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SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES OF HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT: Since three centuries a peculiar architectural tradition arisen from Byzantine culture complex - scattered throughout the country - has been eternized. There are Serbian orthodox churches in settlements along the Danube, the most concentrated in the regions of Budapest, Szeged and Pécs. These churches built mostly in the 18th and 19th centuries are well definable architectural monuments within the Hungarian history of architecture. Their form is typically that of the Western middle-towered single-nave Baroque churches standardized by Franz Anton Pilgram's designs. [Figure1.] Their interiors exhibit, however, the world of decorations of Eastern Christian sacral spaces. In course of some decades the floor plan underwent reorganization to cope with the Byzantine liturgy. Thereby in the late 18th century a peculiar church type has developed - comprising a church for Eastern rite inside Western architectural frames.

Since the state foundation 1100 years ago, Hungary has always been a country determinant for the Carpathian Basin. As a Central European country, it possessed important economical and political power. Due to its regional importance, it always involved and peculiarly mingled the cultures of surrounding peoples at a high sensitivity.

Several national convived in the Hungarian area: in addition to Hungarians, also Saxsons (Germans), Romans, Croatians, Slovaks as well as Serbs. Although keeping the originality of their popular traditions they adopted several elements from coexisting peoples - enriching thereby the variosity of their culture. All that is manifest not only in the realm of religious customs and folklore, but also in the fields of language, music and architecture. [Illustration1.]

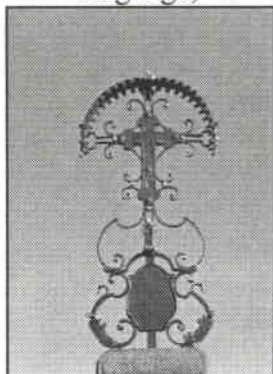


Illustration 1.

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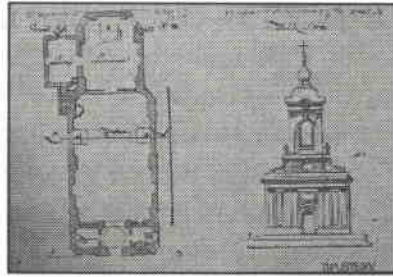


Figure 1.

Typical plan by Franz Anton Pilgram

In course of some decades the floor plan underwent reorganization to cope with the Byzantine liturgy. Thereby in the late 18th century a peculiar church type has developed - comprising a church for Eastern rite inside Western architectural frames.

In course of scientific investigations I have established a typology system of this sphere of monuments. Rural Serbian churches in South-Hungary and those of urban scale in Budapest and Szentendre have been minutiously examined. In the existence of Serbs in Hungary Budapest acted as a leading cultural centre and Szentendre ecclesiastically as centre of the episcopate.

This lecture is intended to present the about typical floor plan system on hand of some monuments in Budapest and in Szentendre. Thereafter amalgamation of Hungarian and Serbian architectural traditions will be discussed: across the wealth of forms of a master builder to the interaction of building communities. Importance of the Hungarian baroque development for the Serbian ecclesiastic architecture will be pointed out. In the end a set of images about churches destroyed since then will be projected.

The most of Serbian ethnical groups moved into the Hungarian territory in 1690. This country was already for 150 years under foreign occupation when by the late 17th century the union between the Habsburgs and the Polish succeeded in forcing the Turks back to the Balkan. News about the success of the campaign elicited a plebiscite in Serbia. Nevertheless the relief troops stopped at the frontiers. The mutineering people of Serbia left under Turkish rule had to run for life - thereby ten thousands of Serbian families escaped to the actual Hungarian territory.

Initially, these ethnic groups erected only temporary timber or adobe-walled churches. After decades of settlement however the claim for stone churches arose. According to contemporary reports the first monuments were single-nave, pitch-roofed, attic constructions. These simple buildings were still unimportant from the aspect of history of architecture.

A real break-through was due to standard designs for single-nave churches with a western middle tower by Franz Anton Pilgram, court architect of Vienna. [Figure1.] The Serbs directly ruled by the Viennese Court adopted these cameralistic standard designs.

The church "Pozsarevacska" in Szentendre was built in the 1750's. [Illustration2.] As to its type it belongs to the first important architectural style of the Serbian orthodox architecture in Hungary. These churches feature directly adopted marks of standard designs: linear sidewalls, initially polygonal later semicircular apses bays as seen in the illustration. [Figure2.]

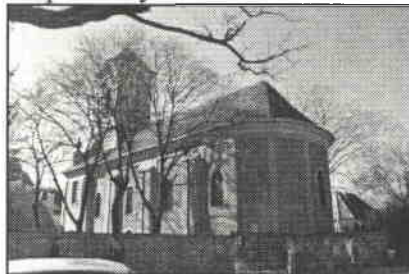


Illustration 2.

Szentendre, "Pozsarevacska" church (1759)

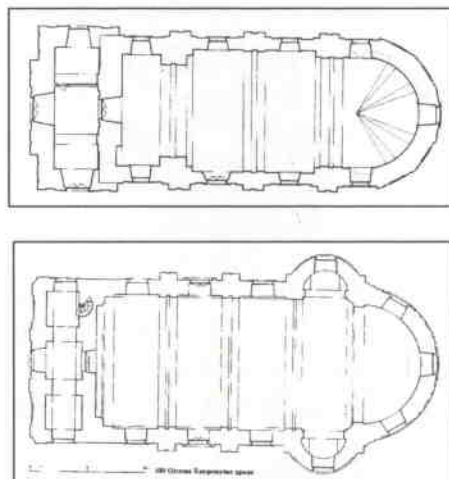


Figure 2-3.

