



# Church of St. Daniel

IRN57

Location	Celje
Time of origin	14th century
Time of restoration	1963–1980
Chief Conservator	Dr. Ivan Stopar and assistants Ivo Gričar, Viktor Povše and Ivo Prodan

In 1229 the first known parish priest of Celje was recorded in a document as Rupertus Plebanus, and this is considered to be the first indirect record of the parish church of Celje. Yet it seems that the present church consisting of three naves and originally furnished with two church towers was built only at the turn of the 14th century. It had been based on a Romanesque ground plan, yet furnished with a long three-sided presbytery vaulted with cross arches from the outset. About 1400 the chapel of St. Mary was added, and in the 15th century all the naves with original flat ceilings were vaulted with cross arches. In the 16th century the vestry was added with two additional side chapels during the Baroque period. The Baroque transformation of the church was Neo-gothicized in the 19th century. The aim of the present renovation of the church, badly damaged during the bombardment of 1945, has been to restore, at least partly, the previous character of the building.

A systematic investigation of the church was conducted during the restoration, and this has facilitated a more precise definition of its history. At the same time, mediaeval frescoes were discovered in several places, some of them belonging to the heyday of late Gothic arts in Slovenia.

The interior of the church was bleak before the renovation; polychrome Gothic groins were deeply sunk in plaster, the former Gothic triumphal arch had been removed as part of the Baroque reconstruction, when the presbytery was transformed and its three-sided moulding was substituted with a conch decorated with a fresco by Franc Jelovšek. In the second half of the 19th century the conch was removed and new windows of a Neogothic shape were installed in three-sided mouldings. Yet they were not placed in the original, still partly preserved, Gothic frames but in the walls next to them. During the latest renovation windows were put into the old, partly reconstructed frames, and thick Baroque layers of brick were simultaneously removed from the walls. Traces of fragmented Gothic buttresses extending to the floor have appeared in the process, as well as a crown and traces of Gothic frescoes on the northern side of the presbytery. The journey of the Three Magi from the beginning of the 15th century was discovered in the first two sections of the vault, and a less preserved composition depict-

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◀ Sedilia in the chapel of St. Mary. "Several layers of paint were removed from the sedilia, relic chest, consoles and phials, and their filigree structure has thus reappeared..."

ing Mary's death, assumption and coronation, the work of the Istrian Colour Master, in the third section. The frescoes were renovated and the missing masonry elements reconstructed and shaded in terracotta. The presbytery was thus revived in its original harmony, and was soon joined by the nave of the same colour; the triumphal arch is still the only missing accent of the church interior. The decision for its reconstruction was a risky one, since it would present the first intervention of that kind in Slovenia; yet the church would have remained incom-



View of the main nave and the presbytery of the abbey church of St. Daniel. "The triumphal arch is still the only missing accent of the church interior. The decision for its reconstruction was a risky one..."

plete without it. Appropriate plans were drawn up, and the church has finally obtained the reconstructed arch, including the painted border decoration with the acanthus motif restored on the basis of preserved fragments. The attempt to restore the original Gothic atmosphere of the place was successful, and all the executed works were recorded in detail.

The renovated chapel of St. Mary now displays a special charm of the abbey church. It had been used as a lumber-room since the previous century. A substantial part of its stone-cut decoration had disappeared during the Baroque period, and its furnishings were modest. Once the lumber had been removed and the walls surveyed, further walled-in, partly destroyed al-



View of the renovated Gothic chapel of St. Mary. "Through the restoration of the architectural elements and fine presentation of the features an exceptional place from the period of chivalric Gothic has been obtained..."

tars and prayer niches appeared on the northern and southern sides of the chapel, in addition to the still preserved Gothic sedilia and a relic chest. They were uncovered, and the remnants of wall-flower ornaments and other masonry elements discovered in the fill were built in to the restored arches. Several layers of paint were removed from the sedilia, relic chest, consoles and phials, and their filigree structure has thus reappeared, while traces of frescoes were discovered by making trial boreholes on the ceiling of the chapel. Their exceptional



Intertwined acanthus on the ceiling of the chapel of St. Mary. "The described paintings can be attributed to the then famous painting workshop of Friedrich of Villach..."

quality was soon recognized. The Throne of Mercy was depicted in the central field of the cross-arched Gothic vault, surrounded by pictures of Church Fathers and symbols of the Evangelists in addition to remarkably elegant angels with instruments of Christ's torture in the final side of the chapel, while the western crossbeams were covered with intertwined acanthus. Originally the walls of the sacred area had been at least partly decorated with paintings, yet only some fragments could be restored. The described paintings can be attributed to the then famous painting workshop of Friedrich of Villach, who had painted the vault of the parish church of St. Veit in Carinthia in the same manner. Through the discovery and the restoration of this painting executed in the secco technique from about 1415, through the restoration of the architectural elements and fine presentation of the features an exceptional monument from the period of the chivalric Gothic has been obtained, further accentuated by the Pietà from the twenties of the 15th century with its almost untouched Gothic polychromy, newly restored in its original splendour.

DR. IVAN STOPAR