

Architecture – Culture – Nation

A Contextual and Comparative Analysis
of Dómkirkjan and Hallgrímskirkja in Reykjavík

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1. Dómkirkjan, Reykjavík



2. Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how two churches, Dómkirkjan and Hallgrímskirkja in Reykjavík, Iceland, can be seen to express Icelandic culture. This is done with a contextual and comparative analysis. Connections are made between societal development, geographical factors, cultural influences, and architectural traditions. Among other things the thesis shows a tension between international influences and a national particularity in the Icelandic culture. The thesis also accounts for parts of the architectural history of Iceland and the different architectural influences on the churches, as well as their cultural histories and their importance and position in the Icelandic society.

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1. Introduction

Icelandic churches, are they interesting? From the first time I came to Iceland Hallgrímskirkja (1944-86) has been a symbol and landmark of Reykjavík to me: the huge grey body floating over the colourful picturesque city centre. Despite the explosive expansion in building over the last decades in Reykjavík it keeps its dominance of the skyline. Something similar was said about Dómkirkjan (1787-96) when it was remodelled in 1847: Reykjavík had never seen a more magnificent building, and it overshadowed all other buildings in the then minuscule province capital.

I find churches in general interesting because they say so much about a culture. Churches are products of their time, but their meaning is also changing with society. They are religious buildings, but also cultural and political. The churches I investigate here are to a very high degree entwined with the history of Iceland.

The culture of Iceland has a unique position among the Nordic countries; Icelanders have always had close contact with other countries and cultures. During long periods they have been under Norwegian and Danish rule but at the same time they have been very isolated due to geographical circumstances. Educational possibilities for architects have been very limited: not until the early 20th century there was an Icelandic architect with formal education. Foreign influences have therefore been very strong, and varied. Even building techniques such as stone building have over the centuries had to be learned from foreigners.

The development of Christianity in Iceland is in some aspects different from the development in other Nordic countries, and this has relevance for the church architecture. Also the question of building material is interesting, the supply of materials in Iceland differs from the other Nordic countries, and this has shaped the building tradition to a high degree. So there are many factors that make Icelandic churches interesting.

Architecture has a meaning and expresses something, partly because of the architect's intentions and the stylistic conventions and ideals, but also because of the values of the society and the viewer or user of the architecture. Architecture is shaped by the world, but it also shapes it. The Icelandic society has very specific historical, social, cultural and religious conditions; I want to investigate how this can be seen as expressed in Dómkirkjan and Hallgrímskirkja.

1.1 Research Objective and Questions

I intend to analyse and compare two churches in Reykjavík, Dómkirkjan (the cathedral) from the 18th century, and Hallgrímskirkja from the 20th century. They are both the most significant churches in Iceland from their respective time. With this, I want to investigate how and in what way Icelandic church architecture can be seen as an expression of Icelandic culture; how the modern expresses the independence, the modernisation and the economic development of the 20th century, and how the older in a similar way expresses other cultural and social conditions. Economy and politics play an important part in this. I will also investigate what the architectural influences and ideas behind the churches are. What I also hope to do is to show the links between different churches, and thereby a larger context of meaning.

These are very extensive questions and the space I have for my analysis is limited. I will therefore select certain themes that I find the most relevant and illuminating for my research interest. For example I do not focus very much on the interior of the churches, but more on the buildings as a whole.

1.2 Research Methods

I will do a contextual and comparative analysis of the two churches, to try to understand the buildings in their cultural surroundings and contexts. In the juxtaposition of the two churches I think certain themes will surface. The two churches have significant likenesses and differences, and the comparison will deepen the understanding of the buildings and their meanings. I will investigate their social, political and cultural meaning and importance in Icelandic society. I do not only want to see the churches *in* context, but also *as* context. Art and architecture affect individuals and social processes, art is not separate from culture or society; they mutually affect and create each other. One driving force behind certain strands of architecture is to change and improve people and society, as will be seen below. For the architectural analysis I am inspired by *Analysing Architecture* (2003) by Simon Unwin.

I spent three weeks in Iceland in August 2007 in order to investigate this subject. I spent a lot of time in and around the churches to get a good comprehension of the buildings and their surroundings and functions. I attended sermons and talked to priests and other employees in both churches in order to understand how the buildings are used and perceived today. This gave me insights and an understanding of the buildings I couldn't have gained in other ways. I also did contextual research, to research the histories of these churches. Many of the questions I ask have their answers outside the churches. I have investigated historical

sources and literature in order to see how the churches are expressing ideas, values and experiences of individuals and groups that are circulating in society.

When I was in Reykjavík I met several people who were a great help to me. I met the architect responsible for the restoration of Dómkirkjan which was finished in 2000, Þorsteinn Gunnarsson. He gave me some of his personal notes and articles. The rest of the staff at the National Architectural Heritage Board was also very helpful with literature and drawings. I also met with the architect Pétur H. Ármannsson, who is very knowledgeable on the architect of Hallgrímskirkja, Guðjón Samúelsson. He helped me a great deal with literature and with the history of Hallgrímskirkja.

1.3 Material

The two churches are my primary material; I have studied them in person and also plans, pictures and drawings of them. But due to my research interest and method I also use different sources regarding Icelandic history and society, including an article where the architect of Hallgrímskirkja explains his influences and ideas with the design. Most of this I have found through existing literature on the subject.

1.4 Earlier Research

My research is dependant on earlier research about the building traditions and the architectural history of Iceland. Important names are Danish architects Helge Finsen (1897-1976) and Esbjørn Hiort (1912-?) with their research on the stone building of the 18th century *Gamle stenhuse i Island fra 1700-tallet* (1977). They have searched the archives and tell the fascinating history of how the buildings came into being. Esbjørn Hiort has also written an article about Dómkirkjan, the original cathedral in Reykjavík from the 18th century designed by Danish architect Andreas Kirkerup (1749-1810), “Andreas Kirkerup’s Islandske kirke” (1980). Ida Haugsted (1940-) has investigated the travels of Danish architect L.A. Winstrup (1815-89) in Iceland. He remodelled Dómkirkjan in 1846 and was the first Danish architect to visit Iceland, “L.A. Winstrups rejse til Island” (1998). The article ”1700-tallets stenhuse” (1994) by Icelandic architect Þorsteinn Gunnarsson also give an important insight into the history of Dómkirkjan, since he was responsible for the restoration of the church in stages in 1977, 1985 and 1999.

I have not been able to profit much from the work of clergyman Þórir Stephensen about Dómkirkjan, *Dómkirkjan í Reykjavík* (1996). It is an impressive work that

was published for the 200 year jubilee of the church, but it is in Icelandic and my skills of the language are very basal. It has nevertheless been a great help for my understanding of the development and history of Reykjavík and the church because of the large picture material.

For Hallgrímskirkja the sources are harder to find. I have had to rely more on general architecture handbooks, articles, and the few accounts that exist of the works of the Icelandic architect who designed the church, Guðjón Samúelsson (1887-1950). Some of this is in Icelandic, and I have tried to take in as much as I could of it. The fact that there is no biography about Guðjón Samúelsson may seem surprising. He is one of the most influential architects in the formation of Reykjavík during the early 20th century, but I have been told that there is no tradition of architect biographies in Iceland. I know very little about his life, but the things I know I owe to Icelandic architect Pétur H. Ármannsson (1961-).

Earlier writings are mainly in Icelandic, Danish and Norwegian. With my essay some of this knowledge becomes available in English, and has the potential of reaching a larger audience. I think there is a potentially large interest in the topic with the increasing flow of tourists and travellers coming to Iceland.

1.5 Outline of the Essay

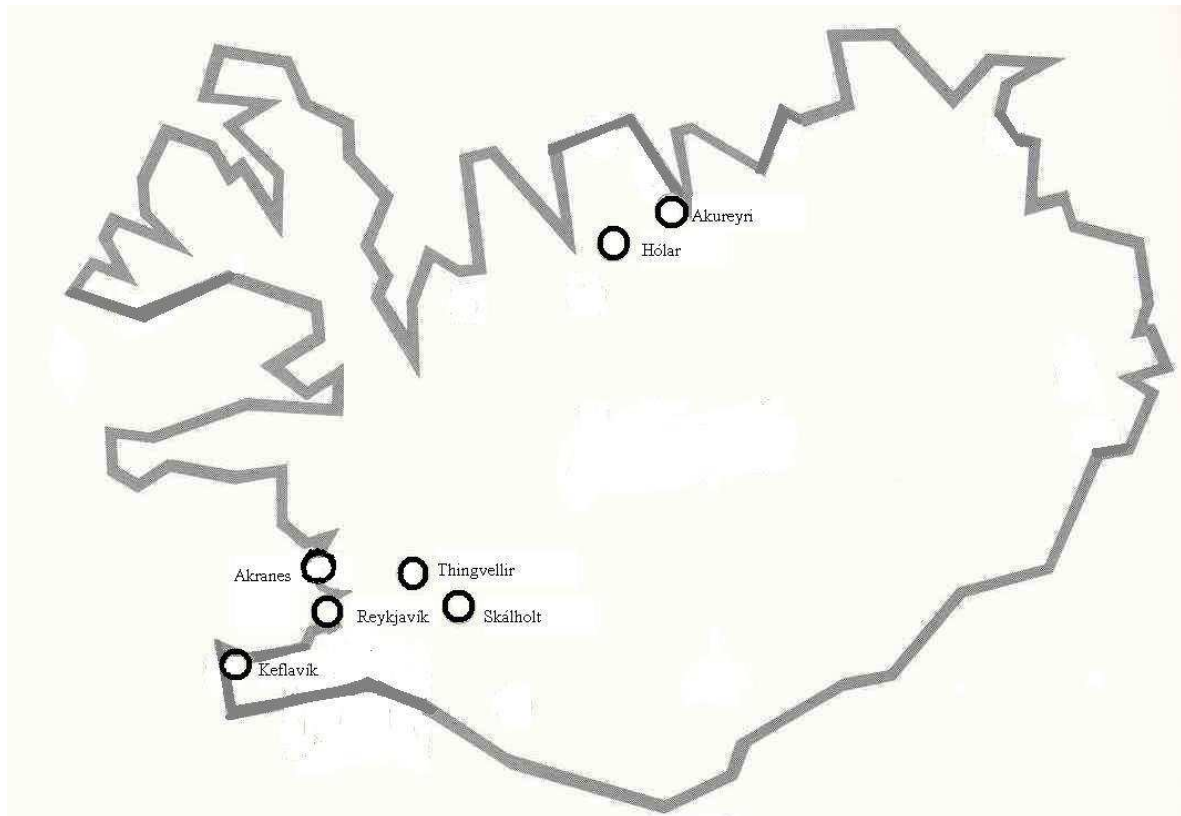
The context is the history of Iceland, especially the history of Christianity and the building tradition, which I will tell in a very comprised and selective way. I focus on the factors that in my opinion have an importance for the formation of the architecture of the churches. I will try to tell the story of the two churches, embedded in and shaping the history of the nation. All attempts to tell history are by necessity constructions, narratives. This does not mean that it is fiction, but it is a way to convey knowledge about the past, and this is always coloured by the present.

