

## The Baroque and the Franciscan Order. A dialectic relation

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### ABSTRACT

Within the Master of Restoration and Patrimonial Regeneration of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning in Timișoara, the 2018 promotion, a complex intervention is being developed on the fortified fortress in Arad. The Vauban fortress, was built in the 18th century and contains a number of buildings of great historical importance and value, made in the same period, of which the most important is a Franciscan Monastery, which was preserved almost intact. The future role of the building is a multi-functional ensemble that has been defined in a Masterplan containing the fortress and the surrounding areas. The Masterplan is conceived as a stage-based scenario of intervention on the entire fortress and takes into account the relations with the city and its needs. The monastery, with its adjacent side wings, is one of the key points of the regeneration project due to its position and symbolic value - it is in the center of the fortress, and with two other military buildings, frames the central Square of Arms. It is also the oldest building in the site and is considered to be of high patrimonial value. The monastery belongs to the Franciscan Order and plays a key role in relation to the original military functions. Since there were not many buildings inside the fortress, the general appearance of those standing is desired to be as close to the original as possible. The interior of the Monastery will have a different, contemporary treatment, respecting the current restoration doctrines. In order to perform interventions on the inside, and to make the best possible use of the physical material that has been preserved, it is necessary to thoroughly deepen the understanding of the original design concepts of such monasteries. Historical, cultural, religious and social research was carried out on the time period that the original building was built in order to underlie some of the decisions taken in the design process. The research also revealed a dialectic phenomenon: the very interesting relation between two movements that are at first site in an ideological contrast. The relation between an extremely pregnant, longstanding artistic and social movement – the Baroque; and the theological doctrines of a monastic order based on poverty, the emulation of Jesus's life and the abnegation of all material wealth – which the Franciscan Order is based on; represents the core theme that is treated in this article.

**Keywords:** baroque, franciscan order, the fortress of Arad, aesthetics, franciscan monastery, dialectic relation

## I. ARAD FORTRESS AND THE FRANCISCAN MONASTERY

Within the Master of Restoration and Patrimonial Regeneration of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning in Timișoara, the 2018 promotion, an extensive and complex intervention is being developed on the fortified fortress in Arad. One of the most important buildings and of great heritage value is the Franciscan Monastery (Fig. 1). The functional role proposed for it is that of a multifunctional space which includes an auditorium in the central space and in the side wings: a museum, coffee shops, gift shop, small administrative spaces, storage, etc. Also, each of the two courtyards will have either a mineral or a natural appearance. The two towers will be accessible all the way to the top and will offer a bird's eye view of the surroundings. In order to achieve a well-founded intervention project, various studies were conducted, of which the most interesting one deals with the dialectical relation of the Baroque style and the Franciscan Order. A better understanding of this relation contributes deeply to substantiating decisions about interventions on the architectural object.



Fig. 1. The Franciscan Monastery in the Arad Fortress

If the exterior of the building will be restored in a more conservative way, the interior space is desired to have a contemporary aesthetic approach. Even so, both the inside and the outside will take into account the present day restoration doctrines.

## II. HISTORICAL PREMISES. REFORMATION AND COUNTER REFORMATION

In order to better understand the relation between the Franciscan Order, one of the most longstanding monastic orders, and the Baroque,

the style that was at its peak in the XVIIIth century, we need to understand the historical context in which they are positioned. This relation, may seem at first to be a contrast between the spiritual values, humility, modesty and piety specific to the Franciscan Order, and the dramatic, theatrical, spectacular and often opulent Baroque style.

The Baroque, is an artistic current that crystallizes social, political and religious movements from the 17th to the 18th centuries, following the major ideas that emerged during the Renaissance and the Reformation. It is the answer given by the major powers influencing the political and religious scene, for the questions raised in a Central Europe that wanted to offer a strong alternative to the Protestant movement of the secularization of religion and state power. The Protestant Reformation, initiated in the sixteenth century, has led to major changes in the existing balance of power between the state, the Church and the proletariat. Thus, the Church of Rome gradually lost the power it could exercise in the European Christian states in many ways. Relations with the nobility and principles governing the states were heavily eroded by the fact that they no longer recognized the central authority of the Church in some spiritual matters (the first to have been a real success in this direction was Martin Luther, with Nine-Five Theses directed against the system imposed by the Church of Rome (Fig. 2). The masses of people in these states were often compelled to make a hard choice between assuming new religions states and exile.



