Kloosters van baksteen. De architectuur van de hervormingsorden in Nederland tot omstreeks 1300

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Citation for published version (APA):
SUMMARY

Since long the new religious orders of the twelfth century, the Cistercians and the Premonstratensians, are supposed to have greatly influenced early brick architecture in the northern territories of the Netherlands. This supposition is examined in this dissertation. The main sources for this inquiry are the archaeological excavation of the Cistercian abbeys Klaarkamp and Aduard that took place in the early forties of the twentieth century under the direction of A.E. van Giffen.

The Premonstratensian architecture

In the twelfth century fabric houses of the religious orders had no recognizable influence on the architecture in Friesland and Groningen. Probably the abbeys of the new orders built their major buildings in tuff from the Eifel, as did the surrounding parishes. With that they presumably accepted the decorative schemes of the Rhineland, which in these regions went always together with tuff.

The late twelfth century Premonstratensian abbey churches of Mariëngaarde at Hallum and Bonifatius and Paulus at Dokkum were both built in tuff. Both churches possessed a small sanctuary at the east end and two supplementary sanctuaries on both sides of a crossing. The thirteenth century abbey churches of Bloemhof at Wittlewierum (build in 1238-1257) and of Mariëndal at Lidium (1242-1287; choir finished in 1268; vaults added between 1296 and 1309), both build in brick, had a similar choir. The naves of these thirteenth century churches consisted of three aisles, whereas that of the twelfth century churches possessed only one. Apparently large-scale churches didn’t appear in Friesland before the introduction of brick around 1200.

In German countries the Premonstratensians applied the very old and respectable plan with lateral sanctuaries very often as well. This scheme wasn’t however typical of the Premonstratensian. Chapters, parishes and Augustinian canons with a less severe style of living than the followers of Norbert applied the same type. With this traditional type the Premonstratensians didn’t distinguish themselves as representatives of a monastic reform movement, but rather demonstrated to be embedded in the main stream of the established church. Accordingly the order of the Premonstratansians didn’t forbid the building of stone church towers, as the more severe Cistercians did from the beginning. The four churches just mentioned had all one or more sturdy towers at their disposal. At Wittlewierum the canons even planned four towers: a big one over the crossing, two on both sides of the choir and a bell tower on the west end of the church. As a result of constructive and financial problems only the tower over the crossing was carried out.

It’s not beyond all doubt that the Premonstratensians introduced the lateral sanctuaries in Friesland. In this matter archaeological data are very uncertain. The excavated parish church of Saint Vitus at Leeuwarden for instance may be older than the abbey churches at Hallum and Dokkum. Some scholars even suppose that the abbey church in Dokkum existed even before the Premonstratensians settled there. This assumption isn’t supported by any indications whatsoever, but evidence for the contrary can’t be given either.

From the end of the twelfth century the lateral sanctuaries of the Premon-
stratensian abbey churches at Dokkum and Hallum were imitated by a lot of parishes in the surrounding countryside. All of these villages seemed to have entertained one or another relationship with the Premonstratensians at Hallum or at Dokkum. The Premonstratensians used to demonstrate an active involvement in local religious affairs and didn’t turn aside from their neighbourhood as did the Cistercians. Possibly the canons of Prémontré were even actively involved by the building of these small parish churches. Another reason for the popularity of the lateral sanctuaries may have been the location of the Dokkum abbey church just beside a very important place of pilgrimage: the little church which commemorated the assassination of Saint Boniface, the ‘apostle’ of Friesland and Germany.

The Romano-Gothic style of the Cistercians

The first documented church in brick was that of the Cistercian abbey of Aduard. This edifice (hereafter Aduard I) was build by abbot Albertus (1205-1216). The monks learned the production and employment of brick probably from Danish abbeys. The plan of Aduard I gives an indication for this. Different from most Bernardine plans the shallow sanctuary of this church possessed three aisles instead of one. This variant of the Bernardine plan was quite common in Denmark. As example for Aduard I served possibly the brick church of the Cistercian abbey in Vitskøl. Later this scheme was also adopted by the Cistercian nuns of Varfruberga in Sweden and by the Cistercians of the Danish abbey Løgumkloster.

The building of Aduard I represented a new style, the Romano-Gothic, which stood close to the earlier Romanesque. The way of treating the walls showed probably no differences worth mentioning with the in Friesland current Romanesque style of the Rhineland. The Romano-Gothic churches in the neighbourhood of Aduard, the early ones included, are moreover characterize by domelike cross ribvaultings. These vaults must have been inspired by Aduard I. As a consequence of the lack of firm buttresses the walls of these parish churches contains only small windows, as doubtless was also the case in Aduard I. The domelike cross ribvault may be seen as an adaptation of the local Romanesque vaults on building in brick. By making the bends of the vaults more pronounced the comparative light bricks of the panels could for the most part be laid without large-scale centring and heavy scaffolding.