After the historical narrative, which is not background but a part of my essay that I use for my arguments and analysis, I describe the churches and their histories. Here I also tell something about their architects, to the extent I find it relevant. On this follows my analysis of the churches and their meaning and importance in Icelandic society.

In the essay I have chosen to use the Icelandic letters and spellings; normally þ is transcribed as th, ð as d, æ as ae, ø as o.

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I would like to thank some people who helped me a great deal with my research in Reykjavík. The staff at the national architectural heritage board: architects Jón Pálsson, Magnús Skúlasson and Þorsteinn Gunnarsson. Also architect Pétur H. Ármannsson and priests Þorvaldur Viðisson and Jón Dalbú Hróbjartsson. They were all very generous with their time and knowledge, for which I am very grateful. I would also like to thank SISF, Svensk-isländska samarbetsfonden, for economic support.



3. Map of Iceland

2. The History of Iceland

The history of Iceland is one very important context that has shaped the culture and the building traditions. I will here bring up relevant themes, processes, and conditions that affect the architecture. I focus on the history of Christianity in Iceland. As I see it, religion is not something purely spiritual or personal; it is to a high degree cultural and political and often a driving force in history. What I also hope to show is how the national identity and self image of the Icelanders has changed over the centuries. I argue that there has always been a distinction between Icelanders and Danes. This is relevant for my analysis of the two churches.

Iceland is a state in the North Atlantic, just south of the Arctic Circle. During the centuries from when it was first populated the size of the population has been rather even. There has been occasional dips due to nature disasters, famine, diseases etc. but estimations have been about 50,000 to 70,000 up until the 19th century. The first census was in 1703 and accounted for just over 50,000 people.¹ In the 20th century there was a population boom and today there are more than 300,000 inhabitants, of which over 60% live in the greater Reykjavík area.

2.1 The Settlement

Iceland was properly settled in the 9th century by Vikings, traditionally thought to be the year 874 AD, but there were Irish christian monks living in Iceland in periods before this. The settlement of Iceland is well known because the art of writing was present from the start. Also, Christianity was present from the start, with the Irish monks, but also some of the Vikings and particularly their slaves, of which many originated from the British Isles.²

The settlement of Iceland was a part of the Viking expansion. The first settler of Iceland was Ingólfur Árnasson and he named the site of his settlement *Reykjavík*, smoky bay. The lane from the site of his farm to the sea is still called *Aðalstræti*, Main Street.³ It was the hope for a better life that motivated the Viking settlement. Iceland was unpopulated and had large fields for grazing, excellent fishing and at this time a mild climate. It is said that at the

¹ Karlsson, Gunnar, "Islands historia", from Schröder, Hasse and Barbro M. Schröder (ed.) *Island – mer än sagor*, Arena Norden, Stockholm, 1997, p. 123

² Sigurbjörnsson, Karl, *The Church of Iceland – Past and Present*, Biskupsstofa, Reykjavík, 1998, p. 2

³ Jóhannesson, Dennis (ed.), *A Guide to Icelandic Architecture*, the Association of Icelandic Architects, Reykjavík, 2000, p. 17

time of the settlement there were forests in Iceland, but this is somewhat exaggerated. The “forests” probably covered about 25% of Iceland and consisted of low birches.⁴ But this quickly decreased after the settlement. Because of this there has always been a severe lack of timber in Iceland. Imported timber or driftwood had to be used, and timber was always reused when a building was demolished.

About 85% of the settlers were Norwegian and 12% from the British Isles, mainly slaves. The Vikings travelled widely for trade, raiding and colonisation, but the settlers in Iceland were mainly farmers. The reason to come to Iceland must have been settlement, since there was no one there to trade with. Norway was facing overpopulation and internal conflicts due to the power centralisation of the Norwegian king Harald Fairhair. The entire island was settled in 930 which brought about an urgent need for a common law code. This was established with the *Alþingi*, the thing, in 930. There was a meeting every summer at þingvellir, a site that still today has a symbolic importance. With this Iceland was established as a republic, on the pagan religion.⁵ The Free State 930-1262 is seen as the golden age of Iceland, initiated by the founding of the Alþingi.

Icelanders are very aware of kinship; it is possible to track family lines all the way back to the settlement. The settlers have been seen as great men and adventurers that left Norway for their political convictions.

The period 1220-1262 is called *Sturlungaöld*, the Sturlung age, after the most powerful family of Iceland. Four families were fighting over power, and the Norwegian king used the internal conflicts to increase his influence. In 1262-64 the Alþingi accepted the Norwegian king; they traded their independence for peace and safety.⁶

At the time of the settlement the living conditions were very good, the climate was mild, and the population rather small. But the climate took a turn for the worse, it got colder and the population increased. The quality of life decreased dramatically during the middle ages.

In 1349 Norway was struck very hard by the plague, the Black Death, and in 1380 Norway and Denmark united under queen Margrethe I (1353-1412); this is how Iceland came under Danish rule. Iceland would remain under Danish rule until 1944.

⁴ Karlsson, p. 117

⁵ Sigurbjörnsson, p. 2

⁶ Karlsson, p. 117

2.2 Christianity

The conversion into Christianity in the year 999 or 1000 was peaceful compared to the other Nordic countries. The Norwegian king Olav Tryggvason (d. 1000) pressured the Icelanders to convert.⁷ The people were divided, but they realised the danger of dividing the country into two states, one Christian and one pagan. They left the decision to one chieftain who was well respected for his wisdom. He decided that they should all convert with the motivation “if we put asunder the law, we will put asunder the peace”.⁸ The entire country was christened, but they reserved the right to continue pagan practice in private.

The conversion seems successful; very few pagan artefacts are found dating from after the conversion. The peaceful and painless conversion indicates that the pagan religion was neither very strong in Iceland, nor very important to the foundation of the republic.⁹ With the conversion to Christianity the Icelanders secured both communication with the Norwegian king, and his friendship.¹⁰ The next Norwegian king, Olav Haraldsson (995-1030) donated timber and a church bell for a church at þingvellir, which was supposed to serve as a model for other churches in Iceland, and to remind the Icelanders that the Norwegian king was a natural leader in the Icelandic church.¹¹

In the period 1000-1200 Christianity became established. Initially the Icelanders kept private churches. Prosperous farmers and local chieftains built churches and employed priests at their own expense, or were themselves priests. It was both a profit and a pride to have a well furnished church. At the end of the 11th century there were probably well over 2,000 churches in Iceland.¹² In 1100 Iceland was divided into parishes and parish churches were established.

The first bishop was enthroned in 1056 in Skálholt of southern Iceland. A second, smaller, bishopric was established in Hólar in the north, in 1106. The churches at the Episcopal sees were by far the largest buildings in the country: stave churches built from Norwegian timber. Due to the lack of timber it was seen as more valuable than stone and the Icelandic church owned forests in Norway for timber use. The cathedral in Skálholt was 48.5 meter in length, to be compared to the current stone church which is merely 30 meters. It has

⁷ Þórlaksson, Helgi, ”Historisk innledning”, from Árnadóttir, Lilja and Ketil Kiran (ed.), *Kirkja ok Kirkjuskruð - kirkur og kirkekunst på Island og i Norge i middelalderen*, Norsk institutt for kulturminneforskning, NIKU, and the National Museum of Iceland, Oddi, Reykjavík, 1997, p. 9

⁸ ”Það mun vera satt, er vér slítum í sundur lögin, að vér munum slíta og fríðinn”, Þorgeir Ljosveitingsgoði, Sigurbjörnsson, p. 2

⁹ Þórlaksson, p. 7

¹⁰ Bjarnason, Björn, ”Forord” from *Kirkja ok Kirkjuskruð*, p. 5

¹¹ Þórlaksson, p. 9f

¹² Stefánsson, Hjörleifur, “Íslandske Middelalderkirker” from *Kirkja ok Kirkjuskruð*, p. 41

been said that this was the largest timber building in Europe at the time, or at least in the Nordic countries.¹³

The medieval church was very wealthy. The Episcopal sees, monasteries, convents and parish churches came to own nearly half of the estates in Iceland. The main income was the lease of farms the church owned.

With Christianity Icelanders learned the Latin alphabet and codified laws and stories in their native language called *Norræna* or *Norse*. In other parts of Europe most writing was in Latin, but in Iceland the domestic literary culture flourished. The Icelandic language has been seen as a strong link to the heroic past described in the famous Icelandic sagas. The language is an important part of the national identity: it has changed very little since the settlement, something Icelanders are very proud of.

In 1536 Denmark carried through the reformation, but the Icelanders were reluctant to accept it. Protestantism was introduced in Skálholt, but the bishop in Hólar, Jón Arason openly resisted. There was a ten year period of internal strife, bordering on war. In 1550 Jón Arason and his two sons were imprisoned and decapitated without a legal trial or conviction, and the resistance ended. This is a dark spot on the Christian conscience in Iceland.

In 1540 the New Testament was published in Icelandic, or *Norræna*, by Oddur Gottskálksson, and in 1584 the entire bible was published by bishop Guðbrandur Þórlaksson.¹⁴ This was highly unusual for a small, non-state language. By comparison the bible was not translated into Norwegian; Danish was already established as the official language there.

After the reformation the Danish influence increased, and the church had a strong grip on the Icelanders. Much of the property of the Episcopal sees was confiscated by the Danish king, who became the supreme head of the Icelandic church.¹⁵ But the Danish presence in Iceland was not very high. Danish merchants and officials mainly stayed over the summer. In 1602 the Danish trade monopoly was introduced, which had as a result that all trade with foreigners was prohibited. It would last almost 200 years.¹⁶ Before the trade monopoly Iceland had quite good contact with both England and Germany. English and German fishermen were fishing intensively around Iceland and also practiced trade with the

¹³ Þórlaksson, p. 14

¹⁴ Hallgrímskirkja exhibition, Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík, Iceland, 2007

¹⁵ Sigurbjörnsson, p. 5

¹⁶ Karlsson, p. 122

Icelanders.¹⁷ The 15th and 16th centuries have been called the German and the English centuries due to the extensive influence.

