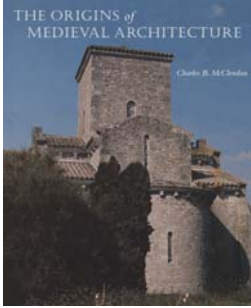


The Origins of Medieval Architecture / Charles B. McClendon.--New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, October 2005.--280 p.: ill.--ISBN 0-300-10688-2 (cl., alk. paper): \$65.00.



The Origins of Medieval Architecture fills a significant gap in every architectural history collection. Until this study, no survey of early medieval architecture was available in English. McClendon synthesizes the dispersed regional and highly specialized studies written in a variety of languages and he masterfully incorporates new documentary evidence and archaeological data to contextualize the developments in architectural designs of the early medieval Latin West. In this chronological study of ecclesiastical architecture, McClendon argues that these architectural developments are fundamentally significant to the later developments of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. He contends that Late Antique forms were gradually transformed in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries resulting in distinctive medieval designs.

Written in ten chapters, this study is divided into two parts. The first establishes the imperial frameworks that constituted the building blocks for medieval development, and then demonstrates how they were dynamically adopted and changed by Germanic attitudes toward architecture and ornamentation. The second shows how this process of assimilation culminated in the forms that arose in the renewed imperial building programs of the Carolingian Renaissance. McClendon argues that architecture was a vital means by which the conquering Germanic elites and converting Roman missionaries marked political legitimacy by assimilating both Christian power (relics) and imperial power (Roman *spolia* and architectural design imitation) into Germanic structures.

McClendon first establishes that the early Christian, centrally planned church and the longitudinal basilica of the fourth to sixth centuries provided the fundamental formal vocabulary from which medieval architecture emerged. Both forms held implicit imperial connotations by their association with Constantine. McClendon then demonstrates how the Germanic drive for *Romanitas* led to widespread adoption of the basilica to display a tangible connection to a Christian imperial legacy. He shows how the cult of relics was used to legitimize rule and led to the conflation of the centrally planned and basilican forms with the introduction of annular crypts beneath the main altars of early medieval churches. Over time, churches became a repository of relics so numerous that they could no longer be housed in crypts, thus spurring new innovations of side chapels in various forms. In the final chapter of part one, McClendon describes the rise of monasticism in Anglo-Saxon Britain and sets the stage for part two, in which he chronicles the development of new forms in the Carolingian Renaissance. He argues that Carolingian antiquarian tendencies imbued their imperial building programs with a specific Constantinian reference to support their claim to imperial legitimacy. He concludes his study with the rise of elaborate structures whose most important elements are the development of towering westwork entryways and outer crypt schemes in complexes beyond the eastern apse, often both with multiple stories, all surrounding the main altar.

Jam-packed with data, this scholarly study is most appropriate for upper level undergraduate survey courses, graduate level seminars, and anyone with an advanced interest in the development of Christian architecture. Its notes and extensive bibliography will serve as an excellent guide to more specialized literature for those pursuing advanced research. There are 216 illustrations including maps, photographs, architectural drawings, and composite plans. The index is of limited use for a study that is so complex and rich.

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