

Summary

Medieval Architecture of Western Pomerania

This publication aims at providing as versatile and comprehensive overview of West Pomerania's architecture as possible, with its main trends and problems, although it is obviously not possible to cover every single piece of medieval architecture that has remained in this region. Chapters 1–3 present the historical background and topography, as well as a historical overview of research in this field. The time frame for this presentation is clearly demarcated, as it is determined by the type of architecture, i.e. starting from the first masonry walled buildings from the turn of the 12th and the 13th century up to the point when the medieval style vanished with the Reformation of 1534. The geographical scope of this analysis may nevertheless not be as obvious. For the purpose of this study, the area covered includes those territories within the contemporary Polish borders that in the Middle Ages comprised the eastern part of the Duchy of Pomerania and the Neumark (The New March), i.e. East Brandenburg. Therefore the architecture of the Pomeranian region beyond the Oder is not included in the study, apart from several references for the sake of analogy.

This delineation can be criticised as both arbitrary and ahistorical. Poland's western border was in fact determined by an arbitrary decision resulting from the Second World War. Nevertheless, state borders comprise tangible factors that are difficult to omit within historical research, not only that related to architecture. Despite several attempts, the dominant pattern of writing history of art as seen from the perspective of contemporary states still prevails. In my opinion, this persistence with what seems to be a rather anachronistic scholarly approach may be determined by the simple fact that any kind of history can only be written from a particular perspective of "here and now" and therefore is always determined by the particular topographic and political divisions. This historical legacy of "the inevitable" with regards to architecture is, on the one hand, obviously dependant on state-financed heritage protection, and on the other hand, it also stems from the duty assigned to the art historians of a particular state to provide informed descriptions of this heritage and disseminate this knowledge. This does not exclude the possibility of international cooperation, and in this particular case of Pomerania, it has been a very fruitful process. The point I am trying to make here refers more to the way responsibility is compartmentalised, duties assigned and properly carried out.

From the point of view of art history, political boundaries also do not correspond to the geographical distribution of historic buildings. Artistic relations or 'inspirations' tend to map out their own topographical network. For instance, the Luebeck-style basilica does not in fact appear at all in the eastern part of Pomerania, i.e. the Oder River seems to constitute a clear-cut dividing line. My aim in this publication is to focus on the artistic features that determine the characteristic style of this region. This book is intended to be more about the pieces of art (architecture) and their history as reflected in works of art.

On the one hand, the area analysed here comes across as a region of particular artistic peculiarities, while on the other, it is part of the vast Baltic coastal region. The cultural landscape of this region reflects its medieval roots, i.e. the fact that its architecture was to a great extent developed in the Middle Ages. Relatively small towns, with their regular networks of streets and the dominating edifice of the church at their centre, are scattered across the vast fields, forests and lakes. The natural environment characteristics of this area have also determined the predominant building material. While this territory cannot boast natural stone deposits, it is nevertheless abundant in clay and wood, which are the essential ingredients for the production of brick. The morainic hills that run across our territory here from south-west to north-east also abound in glacial granite, which was the building material particularly used in the early period.

Nearly all the art trends in this territory find their close or distant reflection in the northern European Baltic Coast Lowlands. The specificity of the Pomerania region is what can be referred to as a flattening of the perspective, i.e. the fact that masonry walled architecture came to this region quite late. This is determined by the fact that Christianity reached this region relatively late in the 12th century. After singular artistically exquisite exceptions were found in the forerunner designs of the 12th century, such as the cathedral at Kamień Pomorski or the Cistercian church in Kołbacz (cf. Chapter 4), the late 13th century saw a bigger wave of masonry walled architecture. As a result, the architectural landscape of the region is quite complex, as various trends, both “modern” and “traditional”, exist side by side, or at least were erected within a short time span (This is the focus of Chapter 5). On the other hand, the architectural forms and types that proved to be most functional had a tendency to last longer, and, as a result, produced a particular uniformity from the point of view of form (e.g. in the case of the technique of laying granite blocks, which is discussed in Chapter 6).

From the geographical, historical and artistic point of view, Pomerania can be perceived as an open region. The architecture that can be found in this area exhibits certain characteristics that point to an external impact, but there are also significant relations within particular styles and typological groups, e.g. related to the influence of the Cistercian workshops or Mendicant churches (see Chapter 7).