2.3 The Dream of Independence

During the 18th century the Danes started to give official posts to Icelanders. The first Icelandic bailiff¹⁸ Skúli Magnússon (1711-94) founded small-scale industries, *Innréttingar*, in Reykjavík in 1752. The industries were a part of the Icelandic Enlightenment, where Icelanders were to be taught different crafts in order to improve the living standards of the island. One particularity of Iceland is that towns or even villages did not develop until the 19th century. The choice of Reykjavík for the location of these manufacturing workshops can be seen as the start of the urban development of Reykjavík. Skúli Magnússon also pointed out that the size and poor communications of Iceland was a severe handicap to administration, and that more efficient administration was a key factor for improved living standards. He suggested that all government administration should be moved to Reykjavík.¹⁹ In 1786 the trade monopoly was annulled and Reykjavík and five other trade posts were granted town charters.²⁰ With this a new urban working class emerged in Iceland. From the mid 19th century the town was the *de facto* capital of Iceland: it was the centre of administration, commerce, religion, education and culture.²¹

In 1783 the volcano Lakagíggar had an enormous eruption with severe consequences; poisonous ashes and mist were spread over the country, killing humans, farm animals and vegetation, thereby causing mass starvation. The coming year an earthquake left Skálholt in ruins, and the Episcopal see was moved to Reykjavík. In 1801 the see in Hólar was deserted. The situation in Iceland was so bad that it was debated whether the island was inhabitable at all.²²

In 1814 Denmark had to give up Norway to Sweden, but the Atlantic islands remained under the Danish Crown.

¹⁷ Ingvarsdóttir, Brynhildur (ed.), *Making of a Nation – Heritage and History in Iceland, a Guide Book for the National Museum of Iceland's Permanent exhibition*, National Museum of Iceland Publication Series, Reykjavík, 2005, p. 22

¹⁸ Bailiff was an office in Iceland similar to sheriff, Icelandic: *landfógeti*

¹⁹ Jóhannesson, p. 17f

²⁰ Hermansson, Nanna and Salvör Jónsdóttir (ed.), *Scandinavian atlas of historic towns. 6, Iceland : Reykjavík*, Odense University press, Odense, 1988, p. 13

²¹ Albrecht, Birgit, *Architectural Guide to Iceland*, Mál og Menning, Reykjavík, 2000, p. 35

²² Hiort, Esbjørn, "Andreas Kirkerup's islandske kirke, af Reykjavík Domkirkes bygningshistorie" from *Architectura*, Selskabet for Arkitekturhistorie, Köpenhamn, 1980, p. 126

The National Romantic movement of the 19th century sought the origin of the Nordic culture, which was believed to be found in the Icelandic sagas. This strengthened the confidence of the Icelanders. They had been subjugated foreign kings for a long time, and all things Icelandic had been looked down upon. The National Romantic movement had its base among Icelanders in Copenhagen. Jón Sigurðsson (1811-79) was the leader; he lived the main part of his life in Copenhagen. National Romanticism was already widespread in Europe, and this was the first time the concepts language, nation and state were connected. Before this the possibility of an independent Iceland was not seen as likely.²³

Home rule was established in 1904, with one minister in Reykjavík responsible to the Alþingi. In 1918 Iceland became a sovereign state in a personal union with Denmark, and the governing was moved from Copenhagen to Reykjavík.²⁴

When Iceland got their own fishing fleet of decked vessels there was a sharp increase in fishing and farmers flooded into town in hope for a better livelihood, creating a brutal lack of housing. With home rule Reykjavík also gained a new class of well-off craftsmen, intellectuals and officials. The population of Iceland had increased from 47,000 in 1801 to 78,000 in 1901, the population of Reykjavík increased from 307 to 6,600 in the same period. In 1940 Reykjavík had 40,000 inhabitants.²⁵

In connection with the Second World War Iceland was occupied by the British in May 1940. The Icelandic government protested, but the occupation was mainly friendly. The occupation changed daily life in Iceland over night, and solved the unemployment in the country. New technologies and commodities were introduced and more money came into circulation. In 1941 the Americans took over from the British. The American presence had a tremendous impact on the Icelandic society: at the most there were 45,000 Americans, to compare with a mere 120,000 Icelanders. Until 2006 there was an American base in Keflavík in south-western Iceland; the American presence has had an enormous cultural influence on Iceland in the post war period.

In 1944, the 17th of June, the republic of Iceland was proclaimed at þingvellir, the old site of the Alþingi.

²³ Karlsson, p. 125f

²⁴ Hermansson, p. 13

²⁵ Valsson, Trausti, *Planning in Iceland – From the Settlement to Present Times*, University of Iceland Press, Reykjavík, 2003, passim.

3. The Building Tradition and Architectural History of Iceland

The Icelandic building tradition differs from other countries; because of the volcanic origin of the island there is no clay suitable for making bricks and no rock appropriate for stonecutting. There is also a lack of timber. It was not until the 20th century and the introduction of concrete building that it was possible to make lasting buildings from local materials.²⁶ Also the settlement patterns differ from other countries – there were no towns or even villages prior to the 18th century and the largest settlements used to be the Episcopal sees.²⁷ The specific Icelandic conditions has shaped and transformed the architectural influences from other countries from the settlement until today.

3.1 The Turf House

Iceland was settled mainly from Norway and the settlers brought their building traditions, but had to adapt them to the conditions in Iceland, taking climate and building materials into consideration. The turf house evolved in a unique direction in Iceland.²⁸

Turf houses were common in Iceland well into the 20th century, but today very few of them remain. If they are not used and heated frequently, they collapse within a few years. It has been said that the turf house is the most important contribution from Iceland to the world architecture.²⁹ At the end of the 19th century the number of turf houses decreased quickly, which was partly due to a number of earthquakes that left many of them in ruins, but also because the increased economical welfare in the country meant that people could afford to build with other materials, first timber and later concrete.³⁰ The respect for the turf houses and the building tradition was lost.³¹ Danish architect Alfred Råvad visited Iceland in the early 20th century and was fascinated with the turf houses; he claimed they were part of the gothic tradition, and that they had a historical value. He saw it as a valuable foundation for a building technique developed in harmony with nature and the landscape.³²

²⁶Albrecht, p. 9

²⁷ Stefánsson, Hjörleifur, ”De gamle træhuse”, from *Islandsk bygningskunst: en udstilling om bygningskunsten i Island fra midten af 1700 tallet til i dag*, Arkitektskolen i Aarhus, 1994, p. 20

²⁸ Albrecht, p. 11, 14

²⁹ Albrecht, p. 15

³⁰ *Hermansson*, p. 14

³¹ Ágústsson, Hörður, and Guðmundur Gunnarsson, “Den islandske törvegård”, from *Islandsk bygningskunst: en udstilling om bygningskunsten i Island fra midten af 1700 tallet til i dag*, Arkitektskolen i Aarhus, 1994 p. 12

³² Haugsted, Ida, “L.A. Winstrups rejse til Island” from *Architectura*, Selskabet for Arkitekturhistorie, København, 1998, p. 77f

A turf house is often a wooden building with a turf layer. Originally this was of stave construction, but later of timber frame construction. The walls consist of turf and uncut stone. The interior was often panelled with wood.³³



4. Árbæjarkirkja, Árbæjarsafn, Reykjavík

3.2 Stone Building of the Enlightenment

When the Enlightenment came to Iceland in the mid 18th century, there was an urge to improve the quality of life for the Icelanders, and thereby the quality of the Icelanders themselves, with different means. One of them was architecture. The turf houses were seen as primitive and bad for the people. Instead stone building was introduced, which was seen as more economic and durable. This was supported by the Danish government. The initiative came from Icelandic officials, with the bailiff Skúli Magnússon and the governor³⁴ Magnús Gíslason (1704-66) at the forefront. The new architecture was supposed to strengthen development and independence. But at the same time the technique was dependant on foreign expertise and materials.³⁵

Skúli Magnússon and Magnús Gíslason wanted to create a new technique with building in Icelandic stone and thereby make a contribution to the Icelandic building tradition. This resulted in five stone churches and four profane houses, all of which remain except the

³³ Ágústsson, 1994, p. 9

³⁴ An office called *amtmaður* in Icelandic.

³⁵ Gunnarsson, Þorsteinn, "1700-tallets stenhuse", from *Íslandsk bygningskunst: en udstilling om bygningskunsten i Island fra midten af 1700 tallet til i dag*, Arkitektskolen i Aarhus, 1994, p. 14

original cathedral. The churches are Hólar cathedral (1757), Viðey chapel (1766), Landakirkja on Heimaey (1774) and Bessastaðakirkja (1777). The profane houses are Viðeyarstofa (1753), Bessastaðir (1761), Nesstofa (1761), and the prison in Reykjavík (1765).³⁶ They are all artistically important, and many of them play a part in the cultural history of Iceland.³⁷ They create a background to the building of Dómkirkjan, which was the last stone building of the 18th century.

It was largely due to the Icelandic officials' initiative, enthusiasm and connections in Copenhagen that these projects were realized. Very few workers were sent from Denmark, and the idea was that Icelanders would work at the building sites and learn the craftsmanship in order to encourage a domestic building tradition. It was a good initiative, but unfortunately it affected the economy and quality of the buildings in a negative way.³⁸

There were four types of problems that faced the stone building in Iceland: technical problems, transportation problems, lack of labour, and the climate. The living conditions were very harsh in the 18th century, and the major part of the population was fighting against starvation. The population decreased, and this is one of the reasons the Icelanders were less than willing to work hard at the building sites. The transportation problem did not stop when the ships reached Iceland, a journey only possible during the summer months. There were only small tracks to transport the materials and men from the coast to the building sites. All of these factors caused great delays.³⁹

The first two buildings, Viðeyarstofa and Hólar cathedral, were designed by Laurids de Thurah (1706-59) and Nicolai Eigtved (1701-54), both royal Danish architects and to this day very well respected. It is interesting to see how they handled the situation, to design a building for a place they had never seen and where the technical possibilities were very limited. They took their designs back to the basics and removed all decoration. The architectonic means were limited to the most fundamental ones, the composition: the interplay between height and width, the shape of the roof, the placement of the entrance and windows. They set the standard for Icelandic stone building in the 18th century, clean and clear.⁴⁰

No architect visited Iceland in the 18th century, but the drawings and the buildings themselves bear witness of an ambition to adapt the buildings to the environment.⁴¹ The dominating styles in Copenhagen at the time were baroque and rococo. These are very

³⁶ Finsen, Helge and Esbjørn Hiort, *Gamle stenhuse i Island fra 1700-tallet*, Arkitektens Forlag, 1977, p. 7

³⁷ Gunnarsson, 1994, p. 14

³⁸ Finsen and Hiort, p. 11

³⁹ Finsen and Hiort, p. 8ff

⁴⁰ Finsen and Hiort, p. 10

⁴¹ Gunnarsson, 1994, p. 14

ornamental and elaborate: which quite clearly would not fit on a small island like Iceland, when the rest of the buildings in the country were made of turf. Furthermore the same standard could not be expected in the province as in the capital. But some baroque traits can still be seen, such as the focus on the impression of the entirety rather than the details for themselves. Georg David Anthon (1711-81) and Jacob Fortling (1711-61) who designed the other stone buildings were also royal architects.

