

ABSTRACT

Evolution and form of the three-aisle hall type layout in Bohemian sacral architecture to the mid-15th century

The hall church with two, three and rarely more aisles in German described as “Hallenkirche” is usually defined as having the aisles of the same or almost the same height as opposed to the basilica. With this type of organization the main nave is lit only indirectly because there is no space for basilica type windows. Other variants or transitional types are pseudohalls, sometimes also called pseudobasilicas (in German terminology Staffenhalle and Stufenhalle), which differ from the main type by having an elevated nave without the aforementioned direct light sources.

These distinctions stem from a thought construct of art history which strives for strict taxonomy in their source material. The diversity of medieval architecture nevertheless proves that there is cannot be drawn a clear and decisive line between the basilical and hall type layouts, just as the distinction between the longitudinal and central floor plans. This is connected to the cultural semantics of the different types and the even more complicated question of the intentions of the choice.

The hall type is spread all across medieval Europe from the Romanesque era to the end of the Middle Ages. This type of architecture was the most common and most popular in the Holy Roman Empire sphere of influence especially in the late Gothic era, when it became the majority architectonic type. Its popularity and longevity in some regions is proven by the fact that one of the late Gothic variants became the structural and partially also spatial source for the dynamic creations of the High Baroque.

In the region of historical Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia there are more than 30 medieval churches of the three aisle disposition still standing which is only a fraction of this type of building found in neighbouring countries. Germany and Austria especially have hundreds maybe even thousands of buildings that base their disposition on the hall type. The same ubiquity as in the German speaking regions was never reached in the Czech lands because here the basilical layout prevailed.

The hall church as a separate architectural phenomenon was not yet systematically covered by the Czech art history. In the last decade there was nevertheless an increasing number of papers covering not only individual buildings but also trying to describe the general evolution of the form and trying to place it in the context of the general works describing the evolution of Czech medieval architecture.

This dissertation thesis is divided into a heuristic part covering the research up to this point in time; especially the general synthetic books and also the important monographs of individual buildings touching on the semantic level of this phenomenon. Second part of the dissertation is a text condensing original research based on detailed surveys of chosen buildings through the methods of building archaeology combined with of art history methodology. Another indivisible part of the thesis is formed by cataloguing individual buildings described in the general part of the dissertation, briefly describing the spread of the three-aisle hall churches in the historic Czech region with the necessary outreach to Moravia and Silesia. The catalogue part does not cover all the buildings of this type because past unfavourable historical events caused a destruction of a whole number of important buildings especially among the monastic architecture (mostly Cistercian and the town based begging orders). Other churches were in later years of their existence rebuilt so extensively that their medieval form was as good as gone.

Sacral architecture of the hall disposition has been for a long time an important part of the conceptual evolution of Czech history of architecture based on form and style analysis. Individual buildings illustrate the story of the evolution of architecture chronologically and the style analysis allows us to follow the possible filial connections between the expected original source and the stylistically related circle. It is more difficult to follow the evolution of the type as a solitary phenomenon and question the choice of a particular type and the reasons that lead to it. Was it a purely artistic/creative decision or was it the client's choice whether motivated by the desire for impressive presentation or were the reasons symbolical.

The last two questions are talked about in the German art history circles for more than a century. The state of knowledge now is that a long-held theory putting the united space of the hall type of sacral architecture together with the rise of the more egalitarian

urban society in contrast with the hierarchically constructed basilical form reflecting the hierarchic structures of the medieval church and aristocracy. The hall space was used and developed not only in urban parish churches but also in the church led environment from monasteries to bishop churches which can be seen not only in our neighbouring countries but also in Bohemia where the first hall type church in the region was built within the complex of buildings of the Premonstratensian monastery in Teplá. The space unification which is supposed to be the main signifier of the hall type church is only present in a small number of the buildings usually put into this category. More importantly the directionality and the width and height dominance of the central/main nave stress the importance of the axis of the choir and the main altar.

