

RELIGIOUS SITES: FROM ANONYMITY TO MONUMENTALITY THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ARCHITECTURAL RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS

M. GUCEK¹, M.STOKIN²

¹BA, MA, Senior Conservator, ICOMOS/SI - Vice President Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the Republic of Slovenia, Regional Office Piran ,
²BA, MA, Senior Conservator, ICOMOS/SI – Executive Board Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the Republic of Slovenia, Regional Office Piran

SUMMARY

The historical development of architectural remains of religious monuments is determined by economical, sociological, political and philosophical aspects; for this reason, the case studies were carefully selected, to illustrate the diversity of the archaeological, art historical and architectural evolution of each respective site, their convergence, functional ability and purpose throughout the historical periods.

The cultural heritage is fragile and, accordingly, must be recorded and preserved in the best manner possible. Consequently, our goal was to establish an interdisciplinary team, conditioned under the terms of modern research design, and to carry out our efforts right from the start without damaging the site before the actual conservation work was initiated.

SERMIN – THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

Sermin is situated in a prominent position at the point of transition from the Italic to the Balkan Peninsula, and between Istria and the eastern Alps; it is visible from the sea as well as from the surrounding hills. Analyses of the structural remains and finds from Sermin have demonstrated the fundamental significance of its location. The area was inhabited for an exceptionally long period, extending from the Middle Neolithic to the mid 1st century AD (Horvat 1997, 130); new discoveries from the most recent campaign demonstrate the existence of Late Roman architectural remains, as well as their destruction in the 4th century AD. A small parish church with an Early Medieval cemetery is situated atop the ruins; perhaps they were constructed during the Early Medieval period. The simple, modest and functional architectural remains of the parish church (foundations) in the countryside were interpreted in the context of different

analyses as the remains of a significant religious center for the small and poor peasant society located at the outskirts of Koper.

Even today, similar parish churches can be found in the hinterland, in the small and abandoned villages throughout Istria, such as at Topolovec - sv. Hieronim (St Jerome), Glem - sv. Nazarij (St Nazarene) and Boršt - sv. Rok (San Rocco). The architectural and material structures are simple, incorporating a nave with an apsis, and constructed using the local stone material. The style of these architectural structures remained the same for centuries; they were never prey to any significant influence of art historical and architectural trends, or religious philosophies or ideological backgrounds. Their only goal was to tend to religious needs, similar to how public houses were used at the onset of Christianity in Roman Aquileia.

KOPER – THE ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BAPTISTERY

The medieval town of Koper, the capital of Istria, is situated on the Slovene coast and represents a cultural monument of national importance. Surviving remains of Roman, Late Roman and Early Medieval still standing buildings are rare. The church complex, which included a basilica with a crypt and baptistery, was built after the model of the basilica in Aquileia. At that period, the Patriarchs of Aquileia were rulers of Koper, where they also founded a diocese (Alisi, 1932). The central building, the former baptistery, now known as the Carmine Rotunda, is located on the northern side of the Koper Cathedral. Near the church stood the Patriarch's Palace, of which only the Patriarch's Tower is preserved still today. The Baptistery of St John the Baptist is one of the oldest standing structures, as well as one of the most representative Christian and cultural monuments in Koper, demonstrating interventions of diverse art historical periods.

The Romanesque baptistery, which originally could have been built as a private chapel of the Patriarchs of Aquileia, has a circular ground plan (Zadnikar, 1982) with a semicircular apsis added to the east. It is built of cut blocks of local gray stone that are set in mortar. The exterior of the baptistery is richly decorated with lesenes, which start at the base and then link together under the roof with triple blind arcades. Experts do not agree on how to date the baptistery; the estimated period ranges from the 10th to the 12th century.

