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Z. H. 102

Church of the Holy Spirit

IRN3210

Location Sv. Duh overlooking Dravograd

Address Sv. Duh beneath the Ojstrica

Time of origin end of the 16th, beginning of the 17th century

Time of restoration 1993–1997

Chief Conservator Svjetlana Kurelac and assistants Irena Čuk, Viktor Gojkovič, Miran Ježovnik, Smiljan Simerl

Visits The church is closed – the key is kept by Mr. Franc Verko, Ojstrica 16, Dravograd; the local name of the house is “Škurlej”.

The three-nave church with a three-sided presbytery was first recorded in written documents in 1616 as the church of the Holy Spirit “on Chimperg”. It was consecrated in 1626. The data showed that the church was built at the beginning of the 17th century, yet according to its style the construction had already begun in the 16th century, but was interrupted due to increased influence of Protestantism.

The entire area inside the church was covered by a flat wooden ceiling; the choir with a banister in the western part was executed in the same manner. The ceiling is, according to its superficies, the largest painted wooden ceiling in Slovenia, and it is worth particular attention because it is signed with the names of Krištof Jamnik, Jurij Skurlej, Rupert Slang, Tomaž Ditmar, and dated 1626 or 1627.

The ornaments of the painted ceiling were typical of that time, yet they represented a special form of stencilled patterns which were basically late Gothic. The same workshop group had also ornamented the painted ceiling of another church in Carinthia in Austria. The importance of the “Dravograd ceiling” in the church of the Holy Spirit beneath Ojstrica moun-



▲ View of the renovated church of the Holy Spirit. “There is a thick-set bell-tower at the juncture of the nave and the presbytery on the southern side...”

◀ Wooden painted ceiling before the renovation. “On account of moisture permeation, microorganisms and other physical damage the wood had severely rotted...”

tain was therefore even greater since it represented a single monument which had marked the painting culture extending from the commercial urban environment to the provinces.

The artistically expressive interior of the church was completed by Baroque features: the main altar with a painting depicting the Arrival of the Holy Spirit by Janez Andrej Strauss from 1770, the pulpit and two side altars. The altar in the south nave was dedicated to St. Joachim, Anna and Mary, and the altar in the north nave to Pope Clement.



View of the main nave with the reconstructed wooden ceiling. "The ceiling is, according to its superficies, the largest painted wooden ceiling in Slovenia..."

With the exception of the painted ceiling there were no conservational dilemmas in the restoration, since through the centuries the church had not experienced substantial transformations that would have radically altered its primary form of a three-nave basilica. Therefore only the key restorational issues in the renovation of the painted wooden ceiling will be presented here.

During her writing of the book *Painted Wooden Ceilings in Slovenia* Dr. Nataša Golob had established, as early as 1984, that the ceiling was greatly endangered on account of the instability of the church architecture and partial decay caused by the damaged roof. In September 1992 the church was stabilized and the rifts between the ceiling boards had no longer increased, yet on account of moisture permeation, microorganisms and other physical damage the wood had severely rotted, putrefied and become brittle and breakable. The adhesive had disintegrated, the layer of colours had faded or been completely washed out. In the south nave the ceiling had slanted by 20-30cm, while the ceiling in the north nave completely rotted due to soaking.

Before the restoration the state of the ceiling and all the damage had to be accurately documented. In a missionary

inspection Dr. Nataša Golob proposed the procedure of the restoration, namely the removal of all the boards of the ceiling and choir and their subsequent cleaning, impregnation, restoration of the ornamented painting and final replacement. Yet the beginning of the restoration clearly showed the impossibility of restoring the original state of the ceiling through conservation only. Therefore the decision to perform the reconstruction of the entire ceiling was taken, with the exception of the choir banister and the ceiling above the choir.



View of the renovated wooden choir. "Therefore the decision to perform the reconstruction of the entire ceiling was taken, with the exception of the choir banister and the ceiling above the choir..."

The ceiling had been made in pine-wood and painted in five shades of colour: brick-red, grey-blue, ochre, green and white. Colour stripes were completed by 20 geometric motifs of the late Gothic style executed by stencils in black. The original painted boards were taken off for the restoration and subsequently cleaned, strengthened and stacked in the attic of the church in their original order as they had been positioned on the ceiling.

The original paint was best preserved under the covering boards, therefore the reconstruction followed the model of the colours there and the copy of the ceiling at a scale of 1:1. That was the only possible method of copying the original with all its faults committed by the original artisans. The signed and dated cross-boards located between the second and third sections in all three naves were impregnated, strengthened, and finally replaced as documents of their time.

The reconstructed ceiling in its vivid "flickering" scale of colours has thus been revived to give its old appearance.