The first stone house to be built was Viðeyarstofa, Skúli Magnússon's residence on the island Viðey off the Reykjavík coast. Nicolai Eigtved designed it; a solid, well proportioned baroque or rococo styled house, with a clear and simple plan. The lack of decorations showed the consideration of the architect, the decorations of brick houses, which he normally designed, are not necessarily appropriate on a house of natural stone. This was the first house in Iceland to be built on precise drawings.⁴²

The building started in 1753 and in 1755 Skúli Magnússon moved in, but the building was far from finished and many problems remained. But despite all the shortcomings the building impressed the Icelanders; they called it "the castle on Viðey". It was the biggest building in Iceland; one storey plus attic, the plan is about 11 meters wide and 22 meters long. It still stands today, as the oldest building in Iceland.⁴³



5. Viðeyarstofa (right) and Viðeyarkirkja (left), Viðey, Faxaflói bay

The most sensitive point of the stone buildings was the roofs. In Denmark the roofing would have been bricks, but this was not seen as suitable in Iceland: the strong winds would make them fall down. Instead wood was used on the stone buildings, with a technique used in Iceland earlier, but only on smaller buildings. First one layer of timber dipped in tar was laid

⁴² Gunnarsson, 1994, p. 14ff

⁴³ Finsen and Hiort, p. 12ff

horizontally and overlapping “clinker style”⁴⁴, like on boats. This layer was then tightened with home spun (wool fabric) dipped in whale oil and tar. On top of this another layer of timber was laid vertically, and with another board covering the seam. This technique immediately proved to be poor for Icelandic conditions. During the summer the tar melted, the timber cracked, and consequently rain poured into the building, causing severe damages. Even though this method for roofing proved to be poor again and again, they held on to it.⁴⁵

The cost of these building were always much higher than calculated, sometimes as much as three times higher.⁴⁶ Eventually the Danish government grew tired of this, and when the new cathedral was to be built in Reykjavík, the first plan was to go back to timber building. But after some lobbying from Icelandic officials the decision was reversed and it was built out of stone.

3.3 Developments in Stone and Concrete

In the mid 19th century there was a new attempt to establish stone building in Iceland on the initiative of the Danish government. Rough hewn Icelandic stone was used, and for the first time cement based mortar. This resulted in the new Reykjavík jail and the parliament building, the Alþingi, at Austurvöllur designed by Danish architect Ferdinand Meldahl (1827-1908).⁴⁷

Another breakthrough came when mason Sigurður Hansson was building a rectory in the town Akranes in 1876. He lacked suitable stone, so he cast bricks out of gravel and cement. A few years later the first concrete building was erected. Soon concrete became the most common building material, but the appearance, structure and plan of the buildings resembled traditional wooden and stone houses.⁴⁸

In the 1920s concrete construction established an individual character. The concrete building was revolutionary since it is more or less the first technical possibility for building long-lasting structures from locally available materials.⁴⁹ With home rule in 1904 the construction of new administrative buildings started and in 1927 the first overall city plan came, designed by Guðjón Samúelsson.

⁴⁴ Kristjánsson, Gunnar, *Churches of Iceland – Religious art and architecture*, Iceland Review, Reykjavík, Iceland, 1988, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Finsen and Hiort, p. 9

⁴⁶ Finsen and Hiort, passim

⁴⁷ Jóhannesson, p. 20

⁴⁸ Albrecht, p. 21

⁴⁹ Albrecht, p. 23

Several architects that returned to Iceland from studies abroad around 1930 were strongly influenced by functionalism. They developed a new building style adapted to Icelandic climatic conditions, where they mixed ground local stone in concrete to make a rough cast with a more durable surface. This became one of the most characteristic features of Icelandic functionalism.⁵⁰

3.4 The Development of Church Building

In Norway most of the churches were built out of wood during the Middle Ages, except for the very large ones which were built out of stone in order to look impressive. Since Iceland was christened from Norway, it also had the tradition of wooden churches. Icelandic churches were almost always built out of wood, as stave churches or clad with turf. The stave church came from Norway; some were imported “prefabricated”, others just built on Norwegian models.⁵¹

At the Episcopal sees in Skálholt and Hólar monumental stave churches were built, and they were modelled on the large stone cathedrals in Europe. Icelanders were the only ones to build their cathedrals out of wood, but they wanted them to resemble the monumental stone cathedrals. Thus they became different from the Norwegian stave churches, which were always smaller and built on the premises of the building material. Therefore they developed their own characteristics. Since the Icelandic cathedrals became models for other bigger churches in the country, the influence from stone churches was transferred to them.

After the reformation almost all churches in Iceland were out of turf, until eventually pure wooden churches replaced the turf churches during the first half of the 19th century. They often resembled residential buildings. With the fight for independence and free trade, architecture became more diverse.⁵² In the 18th century five stone churches were erected, and in the 20th century concrete became very common for church building. The fact that the main part of the churches in Iceland were constructed from impermanent materials is one reason to the many modern churches in Iceland. Today there are about 300 churches in Iceland.⁵³

⁵⁰ Albrecht, p. 25

⁵¹ This chapter is mainly based on Stefánsson, 1997, p. 25-41

⁵² Jóhannesson, p. 11

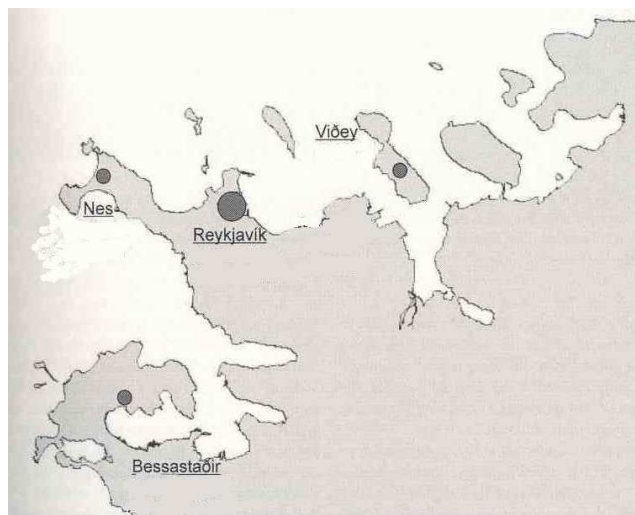
⁵³ Kristjánsson, p. 4

4. Dómkirkjan

The cathedral⁵⁴ in Reykjavík has a dramatic history. The 18th century was very harsh in Iceland, as described earlier. Parts of Iceland were struck by famine due to particularly cold winters and rainy summers. This led to a decrease in population: as much as one quarter of the population died due to famine and diseases.⁵⁵

In 1784-85 Iceland was struck by earthquakes that did not just ruin buildings but also remodelled the natural environment: fields were turned into moraines, hot springs disappeared or appeared. The Episcopal see and the Latin school attached to it in Skálholt were struck hard. When the Danish government learned about this their first priority was to move the Episcopal see to Reykjavík. The reasons for this was that Reykjavík was close to the ocean, had not had an earthquake since the settlement and that the governor lived in Bessastaðir, close to Reykjavík, and this would simplify administration and communication.⁵⁶

With this Skálholt lost its significance as the spiritual and worldly nave of Iceland.⁵⁷ The decision was the end of a long tradition. Skálholt had been considered the capital of Iceland since the establishment of the bishopric in 1056. The decision to move the Episcopal see was met with mixed reactions; there was no real resistance, but while the bishop Finnur Jónsson or his son Hannes Finsson, also bishop, were supposed to move to Reykjavík, neither of them did.⁵⁸



6. Map of official residences around Reykjavík

⁵⁴ *Dómkirkja* is the Icelandic word for cathedral, the church at the Episcopal see.

⁵⁵ Hiort, p.126

⁵⁶ Hiort, p. 126ff

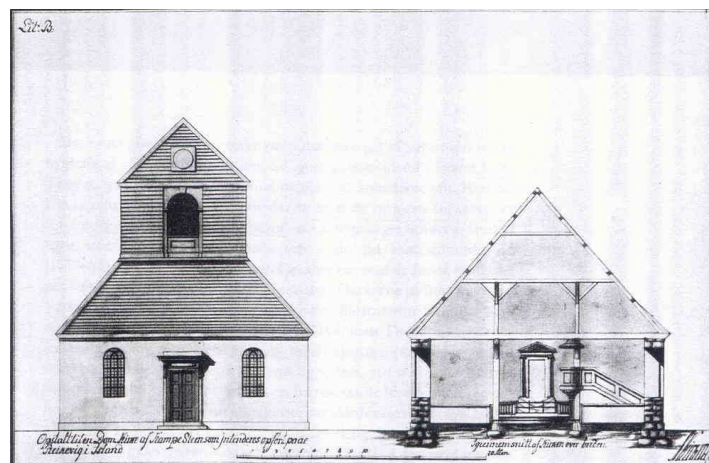
⁵⁷ Stephensen, Þórir, *Dómkirkjan í Reykjavík*, Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, Oddi, Reykjavík, 1996, part 1, p. XXI

⁵⁸ Hiort, p. 128

4.1 The Old Cathedral

The old parish church in Reykjavík was naturally too small and not in any shape to be a cathedral. The assignment to design the cathedral went to royal architect Andreas Kirkerup (1749-1810), who was specialized in timber, not stone.⁵⁹ Initially it was intended that the church would be of timber, there is also a first design of a wooden church by Kirkerup.⁶⁰ This was probably a result of the soaring costs and the questionable quality of the earlier stone buildings in Iceland. The Danish government was reluctant to finance yet another of these educational projects. But Icelandic officials still believed in Icelandic stone building. The result was not better than the earlier buildings though; within fifty years it had to be completely remodelled.

The church was constructed in 1787-96: a building period of nine years. It was quite small and modest, but represented a new stage in Icelandic architecture. It was built of Icelandic stone as the earlier stone buildings of the 18th century, with a similar technique, but in style it differed.⁶¹ The entrance was in neo-classic style; the front and tower were out of wood and underlined the separation between roof and wall in a new way. The interior was dominated by two rows of columns. Interior and exterior were harmoniously designed. The roofing also differed. At last the wooden roofs were rejected and the church roof was clad with red roofing tiles, for the first time in Iceland.⁶² But the tiles proved to be a bad choice for Icelandic conditions too. When the church was inspected in 1803 it was water damaged; seven years after the completion of the church merely one fifth of the roof tiles remained intact.⁶³



7. Andreas Kirkerup's final design for Dómkirkjan

⁵⁹ He had the Danish title *høftørmester*, as opposed to *hofbygmester*, which the earlier architects designing for Iceland had.

