

BAROQUE CALVARY IN BANSKA STIAVNICA – CONSERVATION AND ITS USE IN 21ST CENTURY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Banska Stiavnica is a famous historic town of UNESCO that has prospered from the middle ages thanks to the rich sources of the gold and silver. The paper addresses to one of the most remarkable “trace” in the town landscape - the Baroque Calvary (1744 –1751). This complex of tree churches and 17 chapels is a strong architectural dominant as well as a symbol of strong influence of the Catholic Church in that history. The Baroque Calvary was originally built as a pilgrimage place, full of material sacral monuments, historic trees alley and terraces, with a strong spirit kept through the ages. The last 40 years of the communist regime meant for the Calvary not only functional but also spiritual abandonment. The sacral complex was damaged by vandals step by step in last over 60 years, suffers by lack of interests of the public and owners. That is the reason why the Faculty of Architecture in Bratislava (Architectural Research Centre for Heritage and Art education - ARCHA) started up the activities for the safeguarding of the Calvary from 2007. Till today there were done a large number of conservation and restoration works, both outside and inside of the complex. The safeguarding the Calvary itself increased the interests of the tourists, and also opened different forms of its use. Since in 2008 the Calvary visited 12 000 visitors, in 2014 – 40 000 tourists. And so, the Calvary faces the problem to realise the background which could eliminates the mass tourism from the precious monument and preserves its calm and spiritual genius loci for the future.

Key words: *Banska Stiavnica, baroque Calvary, Calvary Fund, spiritual abandonment, safeguarding of monuments.*

Banska Stiavnica is a famous historic town of UNESCO that has prospered from the middle ages thanks to the rich sources of the gold and silver. This old mining royal town is important not only for its considerable size, already in the Romanesque period, but also for the character of its architecture and large complexes of technical facilities concerned the exploitation and processing of gold and silver.

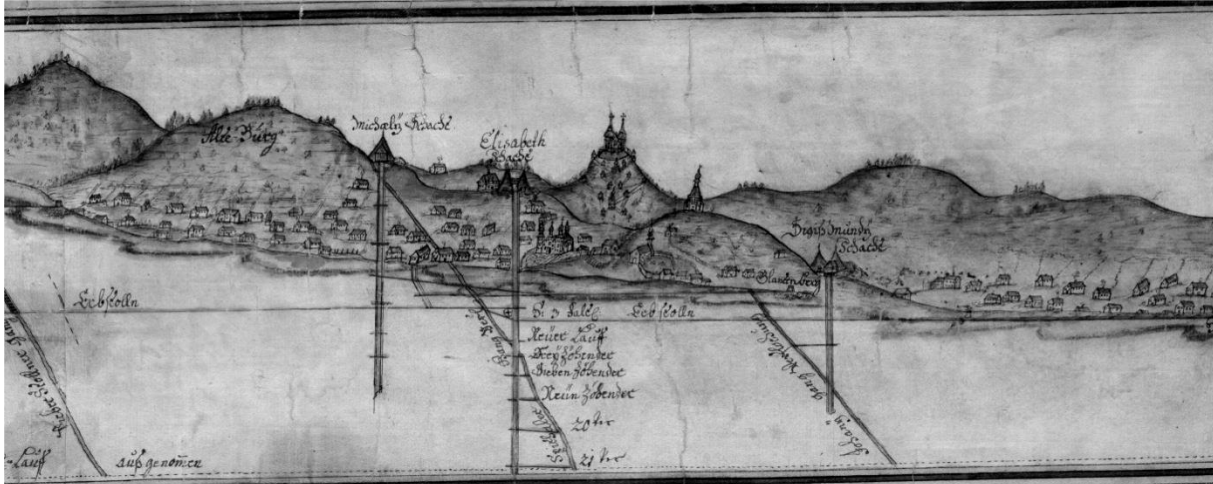


Fig. 1: Banská Štiavnica historical view with a schematic diagram of mining works

