



Town Square

IRN 7591

Location

Koper

Address

Koper, Titov Trg No. 1-5

Time of origin

Since the 13th century

Time of restoration

1968–1998

Chief Conservators

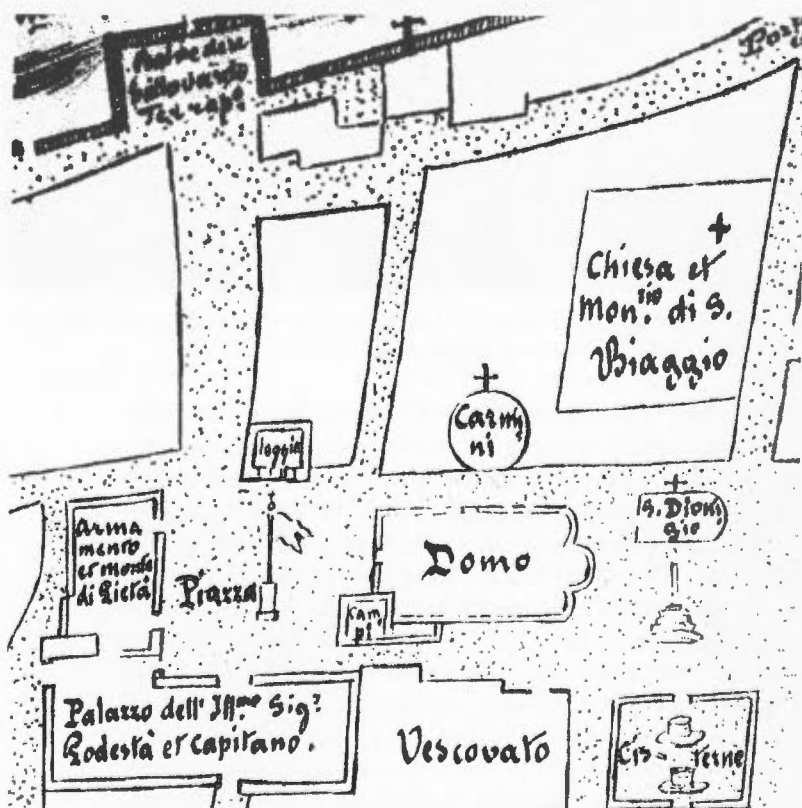
Tone Mikelc and Sonja Ana Hoyer with assistants Jure Bernik, Danilo Biščak, Mira Ličen Krmpotič, Peter Mali, Stojan Ribnikar, Alfred Trenz, Marijan Zadnikar, Matej Župančič and the Restoration Centre of the Republic of Slovenia

Visits

The tower is open from 1 June to 30 September from 9.00 to 12.00 and from 15.00 to 20.00.

The town square of Koper, historically called Platea Communis, is one of the most important urban centres in Slovenia. The most valuable monuments are gathered there, testifying to the ecclesiastical and administrative history of the town.

The square was one of the finest places created under Venetian influence in Slovenia and the most important public place in Koper. It consisted of the cathedral, the town tower, the Praetor Palace, Foresteria, Armeria and Loggia. The renovation of the square included various kinds of works. An overview of conservation work in that area of the town also testifies to the



▲ Giacomo Fini, town plan of Koper from the year 1619. The section depicted the present Mestni Trg and the square by the Carmine rotunda.

◀ Vittore Carpaccio: Triumphant arrival of Sebastian Contarini, Mayor of Venice, to Koper, 1517, oil on canvas, 205 x 154cm. "The Gothic image of the former square with a genuine mediaeval atmosphere of contemporary life was depicted in the scene..."

development of cultural monument preservation works in the region of Slovene Istria.

Platea Communis with its almost rectangular ground plan and closed hall-like character dominated the town as the central public area. The main roads of the traffic intersection converged there. In the original form of municipal administration the square played a vital role in the historic growth of the town.

The houses on the periphery of the square dated from the 13th century; the spatial borders of the ground plan of the



The Franz cadastre of Koper [i.e. cadastre from the period of Austrian Emperor Franz I] from the year 1819, kept by the National Archive of Trieste

square were approximately formed by them. The eastern side consisted of the Romanesque cathedral with the town tower, the southern side comprised two buildings of the Praetor Palace and the original town Loggia inserted between them, and the northern and western sides were concluded by two smaller buildings. The present sides of the square originated from the 15th century when important building works took place in the town. The present main buildings were built at that time: the Praetor Palace (1453–1481), Foresteria (1458–1460) and Loggia (1452–1464). Soon afterwards, in 1505, the Platea Communis was paved. The buildings of the external border of the square were heightened and their interiors were rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries: the Loggia in 1698, the cathedral in 1716, Praetor Palace in 1664, and the Foresteria and Armeria in 1788–1821. Nevertheless, they had to a large extent retained their original Venetian stylistic appearance and, in their mutual harmony, the Mediterranean character of a civic market place. The Gothic appearance of the former square with a genuine mediaeval atmosphere of contemporary life was de-

picted in the scene “Triumphal Arrival of Sebastian Contarini, Mayor of Venice, to Koper” in the presumably lost painting by Vittore Carpaccio from the year 1517. The ground plan of the buildings before the Baroque restoration, including the pedestal for the town banner in the middle of the square, was clearly discernible in the ground plan of the town by Giacomo Fini from the year 1619.

