
BOOK REVIEW

A Review of *The Architecture of the Scottish Medieval Church 1100–1560*

By Richard Fawcett, Yale University Press, 432 pages, 2011, ISBN 9780300170498

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If ever a book could be described as a 'magnum opus' it is this: indeed it is a *summa*. Richard Fawcett has been publishing on Scottish medieval architecture, mainly ecclesiastical, for three decades, ranging from articles on minute changes in Gothic mouldings (the subject of his doctoral research at the University of East Anglia) such as 'Dunblane Cathedral: evidence for a change in the design of the nave' (1982) to a survey of architecture between 370 and 1560, *Scottish Architecture from the Accession of the Stewarts to the Reformation* (1994). For much of that time he was an Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Historic Scotland, allowing him unfettered access to all the key monuments for most of which he has written authoritative guidebooks. However, besides Scotland, his knowledge of other European medieval architecture, especially in England, France and the Low Countries is encyclopaedic. His researches have made unsustainable the inferiorist attitude that Scottish medieval architecture was insular and backward, by pointing out countless foreign parallels, which demonstrate that Scotland's patrons and masons were always aware of contemporary developments beyond its borders and shores. This monumental book brings together the fruits of these years of study into a rich synthesis. At last MacGibbon and Ross' groundbreaking *Ecclesiastical architecture of Scotland* (1896-7) has been superseded.

After an 'Introduction' (actually an illuminating mini-chapter on church architecture before 1100) eight substantial chapters follow, divided chronologically up to 1560, the date of Scotland's Reformation. The book ends with an epilogue on the fate of Scottish medieval churches with some observations on Gothic survival/revival after 1560. Each chapter begins with a few paragraphs usefully setting architectural developments into wider Scottish history, succeeded by pages of detailed architectural analysis ranging from major cathedrals and abbeys to minor rural parish churches, all generously illustrated not only with the Scottish subjects but also their foreign parallels. The chronological emphasis, while justifiable, means readers, who are interested in even a part of a complex building, must flick back and forth between pages: the arcade of

the nave of Dunkeld Cathedral is discussed on pp.256–60, while the triforium and clerestory are on pp.324–6. That is a minor inconvenience, but a more detailed index would have helped.

For the first four chapters, from 1100–1300, most of the non-Scottish parallels unsurprisingly come from England, given the interconnections between the ruling elites in both countries, before the failed attempt to conquer Scotland initiated by Edward I of England, which ended a two-century Golden Age, which saw Scotland enter the mainstream of European culture. Even then there is a suggestion the Scots may have been looking further afield, such as in the case of the twin-towered west front of Holyrood Abbey, begun in the 1190s, which extends beyond the width of the nave. Having pointed out that the closest parallels are at Compostela, Poitiers and Cefalù, Fawcett questions if any of them could have had a direct impact; this nevertheless ignores the fact that Scottish pilgrims were already visiting Santiago, that the contemporary king, William the Lion, had a French queen, and that, shortly after, Michael Scot would be in the service of Frederick II in Sicily.

The last three chapters from 1370, after the Scots had won the Wars of Independence, show continental late Gothic influence, especially French and Netherlandish, becoming common, one strand of a conscious rejection of the contemporary English Perpendicular style. Here, Fawcett is at his best, repeatedly pointing out convincing parallels, such as Ambierle priory in Burgundy, begun in the 1440s, as the model for Trinity College church in Edinburgh, begun before 1460 by Mary of Gelders, queen of James II and grand-niece of the duke of Burgundy.

He is weaker on the post-1370 revival of Romanesque and early Gothic architectural forms, which MacGibbon and Ross had already identified. I revived the idea in an article in *JSAH* in 1995, linking it to a cultural nationalism, found in other areas of contemporary Scottish life. This was picked up in what quickly became the standard *History of Scottish Architecture* by Glendinning, MacKechnie and MacInnes (1996), strikingly absent from Fawcett's bibliography. Initially sceptical, Fawcett published an article in 2003 accepting the main revivalist thesis and furnishing new examples, which makes it all the more surprising that he downplays their significance here, especially when

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books such as *Stil und Bedeutung* (ed. Stephan Hoppe *et al.* 2008), show that such revivalism was not confined to Scotland.

However, no one person can be expected to do everything: Fawcett is much stronger on the 'hows' of architectural developments, than the 'whys'. The rest of us studying medieval Scottish architecture should be grateful to him for providing the solidest of foundations, upon which we can build our speculations.

How to cite this article: Campbell, I 2013 A Review of The Architecture of the Scottish Medieval Church. *Architectural Histories*, 1(1):3, pp.1-2, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ah.ac>

Published: 30 January 2013

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