In 18th century the unique water system had been elaborated for the mining machinery as the system of interconnected artificial lakes, whose waters propelled not only mining crushers but also the pumping facilities as well (more than 60 lakes with more than 72 kilometres interconnected channels). The richness of the golden and silver mines had reflected development of the culture, education and the admirable medieval architecture covered with “layers” of next centuries. The town of Banská Štiavnica since the half of 18th century belonged to the biggest and most influential free royal towns of the Hungarian kingdom. The mining industry in Štiavnica was experiencing its golden period. Favourable economic conditions provided for unprecedented cultural development of the town and brought about changes in its outer appearance including the introduction and establishment of new artistic values. The significance and picturesque town’s character are intensified also by the surrounding protected countryside region of the Štiavnica Mountains, which are one of the largest volcanic mountain ranges in Slovakia. The most significant trace in its panorama was kept by structurally active Jesuits, who constructed on one of the hills the most remarkable “trace” in the town landscape – the Baroque Calvary (1744 – 1751), the complex of three churches and 17 chapels – as a strong architectural dominant as well as a symbol of strong influence of the catholic church at that time.



Fig. 2: Banska Stiavnica old town and Sharp hill with Calvary complex

The landscape concept of the Calvary is strongly impressive by the architectural illusive composition, by the symmetry and dominant position on the top of the Scharffenberg hill. On the one hand – by the location had to remind the real Calvary in Jerusalem (the calvary in distance of the town); on the other hand – by its architectural-artistic concept had to attract and drug into the dramatic story of last hours of Jesus and Virgin Mary. The sacral complex has been very detailed composed on the view from the mountainous terrain around and from the historic town as well. Originally the Calvary hill was built in non-urban area, which was connected with the town by the meandering path with the three preliminary chapels, lined with lime trees. Unfortunately, this part of the landscape phenomena have been destroyed in 70th of 20th century, when a new road and residential buildings were built there.

From the opposite hill Paradajs (the place where the creation of the Calvary was considered) we can see geometrically precise symmetrical composition – with three churches in the axis and zigzag situated chapels on both sides. There are seven chapels on the left side (climbing direction of the pilgrims) with the motives of the Passion; and seven chapels on the right side (descending of the pilgrims) with the motives of the seven sorrows of Virgin Mary. In the churches, the sacral motives are represented by the sculptures, reliefs and illusive frescos around; in the chapel the main motive is the wooden polychromic relief with the motive of the certain station. Mostly, the originals of the wooden reliefs from mid of 18th century were saved to present, only in some cases the originals were replaced in 19th century by the stone or wooden reliefs (station No. 19 -- “Flight to Egypt” and station No. 24 -- “Jesus is Laid in the Tomb”).

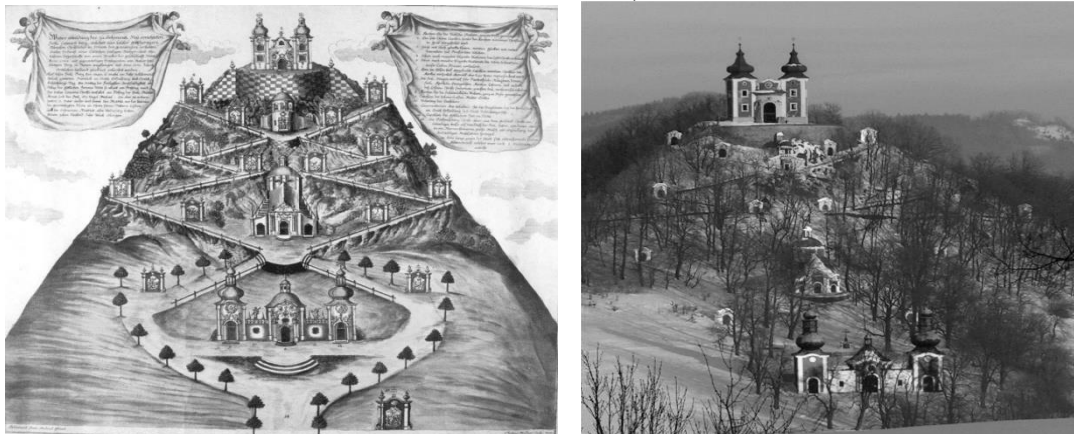


Fig. 3: Calvary complex: Historical drawing and actual state

The Calvary Complex of Banska Štiavnica, a very impressive Baroque sacral complex and a prominent landmark is listed among the most beautiful objects of this type in Europe. The perfectly elaborated composition of architecture and sculptures, a paintings and craftwork in unity with the natural environment literally drags the visitors into the story that materialises the scenes of the last journey of Jesus – the Way of the Cross. This precious site has unfortunately found itself under serious threat in the beginning of 21st century.