The preserved paving made of grey and white stone, the ceremonial carpet in front of the entrance to the cathedral, the



View of Town Square from the air. “Platea Communis with its almost rectangular ground plan [...] dominated the town as the central public area...”

Loggia and the stone benches along the sides of the square create the character of a genuine Mediterranean piazza.

Platea Communis was connected with Brolo Square as the second central square of the town on top of the former island, clearly creating the ground plan structure of a typical mediaeval town centre. The characteristics of Platea Communis were the subject of investigation of various Italian and Slovene experts. Valuable historical data on the development and market buildings could be traced in texts of older Italian historians, while Slovene architects, art historians and conservators have dealt with the art-historical and spatial characteristics of the square and individual buildings and the problems of conservation after the year 1945.

The Inter-regional Institute for Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage Piran investigated the spatial and architec-

tural characteristics of the square in numerous projects. As a consequence protective management was decreed and the guidelines for the treatment of the square and individual buildings were laid down. One of the most important projects was the conservation plan for the renovation of Platea Communis from the year 1987, for which additional studies were carried out. The findings of the investigation of the Armeria and Foresteria were presented in supplement No. 1 to the conservation programme from 1990, and the findings of the protective



Loggia in 1935. "The adaptation was most thorough in 1846 when the Gothic arched vaults were closed by wooden frames as part of the rearrangement of the interior..."

investigation of the Praetor Palace complex together with guidelines for its renovation in supplement No. 2 from 1993. The surface of the square was investigated by employing the latest photogrammetric non-destructive methods. The results were presented in the new programme of 1997, together with the programme for the renovation of the square near the Carmine rotunda.

The renovation of the square and individual buildings consisted of various interventions, in accordance with the occurrence and development of the conservational doctrine in Slovenia since the beginnings of the professional conservation service in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The buildings of the square had namely already been the object of restoration of the Viennese Central Commission (Enrico Nordio), of

Sopritendenza conservators from Trieste (Ferdinando Forlati) and the first Slovene conservators immediately after the Second World War (Emil Smole).

Loggia

The present Loggia of Koper ("Lobia nuova") opposite Praetor Palace was built between 1462 and 1464 by masters of Venetian Gothic, Nicholas the architect from Piran and Tomaso the stonecutter from Venice. The Loggia underwent a thor-



Town Square with Loggia. "Already renovated monuments of the Loggia, the cathedral and the town tower present the continuation of "revived" functions of the central urban area..."

ough Baroque adaptation, preserved to the present, in 1698 when Marco Micheli Salomon, Mayor of Koper, ordered the construction of a new floor on the mediaeval Loggia with an added staircase on the eastern side and a spacious hall and the extension of the five-arched square front with two additional arches. At the beginning of the 19th century the interior of the Loggia was transformed into a coffee-house. The adaptation was most thorough in 1846 when the Gothic arched vaults were closed by wooden frames as part of the rearrangement of the interior. The original appearance of the Loggia was partly restored after a structural reconstruction in its Gothic architecture, performed by conservator Ferdinando Forlati from Trieste in 1935. In the latest renovation of the ground floor in 1987 a glass barrier was erected behind the Baroque columns through which the former original area of the Loggia was presented.

Cathedral

The presentation of the original Romanesque basilica on the southern facade of the cathedral took place in 1968 when the original Romanesque openings were discovered, and again in 1986 when the exterior of the cathedral was renovated. This

kind of presentation was an example of biological protection. The renovation of the cathedral included all the historical phases of the building: the three-nave Romanesque basilica with an atrium on the front side, the Gothic-Renaissance facade which included the former free-standing tower, and the Baroque church from the beginning of the 18th century. Traces of the Romanesque basilica were discovered during archaeological investigations in the eighties and they were partly presented in the paving. The roof was restored and the renovation of the exterior was completed in 1986. The interior of the Baroque building by Giorgio Massari from 1714 was painted anew in 1990. The evident three-nave construction was among the masterpieces of this famous Venetian architect.

Town Tower

The construction of the tower was originally Romanesque. It was designed as a free-standing tower and was subsequently united with the cathedral as well as the Praetor Palace. It was an important accent in the visual appearance of the town. The reconstruction consisting of the strengthening of the tower and its adaptation began in 1985 and was concluded in 1988. It included injecting, strengthening and grouting of the stone walls, partial rearrangement of the Baroque "Aquileian" conclusion on the top of the tower and the construction of a free-standing internal staircase.