Fig. 2. Martin Luther nails the 95 Theses on the door of the Church of Wittenberg – painted by Ferdinand Pauwel

All of these turbulences have not occurred spontaneously or for a limited duration, they are rather the result of major premises that emerged during the Renaissance and were sustained by the humanist movements and the growth of a new system of rational thinking which questioned the traditional social and religious system of organization. The transition to Protestantism, in its various forms, was not homogeneous in the European lands. In the cities, but especially in the villages, where the Church had a stronger presence, and the political and economic situation was more stable, the emergence and development of the religious movement had a lesser effect.

The social transformations of this period have allowed many sects and alternative religious systems to emerge from the dominant Catholicism in Continental Europe. Central countries have been the site of long and bloody wars that culminated in the 30-year War between the Habsburgs and the Holy Roman German Empire of the German lands, concluded by the Peace of Westphalia (1648). The cessation of religious wars has led to a number of major consequences in many European countries. One of the most important results of the peace involved the conferring of each state, the right to choose its own religion (Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism). The practice of other minority religions is possible under certain strict conditions. The intellectual emancipation that follows these phenomena is much stronger in the areas dominated by the Protestant religion. This was also supported by a strong economic development, with the Catholic Church being able to intervene so strongly in the state's internal regulations.

The reaction of the Catholic Church to these phenomena was the Counter-Reformation, initiated after the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The answer was to preserve the status, power and wealth that the Church had in the pan-European universe in relation to the state and the proletariat. The Counter-Reformation addressed some of the issues raised by the Reformation (related to the sale of indulgences, clergy corruption and other financial abuse), but at the same time rejected all theological claims of Protestants. It was rather a return to the spiritual and doctrinal

foundations of church orders. Unlike Protestantism, the Council of Trent believed that "faith" is not enough to achieve salvation, it is necessary instead to prove this constant belief in life by observing certain dogmas and catechisms.

### III. THE BAROQUE

The ways of communication of all these ideas that circulated in the worlds was at first instance, the printing of small pamphlets and publications that were distributed to all the masses of people. Religious and ideological warfare was also strongly disputed in art through all its forms. Since the vast majority of the population could not read (the population was largely illiterate, ~90%), art, through its ability (particularly visual) to transmit powerful ideas was a very appropriate medium to emphasize a particular system of values.

Although, to a large extent, the wars were concluded by the peace of Westphalia in 1648, religious war continued to be expressed through art. These premises were the basis for the appearance of the Baroque as an artistic style subsequent to the Renaissance. If the Reformation started from the German space through the writings of Martin Luther, the Baroque had its birthplace in the Italian space supported by the Counter-Reformation and the Papacy. One of the roles played by the Baroque on the cultural and religious scene of Europe, (initially in Italy, to be spread rapidly in the rest of the Catholic states and later in the Protestant Germany, England, etc.), was to reaffirm the power of the Church as a Christian sovereign entity [1].

In the wake of the Humanist Enlightenment, and the transition from Renaissance to baroque, there was an artistic perception of beauty, from object to subject, from logic to rhetoric. The Renaissance artist chose to pursue beauty, as a self-sustaining entity of objective value, and therefore becoming detached in a sense from its creation. Baroque artists on the other hand, sought not to attain truth, but to demonstrate it. The way in which they attained their goals were by integrating the spectator in a complex artistic representation, therefore becoming an essential element in a dialog with the creator of the work.

Some of the Renaissance architectural elements could still be seen in the first baroque churches, mostly in the facades. They followed a model of a two story structure that had an accent in its central axis that was topped by a pediment. The bays and the individual parts of the facades were tributary to some of the Renaissance models of churches that had strong horizontal accent which divided the first and the second stories. Baroque, though at the beginning was more austere and restrained, taking on certain elements of the Renaissance, in later phases manifested itself as a style with a very dynamic aesthetic, an exuberant play of the space in a continuous movement (Fig. 3). In our case, the Monastery belongs to a provincial type of Baroque, with its less ostentatious aesthetic and décor.