The initiator of the construction of the Calvary Complex was father Franz Perger /1700 – 1771/ from the local community of the Society of Jesus /Jesuits/. His remarkable enthusiasm helped him win the inhabitants of the town over for his idea of building a Calvary on the top of a hill called Scharffenberg /Sharp Hill/. His efforts were crowned with success and on September 14th, 1744 the

ground stone of the Upper Church was laid. Seven years later, on September 14th, 1751 the whole Complex was finalised and consecrated. Father Perger was inspired by the existing calvarias from his previous place of work/ origin forces such as Hernals close to Vienna, Graz-Austein, or Bratislava. But the main architect /constructor is not known.

The concept of the Calvary Complex reaches beyond the framework of the usual interpretations of the Way of the Cross and its fourteen stations. The structure, the spatial design, and the character of the depicted scenes symbolise the message of the history of the redemption in an original, generous, and artistically valuable way. Thanks to that, the story of the Passion is dramatized, reaching an almost scenic quality, enhanced by its being set in the natural landscape. The architectural complex consists of 17 stations, three churches – Lower Church, the Holy Stairs, and the Upper Church and smaller another chapels – *Ecce Homo Chapel and Jail*, *Jesus' Tomb* and, finally, stone statue *Seven Sorrows of Virgin Mary*. The complex takes advantage in an especially sensitive way of the properties of the natural environment, appropriately enhanced by the planted verdure.

Despite the Calvary Complex being built at the time of the Baroque period reaching its peak, the architecture of its buildings is sober and the decorativeness moderate, enabling the pilgrim to concentrate on the intense intimate experience of the Passion. The over of the message is potentiated by the realistic interpretation of the scenes in form of large scale reliefs and the dramatically graded final scene of the Crucifixions created by life size statues and figural paintings in the background. (K. Voškova, 2009, 2014)



Fig. 4: Interiors from Lower Church, Holy Stairs and the Upper Church

The Baroque Calvary was originally built as a pilgrimage place. The place full of material sacral monuments, historic trees alley, terraces are filled with a strong spirit kept by pilgrims through the ages. In spite of all – last 40 years of the communist regime meant for the Calvary not only functional but also spiritual abandonment. The sacral complex was damaged by vandals step by step in last over 60 years, when suffered by lack of interests of the public and owners. The great majority of sculptures and saintly relicts have been stolen, the buildings and furnishings have been demolished. The balance of losses affecting the cultural and historical value of the Calvary is incalculable. After the last raid of vandals in 2004, the original elements of the decorations of the Calvary – wooden reliefs from the chapels and sculptures from the churches – have been gradually brought to a safe place. The Baroque originals were removed from the chapels and churches – a price the Calvary had to pay in order to save them. Instead of the original reliefs the photo-reproduction were installed in the chapels. Some of the original wooden reliefs were during last twenty years restored and being installed after the restoration to the moisture absorbed chapels need another intervention. Therefore the present strategy for the preservation of the original sculptures

and reliefs from the Calvary is step-by step restoration of the originals, which should be presented for public in the museum space and well quality replicas placed in situ (in the original place of chapels).



Fig. 5: Damage by vandals on the Calvary interiors of the late 20th century

Until 2007, however, there was no unified strategy for their protection and appropriate presentation. This sparked the idea to install an exposition titled *Calvary in Asylum* on the exhibition premises of the Slovak Mining Museum at the Old Castle in Banská Štiavnica. In spite of all the place has still today a strong genius loci, offers calm spiritual mood and the architecture is more-less authentically preserved.