⁶⁰ Hiort, p.130

⁶¹ Albrecht, p. 47

⁶² Gunnarsson, 1994, p. 18

⁶³ Hiort, p. 138

It was originally planned that the church was to be built outside of the old one, at the intersection between Aðalstræti and Kirkjustræti. This is probably the site where a church has been since the conversion to Christianity in the year 999/1000. But there had recently been an epidemic and the graveyard was filled with infected bodies. The governor chose a new “more convenient” spot at a safe distance from the graveyard.⁶⁴ This is how the church came to be situated at the eastern end of *Austurvöllur*, the eastern field. The placement of the church strongly influenced the development and formation of Reykjavík. Later buildings were placed in relation to the church. The Latin school (1843-46) was erected in a straight line east of the church and south of the prison. The pharmacy was built in 1833 at Austurvöllur, and later also the post office, a girl school, and the Alþingi in 1881. Austurvöllur became the first park in Reykjavík.⁶⁵

The progress of construction was very slow, the Danish masons were not skilled in stone cutting so the actual building did not start until 1790, three years after the workers arrived in Iceland. The population was strongly reduced and due to this it was very hard to acquire day workers for the heavy labour of transporting stones. The church became more than twice as expensive as projected.⁶⁶ All that remains today of Kirkerup’s church is the foundation basalt walls and the placing of the large windows on each side.

4.2 The New Cathedral

In 1846-7 the cathedral was completely remodelled, partly because of the poor state of the old church and partly because Reykjavík was growing and there was a need for a bigger church.

4.2.1 Description

The modification into a neo-classical style was designed by the Danish architect Laurids Albert Winstrup (1815-89). The church was significantly enlarged; one storey was added, a fore church, a choir at the east gable and a higher tower.⁶⁷ For the enlargement Danish bricks were used, even though there was still plenty of Icelandic stone. The façade is rendered, rusticated and painted grey. Winstrup put in eight small windows over the four large windows on each side.⁶⁸ All the windows are round arched and have arched mouldings over them. The roofing was also replaced with slate, which is better than tiles because each stone is attached

⁶⁴ Hiort, p. 140

⁶⁵ Hermansson, p. 22

⁶⁶ Hiort, p. 141f

⁶⁷ Jóhannesson, p. 29

⁶⁸ Hiort, p. 143

to the roof individually. Today it has a copper roof. Winstrup ignored the Icelandic request for a vaulted ceiling; instead he made it flat in the nave and sloped along the angles of the roof in the choir. All the inventories were renewed, Winstrup designed them himself.⁶⁹ The exterior decorations were very limited: fluted pilasters, cornice, arched mouldings and round painted wooden shields on the tower with the Icelandic arms and the symbol of the Danish king Christian XIII. After the remodelling the interior and exterior was no longer as harmonious, but this is partly due to the nature of the task, as a remodelling.⁷⁰

4.2.2 Influences

Dómkirkjan was Winstrup's first independent work. He was a student of Danish architect Gustav Friedrich Hetsch and influences can be seen from the synagogue and the catholic St. Ansgars church, both in Copenhagen and designed by Hetsch.⁷¹ Remarkable is that he was the first Danish architect to visit Iceland when he was assigned the project.

Winstrup arrived to Reykjavík in the spring of 1846; he was then 31 years old. He stayed in Reykjavík for a month and a half and also travelled around Iceland. In the 1840s most buildings in Reykjavík were made of wood, but in the surrounding countryside the main building material was still turf. An inspection from the Danish government a few years earlier stated that the Icelanders lived “in holes in the ground like animals”, and that something had to be done to improve the living standards.⁷² Winstrup found the turf houses interesting from an architectural viewpoint; as an interesting building technique and tradition.

But Winstrup was not impressed with the stone buildings from the 18th century: the prison designed by Anthon, the house and church on Viðey, or the other houses in the Reykjavík area. Winstrup was a skilled sketch artist, but he made no sketches from his trip to Viðey. Probably he found them uninteresting because they were so “Danish”. The only Icelandic characteristic, in his view, was the roofs. After his trip around Iceland he returned to Reykjavík and started to work on his designs for the enlargement of the church.⁷³ The accepted design was created in 1847 when he was back in Copenhagen. The remodelled church was inaugurated in 1848, but Winstrup never saw the completed church.

⁶⁹ Haugsted, p. 86f

⁷⁰ Gunnarsson, Þorsteinn, ”Domkirken i Reykjavik” speech on Nordisk Byggedag 31st of August 1983.

⁷¹ Gunnarsson, 1983

⁷² Haugsted, p. 67f

⁷³ Winstrups sketches from his trip to Iceland are kept in the archives of Copenhagen Art Academy.

The new church was greeted with great enthusiasm in Iceland. One viewer exclaimed that no building as beautiful had ever been seen in the country.⁷⁴ At the time Reykjavík had about 300-400 inhabitants and the other buildings were mainly tarred wooden buildings. The church must have been rather dominant and impressive in that environment.



8. Dómkirkjan and Kvosin, ca. 1860

⁷⁴ ”Selve kirkebygningen er efter synsmaendenes skön baade solidt opført, som majestaetisk og elegant, - baade udvendig og indvendig, saaledes at dens Mage aldrig vil have vaeret at finde her i landet”, Gunnarsson, 1983

5. Hallgrímskirkja

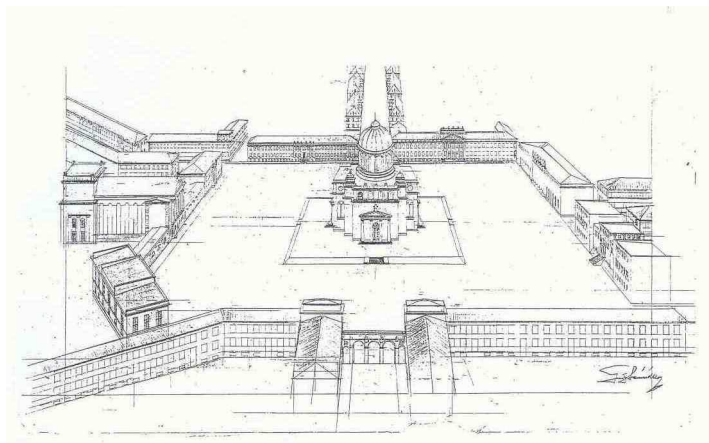
The history of Hallgrímskirkja is closely connected to its architect, the state architect Guðjón Samúelsson. I will therefore present him and his lifework briefly.

5.1 Guðjón Samúelsson

Guðjón Samúelsson (1887-1950) was the state architect of Iceland from 1915 until around 1940. He was the second state architect since the office was established in 1906. Samúelsson was the first Icelandic architect with a completed degree. There is no longer such a thing as a state architect in Iceland.

Samúelsson had a tremendous influence on Icelandic architecture in the years 1915-30.⁷⁵ During his period of office Reykjavík grew very rapidly; it was the period leading up to independence with home rule in 1904 and sovereignty in 1918. He designed many of the new official buildings in Reykjavík. For example he designed the main building of the University of Iceland (1936-40) that was founded in 1908, the national theatre (1928-50), and a number of churches. He also designed commercial and residential buildings. His buildings still dominate the cityscape today. He was also interested in planning; he designed the first city plan for Reykjavík in 1927.

When Samúelsson got the assignment to design Hallgrímskirkja he had already started a design for a cultural complex at Skólavörðuhæð which was included in his city plan from 1927.⁷⁶ His dream was a new cultural and administrative centre of Reykjavík consisting of official buildings, university buildings, museums and a church.



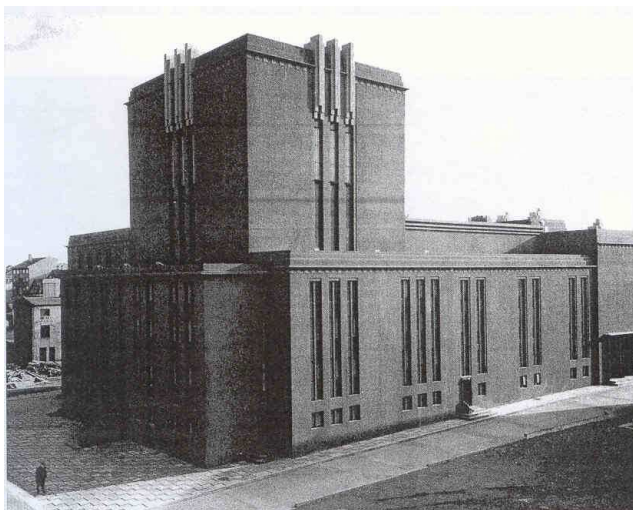
9. Guðjón Samúelsson's plan for Skólavörðuhæð

⁷⁵ Ármannsson, Pétur H., "Det 20. århundredes byggeri", from *Islandsk bygningskunst: en udstilling om bygningskunsten i Island fra midten af 1700 tallet til i dag*, Arkitektskolen i Aarhus, 1994, p. 42

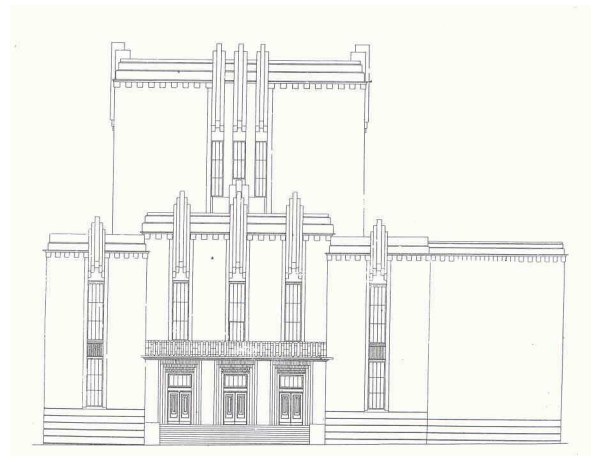
⁷⁶ Albrecht, p. 27

The material of Samúelsson's most famous buildings is concrete. He was influenced by functionalism, but also classicism, National Romanticism, art nouveau, and Icelandic nature and folklore. He often worked with symmetry and rhythm.

Samúelsson wanted to create a national Icelandic architectural style inspired by the nature and geology of Iceland. A common theme of his was the basalt columns he used which gave rise to the name "cliff style". Basalt is a common volcanic rock in Iceland; it is dark grey or black with characteristic hexagonal columns. This of course is closely connected to the fight for independence and a national identity dominating this period. For example when he designed the National Theatre in Reykjavík (1928-50) he wanted the structure to resemble the rocky places where elves are believed to live. The very dark exterior appearance and the high and narrow shape are supposed to underline the association with cliffs or rocks. The windows on the façade and the towers over the stage are crowned with pillars of natural form of basalt. The edges in the ceiling in the auditorium are decorated in the same style, in order to look like the vault of a cave.⁷⁷ .



