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STONE CHURCHES OF CENTRAL NORWAY OF THE 12th–13th CENTURIES: TYPOLOGY, PROTOTYPES, ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

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The stone architecture of medieval Norway holds a special place in the history of Norwegian architecture and the entire Scandinavian Peninsula. The definition of exact borders of the Norwegian dioceses predetermined the course of development of stone construction within the church's administrative districts. Following the principles and order of liturgy in cathedral, Norwegian parishes adopted the layout of cathedrals. The symbolic mimesis, manifested in the appropriation by regions of certain properties and architectural qualities of cathedral, is ubiquitous in the five Norwegian dioceses, including Central Norway. Having analyzed certain monuments, albeit fragmentarily, we can conclude that the parish architecture of the central part of the country has much in common. Most importantly, one-nave temple layout with a square choir is prevalent, with most buildings featuring three portals in the nave and a portal in the south wall of the choir, which corresponded to the cathedral architecture of the Middle Ages. St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim, which held a special status not only within the diocese, but throughout the entire archiepiscopate, had a significant impact on the emergence of a number of constructive and decorative elements. The masons' signs discovered in the parish churches are similar to those in St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim and indicate that metropolitan craftsmen were involved in the construction of small churches. At the same time, we should note the development of local specifics, expressed not only in the layout, but also in the special character of sculptural images whose origins require clarification and further research.

Keywords: stone architecture, Norwegian art, Middle Ages, parish churches, Trondheim cathedral, Central Norway.

The stone architecture of medieval Norway holds a special place in the history of this region's art and has drawn the attention of researchers for many centuries. Despite an extensive historiography, some aspects related to architectural typology and decorative elements need to be revised and complemented. Norway's church architecture of the studied period is notable for its variety of volumetric-spatial and compositional solutions were formed under the influence of a number of factors: from geographical location and political context to the symbolic significance of the building and contacts with other countries. As opposed to cathedral, which served as the main religious buildings of the Norwegian dioceses and resembled European architecture, the parish architecture of Norway is endowed with greater simplicity of layout; at the same time, the monuments in question illustrate the development of local specifics.

Studying the genesis and development of Norway's stone architecture begs the question about the relation between cathedral architecture and parish churches. How did cathedrals influence the formation of typology in the regions? How have local traditions developed in different dioceses? Were there local schools of architecture in Norway? We will try to formulate answers to these and many other questions using the example of temples located in Central Norway. As part of this study, we will outline — referring to a number of architectural monuments — the trajectories along which the development of parish architecture in this region took place. Over the centuries-old history, the appearance and interior of churches have undergone changes; meanwhile, many monuments have retained their original layout despite later reconstructions.

The formative period of stone architecture in Norway is the 12th century, when the main monuments of the Norwegian archiepiscopate were built, namely in five Norwegian dioceses with centers in Trondheim, Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Hamar. The typology rests on a three-nave basilica with an elevated central part and lowered side naves. Despite such a layout, each temple holds its own characteristics and decor. Thus, the general structure of St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim, Central Norway, is distinguished by the variety of designs and sculptural elements: a three-nave basilica, divided by a transept, continued by a three-part choir and an octagonal ending of the eastern part (Fig. 1).

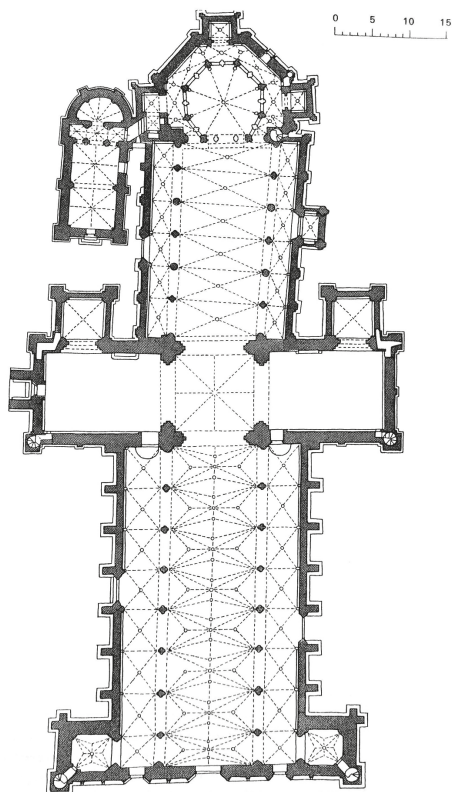


Fig. 1. St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim. About 1300. The plan of G. Fischer. 1965. [Lidén H.-E. *Middelalderens Steinarkitektur i Norge. Norges Kunsthistorie. Bd. 2.* Oslo: Gyldendal, 1981. S. 6–125, Fig. 1.46]