It is possible to delineate within the architecture erected under the patronage of the margraves in the Neumark a group of buildings featuring a clear impact of the forms developed in the Chorin monastery workshop. This group includes churches in Bierzwnik, Myślibórz (the Dominican Order) and Chojna (the Augustinian Order). The influence was passed on from Bierzwnik to the other smaller sites and its impact stretched far into the territory of the Duchy of Pomerania (i.e. Szczecin with its Franciscan church, the Parish Church in Gryfice). Earlier on, a similar role was performed, although to a lesser degree, by another workshop in Paradyż, which developed from the Cistercian Lehnin and which had an impact on Gorzów. Particular architectural forms generic to Lehnin, i.e. the pairs of blind arches between the windows, can also be spotted in Kołbacz, Strzelce, and even in some village churches.

Pomerania witnessed increased building activity in the second half of the 13th century and the first quarter of the 14th century, with particularly intensity at the turn of the 14th century. Both within the Duchy of Pomerania (later split up into several duchies) and the Neumark, this architectural boost was directly driven by the late 13th century’s immense growth in the number of towns established, combined with the settlement of new villages and an influx of German settlers. These processes were in fact initiated and supported by both Pomeranian Dukes and Brandenburg Margraves. Within a relatively short period of time, an extensive network of towns was established. These towns enjoyed a considerable economic independence, and in the case of the Pomeranian territory, this was also accompanied by considerable political autonomy.

The initial stage of architectural development was driven by initiatives coming from the rulers and the Church (bishops and monastic orders), whereas at a later stage, i.e. at the turn of the 14th century, the development in construction was driven more by the cities. The growing ambitions and financial wealth of urban patricians were reflected in spectacular city walls and town halls, but also in numerous remodellings of

sacred buildings. This was the time when the parish churches in Gorzów and Strzelce Krajeńskie were erected, featuring their original solutions in layout and interesting architectural details (Chapter 8). The beginning of the 14th century saw the establishment of a group of parish churches of the hall church type – a chapel-like chancel. The most monumental structure of this type is the collegiate church in Kołobrzeg. The other examples come from nearby towns, i.e. Stargard, Gryfice, Trzebiatów, Choszczno, and Recz (Chapter 9). In Central Pomerania, i.e. Koszalin, Słupsk, Białogard, Darłowo and Sławno, the preferred basilica type features original layout and structural arrangements (Chapter 10).

In some cases, the construction projects were the direct result of particular political initiatives. One such example is the collegiate church and monastery of the Dominican Order in Myślibórz, evidence of which can be found in the documents from the time. In both cases, the aim was to subordinate church structures to the Brandenburg Margraves' rule. Political motivations also lay behind the erection of Cistercian monasteries and establishment of some towns. It is to similar political motivations, or rather the ongoing competition between the towns of Szczecin and Stargard, that their respective parish churches owe their original architectural forms.

The architecture of this region is particularly versatile. One of its functions was to consolidate the social structure, especially with regard to newly established towns. This objective could easily be served by the kind of architecture that is not very sophisticated in form, but instead appeals to the audience with its impressive size, solid build and durable building material. This kind of building also conferred prestige on their founders (initially, local rulers and church institutions, and from the end of the 13th century onwards, also municipalities) in a simple, yet significant way. Great attention was put on the impressive church towers that symbolise hierarchy in an almost heraldic manner. Such processes took place in both the Neumark and the Pomeranian part of the region.

For these extensive building projects, the founders would hire workshops and architects not only locally (Brandenburg region) but also from Westphalia (for the construction work in Myślibórz and Gorzów), Saxony and Meklemburg. Original architectural arrangements, such as the gable in Kołbacz and the chancel in the Franciscan church in Szczecin, serve as evidence of the novel inspirations drawn from the French gothic style of the time.