Fig. 3. The Church of St. Lorenzo, Turin, Guarino Guarini, 1668-1687

The final phases of the Baroque were crystallized in Rococo, which was destined to produce works of total art that embraced all visual arts under the aegis of architecture. The fascination that the Baroque architecture arose was due to

a very complex, theatrical, dynamic, and often surprising system of space control. All of these art forms, mostly buildings, were organized into a weave of religious symbols (or related to the cult of personalities and nations) and the relations that can arise between them in order to convey a certain narrative scenario displayed simultaneously on walls, ceilings and vaults, niches, arches, paintings and sculptures. The scenario, the “story” of architecture is developed to be highly convincing.

Considering that at the time the printing press was invented, the power of transmitting information to a larger number of people has increased exponentially, a new media for the control of the mass has been founded. Even so, at the beginning of this development, the vast majority of people were illiterate. In order to convey certain information accessible to all, socially educated or not, the Baroque was meant to be expressive, rich, and very persuasive language (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The Ecstasy of St. Theresa, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1652

#### IV. THE FRANCISCAN ORDER

The Counter-Reformation, by desiring to return to the dogmatic origins of faith, has also led to a re-assessment of the way in which religious orders were organized. The Franciscan Order is no exception. The order is based on a monastic order emphasized on poverty, a lack of material possessions and a desire to emulate the same life as Jesus Christ. The simple life they had gave their members visions of solidarity with the poor and a certain value to the contribution of social justice. Among the other characteristics of the Order that have been maintained over time, a continuing desire to strive to preserve the role of the Church in society and to remain faithful has been set.

Founded in 1209 by St. Francis of Assisi, the Franciscan Order is a mendicant order, which implies a lifestyle focused on poverty, travel and living in urban areas for the purpose of preaching, evangelism and ministry, especially to the poor. At its foundation, the order rejected the previously established monastic pattern. It provided existence in a stable, isolated community where members did not have material possessions more than just necessary and did not possess land, buildings and other assets. Their survival depended on the kindness of the people they preached.

From the very beginning, the issue of poverty has been the main subject of discord among brothers. Because of the success they enjoyed within the areas in which they were present, the Order was receiving much more material benefits than it would have necessarily desired. Thus, in the first centuries, two major directions of thought were formed within the monastic society: Observers and Conventuals. If the first group represented the strict, ascetic model, which was closest to the original dogmas defined by St. Francis, the second group considered that the extreme poverty should not be practiced to such an extent. The latter, considered it perfectly acceptable that the funds obtained from the people had to be used for general use and for the brethren in particular. This would be the central source of discord between the brothers over many centuries. When the discrepancy seemed impossible to be resolved, the

split became permanent in a way.

Thus, the two groups were accepted as such and continued to function in the same Order. The First Order, the ascetic ones known as the Observers and the second Order of the Conventuals, were joined by a third Order, the Order of the Brethren and the Penitentiary Sisters, which was constituted mostly as a secular organization. The latter was made up of persons that wanted to serve the Franciscan Order, but for various reasons they could not fully dedicate themselves to a monastic life.

#### V. ARCHITECTURE

Until the appearance of the Baroque, the Gothic style of the monasteries in Europe, represented a "infinite forest" of horizontally arranged rooms, accentuated by elongated vertical elements that stretched to heaven (the divine universe) and lit by huge stained glass. The Baroque had an impact on architecture which emulates many of the religious and ideological beliefs of the time. They represent the desire of the Church to reunite and bring back the faithful into the fold. The dome, the large single space and the overlapping of architectural elements give the baroque its specific character (Fig. 5, Fig. 6).

The desire to bring the congregation together in one single space, to attract believers to a single central point [3], is visible both in churches that are configured in an axial form (reminiscent of Roman basilicas) and those that are organized in a concentric form (a tribute to Palladio's Renaissance villa's), where the inner space is modulated by geometric shapes written into each other (the ellipse was especially used) [2].

The lateral columns that formerly fragment the space and form the side naves are now grouped and disposed so that the inner space is perceived as a single unitary space that brings together all believers. For both types of spatial organization (axial and central), complex forms of modulation of the inner envelope were sought, the curves and counter curves overlaid with the intersections of spaces define a continuous expansion of the church upwards to the sky [4].