In Western Norway, which includes Bergen¹ and Stavanger, cathedrals have a similar typology [Hektet på ruiner og middelalderen, 2014]: a three-nave basilica with no transept and a square tower in the west. Viken, Oslo and Hamar established their own layout that consisted of a three-part nave, a transept with short arms and a square tower above the crossing. The Hamar Cathedral has a two-tower western facade, seamlessly included in the overall layout through semicircular arches that join together the side naves and the internal space of the

¹ The plan of Christ Church in Bergen was based on a reconstruction completed in 2013 when making a film about medieval Bergen.

square towers. The construction of major temples involved both local craftsmen and invited masons, primarily from England, Lombardy and German lands.

The definition of exact borders of the Norwegian dioceses, the strengthening of the church's power and the economic growth of its territories — all this contributed to the intensification of stone construction within the church's administrative districts. At the same time, the leading role of bishops in the construction of both cathedrals and parish churches should be noted: they approved the layout and were engaged in developing the internal design of the churches [Lidén, 1974, s. 34]. Thus, Archbishop Øystein writes around 1180 that he “was called by architects to the upper part of the wall to resolve issues related to construction” [Faulkes et al., 2001, p. 62]. As a rule, bishops were consulted in order to determine the cost of building a church, the location of quarries and the conditions for extracting stones for temples. When studying the history of Norwegian church building, it is not uncommon to find mentions of bishops asking the Pope or his inner circle to complete the construction of churches or to provide help with repairs. The “Frostathing Law” book, compiled in the first half of the 12th century², provides insights into the conditions of church building in Central Norway: “It is the duty of all free men in the province to build a church within 12 months; if it is built of wood, they must pay the bishop 15 marks. If some want to erect a stone church and others do not, whereby there is disagreement, the decision is reserved for those who have more desire and knowledge. If men neglect to build [their stone church], the penalty is the same as for those who refuse to build a wooden church” [The Earliest Norwegian Laws, 1935, p. 228].

The building of Norwegian cathedral led to the development of a certain typology, architectural features and decorative elements that are reflected in parish architecture. The advent of stone church-building techniques was primarily due to Norway's desire to become part of the pan-European Christian world, where stone architecture prevailed. Cathedrals became prototypes for many parish churches and played an important role in shaping the architectural typology of entire regions.

² These regulations applied to the residents of Trøndelag in Central Norway. The surviving version of the document dates from 1260, during the reign of King Håkon IV the Old.

From the mid-12th century, the main church of the Norwegian archiepiscopate is St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim, where pilgrims flocked from all over Europe. In the second half of the century the layout of the temple underwent significant changes: an octagonal form arose in the eastern part, the choir and nave expanded, and the western facade decorated with sculpture was erected.

When studying monuments of regional architecture, it is worth paying attention to building materials, designs and technical methods that help determine the “signature style” of masons. The parish churches of Central Norway are usually composed of one nave and a small choir of square or rectangular shape. In some cases, there is a square tower in the west end and a sacristy on the north or south side of the choir. The structure of churches in the Trondheim municipality is notable for the abundance of portals: apart from the western entrance, the churches have additional portals on the north and south, as well as a portal on the south side of the choir, which in cathedral-building is referred to as the “bishop's” portal. The use of such a layout — found in Skaun Church, Byneset Church, Alstadhaug Church, etc. — indicates a close connection with cathedral construction. Following the principles and order of liturgy in Norwegian cathedral, parishes adopted the layout of cathedrals. The symbolic mimesis, manifested in the appropriation by regions of certain properties and architectural qualities of cathedral, is ubiquitous in the five Norwegian dioceses, including Central Norway.

