The Issue of Evolution of Opinions on Gothic Revival Adaptations of the St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava

Jana Pohanicova¹, Patrik Baxa¹

¹Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Faculty of Architecture, Institute of History and Theory of Architecture and Monument Restoration, Námestie slobody 19, 812 45 Bratislava, the Slovak Republic

pohanicova@fa.stuba.sk

Abstract. The St Martin’s Cathedral, one of the most significant medieval monuments in Bratislava, is the reflection of the intricate historical development of architecture and art. It reflects not only artistic styles characteristic for given period but poses an important testimony of history of local as well as regional architectural scene. From the point of view of broader European context and history of monument preservation in historic Hungary, it is important to mention the era of romantic Historicism and Gothic revival, which granted the opportunity to form opinions on and methodological approaches to monument restoration. Among the most pronounced interventions in the St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava were its Gothic revival adaptations in the 19th century. The contribution analyses the evolution of opinions on these interventions in the stylistic integrity of the cathedral, which strived to restore its original Gothic appearance. Nevertheless, even then, the Gothic revival restoration did not have a single methodology and already, during the purism approach to the interiors of the cathedral some of the former methodological decisions from the foregone period were re-evaluated. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were efforts to restore the spire to its former Gothic appearance, before the Gothic revival restoration. These never realised tendencies of Historicism were soon replaced by, likewise never actualized, thoughts of restitution of annihilated Baroque furnishings, above all the high altar by G. R. Donner’s workshop. In the second half of the 20th century, the great restoration of the cathedral, including removal of the most of the Gothic revival interventions, was done, aspiring to restore the cathedral to its authentic Gothic appearance. This approach disrupted the consistent style of the church and destroyed irretrievably the better part of one coherent cultural layer. The restoration continued in the 21st century, when all the developmental stages were considered of equal importance. The contribution, using the case study of the St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava, analyses the evolution of opinions on Gothic revival cultural layer on the medieval religious structure since mid-19th century. At the same time, it introduces personalities involved in the restoration and illustrates further European context. Given timeframe belongs to those least explored periods of one of the most significant monuments of Bratislava in terms of the building history of the cathedral and its creators (architects, master builders, building companies, builders and artists).

1. Introduction

The St Martin’s Cathedral is one of the most significant historical monuments in Bratislava (until 1919 Pressburg). The oldest canonry and parish church of Pressburg was originally situated in the area of fortified castle. In 1204, pope Innocent the Third granted the Hungarian king the permission to remove the function from this church and choose another one to fulfil it in its stead. This never happened. As a
result, in 1221, provost of Pressburg asked pope Honorius the Third to pass this function from the church in castle area to the one in the town. Most likely it was to be the chapel of Csukárd family dedicated to St Martin. As a result, on the site of today’s St Martin’s Cathedral, the new Romanesque church was built and became a new canonry and parish church. For some time, the church was devoted to Sacrosanct Saviour after its castle predecessor, more precisely, it was devoted to both Sacrosanct Saviour and St Martin (after aforementioned chapel). After the attack by Přemysl Otakar the Second in 1273, the church was rebuilt in early Gothic style, not well known until recently.

In the early Classic and Late Gothic era, thanks to sovereigns’ favour, many exceptional buildings were built in Pressburg. Their architecture was influenced by Czech architects of Petr Parléř’s circle and by Danubian architecture. New buildings were characterised by strong connection to builders of Viennese St Stephen’s Cathedral guild and strong relation to artistic circle of the Buda court. Thanks to donations of the sovereign as well as nobility, the St Martin’s church flourished. Originally, the church was meant to be a basilica, but later they decided to build hall church instead. This was due to Danubian-Swabian influences as well as prosperity of the town connected to grand building ambitions of sovereigns. Rebuilding the Gothic basilica involved such important names of craftsmen from the St Stephen’s Cathedral guild as: Michael Chnab, Hans Puchsbaum, Laurenz Spenning and Anton Pilgram. Three naves of the hall church were consecrated in 1452 and the choir was finished by the late 15th century. At the turn of the 16th century, the Gothic side chapel of St Anne was added to the northern wall of the church and at the beginning of the 16th century, the Gothic-Renaissance anteroom was built at the southern wall of the church.