A plaque with an inscription informing that the building was renovated in 1317 is still visible over the entrance portal (Rizzi 1987). The baptistery was thoroughly remodeled at this time. It attained a new entrance portal and a tiled dome, which was then decorated with paintings. The central scene of Christ Pantokrator has survived to the present day (Höfler, 1997). The apsis was removed and the window openings enlarged. The remodeled Gothic structure, which still served as a baptistery, was then further and extensively remodeled during the Baroque period.

Agostino Brutti, Bishop of Koper, turned the medieval central building into a Baroque chapel, which was used as the private chapel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Cherini, 1993). The building was still also used for baptisms, although the upper part of the baptismal pool was removed and its lower part turned into a sepulcher. The Baroque fountain situated in a niche by the entrance serves as evidence that baptisms continued to be performed. The interior was thoroughly transformed: new Baroque wall decorations were added, as was a rectangular presbytery along the axis of the entrance. The Gothic openings were walled up and four large

rectangular windows opened. A strong stucco frame, into which was set a canvas of the Baptism in the Jordan, was placed at the apex of the Gothic dome, which still displayed the image of Christ Pantokrator.

The chapel retained its Baroque appearance until 1934, when the Venetian architect Ferdinando Forlati began restoration of the chapel in the spirit of the Athens Charter regarding the renovation of monuments.

With the establishment of a modern doctrine of monument protection in the 1930s, the former baptistery was declared a monument of a select phase of development of the Romanesque and Gothic styles (Gucek, 1997). Such a presentation was considered bold for a conservation project and, furthermore, was documented in accordance with the international recommendations and possibilities existing at the time. Forlati isolated the chapel by removing all abutting buildings. Inside, he removed all the Baroque decoration, closed up the Baroque windows and re-opened the Gothic windows. Forlati also removed the Baroque presbytery. Due to the approaching war, the project to restore the former baptistery remained uncompleted; although Forlati did indeed manage to restore the building's medieval character.

The area around the circumference of the Baptistery was later the subject of archaeological investigations; the modern layers were removed subsequently, so that the Baptistery was then completely restored to its original height. Archaeological probe trenches were dug corresponding to the georadar surveys carried out, and together with the archive sources, they confirm and broaden our current stance of information concerning the architectural development, reconstructions using different materials that were fashionable during different historical periods, as well as records of conservation interventions from the first half of the last century. The anticipated Late Roman structures were not found, only medieval pottery from the 13th century was (Stokin 1998). The Carmine Rotunda has been documented in a variety of non-destructive techniques, including the use of photogrammetry as a geodetic method. For this reason, we also developed a methodology based on non-destructive research and documentation; this methodology is effective and feasible within the context of the Slovene conservation policy.

PIRAN – AN EVALUATION OF THE ST GEORGE MINSTER CHURCH COMPLEX

The Baroque ecclesiastical complex of the Minster church, baptistery and steeple stands on the summit of a height, which rises above the medieval town of Piran, situated at the end of the peninsula; it probably dates to very early archaeological periods. The place, due to its specifics, was a significant sacral town already during earlier archaeological and historical periods.

Past archaeological investigations, as well as new research, have confirmed that from the prehistoric period onwards, the area was dedicated as a religious part of the ancient "Piranon". The archaeological excavations in the St George Minster church were not necessary, regarding that the archaeological deposits were not under imminent threat of destruction. On the basis of non-destructive methods of archaeological investigation of the archaeological deposits in the church interior, it is already possible to interpret the individual anomalies with the aid of other sources. The drawing from the Caprina book (Caprin, 1905, 126) shows a tower, which stood on the northwestern side of the church before 1608, and which is probably preserved in ground

plan beneath the foundations of the modern floor to the side of the main entrance into the church.