The collective organization of construction prevalent in the Middle Ages also developed in Norway. This is evidenced by the marks of masons in the form of simple geometric figures left on the stones of cathedrals and parish churches. By examining the wide range of marks in St Olav's Cathedral, it became apparent that Trondheim craftsmen worked in different parishes in Central Norway. Craftsmen's marks found in the south portal of the Skaun Church refer to similar marks discovered in one of the most impressive structures in St Olav's Cathedral, the octagon [Ekroll et al., 2000, s. 204]. A close examination of the masonry in the preserved square tower of Værnes Church revealed marks of the Trondheim Cathedral Artel's masons [Ekroll et al., 2000, s. 231]. Moreover, similar marks are found in the northern parts of Norway: marks of masons from Trondheim were discovered in the niche of the north-eastern corner of the Dønnes Church's nave [Liepe, 2001, p. 26]. All these examples indicate the free movement of masons and the rapid

spread of traditions of cathedral architecture within the dioceses in the 12th–13th centuries.

As mentioned above, the layout of stone parish churches has a simpler scheme than cathedrals; at the same time, some churches have certain design features directly characteristic of cathedrals. In particular, Alstadhaug Church in Skogne, built around 1140–1160, has an unconventional ending of the eastern part in the form of an octagonal apse, which was built in the second half of the 13th century (Fig. 2).

The octagonal shape is only reflected in the interior, while from the exterior only six sides can be seen, separated by thin semi-columns. The main analogue is the principal monument of this region, the church of St Olav in Trondheim, where from the late 1190s work began on the construction of an octagon with three square chapels. The connection between parish church-building and cathedral architecture is evident when studying the decorative elements of architectural monuments. Thus, in small churches, sculptural images are usually found in portals



Fig. 2. Alstadhaug church. 12th–13th centuries. Photo by Brit Heggenugen. 2008. Riksantikvaren. Available at: <https://kulturminnebilder.ra.no/fotoweb/> (accessed: 14.05.2024)

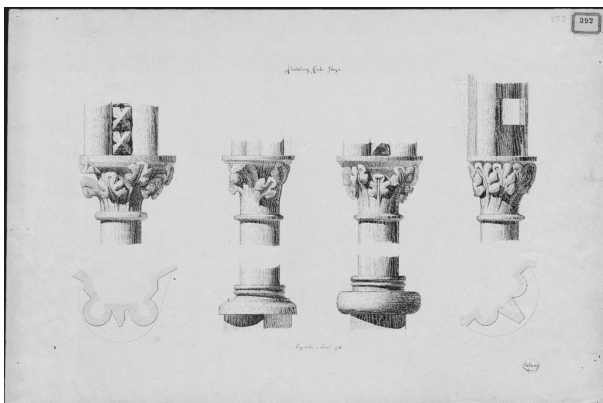


Fig. 3. Alstadhaug church. Fragments of pilasters. Drawing by Christian Christie. 1860. Riksantikvaren. Available at: <https://kulturminnebilder.ra.no/fotoweb/> (accessed: 14.05.2024)

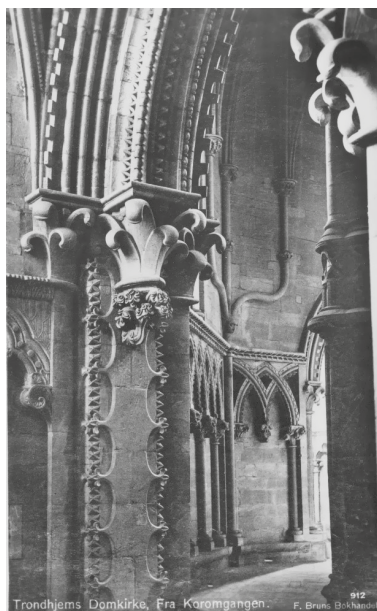


Fig. 4. St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim. The corner of the north chapel and the ambulatory. 13th century. Photo between 1920–1930. National Library of Norway, Oslo. Available at: <https://www.nb.no/items/0c9fe676fde2cc3e1be565e86c-9c4690?page=0&searchText=trondheim%20domkirke> (accessed: 22.04.2024)

and less often in the decoration of interior space. The interior of the Alstadhaug Church's apse is decorated with pilasters and carved capitals, each with a unique foliate ornamentation (Fig. 3).