All this facts became the reason why the Faculty of Architecture in Bratislava (Architectural Research Centre for Heritage and Art education - ARCHA) started up the activities for the safeguarding of the Calvary from 2007. Centre had entered the process of the multidisciplinary researches by international students' workshop and scientific colloquium with the topic "Safeguarding the Baroque Calvary". Since 2007 we can speak of a breakthrough in the modern fate of the Calvary in Banská Štiavnica. Thanks to the initiative that came from the local activists, The Calvary was enrolled to the *List of the 100 Most Endangered Sites* (World Monuments Fund, New York, USA). This fact has made the quite an impact in the community and motivated activists to take further steps in order to save and rehabilitate the Calvary. In 2008 a civic association The Calvary Fund has been established. From the first moment the Calvary Fund has taken systematic charge of the professional conservation of the monument, and safeguarded the appropriate protection and revitalisation of the Calvary in Banská Štiavnica. The present Calvary Fund continues the historical tradition of protecting, maintaining, and beautifying the Calvary – an activity originally performed by the initiator of its construction, Jesuit – father Franz Perger. Originally the Calvary Fund was established in 1751 (after the construction of the Complex) and was working up to 1951, when its activity was stopped by communist regime.

Till today there were done a large number of conservation and restoration works, both outside and inside of the complex. The architectural Complex of the Calvary and all its artistic decoration – paintings and sculptures – have an important place in the Slovak history of art and there is no doubt, the architectural and artistic values of the Complex overstepping the borders of the country also. The Calvary Complex is one of the important representatives of the Baroque sacral architecture, especially in its typological class in Europe. The Banská Štiavnica Calvary has become a part of the network of the atlas of the European calvarias and holy mountains, which were surveying in 2001 by the Italian Istituto Geografico DeAgostini (*Atlante dei Sacri Monti, Calvari*

e Complessi Devozionali Europei). The Banska Stiavnica Calvary is always a subject of the many art-historian studies, thesis, diploma projects, seminars, colloquiums, monographs, etc., which wants to reconstruct its history and bring more and more lights to the circumstances of its creation. Faculty of Architecture SUT in Bratislava takes part of the scientific researches, and also coordination of multidiscipline researches and restoration.



Fig. 6: Realised restoration works. State before and after the restoration.

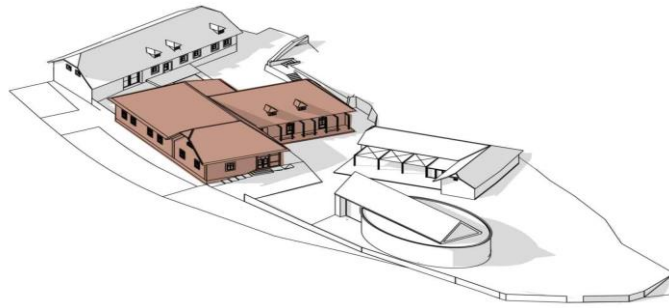
Calvary was originally constructed as a pilgrim place. But the life in 21st century is very different and there are only few religious programmes so far. We face the question: How to revitalize the place, how to bring there the permanent life again and also open it for different forms of use (less religious, more civil – such as the weddings, historical games for children, concerts... etc.). That is the reason why a small visitor centre with exposition of the history of the Complex was created, or small open air stage for occasional events, also all the complex was illuminated not only for the reason of presentation, but same for the safety of visitors safeguarding during the night.



Fig. 7: Small open air stage for occasional events in the area of Calvary complex.

The safeguarding the Calvary itself increased the interests of the tourists, and also opened different forms of use. Since in 2008 the Calvary visited 12 000 visitors, in 2014 – 40 000 tourists!

And so, the Calvary faces another problem – to realise the background which could eliminates the mass tourism from the precious monument and preserves its calm and spiritual genius loci. The existing built fabric under the Calvary hill offers the solution for the creation of the Calvary Visitor Centre. Multifunctional use of the Calvary Visitor Centre (interpretation of the Calvary in the expositions, snack-bar, modest accommodation for pilgrims..., etc.) and an appropriate architectural designs – it is a actual challenge and a subject for the creative works under the Faculty of Architecture and its Research Centre (ARCHA) in Banska Stiavnica.



*Fig. 8: Proposal of Visitor Centre under the Calvary.
Diploma project, Faculty of Architecture SUT 2015*

Faculty of Architecture SUT was one of the active members of the safeguarding the Calvary Complex scientifically, and following the restoration works as well as another needs of the Complex. Faculty had organized two international scientific colloquiums already, last one “Banska Stiavnica Calvary – Seven years of intensive conservation and Perspectives of Revitalisation” in 2014 (first in 2007). This scientific and independent forum offers the platform for the evaluation of new knowledge, as well as the critical evaluation of the conservation and restoration works of the Calvary.

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