

“Fabrica Ecclesiae”: Organisation of Church Construction in the Baltic Sea Region in the Late Middle Ages (13th-16th Century)

One of the most important factors shaping the form of Gothic churches was the way in which construction works were administered. These works were managed by a **special church fund called *fabrica ecclesiae***. It comprised the church's immovable property and all income from donations, foundations and loan transactions. The institution of the church fabric developed in Western Europe in the 12th century, while in the Baltic Sea region and in Central Europe, **it appeared with the establishment of towns and villages under German law**, along with the influx of settlers from the Holy Roman Empire. **Church fabrics were common institutions**: they existed at almost all churches – cathedrals, collegiate and parish churches in towns and villages, monasteries and hospitals. This phenomenon has so far been studied in relation to cathedrals in Western Europe and urban parish churches in western and southern Germany, while **very little is known about the activities of church fabrics in the Baltic Sea region** and lands east of the Elbe, even in the largest towns.

This project will be devoted to **interdisciplinary research on the institution of *fabricae ecclesiae* in the 13th–16th centuries** (prior to the Reformation) **in the Baltic Sea region**: northern Germany (Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Brandenburg), Poland, the Teutonic Order's State in Prussia, Livonia and Sweden. The focus will be placed on **the activities of church fabrics in all architectural matters**, i.e. those related to the planning and construction of churches, as well as their ongoing maintenance and repairs. The aim of the project is to gain new insights into the functioning of this type of institution and to demonstrate their key role in the formation of Gothic churches in this part of Europe. The long-term goal of the project is to restore awareness of the former existence of church fabrics to a wide circle of researchers of the past, art lovers, regionalists and today's worship attendees at Gothic churches in the Baltic Sea region.

The basic methodological premise of the project, which is innovative in the context of existing literature, is **the necessity of combining methods from two disciplines: history** (research of written, published and archival sources, especially church accounts and ordinances, agreements with building contractors, any references to *fabricae ecclesiae* and its administrators) and **art history** (analysis of the structure of buildings, their typology, decoration and furnishings), in close cooperation between experts representing both disciplines. It will also be important to take into account **issues related to the history of law**, especially those related to canon law, municipal law and patronage law. **The main working hypothesis** of the project assumes that **church fabrics with a developed organisational structure existed throughout the Baltic Sea region, and were responsible for all key decisions related to the design of church buildings**. However, these fabrics differed in terms of management depending on the type of a given church – in most cathedrals and monasteries (though not in all) they were governed by canons or monks, while in parishes they remained in the hands of lay ***vitrices* (churchwardens)**, who **were usually dependent on the municipal council**. In urban churches, it was the latter, and not the legal patrons of the church (i.e. the holders of *ius patronatus* – the right of advowson, formulated during the pontificate of Pope Alexander III, 1159–1181), who usually made the final decision in planning the form of the building and its architectural development. However, there were exceptions to this rule, as well as regional differences in the functioning of church fabrics, and this will be the subject of the planned research.

Thanks to the research planned in this project, the late medieval institution of *fabrica ecclesiae* in the Baltic Sea region will be comprehensively studied from a local and transregional perspective, as well as from a comparative European viewpoint. The significance of church fabrics for contemporary societies and their role in parish and city life will be highlighted. Their importance in the dynamics of church building development in the 13th–16th centuries will also be considered, and this will broaden our understanding of the historical processes that shaped the history of architecture.