The analysis of floral motifs used in the church allures to the sculptural plastics of the cathedral in Trondheim (Fig. 4).

Traces of Trondheim architecture can be seen in some churches of the northern region. An example of this is Alstadhaug Church on Altsen Island, built in the second half of the 12th century. Its portal — an archivolts with impressed stars, supported by columns with bow-shaped capitals and a profile with a twisted break [Liepe, 2001, p. 53] — resembles a similar element in the main cathedral of the country dating back to the beginning of the 12th century (Fig. 5).

Stiklestad Church, built on the site of the battle that killed the Norwegian king, Olav the Saint, should not be overlooked. The layout of the church follows the chosen architectural type of a simple church with



Fig. 5. The Western portal of Alstadhaug Church. Second half of the 12th century. Photo by Hallvard Kjelen. 2007. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portal_Alstadhaug.JPG (accessed: 14.05.2024)

a rectangular nave and a square choir. A rich decorative ornamentation should also be noted, concentrated primarily around portals and window openings. The southern portal of the temple is marked with a chevron ornament, and the western portal is flanked by pilasters with carved capitals, reminiscent of similar elements in the octagon of St Olav's Cathedral [Ekroll et al., 2000, s. 241] (Fig. 6).

In addition, let us note the variety of decorative reliefs with floral motifs and anthropomorphic images on the western façade, namely the sculptural depiction of a half-naked woman, or *shila-na-gig*. The iconography of such images has a long history and references English and Irish sculpture of the Middle Ages. At the same time, the closest example of such an image is found on the facade of the St Olav's Cathedral's south transept. The two figures have little resemblance to each other in terms of style or technical properties: while the Trondheim image is more general and minimalistic, the Stiklestad Church's relief stands



Fig. 6. The South portal of Stiklestad Church. 1150–1200. Photo 1920. Riksantikvaren. Available at: <https://kulturminnebilder.ra.no/fotoweb/> (accessed: 14.05.2024)

out owing to a large number of details and is more anthropomorphic. The presence of reliefs in the western part of the parish church makes us wonder about the origins of this decoration in a regional monument. Considering the construction history of this church in close contact with the cathedral architecture, we should, above all, note the symbolic significance of the two churches in the history of the St Olav's cult: the parish church marked out the place where the saint died for his faith, and the cathedral served as martyrdom and pilgrimage centre where the relics of St Olav were kept. In this regard, it seems that the construction team of the parish church probably included masons who worked on the cathedral in Trondheim. In addition, the presence of decorative elements belonging to the European tradition can also be conditioned by the involvement of masons from the country's capital or construction according to a certain model: it is known that St Olav's Cathedral, like other cathedrals, was a conduit of foreign influences, in particular English architecture. In the meantime, the arrangement of decorative elements within Stiklestad Church and the sophistication of the images testifies to the predominance of regional specificity and the work of local masons.

One of the largest parish churches in Central Norway is Værnes Church, built between 1130 and 1190. Unlike many other churches in the region, this church does not have a west entrance, but a north and south entrance. The original structure of the Værnes Church also includes a low square tower in the west that reflects the volume-planning composition of an earlier church on the site of the cathedral in Trondheim, namely Christ Church, erected in the 1070s. Furthermore, studies of the stonework show that the tower of the parish church and the early structures of St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim were built from stone quarried from the same quarry.

The sculptural decoration adorning the portals draws attention, too: an image of a lion is found in the tympanum of the north portal of the nave, as well as in the left part of the portal in the south wall of the choir. Despite a common idea, the two images have their own characteristics and qualities. A lion in the south portal, eating a human leg that is sticking out of its mouth, is of particular interest (Fig. 7).

Such an iconographic type is not often found on Scandinavian land. Teratological motifs can be observed in the design of St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim, which has already been mentioned several



Fig. 7. Værnes Church. The image of a lion on the south wall of the choir. The second half of the 12th century.