On the other hand the fact that in this region this particular type never gained traction allows us to follow the coexistence of both layout solutions and ask questions about the basis of the decision to use one over the other. As the preserved buildings show the choice of one type cannot be easily explained by one decisive criterion. The individual cases show that we have to account for a number of possible factors that determined the final look of the building whether it was the availability of building material, construction choices, the urbanistic context, the intentions and requirements of the customer and the artistic choices of the architect which were themselves limited by the availability and competence of the workforce.

Even with the first building of the hall church in Teplá there is an obvious connection with a circle of late Romanesque hall churches in the nearby Upper Palatinate where the masonic workshop that built the church came from. The convenience of geographical proximity and the potential of available experienced craftsmen were in the time and place an optimal solution. The layout of the St. Bartholomew church in Kolín takes inspiration for its complex form from the Thuringia region. The Early Gothic period can be with certain limitations defined as a period of adaptation connected to adopting already existing layout and space templates while including new morphology. The church of St. Giles in Prague's Old Town which was founded in first quarter of 14th century was built on a narrow plot among older buildings cramped from the west and the east side by important roads connecting to the centre of the town. This limited space did not allow for a presbytery but for the main corpus they chose a monumental form, a strongly elevated three aisle hall. With this solution they maximised the capacity in a

cramped space and the size had its representative function – the church was taller than the neighbouring buildings and dominated the panorama. This purely representative function and artistic intention is present in the new churches of the Charles IV era which grew in a well-planned and designed organism of the newly founded town. It is especially obvious in the two new parish churches St. Stephen and St. Henry. Both buildings on identical plots were built on almost identical plans with completely different layouts; in the first case a basilica and the second a hall church. The scarce written sources indicate that both buildings were constructed by the same architect. It opens a number of questions about the role of a “main court architect” whose task it was to design the urban plan for the newly set up town, the role of the master builder on a particular project and the possible influence of the clients – the Old Town Knights of the Cross together with the burghers of the newly founded town districts. Both different, simultaneously chosen layouts point to a purely artistic intention, which was probably a part of the wider collector mind-set of Charles IV, whose goal it was to include all existing architectural forms used for sacral buildings (apart from the basilical and hall forms the New Town also contains one aisle hall churches and centrally planned buildings on the ground plan of a square, an octagon and a Greek cross).

Václav Mencil defined the fundamental basis of Czech architectural style of the second half of the 14th century as a tendency towards unity and centralisation of the sacral space through suppressing of the segmenting apparatus and the emphasis on the sensual side of architecture modelled by light. Even though the conclusions explaining this tendency in an unambiguous and polarising nationalist context are long time refuted, the phenomenon persists. Apart from the centrally planned hall spaces there is the longitudinal, directional style with three aisle hall with a three-choir chevet asserting itself in Czech architecture of late 14th century. The prototype for this style can be seen in the church of the Na Slovanech monastery while its origins are even older (the Regensburg cathedral, St. Stephen in Vienna). The longitudinal directional hall churches with a reduced three-choir chevet, like the ones in Jaroměř or Jičín were built at the turn of 14th and 15th centuries along the central types in Dvůr Králové or Kutná Hora. Between these two distinctive trends there are a number of varieties adhering more or less closely to one or the other. The central ground plan was common with town churches of hospital orders since late 13th century as in Cheb, Jihlava or Olomouc. The different varieties of longitudinal layouts with supported arcades separating aisles

on a round or rectangular ground plan prevail among the town parish churches in Žatec, Plzeň, Znojmo, Praha or Kutná Hora. It is remarkable that Czech architecture did not influence further development of the hall layout which in Bavaria and the wider central Germany lead to the integration of the hall choir with the ambulatory and the corpus of the nave which started before the middle of the 14th century (Verden, Swabian Gmünd, Berlin and the early 15th century works of Hanse von Burghausen). Whether this was due to unfavourable historical conditions or the local preference for central layouts as described by Mencl is to be examined in further research.