Fig. 5. The Church of St. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome, Italy, Francesco Borromini, 1634

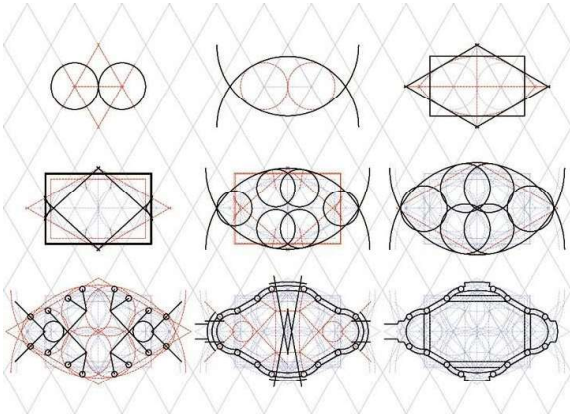


Fig. 6. Regulatory routes used to model the ceiling

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This constant vibration is also encountered in the churches of the Franciscan Order with certain elements characteristic of the order's dogmas. The interlinking between the Baroque concepts and the more austere character of the order is reflected in a more austere approach to the details found, while preserving the spatial organization specific to the style. The domes that rest on the massive cornice retain the dominant

role in the composition, while the side naves are reduced as a presence, these being oriented towards the center or the dominant axis of the churches. Some lateral areas are partially delimited by pillars, usually made in a composite or tuscan style. Most of these compositional elements are also visible in the interior space of the Franciscan Church in Arad (Fig. 7).

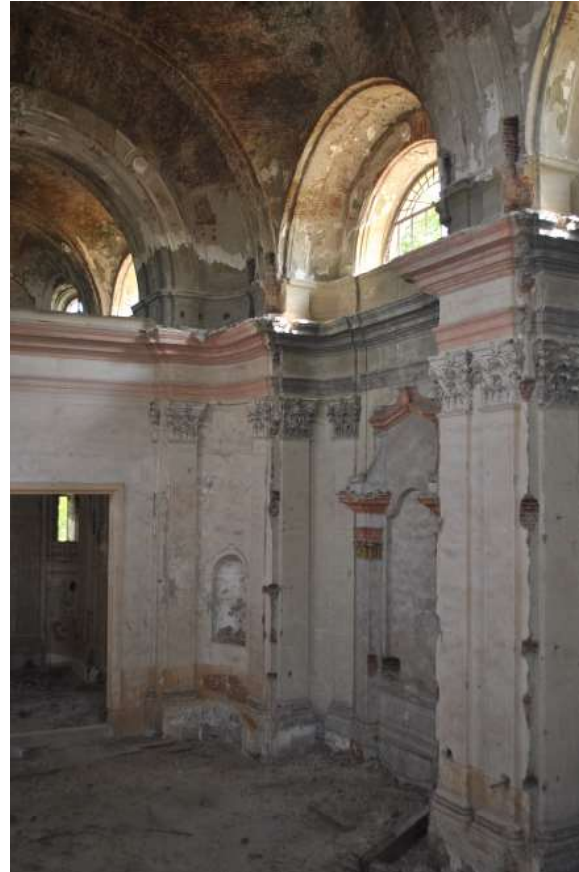


Fig. 7. The interior of the Franciscan Church

## VI. DIALECTIC RELATION AND THE FRANCISCAN MONASTERY

Taking into consideration all of these facts, we can start to recognize the important elements that are present in the Baroque Monasteries at large, and try to point out those that are recognizable in the Franciscan Church from Arad.

The Church fits into a provincial type of baroque architecture that is often seen in the less populated cities or villages. It's position in the very center of the fortress is gesture that symbolizes that "God is supporting the army" and all those around it. On the outside, the Church is being

flanked by two shorter and symmetric buildings. One of them contained the living space of the monks, while the other was used as a military hospital. They are less decorated, and tend to “fall back”, while the Church with its two towers stands out as a powerful statement.

Inside there are some architectural elements that tend to stand out in the way the space is organized. Originally, there were four altars, two on each side, partially enclosed by thick pilasters, that are open to the central space and to the northern altar (Fig. 8). A heavily decorated cornice separates the tall vertical walls and the great domes that enclose the space while large windows bring the light in from the sides. Composite golden capitols adorn the pilasters and a recurring overlaying of architectural elements (pilasters, capitols) represent a usual stylistic artifice of the baroque era.