Initially, in the second half of the 13th century, there was a period of trial and error, which, on the one hand, brought about numerous granite projects (e.g. Moryń, Banie, Gryfino) and, on the other, several brick churches (a continuation of the construction of the main part of the churches in Kamień and Kołbacz, of the parish church in Gorzów and Strzelce). With the onset of the 14th century, a new type of the hall church emerged with its characteristic feature of a one-nave chancel. At the same time, a group of basilica-type parish churches developed in Central Pomerania (i.e. in Koszalin, Białogard, Drawsko, Słupsk, Sławno). This did not, however, lead to a sweeping standardisation of the style. Within these two major trends, particular projects actually vary with regard to the naves' proportions and the way the choir vault is constructed. The recurring architectural challenge in this region is the internal or quasi-internal buttress system. The solutions range from the late-Romanesque wall buttress in Kamień Pomorski and Gorzów, through half-octagonal pillars in Myślibórz, through sets of two-storey recesses that add the impression of space in Kołobrzeg, Gryfice, Bierzwnik and Choszczno, to very modest and simple lesenes linked with arches in Drawsko and Dobiegniew.

The region became a hub for original architectural design in the late gothic period, which is marked here by the commencement of the project to extend St. James' Basilica in Szczecin around 1375 (Chapter 12). The architectural solution applied in this project was the most unique in Europe of the time, i.e. an ambulatory around the choir composed of tall two-storey chapels in between inward buttresses. The fact that a masterpiece of sacred architecture in the form of the Holy Mary church emerged soon afterwards in the neighbouring town of Stargard can be seen as a challenge to the Szczecin project. On the one hand,

what the Stargard church adopted from its Szczecin counterpart was the novel solution of an ambulatory. On the other hand, the Stargard project is augmented by the motif of triforium, an exception among the basilica churches east of the Rhine, and it also boasts tracery ornamentation on the facade. This structure also represents the pinnacle of technical solutions, as it overcomes all the limitations usually related to brick work, which tends to force simplified forms. Chapter 13 of this publication discusses this particular church structure. The Stargard parish church and several other buildings erected in a similar style (among them the parish church in Chojna) are directly connected with the builder and architect Hinrich Brunsberg, and for the first and only time in history, Pomeranian architecture forged its own distinctive regional style. In this architectural milieu, which influenced its neighbouring regions (including Wielkopolska and Brandenburg), new solutions to current artistic problems were put forward. In the 15th century, many earlier buildings were also modernised and brought up to a prestigious standard (for example, the parish church in Pyrzyce and St. John's Church in Stargard).

In the 15th century, secular buildings in cities became one of the leading "topics" in exceptional monumental architecture: in terms of scale and artistic value, the city walls built at the time, gates, towers and town hall went beyond strictly utilitarian functions. It is in this very category at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries that we see the rich ornamental forms of the passing Middle Ages: complex tracery and fancifully shaped arches.

The most numerous works of architecture are without doubt the rural parish churches, to which Chapter 16 is devoted. The majority of early buildings, dating from the 13th century and around 1300, are granite edifices, often particularly modest in form. There are fewer brick churches, whose construction was influenced by the architecture of religious orders (Cistercian and Mendicant orders), and are immediately distinguishable by their typological differentiation (single-nave churches, triple-aisled, with a presbytery or an integrated choir marked off). In the 14th century, brick became a more common building material in the countryside. In the late-gothic period (the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries) the greatest architectural achievements were churches with ambulatories (Sławsko, Sarbia).

In the late waning medieval period, construction in sacred architecture came to an end. Few new churches were erected at the beginning of the 16th century, and only in small centres and of palpably lower quality, both in artistic and technical terms (Chapter 18). However, the reverse trend could be observed in secular buildings, above all in castles and town halls (Chapter 17). It was in such buildings of that time that a richness of ornamental form could be seen in fluid tracery and arches in fantastic shapes. The Reformation of 1534 and resulting political, ideological and economic changes led to a radical turning point in architectural creativity. Not only did large churches cease to be built (this process began earlier; Chapter 18), but many of the edifices constructed at an earlier date fell into ruin with the dissolution of the monasteries. The destruction of the Thirty Years' War and decline of local dukedoms, which precipitated the dissolution of the Pomeranian state all limited the possibilities of local patrons. On the other hand, it is thanks to the relative stagnation of the modern era that so many medieval buildings have survived in Pomerania, which in turn are key to the artistic face of this region. These buildings provide visible testament to historical events and historico-artistic processes; in many case, they are also architectural works at the very highest level, spreading significantly beyond regional boundaries, which makes them all the more worth discovering and retaining.

Translated by Rob Pagett