Written sources and research of the available archives in the local commune and Kapitelj, as well as determinations from the archaeological rescue trenches, reliably establish that the buildings on the summit of the hill reach back to the Roman period. The preserved remains of the walls of a structure, the function of which was either for ecclesiastical or perhaps even defensive purposes, cannot be determined. Historical research of the archive materials concerning the ecclesiastical complex allows us to reliably assert that a Romanesque basilica and baptistery existed in this place, and were followed later by a Gothic church (Kandler 1879, 11). The Baroque restoration of the church in the 17th century radically changed the fabric of the ecclesiastical complex, whilst perhaps also incorporating the architectural remains of structures from earlier phases of different stylistic periods. Consequently, it was deemed necessary to design a research program that would minimize all imminent threats to the architectural elements, which might tell us more about the historical development of the ecclesiastical structure (Ungaro 1992, 59, 63, 68). It is only on the basis of a well-prepared interdisciplinary research project that the results can then contribute the most fitting proposal and solution for the achievement of the final goal of our work, that is, the presentation of the monument. The church was restored a century ago in the spirit of the historic stylistic expression that prevailed at that time. The present condition of this ecclesiastical monument demands fundamental static consolidation with anti-earthquake protection of the structure, the renewal of the plaster on the interior and exterior, and the restoration of the entire assemblage of rich church furniture.

The thermographic research efforts over the entire covering of the church were the most extensive. The aim was to examine all currently standing structures of the church, which we knew had not been built as a single unit, but which includes walls from previous building phases (Rota 1882, 24, 29). Precisely these analyses could provide us with valuable information about exactly what is hidden beneath the layers of plaster, perhaps walled-up openings of older structures. Based on historical data, which are preserved and which report the construction of a new façade, the endoscopic analyses were concentrated on the facade of the main entrance into the church.

Interdisciplinary scientific research provided the basis for the conservation project. The process of research design starts with an identification of the problems that need to be solved. In conservation, the search for timely research problems, in addition to those specified in the contract begins at the overview and assessment stages.

The conservation management cycle consists of the process of collecting and surveying documentation, as well as the processes of establishing an inventory of the respective monument and then carrying out conservation research methods (destructive and non-destructive), which are the foundations for any conservation project. Monitoring the research objectives and effectiveness of different research methods represents the final stage of the conservation management cycle.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the continuity of settlement and intensive historical, cultural, social and economic development, research of the cultural heritage throughout the coastal region, which reaches to the earliest historical periods, represents an exceptionally demanding interdisciplinary research design incorporating experts from the humanities, sciences and technical fields. The three cases discussed above demonstrate the development of sacral architectural structures that preserved their respective functional purposes. The historical development of monuments in towns, as well as of sacral architectural structures, was in part dependent upon the stylistic trends of the time, while the tradition of autochthony and the authenticity of the Early Christian period preserved the sacral architectural structures in the countryside.

The significance and role played by the rich Venetian Republic, especially in the coastal towns, cannot be underestimated; after all, it prevailed over this region almost half a millennium. The opulence of Piran, which reached its climax during the Baroque period also in the field of sacral architecture, is reflected in its rivalry with Venice. Piran consignees, otherwise from the Venetian area, used precious building materials, that is, the works of art and industrial products of the most influential Venetian masters. The renovation of the church of St George also represents an important monument where the influence of Andrea Palladio can be discerned; in the final term of his life, his architecture prompted the determination to renew the Piran church.

