed and carved by Olav T. Berg (1805-1859) when it was moved to the new church. It was then painted in gold, red, green and grey.

There are also two other old paintings in the church. Both of them were gifts from Aase and Gudbrand Askvig, who had bought the farm "Bakken" at Bjørgum before the war. Above the pulpit there is a painting by the Italian painter Pietro Paolo Vasta (1697-1760). The painting portrays Jesus being taken down from the cross.



Supposedly, this painting has belonged to Lord Nelson himself. There is also another Italian painting which portrays Mary and the infant Jesus. The artist is unknown, but it was probably painted in the late 1700s or early 1800s.

In connection with the 100th anniversary in 1939, Aase and Gudbrand Askvig also donated a Chicago Cottage harmonium to the congregation. But due to this the traditional hymn tunes were lost, because one now had to sing according to the melodies in the hymnal. Thus, the musical expression changed. The present organ was built by the organ builders Br. Torkildsen in 1991. It has 11 stops divided over one manual and pedal.

On the churchyard there is a monument of the two brothers, Bjørgulv (1901-1944) and Sigurd (1917-1945) Rysstad, who died in German captivity, as prisoners of war.



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