In the thirties of the thirteenth century the completion of the abbey church of Mariëngaarde at Hallum recommenced in brick. In 1238, two years before Aduard II, the building of the brick abbey church of Bloemhof was launched. Both buildings probably possessed domelike cross ribvaults. As master builder of both church acted Everard from Cologne, which was at that time in matters of architecture pretty conservative. In Friesland Everard worked probably for the first time in his career with brick. Used to tuff his architectonic idiom must have leaned heavily on the Romanesque style of the Rhineland. Details of the abbey churches he built aren’t known. The exterior of the Martinikerk at Groningen, which had in common with the Premonstratensian abbey churches the lateral sanctuaries, reflected the same Romanesque tendency as these churches probably did.

With the building of Aduard II (1240-1263) the Romano-Gothic style entered a new, richer phase. This new style is probably the merit of a lay brother of Aduard, who worked as a master builder. In preparation of the building of a new abbey church abbot Wigbold sent him and his son to the abbey of Clair-
The architect, however, concentrated his attention on entirely different examples. The choir with the ambulatory and the seven radial chapels of Aduard II were based on the Cistercian abbey church of Royaumont, which was built in 1228-1235 in commission of the young king Louis IX of France. The abbey church of Royaumont was a quite faithful copy of the Cistercian abbey church of Longpont. Louis IX and his mother Blanche of Castile both assisted at the solemn consecration of this church in 1227. The master builder of Aduard derived the semicircular wall between the sanctuary and the ambulatory from the early thirteenth Cistercian abbey of Heisterbach. From the same church the lay brother derived without doubt also the second (reduced) transept. The choir of Royaumont was an early example of the high Gothic. The architecture of Heisterbach on the other hand represents the late Romanesque of the Rhineland.

The choice of these divergent examples characterize the later developments of the Romano-Gothic style, which combined Romanesque and Gothic elements. The constructions of this school of brick architecture are mainly Romanesque. The vaults are supported by heavy walls without any buttresses. The buttresses against the radial chapels of Aduard II made up an exception. The far more important buttresses between the radial chapels to support the vaults of the sanctuary and the ambulatory were entirely omitted. Because external supports were lacking the heavy walls of the transept and the nave must have been rather closed.

In the bay of the choir the master builder of Aduard repeated the alternating system of the abbey church of Schola Dei at Ihlow, a daughter foundation of Aduard. The building of this church began in the thirties of the thirteenth century. The double bays in Ihlow weren’t square anymore as in Romanesque churches and as in the contemporary church of the Cistercian abbey of Longmunkloster. In the transept and the nave of Aduard II the lay brother turned from double bays to single ones. Instead of alternately heavy and lighter supports he planned arcades with identical compound piers as in contemporary Gothic architecture. The proportions of Aduard II however weren’t Gothic at all, because they were comparatively much longer. This to give room for the domelike cross vaults, which were in Groningen common.

The interior of Aduard II must have shown of a strange mixture of Gothic structure and Romanesque decorations, which still can be seen in existing Romano-Gothic parish churches. The compound piers in the nave and along the walls of the aisles formed a vertical, utterly Gothic structure. The walls between answered to the current Romanesque scheme, which was marked by a horizontal arrangement with circular arched mouldings. The wall between the sanctuary and the ambulatory made up part of this scheme. The very decorative treatment of the masonry eased this sharp contrast between horizontals and verticals.

The prohibition of the order to apply wall paintings made the vast, whitewashed surfaces for the Cistercians very awkward to deal with. Bare, but decorative applied brick, more often then not painted, offered them a way out. It is therefore very likely that it was Aduard II that initiated in Groningen the transition from whitewashed walls with paintings to decorative brick patterns. On the whole the style of Aduard II didn’t befit the principles on simplicity of the order. For that the handling of the masonry was too decorative.

The lay brother of Aduard who acted as master builder maintained connections with Danish architects as did his predecessor who built Aduard I. Upon
this points the typological resemblance between Logumkloster and Schola Dei on the one hand and the stylistic and geometrical resemblance between Schola Dei and Aduard II on the other. The plan of Schola Dei at Ihlow derived from Logumkloster, but the compound piers and the proportions of the bays stood closer to Aduard II. The exchange between Aduard and Danish lodges took place in both directions. The geometrical scheme of Aduard II was adapted as far away as Oliva (Poland), a Cistercian abbey of Danish origin.

In the abbey church Aduard II the traditional Romanesque and the contemporary high Gothic were both forged to a new unity and radically adapted to the technical and decorative possibilities of brick. After the middle of the thirteenth century the developments of the Romano-Gothic brick architecture in Groningen was entirely governed by the example of Aduard II. Till the middle of the fourteenth century all the new parish churches here showed the same combination of an inner Gothic structure with compound piers along the walls and a flat decorative treatment of the walls with circular arched mouldings.