New Building

The new building constructed by Investbiro in 1964, the work of architect Edo Mihevc, belonged to the so-called interpolations. The new building was erected at the location of the former Vicedom building and the Diocesan gardens or two subsequently demolished Baroque buildings. In spite of the fact that the new building levelled the line of the street and observed the height of the buildings of the square, it was not in accordance with the most "harmonious" modern conception of a historic Mediterranean ambience.

Praetor Palace

The Praetor Palace was the main objective of the restoration performed by the Inter-regional Institute for the Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage during the last 25 years. The Palace should again resume its dominant position in the square and thus facilitate the revitalization of that part of the town. The ground floor of the Palace was adapted in 1964 according to the plan of architect Edo Mihevc. The District Authority of Koper finally decided that the Palace would resume its function of the town hall of Koper, which was an important decision on the part of the monument preservation service, since a historical monument can only be revived by giving it an appropriate function.

The main objective of all conservation programmes in the last few decades was based on the decision that the Praetor Pal-

ace take over the leading role in further renovations of the square. New methodological approaches of interdisciplinary work were applied in the preparation of conservation documentation at various stages of the process.

The first survey from the year 1987 was performed according to the conventional monument preservation methodology. It presented the historical development of the square and determined the classification and protective regimes for subsequent renovation of individual monuments on the basis of



The Praetor Palace after the last renovation. "The Praetor Palace, resuming its function of the town hall, was the most important achievement of the renovation..."

temporal and stylistic analyses. Additional architectural, archaeological and historical research together with photographic and architectural documentation presented the starting-point of all the works on the monument.

The survey of the Praetor Palace complex began in 1993. It included making archaeological trial boreholes in the eastern and western parts. Borehole surveys were also performed on the Gothic buildings leaning on the eastern facade of the Palace: Tito Square No. 2 and Čevljarska (Shoemaker' Street) Nos. 1 and 3. The construction development of the building was documented since the existence of the two original palaces in the 13th and 14th centuries, until the creation of a unified building in the 15th century and its subsequent refurbishment. Various measurements were performed and a drawing of the entire complex was made. The overview of the historical development was completed by entries in historical written documents and in older Italian literature. The renovation of the complex was proposed on the basis of collected data.

The renovation was presented according to advanced monument preservation concepts. The selected methodology should be observed in the presentation of the Palace from the 15th century, the period when the houses on the eastern side of the

Palace were erected. Platea Communis was likewise formed in the 15th century. In spite of subsequent Baroque supplements, the square had retained the appearance of the Venetian style of the 15th and 16th centuries. The restoration of the Palace anticipated a combination of the conventional restoration and conservation method with that of modern design which should complete the historical architecture. Modern architectural details should be introduced in such a way as to preserve the distinction between the original elements of Venetian Gothic and those that present a new interpretation of that style.

Praetor Palace was structurally restored as early as 1972 when the facade was renovated. The new restoration began in 1996 and was completed in 1998. It included the renovation of the exterior, the restoration of the Baroque staircase in the western courtyard, refurbishment of that courtyard, presentation of the original Loggia ("Lobia vetus") on the ground floor of the eastern part of the Palace, structural restoration of the entire building and restoration of individual construction elements in the interior. The restoration of the Gothic external staircase on the square side was particularly demanding, as well as the plastering of the facade and the restoration of inserted stone pieces. Five of the original busts of the podestas and four heraldic compositions were replaced by copies; the statue of Justice on the top of the facade was likewise replaced by a reconstructed copy.

Armeria and Foresteria

Investigations were performed in the Armeria and Foresteria in 1990 based on the survey from 1987.

On the basis of test boreholes surveys of the exterior and interior precise guidelines were determined for the restoration of both buildings. The guidelines from the study of 1987 were mostly confirmed by the survey results. The final conclusion was that the construction development of the Armeria and Foresteria could be traced to the 15th century. The buildings underwent major reconstructions in the late Baroque period at the end of the 18th century, and major adaptations in the 19th century. On account of that the buildings present typical examples of multi-layered architecture from different stylistic periods that corresponded with the divisions of the exterior and the disposition of rooms in the interior.

The latest research of the square with modern non-destructive methods confirmed possible traces of locations from the construction history of the Praetor Palace and the planned location of the column of the market banner, apart from traces of recent infrastructural works. The conclusions would be confirmed or refuted by the planned test borehole survey during the reconstruction of the historical paving of the square.

The possible conclusion was that Platea Communis in Koper as a Mediterranean market-place under Venetian influence could be treated as a unified historical area. The already renovated monuments of the Loggia, the cathedral and

the town tower presented the continuation of "revived" functions of the central urban area. The Praetor Palace, resuming its function of the town hall, was the most important achievement of the renovation. The restoration of the first floor with the seat of the mayor of Koper is now in progress, undoubtedly an assurance for the revitalization of the entire square. If the neighbouring buildings of the Armeria and Foresteria obtain suitable functions according to the conservation programme, the successful restoration of the main historical square in Koper will be completed.

DR. SONJA ANA HOYER

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