In the 18th century, the church was remodelled in Baroque style. The most pronounced changes were the additions of the side chapel of St John the Almsgiver and monumental high altar with the riding statue of St Martin and a beggar by Georg Raphael Donner. Later, other Baroque and early Neoclassical furnishings were added. Gradually, they replaced older Gothic and Renaissance works. The era of Baroque modifications was finally concluded by remodelling of the tower and the western façade in 1760’s in the time of aborning Neoclassicism (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Matthäus Kern: The interior of the St Martin’s Cathedral before Gothic revival adaptations. Aquarelle from 1837. Vienna, Albertina, inv. no. 14121](image-url)
Large-scaled Gothic revival adaptations of the church in the era of romantic inspirations by medieval architecture heritage in the second half of the long 19th century were inspired by the great romantic restoration of the St Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna and finishing of the Cologne Cathedral according to its original plans. Further interventions dating from mid-19th century to early 20th century demonstrated different historical approaches to saving monuments in historical Hungary – including romantic restoration, puristic restoration and modern monument restoration. These were undertaken by significant restorers and artists of European rank (Josef Erwin Lippert, József Könyöki-Ellenbogen, Frigyes Schulek et al.), whose work made the St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava and its Gothic revival restoration an integral part of the period European cultural trends. During the latest restoration of the church at the turn of the 21st century, the Gothic revival romantic restoration layer was accepted as one coherent cultural layer of equal importance to all others.

2. The romantic restoration of the St Martin’s Cathedral in the long century

Gothic revival adaptations of the St Martin’s Cathedral posed a lengthy process, undergone in several phases. This enabled an opportunity to form opinions on and methodological approaches to restoration of medieval religious architecture. At the same time, it reflects the history of Hungarian monuments conservation and restoration, strives to institutionalize it, as well as varied personality background.

During the early phase of restoration (1840’s to 1850’s), the changes were mostly without concept. They often consisted of pragmatic interventions due to current technical and functional state of cathedral. Since mid-1860’s, the radical and systematic puristic restoration began. Its aim was to purify the church from all interventions dating after Gothic period but at the same time, it did not accept some of the authentic Gothic details. The Gothic revival restoration, striving to bring the church its former appearance, lacked the consistent methodology and during the radical puristic interventions to the interiors of the cathedral some of the former interventions were questioned. Similar opinions emerged also at the beginning of the 20th century, while there are existing accounts concerning comparatively bold ideas promoting reconstruction of the removed Baroque high altar. This demonstrated the rejection of the 19th century Historicism which culminated during the cathedral’s restoration in 1960’s and 1970’s in removing significant part of this cultural layer. The turn of the 21st century brought real change concerning the attitude to the long 19th century and further restoration of the St Martin’s Cathedral fully accepted all of the previous cultural layers.

A prologue to Gothic revival restoration of the cathedral was the adaptation of the western façade and the tower during 1840’s according to engineer Ludwig Berger’s project. A stimulus for the expensive rebuilding was the fire caused by a lightning strike in 1833. New-built façades and roof did not have strictly Gothic revival expression – their elements rooted in part from Neoclassicism and the Empire style (Figure 2). Between 1842 and 1843, the western Baroque singer’s gallery was extended. As can be seen in the aquarelle by Franz Alt, depicting interior of the cathedral in 1848, Baroque breast-wall of the gallery was enriched by Gothic revival panelling. These early demonstrations of Gothic revival in architecture of St Martin’s Cathedral were completed by complex restoration of St Anne’s side chapel in 1854.