Szentendre, "Pozsarevacska" church (1759)

Szentendre, "Tyiprovacska" church (1792)

They differed from the actual system in that - when originally built - they had no tower. Namely before the last quarter of the 18th century religions other than catholic were not allowed to build belfrys. The ulterior addition is manifest from the church ground plan; appearing also in the facade. Let me point out again the generalized western facade design: the tower stresses verticalness, and so do tympan transfers.

By the late 18th century a peculiar differentiation adapted to the Byzantine liturgy appears. Let us note transformation of the architectural scopes in the "Tyiprovacska" church of Szentendre. [Illustration3.] In Byzantine liturgy singers have an important role. Their benches in front of the sanctuary are given a separate room - forming a conchal space extension in the mass of the church. Later on it becomes the typical mass of Serbian churches. [Figure2-3.] Since that the tower is built together with the nave.

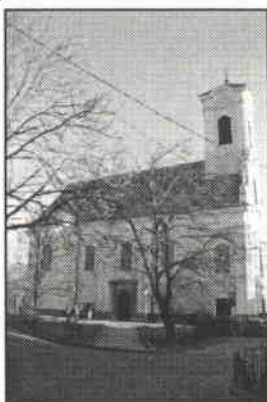


Illustration 3.

Szentendre, "Tyiprovacska" church (1792)

After having surveyed this train of development let me consider some important architectural form-marks. In relation to the "Blagovestenska" church in Szentendre and to the Serbian church in Budapest pertinence to the same sphere of building masters emerges. All these are indicated by the broken-arch entablature of the church in Pest, balconies of tall windows, perforated parapets of choir windows above the doors. [Illustration4.] Style criticism and examining the relics support András Mayerhoffer. He belonged to the sphere of designers and architects having replaced the Austrian type of baroque in the 1830's. Austrian effects prevail in the church of Budapest-innercity at its gate door; but the University church and the Centennial Restaurant [Illustration5.] by Mayerhoffer exhibit already peculiar Hungarian features imprinted by the civilian baroque of Pest.

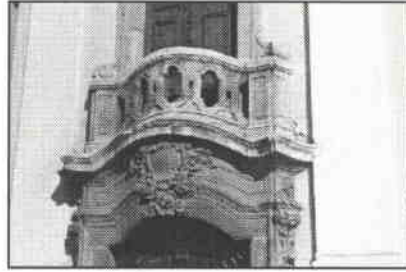


Illustration 4.

Szentendre, "Blagovestenska" church, balcony

As to the detail designs architecturally valuable monumental details are the entrances. Side-gate with rococo stone framing of the "Episcopal" church in Szentendre has door leaves with original rococo wood carvings. The red marble door frames of the "Tyiprovacska" church remind us of best details of Renaissance.

There is interaction vice-versa. Belfry of the Roman Catholic church in Szentendre [Illustration6.] bears an entablature with a clock-ledge typical feature of nearby Serbian churches.

It has to be pointed out that these relics in Hungary are unique for the Serbian orthodox church architecture. In the 18th century the main point of Serbian culture and so of architectural development shifted to Hungary - Serbian areas were still under Turkish rule. Delivered from strict constraints typical of eastern orthodox christian architecture this peculiar Byzantine architectural tradition alloyed with baroque animation. This well definable building period provided for the further development and historical continuity of Serbian sacral architecture.

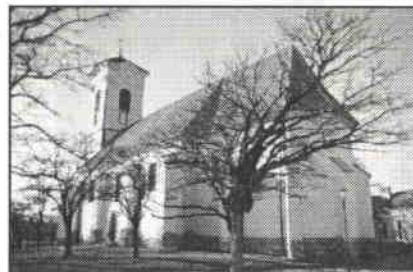
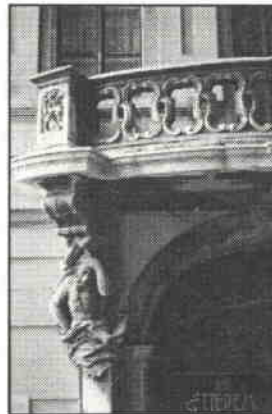


Illustration 5-6.

Budapest, Centennial Restaurant, balcony
Szentendre, Roman Catholic church

At least let me end this lecture by a quotation and a sequence of images.

"Marks of grandness and talents of a nation are not merely pages in its history but in particular their monuments; monumental masterpieces, although mute but living relics, provide sources of the history itself... Thus by the loss of every one of a national monument causes to erase a page from the history- book! - By nature f this subject the most important and most ancient monuments are architectural." - told by Arnold Ipolyi, academician, in 1861.

By the middle of the 20th century war devastation and battles of political nterest reduced the number of ethnic Serbian inhabitants in Hungary. Churches were abandoned. The personal

emotional background imbuing the existence of an Orthodox church is off. The Serbian bishopry in Buda could not financially support upkeeping of these churches - so these buildings heavily mutilated in World War 2 were demolished in the '50s and '60s. [Illustration7.] Demolishing a church means devastation not only of material but also of ideal-human values - that has to be reminded to via scientific investigations, too.



Illustration 7.

Báticasék, Serbian Orthodox church, demolished in 1958

Illustrations made by the author

Figures taken from:

Figure1: in: Cs. Dobrovits, D.: Buildings of 18th century in Hungary. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983.

Figure2-3: in: Davidov, Dinko: Monuments of episcopate Buda. Beograd, Prosveta, 1990