
AALHOLM
The Kingdom Rises Again
2

One castle. Two kings. A kingdom rises again.

In 1332, a king comes to Aalholm as a prisoner. Eight years later, his youngest son becomes king of a Denmark divided and pledged to lenders.

Valdemar Atterdag is Christopher's youngest son. He wants to reunite the kingdom. Selling Danish rule over Estonia gives him money to pay debts and redeem pledged lands. He also needs soldiers, clever thinking and a great deal of paper. Aalholm becomes important for the king's work and major agreements.

This is a comic, not a diary. The main events are based on history. Conversations and comic scenes are imagined. The pages at the back explain the difference.

Aalholm, 1332




Is this really my room?
Yes, Your Majesty.
And who has the room next door?
I do. With a free exit.
Then let's swap.

Aalholm, 1332




Count Johan gets Christopher released.
You must go on to Nykøbing Falster.
Aren't you going to lock up?
With you on that side? No.
Then I suppose I must release you too.


Christopher is free, but his strength is fading.
Shall I close the window?
No. I've had enough of things being shut.
Let the air come in.


Christopher II dies in Nykøbing Falster on 2 August 1332.


He is buried in Sorø.


Denmark has no new king at once. The kingdom is divided, and much of it is pledged to lenders.
DANMARK
SKÅNE


Denmark, 1340
1340. Eight years after Christopher II's death, his youngest son, Valdemar, becomes King of Denmark.
Your kingdom, Your Majesty.
Is the rest on the back?
Denmark
Skåne
My father lost power over the kingdom. I will unite it again.


Denmark, 1340
Valdemar's marriage to Helvig gives him an important foothold in northern Jutland.
From here, we'll unite the kingdom.
Jylland
Skåne
Fyn
Zealand
Start by putting the table together.


Denmark, the 1340s
Those who lent the kings money hold land as security.
To get your rights back, we need a deal.
Good. Let's hear the price.
I didn't know bills needed a seat too.


Denmark, early 1340s
There isn't enough money.
I command it to be enough.
The coins won't obey.
Then we'll have to negotiate.
SJÆLLAND
SKÅNE


Valdemar raises money, makes agreements and regains possessions.
Only that much?
It's more than yesterday.
Sjælland
Skåne
Then we'll take the next piece.


Some castle lords refuse to let go. Agreements aren't enough everywhere.
You'll never get this castle!
Then come down and let's discuss it.
I can't come down!
He's clearly practised that answer.


Valdemar also uses soldiers and sieges. Words alone cannot unite the kingdom.
et
m
Your plan is heavy, Your Majesty.
Now I see why kings like to rule from a chair.


Copenhagen, 1343.
In 1343, Valdemar gains Copenhagen.
KØBENHAVN
SJÆLLAND
SKÅNE
Copenhagen, 1344.
The work continues. Kalundborg and Søborg follow.
KALUNDBORG
KØBENHAVN
SØBORG
SJÆLLAND
SKÅNE
1346.
We're gaining more land.
And less room in the cart.


1346 • Nykøbing Slot
In 1346, Valdemar sells Danish rule over Estonia to the Teutonic Order.
Danmark
Østersøen
Estland
Skåne
We're giving up land.
To redeem the pledges and regain land at home.
The money helps the king pay debts and continue reuniting the kingdom.
Pledges
Sale of Estonia
Then we're rich!
No, Your Majesty. Now we can afford to begin.


Denmark, 1340s
Your people are asking for money again.
I have a kingdom to pay for.
I have a farm to pay for.
The king's work costs his subjects too. Many grow angry with him.
JYLLAND
SJÆLLAND
SKÅNE
ESTONIA


Denmark, 1346
Jens brings news to the camp: the travelling party's cart has broken down.
We can demand a horse from that farm.
Then who will plough?
Don't write that the king pulled the kingdom forward.
You're pushing, Your Majesty.


In 1348, Valdemar secures Lolland, Falster and Møn, among other lands.
The crown must be strong here again.
Skåne
Lolland
Møn
Falster
Is that the whole army?
No. Just the paperwork.

Years pass. Valdemar gains power, but also faces resistance.








Aalholm, 1359.
Your father was held here.
I know.
Now show me where we can work.
DANMARK
SKÅNE


Aalholm, April 1359
The king travels between his castles. His staff and government work travel with him.
A chair worthy of your dignity.
SKÅNE
SJÆLLAND
Have you one worthy of my work?


Aalholm, April 1359
Armed men take food and lodging without permission. We can't feed everyone.
My men too?
Your men get hungry too, Your Majesty.
DANMARK
SKÅNE
Then the answer applies to them too.