Systematic and radical Gothic revival restoration began in 1860’s on initiative of Karol Heiller, parish priest, abbot and canon, who initiated the aforementioned St Anne’s side chapel restoration, too. Arnold Ipolyi-Stummer, conservator of the Viennese Central Committee for Researching and Conservation of Monuments (Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale) and expert on the St Martin’s Cathedral architecture, also played an important role in this process.

After establishing of the Society of St Martin’s Cathedral Restoration in Pressburg (”Preßburger Domrestaurirungs-Verein”) the first stage of Gothic revival restoration began, which we date from 1865 to 1882. Firstly, between 1865 and 1867, the choir was renovated and few years later, they
restored the naves as well (consecrated in October 1875; Figure 3) [8]. The St Anne’s side chapel was renovated once more in 1877. [9] The given reason was that more than twenty years ago the chapel “was not restored in the way befitting the spirit of the Gothic”. [6] In the same year, the restoration of the southern anteroom began. It was finished in 1879. [10] During this renovation, restorers radically modified extremely valuable Gothic entrance portal to southern nave of the cathedral, which they falsely considered to be a proof of a decline of the Gothic style. The last building renovation was the restoration of the great singer’s gallery and rooms of the west part of the cathedral, finished in 1882 with the approval of use for a new organ. [11]

First part of Gothic revival restoration, led by archbishop’s architect Josef Erwin Lippert, introduced puristic modifications in an attempt to restore the original Gothic appearance. Restorers removed the majority of the original furnishings, including extremely valuable Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical works, and replaced them with the furnishings of Gothic revival style. New murals in the cathedral’s interior ignored partially preserved medieval decorations. They consisted of Gothic revival style fiction of contemporary restorers, while it “corresponded only poorly” with the real Danubian Late Gothic style of the St Martin’s Cathedral, as it came from absolutely different provenances (e. g. Cologne etc.). [13] Gothic revival adaptations have not included only the Baroque side chapel of St John the Almsgiver, Baroque portal of the parish sacristy with clock and furnishings of several rooms in the western part of cathedral.
Second part of the cathedral’s Gothic revival restoration (1890 – 1917) was characterized by conservational approach and it began by planning a restoration of the northern anteroom which was realized in 1893. [14] Next year, parish priest Edmund Zandt (by then the head of the Society of St Martin’s Cathedral Restoration in Pressburg) asked the Hungarian Provincial Committee for Monuments (Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága) for a design of “stylistically uniform” restoration of façades of the cathedral. The Committee entrusted architect Frigyes Schulek with this task but for various reasons, the whole business was postponed for a long time. Schulek presented his ideas in 1903. He criticized current appearance of the western façade and the tower dating from 1840’s and suggested remodelling of these parts of the cathedral. The remodelling should have consisted of a combination of reconstruction of preserved Gothic fragments and “new modifications in a strict Gothic style”. Schulek completely refused the form of the existing roof and suggested to build a new roof of the tower more corresponding with Gothic style. However, the Committee recommended to preserve the roof, as it was in suitable condition and was not disturbing. The other parts of the cathedral Schulek suggested to restore in conservational approach. In addition to this project, Schulek also devised less expensive project of a “long-term provisorium”. [15]

At the same time, in 1902 – 1903, there was a relatively consistent stylistic restoration of the Baroque side chapel of St John the Almsgiver, which was led by architect Ladislav Steinhausz. [16] Nevertheless, Schulek’s plan of remodelling of the western façade and the tower was never realized; the tower was simply restored in 1905. [17] Dates for restoring the other façades of the cathedral are still unknown.