10. The National Theatre, Reykjavík



11. Samúelsson's design for the National Theatre

5.2 Hallgrímskirkja

In 1929 a competition was held by initiative of the parish of Reykjavík for a new church on Skólavörðuhæð. The instructions were that it should seat 1200 people and have a high tower which could serve as a radio mast for the soon-to-be-founded national radio service. There was no winner elected so in 1937 the task went to the state architect. In 1942 one of Samúelsson's two suggestions was accepted and construction started in 1945. In 1948 a temporary chapel was consecrated, in 1974 a community hall in the south wing beneath the

⁷⁷ Jóhannesson, p. 49

tower, and on the 26th of October 1986 the entire church was consecrated. The building period stretched over more than forty years. Competitions for major buildings were quite common, and also that there was no winner elected. This was also the case with the Akureyri church (1938-40). Akureyri is the biggest town of northern Iceland. The assignment went to Samúelsson in that case too, and it is also a neo-gothic concrete church. It has a prominent placement at the brow of a hill above town. Interestingly this church took only eighteen months to complete.⁷⁸

Hallgrímskirkja has been surrounded by controversies; it is one of those buildings everybody has an opinion about. During the 1940s the style and size of the church was harshly criticized by other architects. There is also the fact that Samúelsson due to a disease he later died from never finished the design completely.⁷⁹ The interior design was never much specified, and the state architects who followed Samúelsson, Hörður Bjarnason and Garðar Halldórsson, had to finish the church. They were very limited in the task. They were supposed to follow the plan of Samúelsson, which was very difficult due to the limited material he left behind. The interior is another subject of debate, there are those who want to keep it clean and simple, and those who think it is barren rather than simple.

Hallgrímskirkja is built in memory of the Icelandic hymn writer Hallgrímur Pétursson (d. 1674). He was brought up in Hólar but left for Copenhagen to study at a young age. When he returned to Iceland he served as a parish pastor in Saurbær in the west of Iceland. He is most famous for writing *Passíusálmur, the Hymns of the Passion*; this book is printed in more copies than any other book in Iceland, and is a “mandatory” gift at every communion.⁸⁰

5.2.1 Description

The church is built of concrete, coated in a rough cast with white granite for protection from the elements, and for the connection to Icelandic nature. The roof is covered with copper sheeting. It is clearly influenced by neo-gothic architecture: the ground plan, the pointed arches, and the very strong vertical force.

The west façade is compiled by hexagonal columns, which are a bit separated, leaving high, narrow windows with clear glass. They light the façade when it is dark outside. Above the door there is a high and narrow stained glass window. The tower is 73 meters high

⁷⁸ Jóhannesson, p. 168

⁷⁹ Conversation with Pétur H. Ármannsson, architect, Reykjavik, Iceland, 16th of august 2007

⁸⁰ Hallgrímskirkja exhibition.

and has no ornaments; it is just a plain wall with six small rectangular windows in a single vertical row. Just on the verge to the pointed roof there are three bigger pointed windows in each direction: a popular viewing-point over Reykjavík.

There are nine tall and narrow windows with transparent glass on each side of the church body. Between them there are pilasters, in the same basalt style as the pillars on the front. They have similarities with clustered piers.

The apse is semicircular and has a cellar due to height differences in the ground on the site. The roof of the apse resembles an onion-shaped dome, but it is not rounded in the base. It is not decorated and makes a striking contrast to the rest of the church. This style clash is one of the controversies of the church.

The interior of the church is bright, the walls have the same colour and texture as the exterior. The nave is separated into a central aisle and two side aisles on each side, one very low and one only slightly lower than the central aisle. There are double rows of cluster columns, which continue up into the pointed rib vaults. The ceiling of the chancel is also a rib vault, slightly less lofty than the nave.



12. Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík, south side



13. Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík, west façade

5.2.2 Influences

Samúelsson has in an article described his thoughts around the design of Hallgrímskirkja, before it was built.⁸¹ According to this article four factors affected his design. The first one is the fact that the church is situated at the highest point of the city, and is therefore extremely visible. This is why he chose to give it such a tall tower. A smaller tower would look stunted

⁸¹ “Hvað fyrir mér vakti með uppdrættinum að Hallgrímskirkju. Frásögn Guðjóns Samúelssonar húsameistara ríkisins.”, article from the Icelandic newspaper *Vísir* some time around 1940.

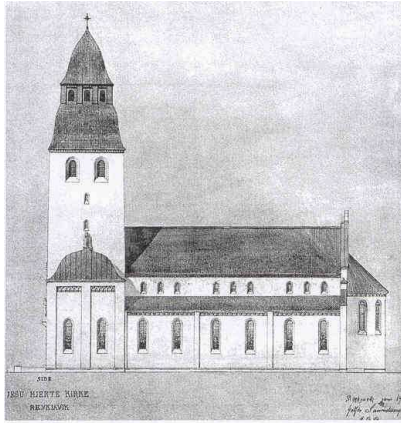
from the bottom of Skólavörðustígur. The second factor is that the church is standing on solid bedrock. That means that there could not be a cellar without extensive blasting. Therefore room for congregational activities had to be built at the same level as the church body. Congregational activities are located in the two extensions next to the tower, and they form a part of the characteristic shape of Hallgrímskirkja. The third factor is that the church closes one of the biggest streets in the city. This is why he placed these extensions at the side of the tower, in order to make a more impressive west façade. The fourth factor is that he wanted to use Icelandic rock as a pattern in the church, namely basalt, which also is one of the characteristics of the church.

Samúelsson meant for the west façade to “open its arms” towards the visitors of Reykjavík, who at this time practically always arrived from the sea, i.e. from northwest. He also referred to the English art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) when he calls architecture “music turned into stone”, and he compares the basalt columns to organ pipes.

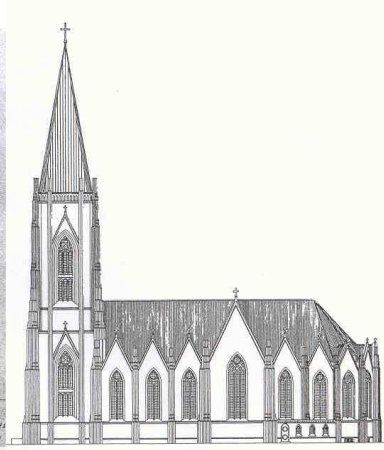
Samúelsson also pointed out a source of inspiration in Grundtvigs kirke, a church on Bispebjerg hill in Copenhagen (1921-40) designed by architect Peder Vilhelm Jensen Klint (1853-1930). There are striking resemblances, the neo-gothic style, the clean interior, and the use of one material throughout the churches: Hallgrímskirkja in concrete, Grundtvigs kirke in yellow brick.

There are also other likenesses, like the fact that both are built in memory of hymn writers, Grundtvigs kirke has its name from the priest and hymn writer Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) who was of great importance to Denmark. They are also both situated at a hilltop and therefore very dominating.

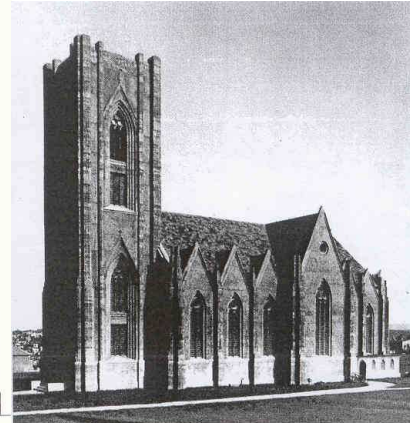
One more church has a role here, the Roman Catholic church at Landakot (1925-9) in Reykjavík, a height west of Kvosin, the old city centre. In 1923 a Cardinal emissary of the Pope visited Iceland to discuss the construction of a new church for the catholic congregation. A smaller catholic church was since 1859 located at Landakot. The new church was designed by Samúelsson and must have looked quite magnificent as it soared over the western parts of town. The Protestants were provoked by the fact that the Catholic church became so visible and dominant. The modest Dómkirkjan was located at the lowest part of town, completely overshadowed by the tall buildings that were erected in Kvosin and on Laugarvegur.



14. Samúelsson's initial design for Kristskirkja



15. Samúelsson's accepted design for Kristskirkja



16. The final appearance of Kristskirkja

Kristskirkja was built entirely out of concrete. It is probably the first large church built of concrete in Iceland, and the first attempt from Samúelsson to create concrete imitations of basalt.⁸² The church was commissioned to be in a neo-gothic style and based on a specific model in France. It has a classical cruciform shape and is very similar to stone churches, except that the weight bearing pillars are cast in concrete with steel reinforcements, which makes the characteristic gothic flying buttresses redundant.⁸³

Samúelsson clearly states the intention to build Hallgrímskirkja by stages. Some critics were of the opinion that it would be better to wait until it was possible to build the entire church in one go. One factor here is of course economy. 60% of the funding for the church was from the parish's own resources, the rest from the local and national government.⁸⁴ But Samúelsson argued that churches in other countries were often built by stages, such as earlier mentioned Grundtvigs kirke in Copenhagen. This was constructed over a period of 21 years and completed in 1940. Hallgrímskirkja was built by stages, just as planned, starting with the tower. The construction took over forty years, but the church was used for services from 1948.

⁸² Jóhannesson, p. 56

⁸³ Albrecht, p. 87

⁸⁴ Hallgrímskirkja exhibition.

6. Analysis

As has been shown above the two churches are closely entwined with cultural, social and political aspects of the history of Iceland. I will here develop my analysis around some of the themes I found interesting and relevant. I base my analysis on the premises that architecture can be seen as a material manifestation of a specific culture and societal circumstances, and as a driving force in society. I also see churches as a particular category of architecture with a specific function in society. It is a part of a strong tradition which in some ways is limiting; the patronage is very strong, and has often political agendas. Churches are buildings with spiritual functions, but factors such as economy and politics are highly influential in the design of the church building.

6.1 Icelandic Culture

A specificity of Icelandic culture can be seen in the fact that it is very homogenous. Reasons for the cultural homogeneity in Iceland are of course the modest size of the population and the geographical isolation.

I also argue for the “Icelandicness” of the culture. Despite the fact that Iceland was under the rule of Norway and Denmark and the national culture inevitably declined, Icelanders kept a strong sense of history and origin. This is partly due to the conservation of the language and the literary tradition, and partly due to the specific geographical and climatic conditions of Iceland that has led to the fact that no foreign ideas, for example architectural, could be applied directly without adaptation.

An important trait in Icelandic culture is the tension between uniqueness and internationalism, in architecture as well as other aspects of the culture. For a small country with intense contact with other countries it is impossible to remain uninfluenced. The Danish influence has of course been strong up until the mid 20th century, and there is still a connection. The identification with Norway, which was the country of origin for the initial settlers, has also remained rather strong through the centuries. But influences in themselves are not a problem; the problem is when another culture becomes so influential and dominating that the domestic culture and tradition is suffocated. This is often the case when the political and cultural rule lies in another country, as in the case with Iceland and Denmark. The point is to take influences and make them your own, make them suit your own conditions and culture.