The diversity, miscellany and richness of architectural structures in the presented historical development, as well as the valorization of sacral objects situated within the context of the discussed micro-locations, are altogether the result of the historical, cultural, social and economic development and it demands the application of modern conservational doctrines of the new millennium.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alisi, A., 1932, *Duomo di Capodistria*, Roma.
- [2] Barker R., (1977) 1982, *Techniques of Archaeological Excavation*, London.
- [3] Bernabini M., et all, 1994, *Application of ground - penetrating radar on colosseum pollars*, 5th international conference on GPR.
- [4] Bernik, S., 1968, *Organizem slovenskih obmorskih mest Koper, Izola, Piran*, Ljubljana – Piran.
- [5] Caprin G., (1905) 1968, *L'Istria nobilissima*, Trieste.
- [6] Cherini, A., 1993, *La Rotonda dei Carmini*, "La Sveglia" 112, Trieste.
- [7] Davis J.L., Annan A.P., 1989, *Ground Penetrating Radar for high-resolution mapping of soil and rock and rock stratigraphy*. *Geophysical Prospecting* 37, 531 - 551.
- [8] English Heritage, 1993, *SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW, Supplement to Conservation Bulletin 20*, London.
- [9] English Heritage, 1995, *Geophysical survey in archeological field evaluation*, London.
- [10] Fras, M., Gucek, M., Stokin, M., 1997, *Rotunda Carmine – Case study*, *Studies in Ancient Structures*, Istanbul, Turkey, pp. 115-124
- [11] Gaffney C., Gater J., Ovenden S., 1991, *The use of Geophysical Techniques in Archaeological Evaluation*. IFA, Technical paper 9, Birmingham.
- [12] Gucek M., Hudolin J., Stokin M., Tomšič B., 1996, *The conservation project and presentation of St. George's Chatedral in Piran (Slovenia)*, Non-destructive testing to

evaluate damage due to environmental effects on historic monuments, European Commission Workshop, Trieste, february 15 -17.

- [13] Gucek, M., 1997, *Metodologija zavarovalnih konservatorskih raziskav v Marijini rotundi v Kopru in nova odkritja*, Annales 10/97, Koper, pp. 81-86.
- [14] Hofler J., 1997, *Ob odkritju Kristusove podobe na oboku Marijine rotunde v Kopru*, Annales 10/97, Koper, pp. 75 – 80.
- [15] Kandler P., 1879, *PIRANO - monografia storica*, Parenzo.
- [16] Kosmatin Fras, M., 1997, *Tridimenzionalna metricna dokumentacija in digitalni ortofoto Marijine rotunde v Kopru*, Annales 10/97, Koper, pp. 91-95.
- [17] Mihelic D., 1995, *Kompleks piranske Župne cerkve sv. Jurija (Korak k odkrivanju novih umetnostnozgodovinskih dejstev)*, Annales 6/95, 7 - 16, Koper.
- [18] Rizzi, A., 1987, *Scultura esterna a Venezia*, Venezia, pp.
- [19] Rota S., 1882, *Notizie sul duomo di Pirano*, Parenzo.
- [20] Scaife J.E., Annan A.P., 1991, *Ground penetrating Radar, A powerful, high resolution tool for mining engineering and environmental problems*. Paper prepared for 93rd CIM Annual General Meeting, Vancouver B.C., April 29th-May 1st.
- [21] Schmidt, H., 1996, *Building Research from Past to Present, Methods Development in the 19th Century*, Preparatory Architectural investigation in the restoration of historical buildings, Leuven, Belgium, pp. 1-10.
- [22] Stokin, M., 1997, *Arheološka interpretacija rotunde Karmelske Matere božje v Kopru v kontekstu umetnostnozgodovinske stroke*, Annales 10/97, Koper, pp. 87-90.
- [23] Stove G.C., P.V., 1989, *Ground probing impulse radar: an experiment in archaeological remote sensing at York*, *Antiquity* LXIII63, 337-442.
- [24] Trotzig G., 1989, *The cultural dimension of development - an archaeological approach*. A archaeological Heritage Management in the Modern World. H.F.Cleere (ed). 164-170, Unwin Hyman London.
- [25] Ungaro A., 1992, *L'indagine termografica nella tutela del patrimonio artistico*, *Restauro* 121/1992, 52 - 68, Napoli.
- [26] Wolters, W., 1996, *Art History and Bauforschung, Observations on the current state of co-operation*, Preparatory Architectural investigation in the restoration of historical buildings, Leuven, Belgium.
- [27] Zadnikar, M., 1982, *Romanika v Sloveniji*, Ljubljana, pp. 448-452.