Concerning the salvation of the riding statue of St Martin and a beggar by Georg Raphael Donner, which was by the time of the Gothic revival restoration placed outside the church, first negative reaction to the removal of the Baroque high altar (1866) appeared by the beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, there were ambitions to reconstruct this significant work in situ, but for various reasons it never happened. [18]

Certain interventions influenced by the 19th century Historicism still came to pass during the first two decades of the 20th century. In 1911, the altar architecture of the side altar of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary (pietà) was moved to the altar of St Andrew and the “miraculous” statue of pietà was given the new monumental altar architecture (by Ferdinand Prinoth of Sankt Ulrich). [19] In 1917, the altar of the Holy Cross was rebuilt to “war altar” of the Sacred Heart by the same company. [20]

3. Personality background
History of the Gothic revival restoration of the St Martin’s Cathedral during the long century is closely connected to important personalities of Hungarian monument restoration movement. Their activity is supported by both archival and biographic research. It was architects, monument conservators and restores active in Hungarian Temporary Committee for Monuments (Magyarországi Műemlékek Ideiglenes Bizottsága; 1872 – 1881), Hungarian Provincial Committee for Monuments (1881 – 1919) or under their authority. Those were:

a) JOSEF ERWIN LIPPERT, knight of Granberg (1826 – 1902, Figure 4a)
   - He was an architect, monument conservator, restorer, artist, handcrafts designer active in Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Moravia.
   - Lippert was schooled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. He gained experience as a restorer in the Viennese St Stephen’s Cathedral guild and its circle.
   - He also worked for the archbishop of Esztergom János Simor and became the leading architect of the St Martin’s Cathedral in Pressburg restoration.
b) JÓZSEF KÖNYÖKI-ELLENBOGEN (1829 – 1900, Figure 4b)
- He was an excellent draughtsman, an absolvent of the Imperial and Royal Polytechnic Institute in Vienna, he taught drawing at Realschule in Pressburg and cooperated with the Hungarian Committee for Monuments.
- Könyöki-Ellenbogen was a founding father as well as custodian of the Town museum of Pressburg. As a correspondent of the Viennese Central Committee for Researching and Conservation of Monuments he watched over methodology of Gothic revival restoration of religious objects as well as documentation. [21]

c) FRIGYES (FRIEDRICH) SCHULEK (1841 – 1919, Figure 4c)
- An architect originally from the region of Orava (Árva), an absolvent of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (where he studied under Friedrich Schmidt), the first architect of the Hungarian Temporary Committee for Monuments.
- His most significant work was the restoration of the Matthias Church in Buda (1873 – 1896). In the territory of present day Slovakia, Schulek designed the (never realized) restoration of the western façade and the tower of the St Martin’s Cathedral and the tower of the Franciscan Church in Pressburg (1895 – 1896), the church tower of the parish church in Prešov (early 20th century), and he also contributed to restoration of the church in Diakovce (1873 – 1875) and Rimavské Janovce (1875). [22]

*Figure 4* a) Josef Erwin Lippert [23], b) József Könyöki-Ellenbogen [24], c) Frigyes Schulek [25]

4. Rejecting of the heritage of Historicism in the second half of the 20th century

Around the half of the 20th century, the St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava was in such a bad condition, that it demanded a complex reconstruction. It began in 1956 [26] and have not been finished yet. Restoration and design works, led by the team of experts, were influenced by contemporary views that considered Gothic revival restoration to be unworthy cultural layer, usually repressing the real Gothic architecture of the building. Their main goal was to reinstate the original medieval appearance of the church. This approach was manifested already during the restoration of the cathedral’s exterior when they decided for using conservation and reconstruction method for the treatment of the Gothic façades, while, at the same time, they removed almost all the Gothic revival elements, except for the windows and tracing, from the western façade and the tower. The part of the cathedral in question thus acquired the current stylistically ambivalent appearance (Figure 5, 6), even though, the restorers aimed to reinstate the tower to its original medieval state. Nowadays, their methods are deemed questionable and the result is unsatisfying. It is undeniable that the authors were not successful in restoring the
original Gothic appearance of the cathedral’s tower, considering the fact, that in the Middle Ages it used to be considerably lower (the extension was built in 1760’s) and the western façade was not perforated by large windows, never mind their Gothic revival style. The overall expression is certainly not being helped by the chaotic presentation of several preserved Gothic stone fragments at the base of the tower. Furthermore, stylistically ambivalent tower is topped with the roof bearing distinctive Neoclassical and Gothic revival characteristics. Before the second half of the 20th century restoration, it corresponded with similar façades but nowadays, this treatment is questionable.