One singularity of Iceland is the nature; it is not similar to the nature in any of the other Nordic countries. The combination of the volcanic origin and the climate causes that there is not much vegetation, in large parts of Iceland the rock is bare and has extraordinary colours and shapes. Icelandic nature is, a bit simplified, synonymous with Icelandic rock. Therefore this can easily be seen as a symbol of Iceland.

6.2 Danish Influence

Both churches can be said to have been influenced from Denmark. Dómkirkjan more of course; it is commissioned by the Danish king and designed by two different Danish architects at times when Iceland was under Danish rule. The influences and inspirations were sought in Danish buildings since they did not have much relevant Icelandic tradition to lean on. Both architects took a stance against the older stone buildings in Iceland of the 18th century. Kirkerup by not following in the same style as this established tradition, and Winstrup implicitly expressed his disinterest in them by not drawing them during his travels in Iceland. But they were of course influenced by them at some level; the experience of the difficulties of building in Iceland, the trial and error process affected the recommendations for material etc. Without this there would hardly be any tradition to build on at all. So both versions of the church would probably look quite different if it was not for the earlier stone buildings. Kirkerup's church is built in the same technique and material as the older buildings. The cathedral would probably not have been located in Reykjavík, had it not been for the establishment of the official residences around the town (see illustration 6, p. 23).

The influences on Kirkerup's initial cathedral are not quite clear to me; it differs to some degree from the older stone buildings in Iceland. The design for the timber church Kirkerup initially made is very similar to the stone church that was constructed, so Kirkerup's background in timber building is probably a large influence. The red roof tiles that were first introduced in Iceland on Dómkirkjan shows a stronger connection to Denmark, where this was very common. But the inspiration for Winstrup's remodelling is clearly found in Copenhagen, interestingly in a synagogue and a catholic church, a fact that might indicate that architecture and religion are not as tightly connected as one could imagine. Or maybe rather that Winstrup did not have a rigid position towards the different strands of religion. Of course the decoration of the church is protestant, and the use of the same foundation or ground plan in Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism can be seen as appropriate since the three has the same origin.

Even the “content” of the church was influenced by Denmark; the clergymen active in the church were mainly educated in Denmark for a long time.

The architect of Hallgrímskirkja was also educated in Copenhagen and earlier in his career influenced by Danish National Romanticism. He has also pointed out the influence of a Danish church, Grundtvigs kirke; and the likenesses are very clear. This church was being constructed at the time when Samúelsson designed Hallgrímskirkja. It was a very large project in Denmark and it is not surprising that Samúelsson was influenced by this. Since he was educated in Copenhagen it is natural that he found a model here rather than in another city or country. The likenesses are clear in the gothic influence, more so in the interior, with their lofty vaults and the lack of decoration, than the exterior. I would say that the interior of Grundtvigs kirke is more pleasant than Hallgrímskirkja. The material and the structure of the decorative fitting of stones make the church warmer and give it a scale that Hallgrímskirkja lacks. Grundtvigs kirke has surrounding residential areas that are designed by the same architect which gives the church a setting and architectural context. Samúelsson also wanted to create a whole environment, but his plans were not completed.

6.3 Separation from the Danish

The art of architecture is to a large extent an “export and import commodity”, and especially so in a small country like Iceland. But regardless of who designs the building it will always belong where it is erected. It is inserted into a specific cultural context and it also comes to affect the local architecture. A building erected in Iceland is therefore Icelandic, even though it is projected in Denmark or somewhere else.⁸⁵ Eigtved and de Thurah had both studied in Germany, and Anthon and Fortling were originally German, but lived and worked in Denmark.⁸⁶

So despite the clear architectural models in Denmark I argue that both churches take a stance against the Danish influence. Dómkirkjan is not merely a Danish church inserted in an Icelandic setting. It was initially constructed out of Icelandic stone, which is a political statement, not by the architect but by the Icelandic officials who stubbornly kept insisting on this material. There was a will to value this Icelandic material which since long had been looked down upon. A large influence on the initial design was the governor of Iceland L.A. Thodal, who had lived in Bessastaðir and knew the conditions of the Icelandic climate and

⁸⁵ Finsen and Hiort, p. 10

⁸⁶ Finsen and Hiort, p.10

materials. He was the one who insisted on a stone church, since a wooden church often rotted away in merely 25 years.⁸⁷

During earlier times wooden churches were erected despite the lack of timber on the island. The use of an exclusive material is an indication of the importance of the buildings. With the stone building it is seemingly the opposite, there is definitely no lack of stone in Iceland. But nevertheless it was a building technique that was very expensive and exacting. Everything except the stone itself had to be imported; mortar, timber, tools, labour and expertise. So this is a signal of the importance of the building and of how important it was for the Icelandic officials to create an Icelandic building tradition and develop technical know-how in Iceland.

The church was initially constructed during the Enlightenment in the 18th century when the fight for independence was not yet fully developed. But the fight to improve conditions in Iceland and to appreciate Icelandic culture was part of the Enlightenment and strongly promoted by bailiff Skúli Magnússon and his likes.

When the church was remodelled Winstrup was the first Danish architect to visit Iceland, he travelled around Iceland and saw the vernacular building tradition. He was not impressed with the stone buildings; he was the more interested in the turf houses, a tradition still alive in Iceland at this point. He also expressed his interest in the wooden churches in Iceland, for example the one at Þingvellir.⁸⁸ This was during the 19th century when the fight for independence awakened. Although Winstrup might not have had a political interest in the independence of Iceland, the spirit could have affected him. This was also the time of the Icelandic National Romanticism lead by the Icelandic Diaspora in Copenhagen. Impressions from this can be seen in the fact that he rejected the “Danish” stone buildings and his interest in the turf houses.

Samúelsson was state architect during the period when Iceland took real steps towards independence. He explicitly wanted to form an Icelandic architectural style: a political standpoint and dissociation from the Danish. With a prehistory of impermanent building materials and hardly any architectural remains dating from before the mid 18th century it was time to create something doubtlessly Icelandic. As mentioned earlier the peculiarity of the Icelandic nature is an important factor in the Icelandic national identity. This is also an important inspiration for Samúelsson; hexagonal basalt is his most characteristic motif. In Hallgrímskirkja he took it further than in any other of his designs. Icelandic rock is

⁸⁷ Hiort, p. 136

⁸⁸ Haugsted, p. 84

thereby an important symbol in both churches: in Dómkirkjan as a material, and in Hallgrímskirkja as a constructional motif: the basalt columns are the support of the church, and can be seen as a symbol for the Icelandic strength. The church was designed late in his career so he had developed his Icelandic “cliff style” for quite some time. The fact that the church is built in memory of devotional poet Hallgrímur Pétursson who has been very important in the Icelandic Christianity also makes the church “more Icelandic”.

6.4 Style and Influences

6.4.1 Style

Architectural style is one way the architect can convey meaning through architecture. Style can communicate values and ideas through the conventions and connections established by tradition.⁸⁹ In this aspect a church can be seen as a “child of its time”, but at the same time it is in the interest of the Church that its buildings in some aspect are “timeless” in order to express the stability and eternity of Christianity. There is a clear tradition of church architecture to build on, and neither of the churches deviates significantly from this. I have already brought up some of the influences on the churches, but there are several more factors that have affected them.

When Dómkirkjan was first constructed its neoclassical style broke off from the just established baroque and rococo tradition of stone building. The importance of this can of course be discussed, but one reason for it was that Kirkerup was an architect specialised in timber building, and probably did not have as close connection to the first architects who designed for Iceland, Eigtved and de Thurah, as architects Anthon and Fortling, who also designed stone buildings in Iceland and followed their style quite close. The fact that he started out designing for timber also affected the end result with the timber clad tower.

When the church was remodelled Danish bricks were used. This represents a shift from the 18th century building influenced by the Enlightenment. But more than anything it was probably for economic and pragmatic reasons. It became a model for a number of small wooden churches in Iceland during the second half of the 19th century.⁹⁰ This shows the importance and impact of the building. It also shows the importance of the issue of material in Iceland. Material is always a conscious choice of the architect or builder of any building, but perhaps it could be argued that it is even more important in Iceland than most other places since the only convenient building material for a long time was turf. So the choice of timber

⁸⁹ D’Alleva, Anne, *How to write Art History*, Laurence King Publishing Ltd, London, 2006, p. 67

⁹⁰ Haugsted, p. 87f

and stone is a highly conscious decision. But the timber import had increased significantly during the 19th century.

Samúelsson had already designed a cultural complex for Skólavörðuhæð which included a church when he got the assignment to design Hallgrímskirkja in 1937. One can tell from his early drawings of this that the church as he initially planned it had quite a different style. (See illustration 9, p. 28). It is a classical cruciform building with clear sight lines in several directions. I am not sure when the drawing is made, but at least the idea dates from before 1927 when he designed the official city plan where it is included. To me it seems like he wanted to create an “Acropolis of Reykjavík”. It is interesting to see the difference in this design and the design he made 10-15 years later and was executed. Samúelsson lived most of his life on Skólavörðustígur, the street leading up to Skólavörðuhæð. This probably inspired his interest in the hilltop. The street is quite steep, leading from Laugarvegur, the street leading into Kvosin which is also the main shopping street in Reykjavík. From the hilltop there is a fantastic view of the city centre and the harbour.

It seems like the introduction of the gothic style to Samúelsson came with the commission of the Catholic church at Landakot in Reykjavík. (See illustrations 14, 15 and 16, p. 33). He first made one design, but the Catholic church clearly expressed that they wanted a neo-gothic church. The influence of the commission can be seen when Samúelsson’s original design is compared with the design that was accepted. The former was a white basilica church with round arched windows. Kristskirkja as it was constructed is not really revolutionary in any other way than that it was the first gothic church made of concrete in Iceland. Samúelsson is not using the full potential of the material though. The church looks more or less like it would if it was built out of stone, except that the flying buttresses are not needed. But it is something new in Iceland, and in my opinion the style of this church influences several of his later churches and his style. The churches in Akureyri and in Laugarnes are also neo-gothic. This church is a major reason why Hallgrímskirkja looks the way it does and why it is erected at “the Acropolis of Reykjavík”, Skólavörðuhæð.

So the neo-gothic style was introduced by the Catholic Church, but it can actually be seen as appropriate for Iceland. Samúelsson himself refers to John Ruskin in another context, and this can be one reason to why he held on to the style: Ruskin favoured the gothic style for its reverence for nature and natural forms: issues that were important to Samúelsson. I base this on another reference Samúelsson makes to Ruskin when he compares architecture and music. Samúelsson himself does not make the connection with the neo-gothic style, at least not in the material I have read. But his other reference shows that he was

familiar with Ruskin's work. Another loose connection to the gothic style is the remarks Danish architect Råvad made about the turf tradition: he insisted they were part of the gothic tradition, in plan as well as exterior appearance.⁹¹ Råvad was in Iceland in the early 20th century, but his work did not get much attention at the time. I find it possible that Samúelsson knew about his research.