The Gothic brick architecture

The Romano-Gothic brick architecture contained a lot of Gothic elements, but was in matters of construction and geometry essentially Romanesque. The early brick architecture in Flanders on the other hand showed from the beginning high Gothic proportions and an effective system of heavy buttresses. The earliest known Gothic church with flying buttresses entirely erected in brick was that of the Cistercian abbey of Ter Duinen (1214-1262) in Belgium. The church and the cloister contained still some Romanesque elements, for instance the closed and heavy crossing tower and the round arches twin windows on the storey of the cloister, but these lacked the decorative qualities of the Romano-Gothic in the north. The architect of Ter Duinen abbey completely thought in terms of structures and construction. The lodges in the north of France determined his outlook.

In the neighbourhood the lodge of Ter Duinen and Ter Doest had as much influence on the local architecture as the consecutive lodges of Aduard had in Groningen. The Gothic architecture in brick of the Cistercians spread in the lowlands of Flanders and even reached the county of Holland. In the second quarter of the thirteenth century a Flemish lodge built for the Cistercian nuns of Loosduinen near The Hague the still existing church. The design of this brick structure was based on the convent buildings of Ter Duinen. The Flemish lodge was probably asked for by the abbot of Ter Doest (a daughter foundation of Ter Duinen), who acted as supervisor of the nuns.

Further north, in Friesland, the first Gothic churches in brick which are more or less datable are the Dominican church at Leeuwarden of around 1300 and that of the perhaps slightly older church of the Franciscans at Bolsward. Both churches with exception of the façade at Bolsward, distinguish themselves by a very dry and simple design. The geometry of the plan however corresponds with that of Aduard II and not with contemporary Gothic churches. Archaeological excavations have established that at Leeuwarden at first a Romano-Gothic church with compound piers as in Aduard II was foreseen. The plans were changed after the foundations of the pillars were laid. The source of inspiration for this alteration of plans must have been the Cistercian abbey church of Klaarkamp, which possessed heavy buttresses on all detached fronts and - in contrast to the churches of the friars in Leeuwarden and Bolsward - a
plan with fully Gothic proportions. The building of Klaarkamp was probably started after the middle of the thirteenth century and marked the beginning of the Gothic or Flemish influence in the north. The western parts of the Franciscan church at Bolsward for instance shows a rather clumsy executed Flemish bond instead of the monk bond, which was until then usual in Friesland and Groningen as well as in Denmark. In the same period elsewhere in the northern brick landscape along the coast of the Baltic Sea rose for the first time Gothic churches as well. Earlier assumptions that the abbey church of Klaarkamp dated from about 1165, the years in which this abbey was founded, are therefore untenable.

Perhaps the monks of Klaarkamp considered the lush and decorative style of Aduard II not appropriate anymore for an abbey which aimed for poverty and simplicity. In this respect the monks ran in the second half of the century indeed the risk of being compared unfavourably with the Franciscan and Dominican friars, who built very simple. The friars embraced this modern, but somewhat dry Gothic almost immediately after it was introduced by the Cistercians.

The nunneries
In the twelfth and the thirteenth century the number of convents for women increased very rapidly. In general the new convents for women became more and more subordinated to the abbot of a monastery. This subordination reflected itself in the architecture of the churches. All the known and still existing churches of female religious communities of the thirteenth century in the Northern parts of the Netherlands consisted of one bay. In these respect the churches of the Cistercian nuns didn't differ from these of the other religious orders. In the late Middle Ages these simple halls became among female communities the rule.

As in the German countries the nuns in the low countries often had their stalls on a gallery in the western end of the church, far from and high above the high altar.

In many cases the churches of the religious women were build by the abbot who acted as supervisor of the nuns. The abbot often brought his own lodge into action. The church of the Cistercian nuns at Loosduinen for instance, was, as has already been remarked, unmistakable build by a lodge from the abbey of Ter Duinen or Ter Doest. Therefore the nunneries developed no architecture of there own.
The Gothic Revival architecture

The Romanesque was the first style of Gothic architecture to be revived. It was the most popular, especially in the later part of the 19th century. The Romanesque style was characterized by its heavy, solid mass and thick walls, which were often reinforced with heavy timbers. The style was revived in the late 18th century, and the revival continued into the 19th century, with many examples in England and France. The style was also influential in the design of other buildings, such as churches and public buildings.

In the 18th century, the Gothic style was revived in England and France, and this trend continued into the 19th century. The Gothic style was particularly popular in England, where it was used for many public buildings, including churches, hospitals, and schools. The style was also influential in the design of other buildings, such as churches and public buildings.

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