The lack of very heavy and expensive decorations blends well with the principles of the Franciscan Order. Although they usually did not build in baroque style, here we see a typical solution: a more “austere” and provincial baroque in means of decorations. Even so, it does not mean that the building is lacking its “persuasive” ability. The perceived space could still bring together the faithful through its vast opened and domed ceiling.

It must be also noted that the spatial composition of the interior is controlled by aesthetically pleasant proportions (based on the square and the golden triangle). The interior physical elements that give the church its specific character are: the central space, the pilasters, the heavy cornice and most importantly, the dome. All of these features should and will be taken into account in the intervention project.

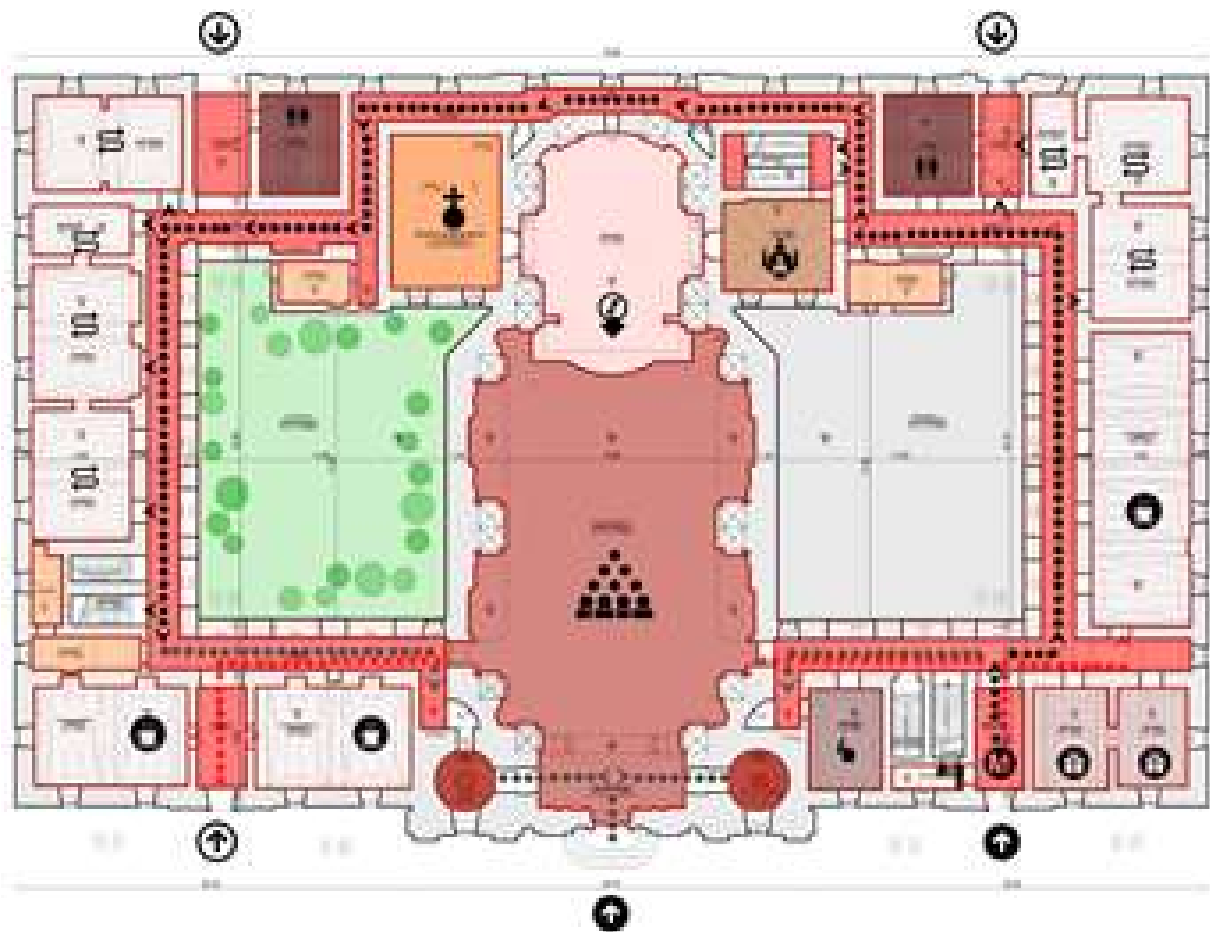


Fig. 8. Franciscan Monastery – floor plan

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