Aalholm, April 1359
But we serve the king.
A badge makes you my man.
It doesn't make other people's food yours.
DANMARK
SKÅNE


Aalholm, 29. April 1359
From Aalholm, Valdemar bans abusive demands for hospitality and illegal taxes on priests and monasteries.
Include my officers. No one may hide behind my name.
Can we call it a voluntary payment?
Now we can.


Kalundborg, 24. May 1360
At Kalundborg, the king and leading men of the kingdom agree on a public peace.
We must be able to count on each other.
Peace apparently needs a very large table.


Kalundborg, 1360
The agreement also concerns law and justice. It sets rules for when someone may be imprisoned.
May I?
Sometimes the smallest words work best.

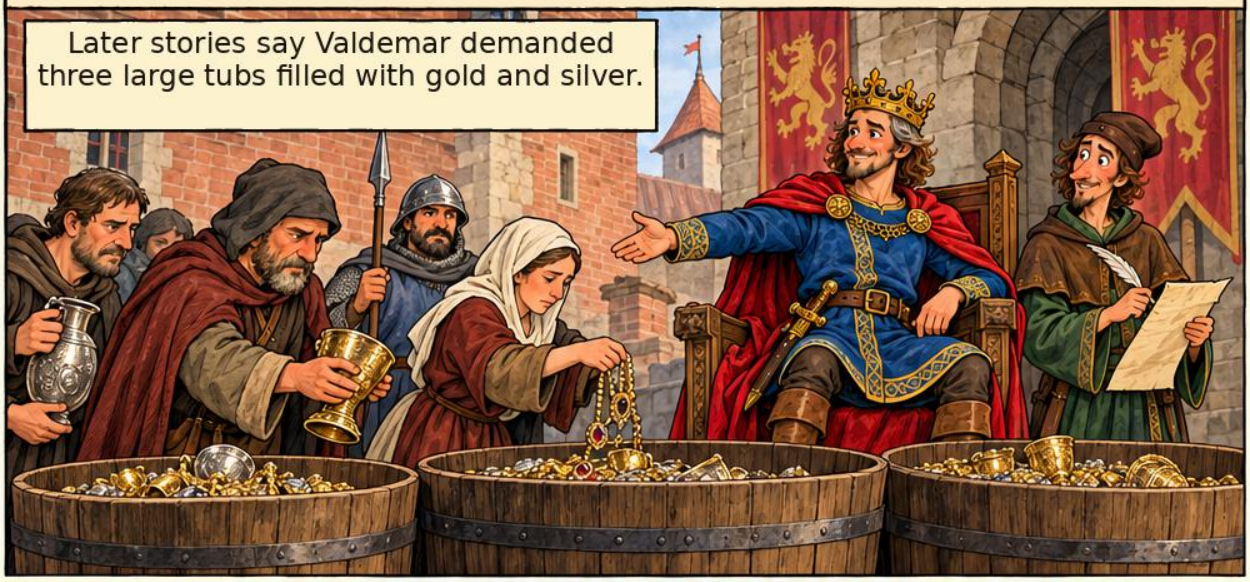

The Scanian lands, 1360
Valdemar regains Skåne, Halland and Blekinge.
Halland
Blekinge
Øresund
Skåne
Your map is getting bigger.
The country is fitting together better.
My case disagrees.
FJOP!