Samúelsson has compared Hallgrímskirkja to a basalt cliff with its regular geometrical form. Comparing the church to a cliff has many bottoms, an old Christian idea is the "rock of faith", but in Icelandic folklore cliffs or rocks are the homes of elves. In the heathen religion people were believed to end up inside the mountains when they died. There is much superstition surrounding the mountains in Iceland, and many volcanic cliff formations are called "churches" or "troll churches". This can be seen as a way to undermine Christianity with folklore, or the opposite: as a way for the church to undermine folklore by using the same symbols. It can also be seen as something specific to Iceland, the combination of Christianity and folklore. I also find it interesting that the basalt columns are the support of the church, and that the church to a large extent consists of basalt columns. This can be interpreted as Iceland is supporting the church, in addition to the church being important for Iceland. Nationalism is as prominent as Christianity in the building.

Hallgrímskirkja may seem modern at first sight, but probably "modern" in the sense "newly built" or "recent". It does not break any conventions though. In Iceland it has also been criticised because it is not modern enough; other churches designed by Samúelsson are more modern, for example Laugarneskirkja. Critics said that if he wanted it to be seen as a national monument it should symbolise the modern times more, not be a National Romantic remainder.⁹²

6.4.2 Location

At the time when Hallgrímskirkja was designed most visitors arrived to Reykjavík by boat. Samúelsson explicitly expressed that he took this into consideration for his design: the church is supposed to look impressive not only from other parts of town, but especially from the sea. The west façade is supposed to welcome visitors and returnees with its impressive tower. When it is dark the façade is lit from inside (see illustration 13, p. 31), which can be seen as a symbol of the light of God and the church as a lighthouse leading stray souls to the right path. Today this is lost to some degree; most people arrive in Iceland at the airport in Keflavík in

⁹¹ Haugsted, p. 77

⁹² Discussion with Ármannsson, 2007

the southwest corner of Iceland, and thereby to Reykjavík from the south. Thus when people arrive they see the church from the back. But it is still very visible and Samúelsson's intention was clearly that the church should dominate the skyline of the city, and preferably all of space too with its "music turned to stone".

Architecture is one way of giving identity to a place, something both churches have done. As shown above Dómkirkjan was initially very prominent and helped shape the development of Reykjavík. It is still part of the cultural and worldly centre of Iceland, with the location next to the Alþingi. Hallgrímskirkja is more a marker of an already existing place, the highest part of the city. The dominance of the skyline has few counterparts.

6.5 Social, Political and Cultural Importance

Art and architecture are not separate from the rest of the culture or society; the society and the arts mutually affect each other. Artefacts of all kinds both express and shape identities and ideas in a society.⁹³ Both churches have affected Icelandic society and identity. The church in Iceland has always functioned as a meeting point, even more than in other countries since the urban development was so late in Iceland. The buildings are therefore focal points of Icelandic societal and cultural life. In Dómkirkjan several cultural institutions started out, such as the national archives and the national museum.⁹⁴ It was also the office of the leader of the National Romantic movement, Jón Sigurðsson, when he was in Iceland. It was simply one of the few cultural buildings in Reykjavík, which of course makes it extremely important for the development of a national culture.

Dómkirkjan was a part of a dream for an Icelandic architecture that would enhance the society and improve the living conditions and status of the Icelanders. It was also part of the start of Reykjavík as the capital of Iceland. Reykjavík had earlier been seen as "too plain" to be the capital, with no tradition as a cultural or intellectual centre: it was a mere trading post. When the church was built it was a symbol for something new and spectacular; in both versions it was something completely different from the turf houses and the tarred timber houses. Well into the 19th century there were only two stone buildings in Reykjavík: Dómkirkjan and the jail.

The construction of a cathedral must have given hope and self esteem to the inhabitants of Reykjavík. Before this it was established as a trading post and as the location of

⁹³ D'Allea, p.14, 21

⁹⁴ Stéfansson, Hjörleifur (ed.), *Kvosin. Byggingarsaga miðbæjar Reykjavíkur*, Torfusamtökin, Forlagið, Reykjavík, 1987, p. 223

the first industries in Iceland: Skúli Magnússon's *Innréttingar*. The governor and the bailiff had their residences in the Reykjavík area: on Viðey and in Bessastaðir, but Reykjavík itself was not a cultural centre. The move of the Episcopal see was initiated by the Danish government and silently opposed by the Icelandic bishops at the time. It was a part of a political restructuring of Iceland. But bailiff Skúli Magnússon supported the centralisation of administration.

When the Episcopal see was moved to Reykjavík it included the Latin school. This gave Reykjavík a new significance. Kirkerup's design might not express this, but it was designed when this process had started in theory more than in practice. Reykjavík was a very small town, and Kirkerup's church fits there. When Winstrup designed the remodelling it was a somewhat different situation. The development of Reykjavík had taken off; in the 1830s it was already the focal point of administration. The church was much admired when it was completed. It can be said that this version pointed more to the future than Kirkerup's. The developmental potential of Reykjavík was probably clearer now. The fact that Winstrup actually visited Reykjavík probably helped too. That the church today is overshadowed can not be blamed on Winstrup; in 1846 no one could have predicted the enormous development of Reykjavík that was to come.

Hallgrímskirkja can also be seen as a signal of a new confidence. It is enormously ostentatious, despite its clean style. There is nothing modest or humble about Hallgrímskirkja with its 73 meter high tower. This was what Iceland needed in the 1940s with the independence and economic boom. Hallgrímskirkja can almost be seen as a monument for the Evangelical Lutheran Icelandic church; something unique and impressive. I would like to compare it to the monumental wooden churches at the Episcopal sees during the Middle Ages.

From the documents surrounding the construction and remodelling of Dómkirkjan one can see how important economy is for the design of a building.⁹⁵ The initial planning took two years with documents being sent back and forth between authorities who had to approve them. Both architects made several designs before they were accepted. Also Hallgrímskirkja is and has been struggling with the economy. I assume it is one of the reasons why the construction took so long, and several decorations have not been realised because the funding first and foremost has to cover maintenance.⁹⁶

The two churches have very different symbolic status today; Hallgrímskirkja is a very popular tourist sight. From what I've been told they have about 1000 visitors every day

⁹⁵ As told by Hiort.

⁹⁶ Conversation with Jón Dalbú Hróbjartsson, Dean of Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík, Iceland, 21st of august 2007.

during the tourist season, which is strenuous on the church, hence the costly maintenance.⁹⁷ Dómkirkjan has a much more anonymous location, and is not as prominent in the public awareness. But it is still a symbol of the old city centre, Kvosin. It symbolises a different time in Icelandic history and society. But still it has an important role today with national events such as the inauguration of the Alþingi and of the President taking place there.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

As has been seen above the physical and climatic conditions in Iceland have shaped the Icelandic architecture in many ways. The adaptation of foreign ideas to suit local conditions can be seen all the way from the turf house to the concrete building, in both material and design. This adaptation is visible in both churches, in choice of material and technique, as well as in design.

Dómkirkjan can be seen as a symbol of Kvosin and the old Reykjavík. Hallgrímskirkja wants to be seen as a symbol of the modern times with urbanisation, independence, economic development etc. but it does not quite succeed. They were both very prestigious projects and prestige has both good implications and bad. The controversies surrounding Hallgrímskirkja: the design, the long building period etc., is an interesting topic, one that I have merely touched upon here. I think that Dómkirkjan deserves more public attention, since it is an important building in the cultural history of Iceland and Reykjavík. I also think that Hallgrímskirkja deserves more academic attention, it seems like it in some ways is seen as not “cultural” enough, or as sufficiently “good” architecture. I would almost like to draw a parallel to the Eiffel tower, a structure that was initially detested by most people and considered ugly, but that came to be loved and seen as an important feature in the cityscape.

⁹⁷ Conversation with Dalbú, 2007

7. Conclusion

Iceland has been populated for more than a millennium. During this time two religions have been present: paganism and Christianity. The history of Christianity is entwined with the history of Iceland, and to a high degree connected with politics and economy. Iceland started out and came out as an independent republic, but in between it has been under two other countries, first Norway and later Denmark. Both of these used religion to exercise power, Norway through the conversion to Christianity and Denmark through the reformation. Both of these events had great impact on the internal power structures in Iceland, and in the relation between Iceland and the ruling country, as well as the everyday life of the Icelanders.

Even though Iceland was under foreign rule for almost 700 years the culture kept an individual character. This is partly due to the geographical location, but also because of the Icelandic language. The language has remained more or less the same since the settlement and is a unifying force. The language is also a link to the past. The National Romantic movement of the 19th century connected language, nation and state and inspired and provided the Icelandic fight for independence with arguments.

As has been seen here Iceland has specific conditions, of climate and supply of material, which have shaped the architectural tradition. Techniques have always had to be adapted to fit the circumstances. It started out with turf, an easily accessible locally available material; over stone building, also a locally available material but only with a massive effort; to reach the concrete revolution, the first time it was possible to make lasting constructions of locally available and easily accessible materials. With the prosperity of the 20th century there were finally Icelandic educated architects, improving the conditions for the development of an Icelandic architectural tradition, rather than just building tradition. But this also shows a typicality of the Icelandic culture: the combination of internationalism and distinction.

The two churches I have investigated are a part of the tension in Icelandic culture, between the will to keep a national singularity and the need to connect to the rest of the world. I have shown several interesting connections between different buildings, persons, processes and influences that have helped to shed some light over these two churches. The most important factors in my opinion are: the stone building of the Enlightenment which was a vital contribution to the initial design of Dómkirkjan, as well as the Enlightenment itself, which gave rise to extensive development in Iceland. Also, the developments in concrete building, a material that was extremely important for the development of an Icelandic

architectural style, and National Romanticism, which gave birth to the idea of Iceland as a nation and thereby as a state.

I see these churches as closely connected to Iceland as a nation; with a specific culture, a specific language, and a specific architecture. Both churches have political causes for being built, as well as political implications. For me, one of the most interesting aspects of the art of architecture is that it is so tightly connected to society. This is what I wanted to investigate in this essay, and hopefully I managed to show how these churches were affected by the societies they were created in, and how they in turn affected them.

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8.2 Unprinted material

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8.3 Exhibitions

Hallgrímskirkja exhibition, Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík, Iceland, 2007.

8.4 Conversations

Conversation with Jón Dalbú Hróbjartsson, Dean of Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík, Iceland, 21st of august 2007

Conversation with Pétur H. Ármannsson, architect, Reykjavík, Iceland, 16th of august 2007

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