Available at: Værnes kirke Korinngang Hauglid — Værnesløva — Wikipedia (accessed: 14.05.2024)

times, but no similar composition can be found there. The lion image was actively used by the Lombards, whose “traces” of influence can be found in all Norwegian dioceses, as well as in Southern Scandinavia: St Lawrence Cathedral in Lund is a striking example. The question remains open as to how Lombards or other craftsmen with knowledge of Lombard sculpture ended up in Værnes. The active participation of Lombard craftsmen in the construction of Romanesque churches in Europe and Scandinavia, the spread of bestiaries, where the lion image figured prominently, and the developed tradition of decorating portals with animalistic compositions in wooden Norwegian churches have all

contributed to the emergence of such images in one of the Norwegian provinces. Moreover, it is worth paying attention to the fact that Værnes was a royal domain and the location of the monarch's estate [Ekroll, 2002, s. 87]. The close connection with royalty has probably had a certain influence on the construction of such a monumental structure and the choice of ornamental compositions that are uncommon for Norwegian architecture and reference European monuments.

Summarizing the brief reflection on parish architecture in Central Norway, it should be noted that the formation of architectural typology in a region depended on both political and socio-cultural prerequisites. Do the churches of Central Norway constitute a special group of monuments in Norwegian medieval architecture? Having analyzed certain monuments, albeit fragmentarily, we can conclude that the parish architecture of the central part of the country has much in common. Most importantly, one-nave temple layout with a square choir is prevalent, with most buildings featuring three portals in the nave and a portal in the south wall of the choir, which corresponded to the cathedral architecture of the Middle Ages. In Central Norway, local rocks produced in the nearest quarries were used as building materials.

St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim, which held a special status not only within the diocese, but throughout the entire archbishopate, had a significant impact on the emergence of a number of constructive and decorative elements. Undoubtedly, the advanced ideas in construction prevalent in Norwegian provinces underwent changes in order to meet the conditions of construction orders and the possibilities of their execution. The masons' signs discovered in the parish churches are similar to those in St Olav's Cathedral in Trondheim and indicate that metropolitan craftsmen were involved in the construction of small churches. In the same time, we must note the development of local specifics, expressed not only in the layout, but also in the special character of sculptural images whose origins require clarification and further research.

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**КАМЕННОЕ ПРИХОДСКОЕ ЗОДЧЕСТВО
ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ НОРВЕГИИ XII–XIII ВВ.:
ТИПОЛОГИЯ, ПРОТОТИПЫ, АРХИТЕКТУРНЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ**

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Каменная приходская архитектура является важной страницей в истории как норвежского зодчества, так и всего Скандинавского полуострова. Закрепление четких границ за диоцезами предопределило ход развития приходского строительства внутри каждой церковно-административной территориальной единицы. Следуя за принципами и порядком проведения литургии в кафедральных храмах, норвежские приходы реципировали планировочную структуру соборов. Символический мимесис, проявленный в присвоении регионами определенных свойств и архитектурных качеств кафедральных храмов, повсеместно отмечается в пяти норвежских диоцезах, в том числе в Центральной Норвегии. Проанализировав некоторые памятники, хоть и фрагментарно, мы можем сделать вывод о том, что в приходском зодчестве центральной части страны много общего. Прежде всего, превалирует однефная планировка храмов с квадратным хором, при этом большая часть сооружений имели три портала в наосе и портал в южной стене хора, что соответствовало соборному зодчеству Средних веков. Значительное влияние на появление ряда конструктивных и декоративных элементов оказал собор св. Олава в Тронхейме, имевший особый статус не только внутри диоцеза, но и во всем архиепископстве. Знаки каменщиков, обнаруженные в приходских церквях, аналогичны знакам в кафедральном храме и сообщают о том, что строительство небольших церквей велось при участии столичных мастеров. В то же время нельзя не отметить развитие местной специфики, выразившейся не только в планировочных схемах, но и в особом

характере скульптурных образов, истоки которых требуют уточнения и дальнейшего исследования.

Ключевые слова: каменная архитектура, норвежское искусство, средние века, приходские церкви, собор в Тронхейме, Центральная Норвегия.

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