

**From a Parish Church to a National Monument: Restoration of Finnish Medieval Stone Churches and Its Background, 1870-1920 (abstract)**

During the period covered by the study the medieval churches were under many kinds of pressure for change. The Finnish population began to grow rapidly around the middle of the 18th century. Many medieval churches were extended. As a result of new hygienic and confort requirements, churches began to be heated, lighting was improved, pews were remodelled and more attention was paid to the general cleanliness of the church.



*The church of Taivassalo in Southwestern Finland.*

Demands for conservation brought new pressures to bear on church maintenance and repairs. As early as in the 18th century, churches had become the responsibility of the building authorities and subject to their supervision. The legislation relating to antiquities that emerged in the 1880s created a totally new type of supervision. The Antiquities Act issued in 1883 gave the Commission for Antiquities no very great powers to intervene in the parishes' repair plans. Even the medieval churches still used by the parishes

were excluded from the antiquities defined by the act. A parish was obliged only to announce its intention to conduct repairs and to give the commission an opportunity to document the situation before the repairs were begun. However, despite the limitations of the act the commission quickly consolidated its position.



*Interiors of the Taivassalo church.*

For a parish, repairing its church was a major operation representing a massive economic effort. From the parishioners' viewpoint, the central problems involved in such an project were financing the repairs and undertaking the complex arrangements needed to acquire the materials. Judged from the minutes of the parish meetings, the parishes examined here paid little or no attention to stylistic considerations. The choice of the architect to plan the repairs was equally little discussed.

Before the end of the 19th century, an architect's training included little that was helpful in repairing Finland's medieval churches. The first architects with at least some familiarity also with the architecture of Finland and its neighbouring areas graduated only at the turn of the century. Many turn-of-the-century architects paid much attention to medieval churches and their conservation-oriented preservation.

In the 1870s and 1880s the parishes as a rule asked the provincial architect to draw up the repair plan. By the 1890s there was a more considerable number of private architects practising in Finland with the result that also the parishes had more choice. The early 20th century saw the emergence of a new type of architectural profession, the architects working at the Commission for Antiquities, architectural assistants.



*One of the wall paintings in the church of Taivassalo.*

Studies of Finnish medieval churches increased rapidly from the 1870s onwards. Most of them represented art history. Their classical academic background hampered the art historians in their approaches to the Finnish medieval materials. They did not fit the classical canon and differed also from the Central European materials from the Middle Ages. The art historians' attitudes towards the Finnish medieval materials changed during the period studied here. Over a few decades, features previously considered strange were accepted and even turned into positive characteristics. More and more areas were defined as art until all the medieval artefacts, buildings and paintings had become the proper concern of art history. Behind this development was, apart from increased knowledge, a new conception of art as such. As trends of visual art, Realism, Naturalism and Expressionism gave names to a form of representation that in its angularity and rough texture approached medieval art as it was seen at the turn of the century. Admiring simplicity as authenticity, a perspective that allowed a rugged exterior to be translated into archaism.

In the course of the period examined here, the Finnish medieval churches were imbued with meanings that made them into national monuments. They served as signs of and bore witness the Finns' long history and their long-standing pursuit of civilisation. At the same time they could be seen as symbols of a shared Finnish national character: greystone churches and Finnish people were rugged, simple, tenacious and honest.

The churches became the objects of new types of activity. They became objects of research and tourist attractions. At the same time, expertise not based on local tradition began to limit the local community's or the parish's right to decide about their own church. For professionals of preservation a church became a scientific document that must be maintained in its authentic form.

Thus, Finnish parishes faced increased pressures to alter their church to meet new requirements regarding, for example, heating and lighting. Simultaneously, however, they found their scope for action limited by new preservation requirements. Church repairs became something completely new, conservation, where the parishes needed the help of expert antiquarians. A parish was no longer responsible only for fitting and venerable place of worship but also for relic of the past and a national monument, a picture of Finnishness. The parishes' responsibilities grew at the same time as they lost control of the relevant expertise.

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