Treatment of the interior was similar. During 1970’s restoration, restorers removed all the Gothic revival murals from the walls, columns and vaults of the naves. They also scheduled the removal of the singers’ gallery and radical interventions to western wall – these were never realized. The Gothic revival murals remain in the choir, St Anne’s chapel and in western part of the cathedral. Even though, it must be stated, that the Gothic revival murals at least in part interfered with the spatial effect of the cathedral’s interior and were in terrible condition, the radical removal of the whole cultural layer in such an extent brings forth some ambiguity. Similarly, to the interventions to the exterior of the cathedral, the stylistic coherence of the interior was disrupted.

5. Contemporary approach to the Gothic revival cultural layer

The fact, that the restoration begun in 1950’s was never completed, stimulated new interventions at the beginning of the 21st century. Finally, they led to a great ongoing restoration of the cathedral.

In 2000, restoration of the western parts of the interior begun and floor tiles in the naves were replaced. This enabled conducting of an extensive archaeological research. So far, both interior and exterior of the southern anteroom and the chapel of St John the Almsgiver (2005) were restored. For all the interventions, with an exception of the floor tiles replacement, the conservational approach was
used, accepting all the cultural and stylistic layers. Western rooms, in which the Gothic revival layer either absented or was severely damaged, were given new Gothic coating based on preserved fragments of the original coating (former canonry sacristy/St Joseph chapel, former imperial oratory of Sigismund of Luxembourg and treasury). At some places (former so called parish sacristy and lower ceiling of the western gallery) they decided for the analytical presentations of several former stylistic layers.

Subsequently, the exterior was restored in several stages. At first, the side chapel of St John the Almsgiver (2009) was done. Later, works continued with restoring the western façade and the tower (2010 – 2011), northern anteroom and the St Anne’s side chapel (both 2012), the façade of the northern nave (2013 – 2014) and the façade of the southern nave (2015 – 2017). Meanwhile, the organ was replaced (approved for use 2010) and the Donner’s sculpture of St Martin and a beggar, canonry chairs in choir (both 2014) and the interior of St Anne’s chapel were restored (2016). Most of the restoring works were led by academic sculptor Lúčomír Sabo. The second half of the 20th century interventions to the western façade and the tower were reconsidered in 2010, and it was suggested that the removed Gothic revival panelling should be reconstructed. This methodically most suitable variant was not realised due to lack of finances on the part the investor and facades were simply covered with a new layer of coating. [29]

In future, a complex reconstruction of the facades of the choir according to method already used for the façades of the naves is planned. Potential presentation of many original Gothic mural fragments in red paint will pose an interesting issue.

6. Conclusions

Aborning national awareness, as well as revolutionary atmosphere in the Habsburg Monarchy culminating in 1848, stimulated unprecedented interest in national history and cultural heritage in the territory of the present-day Slovakia, too. In this period, the strives to salvage valuable, mostly medieval, monuments led to the institutionalisation of the monument conservation and protection in Hungary. 1850’s and 1860’s brought first great restoration actions in the territory of the present-day Slovakia – not regarding earlier Gothic revival adaptations of church towers (the St Martin’s Cathedral in Pressburg in 1840’s and the St James’ Church in Levoča in 1825 – 1857). Gothic revival restoration of the St Martin’s Cathedral in Pressburg and the approach promoting idealised idea not corresponding with the building’s chronology and its development, precedes the puristic restoration phase. The restoration method was influenced by Hungarian political interests. Accepting of Historicism, Gothic revival fiction, respecting and presenting preserved authentic layers at the turn of the 21th century is a result of reflections of archival, archaeological and architectural-historical research of singular monument.

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