

CHALLENGING THE ROMANESQUE

RECONSIDERING APPROACHES TO THE RURAL PARISH CHURCH OF TWELFTH-CENTURY DENMARK

Line M. Bonde

More than 3,100 churches in the style now known as ‘Romanesque’ were built on the territory of Medieval Denmark between *c.*1100 and *c.*1250. This dissertation orbits around this first generation of rural stone churches, and the notion of the Romanesque style. It explores how the church was experienced and used, and how the stylistic idiom of the round arch contributed to past meaning-making in and around the building.

The dissertation is divided into two parts: Part I, “Assessing the Rural Parish Church: The Prerequisites,” and Part II, “Assembling Past Meaning-Making: Style and Commonplace.” The first part opens with an introductory chapter 1. Chapter 2 is a historiographical synthesis of the different scholarly paradigms from the nineteenth century through to today: both the many brilliant insights as well as the idiosyncrasies of previous, primarily Danish, scholars. With that firm point of departure, chapter 3 describes the typical rural parish church of twelfth-century Denmark. On that background, a minimum church model is constructed, apt to serve as a heuristic tool throughout the rest of the work. Chapter 4 falls into two parts contrived to bring different, essentially unrelated, theory formations to coalesce so as to give new entry points when exploring aspects of past potential meaning-making in the churches: first, the conceptual context and medieval interpretation of the church is related. Theoretical and methodological considerations on how to access past meaning-making through form concludes the first part. Here the concept of the commonplace motif is introduced.

The inherent complexity of the second part cannot be as easily summarised as the first. It aims however to explore how the main stylistic idiom of the Romanesque, the round arch, plays a vital part in meaning-making in and around the early Danish stone church. This enquiry is confronted from multiple angles. First, in chapter 5, the ubiquity of the round arch is addressed and it is demonstrated that the round arch crosses conventional art-historical groupings and thus cannot be dismissed as devoid of meaning or a whim of fashion. On this background it is argued that it is, in fact, to be regarded as a commonplace motif. In chapter 6, it is shown that the prevalence of the round arch – outside Danish territory as much as in – enables a renovation of the modernist concept of style: the

Abstract

Dissertation submitted for the degree of PhD at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society

2021

round-arched commonplace motif is a cultural, ontological, and cross-temporal phenomenon adding to past meaning-making. In chapters 7 and 8 it is demonstrated that the ‘style of a work’ carries with it a cluster of metaphors and connotations. These, it is shown, are activated when rituals are performed in and around the church: they function as ambiguous cues that contribute to the potential of meaning-making. Finally, chapter 9 encircles the potential meaning-making by animating the church model. Surveying how the early stone churches were used, exemplified by the liturgy of Sunday Mass and the Baptismal Rite, serves to show how the many round-arched commonplace motifs in and around the church worked together in a dialogue with worshippers, the liturgy and sensual factors to produce meaning. By the closing chapter 10 it is concluded that new insights into well-studied subjects such as the early Danish church and the Romanesque demand a break with rigid discipline specificity: a combination of conventional approaches and new theoretical currents gathered from different disciplines is a precondition.