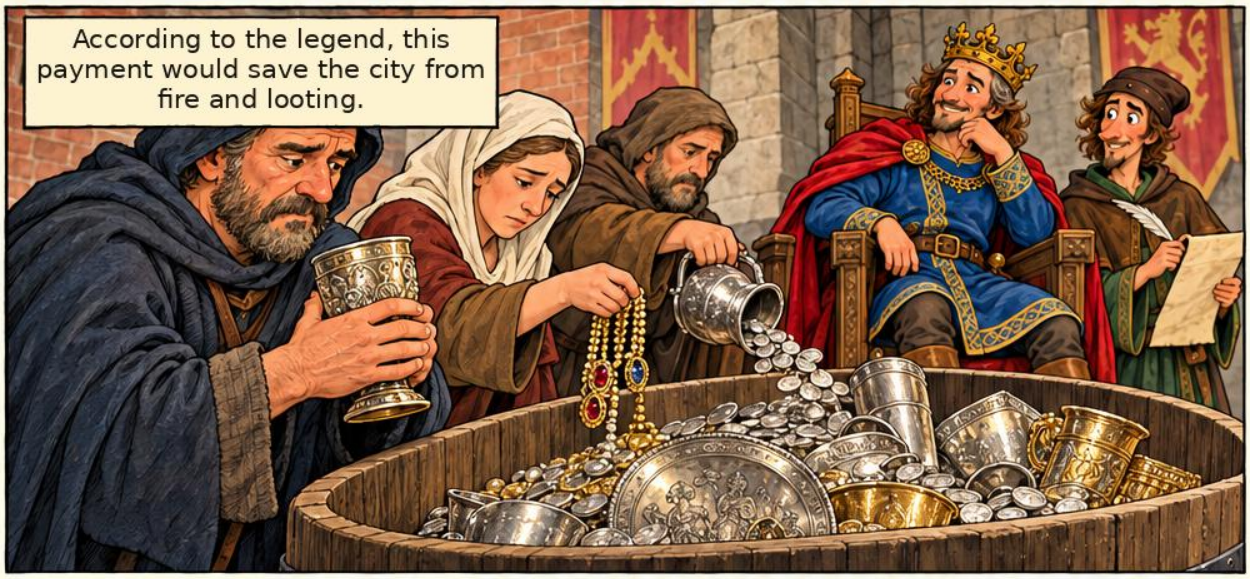

The Scanian market, 1360
Trade through the Øresund and the herring market bring the king important income.
Such a small fish. Such big money.
At least the accounts are fresh now.


Visby, 27. July 1361
On 27 July 1361, Valdemar's army faces the Gotland farmers outside Visby's walls.
The farmers fight for their island, but the king's experienced army defeats them.
About 1,800 Gotland farmers are thought to have lost their lives.
There are people behind every victory on the map.


Visby, July 1361
After the defeat outside the walls, Visby surrenders to Valdemar.
We want to preserve our city.
An old chronicle says the king demands a large payment in gold and silver.
And the city's rights?
Gotland
Skåne
Øresund
Valdemar confirms Visby's privileges. The city lives on under a new ruler.
That must be written down too.

LEGEND - LATER STORIES








Aalholm, 1362
1362. Valdemar meets Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg at Aalholm. Now words and agreements will shift power.
A family tie is a beginning.
But we still have our own interests.
Denmark
Skåne
There. Now only the Nordic lands remain to be divided.


Aalholm, July 1366
Four years later, there are more talks at Aalholm. Denmark is now a power others must reckon with.
That table is full too.
Has the paperwork ordered lunch too?


Aalholm, July 1366
Researchers can distinguish four scribes' hands in the surviving Aalholm agreements.
Our words must last for generations.
Then start by keeping your elbow up.


Aalholm, July 1366
Albrecht...
Yes?
The King of Sweden. Your son.
Then say King Albrecht.
Denmark
I'd like one name that belongs to just one person.
SKÅNE
Try Peder.
Albrecht


Aalholm, July 1366
The agreement recognises Danish rights to Gotland, including Visby, and several other areas.
Gotland
Visby
Gotland
Visby
That's why I want the words included.
Pieces can be moved. People try that with words too.
Gotland
Visby


Aalholm, July 1366
You want our promises. We want yours.
SWEDEN
DANMARK
SKÅNE
MECKLENBURG


The parties promise support. Valdemar also makes commitments to the princely house of Mecklenburg.


They agree on something.
What?
That I must write it all again.


Aalholm, July 1366
The agreement has a harsh side too. Magnus must remain captive until he gives certain guarantees.
DANMARK
SKÅNE
This concerns a human being.
Yes.
Valdemar can rebuild a kingdom and still make harsh choices.


Aalholm, July 1366
That isn't what I meant.
Then we must write what you mean.
Now there's no doubt!
Yes, there is. About who's the duke.


Aalholm, July 1366
Valdemar acknowledges an old compensation settlement and gives up raising the claim again.
That dispute mustn't start again with a new bill.
DANMARK
SKÅNE
It's the first time I've been buried in good news.


Aalholm, July 1366
Ingeborg's financial rights are not erased. The obligation remains, with a new deadline.
This part protects her. It stays.
Everything rarely means everything when kings say it.
DANMARK
SKÅNE


Aalholm, July 1366
Another agreement concerns prisoners taken in the Swedish war since the last Whitsun.
DANMARK
SKÅNE
SVERIGE
On both sides.
These prisoners must be released. Their ransom agreements must be cancelled too.


Aalholm, July 1366
Are they freed without paying to get out?
Yes. Those covered by the agreement.
Then the door really is open.
You're better at protecting paper than many dukes.
Danmark
Skåne


Aalholm, July 1366
On 28 July 1366, the great agreements take shape at Aalholm. They become known as the Aalholm Treaties.
DANMARK
SKÅNE
Are we finished?
With the letters. Not with lunch.


Aalholm, July 1366
From a powerless father to his son's strong kingdom. Aalholm has a new role.
DANMARK
SKÅNE
You may stop writing now.
To those who made it happen.


Aalholm, July 1366
Christopher lost power over the kingdom. His son Valdemar united it again.
For Denmark, and for those who will live here!
For Denmark!
DENMARK ROSE AGAIN.

What do we know?

Christopher II was brought captive to Aalholm in 1332 after being seized in Sakskøbing. Count Johan secured his release. He died in Nykøbing Falster on 2 August 1332 and was buried in Sorø.

His youngest son, Valdemar Atterdag, became king in 1340. He rebuilt royal power through payments, negotiations and military force. In 1346, he sold Danish rule over Estonia to the Teutonic Order. The money helped with debts and redeeming pledged lands.

In 1348, he secured Lolland, Falster and Møn. In 1360 he regained the Scanian lands, and in 1361 conquered Gotland. At Visby, a Gotland peasant army was defeated outside the walls. About 1,800 are thought to have died. The city surrendered; Valdemar Atterdag confirmed its privileges.

A letter of 29 April 1359 records the king's work at Aalholm. The public peace of 1360 was agreed at Kalundborg. On 28 July 1366, major agreements concerning territories, support, old claims, Ingeborg's rights and prisoners were drawn up at Aalholm.

What did we invent?

All dialogue, thoughts, mishaps and jokes are invented. Peder, Eskil, Agnes and Jens are fictional adults. Helvig's advice and the individual comic negotiations are imagined too.

Four scribes' hands can be recognised in the Aalholm agreements. Their personalities are unknown. Our four scribes are a dramatisation.

The prisoner agreement is a historical promise. The source does not say when every prisoner it covered returned home. We therefore show no documented emptying of Aalholm's prison.

The silver tubs come from later tradition. An old chronicle mentions a large payment, but its form and size are uncertain. The painting below dates from 1882; it is not an eyewitness image from 1361.

The castle rooms are reconstructions. The final celebration and Valdemar Atterdag with the Danish flag, Dannebrog, are invented symbolic images of Denmark's recovery.



Carl Gustaf Hellqvist: Valdemar Atterdag collects tribute from Visby, 1882. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. A later imagining of the event.

A stronger Denmark, with problems still to solve

Valdemar Atterdag united Denmark over many years. He did not rule all the Nordic lands, and castles and borders were not settled at once. Parts of Funen remained disputed after the Scanian lands were regained.

He was decisive, but harsh too. Taxes, war and rebellion had a great human cost. The book shows both the joy of a restored kingdom and the price of victory.

The Aalholm agreements gave him a strong diplomatic position in 1366. They did not end every conflict forever. More war followed; peace came at Stralsund in 1370. Our story ends at a moment worth celebrating.

Pledge: security for a loan; here, rights to land and income.
Treaty: agreement between political powers.
Seal: an impression confirming a document.
Dower: financial provision for a wife, especially if widowed.

The prison in the photograph is in Aalholm's north-west corner. The photo shows the room in modern times; Christopher's exact cell in 1332 is unknown.



The prison today · Photo: Aalholm Slot

Sources and pictures

Christopher II: captivity and final days
aalholmslot.dk

Christopher II and Valdemar Atterdag
Lex

Valdemar Atterdag: reunification and the sale of Estonia
Lex

The king's prohibition, Aalholm, 29 April 1359
Diplomatarium Danicum, nr. 212

Public peace ordinance, 24 May 1360
Danmarkshistorien / Lex

Battle of Visby, 1361
Danmarkshistorien / Lex

Meeting at Aalholm in 1362
Aalholm Slots historiske oversigt

Preliminary treaty and four scribes' hands, 1366
Diplomatarium Danicum, nr. 407

Valdemar Atterdag's commitments, 1366
Diplomatarium Danicum, nr. 409

Compensation settlement, 1366
Diplomatarium Danicum, nr. 410

Ingeborg's dower, 1366
Diplomatarium Danicum, nr. 411

Prisoners and ransoms, 1366
Diplomatarium Danicum, nr. 412

Gotland mass graves: Medieval Massacre
Historiska museet, Stockholm

Hellqvist's painting and the uncertain tribute
Danmarkshistorien, Aarhus Universitet

The chronicle and legend of the three silver tubs
HistorieLab, kilde 5 og 6

The painting of 1882: history and legend
Anekdot, Stockholms universitet

Sources checked 10 October 2026. Historical events, legends and invented scenes are distinguished on the preceding pages. Original comic illustrations with AI assistance. Aalholm Slot.