

Conservation of Monuments in Transylvania Between 1945-1977

Abstract

Coordinating prof. univ. dr. Sabău Nicolae

PhD. Candidate Rus Veronica Ioana

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Contents

Introduction

1. Methodological approach

1.1. Delimitations

1.2. Sources of research

1.2.1. Monuments

1.2.2. Written sources

1.2.3. Other sources

1.2.4. Historiography of the subject – the present state of research

1.3. Terminology

2. Introduction in monument conservation – The origin and evolution of monument protection

2.1. A short evolution of the concept of historic monument (from Antiquity to the end of the 19th century), in parallel with problems of European legislation in the same period of time

2.2. The establishment of monument protection in the 20th century (a selection of the most important charters, conventions, documents) on an international level

3. Introduction in monument conservation in Transylvania – The origin and evolution of monument protection along time (18th century – 1918)

3.1. General considerations, from the oldest times

3.2. The frame-work of the Austrian Empire (1699-1868)

3.3. The frame-work of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy (1868-1918)

3.4.1. The work of István Möller and its significance for the restoration of monuments in Transylvania

4. Monument conservation in Transylvania from 1918 to 1945

4.1. Framework: the unification with the Romanian principalities

4.2. Legislation problems – The Transylvanian Department of the National Committee of Monuments 1921-1940

4.3. Means of protection in Transylvania and their actual consequences (from 1918 to 1945)

5. Monument conservation in Transylvania between 1945-1977

5.1. Authorities responsible with the fate of monuments in Romania during the Communist regime

5.2. Methods of intervention in the conservation and restoration works of historic monuments between 1947-1977 and the principles that have governed upon them

6. What happened after 1977 ?

Conclusions

Annex

I. Bibliography

II. Other abbreviations and symbols

III. List and sources of illustrations

„The creed dedicated to [...] historic heritage must be researched, as it reveals, sometimes without being taken into consideration, a certain state of the society and the questions that concern it”.¹

The historical and cultural heritage and the many theoretical and practical reactions (first empirical and then consciously sought) that are associated to it, illustrate indirectly significant aspects of the society in which they have grown. Therefore, based on the above quotation, when studying cultural aspects of any point in history, a need of knowledge and research of all behaviour towards heritage developed during that period emerges.

Therefore our study aims to address this need of knowledge, by approaching in terms of theoretical and practical cultural heritage conservation, a quite recent historical period and therefore insufficiently researched: the Communist regime era.

Restoration of monuments in the Socialist regime was at the beginning, paradoxically, an area full of momentum, being opened large conservation sites at the monasteries in Moldova, the wood and stone churches in Transylvania, and many residences of the former nobility. But this lasted only until 1977, when there was a sudden change of attitude from the authorities who began to perceive the protection of monuments only as an obstacle in achieving their megalomaniac plans of town planning. Many of the monuments listed in the work plans of the committees and special departments lost their funding never to be opened again, or even worse, a number of ongoing conservation sites were abandoned even before the completion of works, this leading to unimaginable damage.²

Restoration works carried on until 1977 created the possibility for theoretical activities to emerge. Thus, after the successful 30 years there ought to follow the theoretical and synthetic publications.³ However, the suppression of conservation sites and of the specialized institutions was followed by a natural dispersion of the specialists, and such synthesis studies as a natural result of previous practical activity could not appear any more. Only some restricted texts and case study presentations appeared in the journal series dedicated to historic monuments⁴ or in the 3 volumes⁵ edited by the Department of Historic Monuments.⁶

Although the present times may also be seen as unfriendly to theoretical retrospectives⁷, we found an opportunity for study in this subject, noting that now more than in the past century, there are still no such initiatives. The contemporary consumerist society "devour" the historical heritage from different angles, through the rapid development of town planning that swallows the historic tissue, either by its removal, or by treating it in the modernist practice of the 21th century. The contemporary practice is based on the principle of the obligation to preserve all historical construction stages of heritage, considered today to be carrying at least a value as document, regardless the era in which they were created. However, this principle does not concern the historical stages of restoration of this heritage, contemporary specialists attacking swiftly past interventions, particularly those of the early and mid 20th century, harshly judging them and often removing them, even before being recorded. Therefore we consider that the lack historiographical activities that should critically and objectively document and analyse this era, together with the haste with which past interventions traces disappear, generate the risk of deleting an entire chapter in our history of monument conservation, which represents a milestone in the evolution and development of restoration science, without which today we would probably have had a different view over things.

This is in fact the purpose of this paper: the analysis and then the synthesis of the main theoretical trends in the era of the Communist regime in Romania, taking into consideration the most

¹ Françoise Choay, *Alegoria patrimoniului* followed by *Șapte propoziții despre conceptul de autenticitate și folosirea acestuia în practica patrimoniului istoric*, Simetria Publisher, București, 1998, p. 1.

² Virgil Pop, *Istoria conservării*, U. T. Press Publisher, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 5.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice, Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor seria Monumente istorice și de artă* etc.

⁵ *** *Monumente istorice. Studii și lucrări de restaurare*, Comitetul de Stat pentru Construcții, Arhitectură și Sistematizare. Direcția Monumentelor Istorice, București, vol. I-III.

⁶ V. Pop, *Istoria conservării*, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

significant case studies and publications issued in connection with these. Our approach is not however an encyclopaedic one, such works being difficult to conduct, and also almost unnecessary, given that they can easily repeat what has already been written in the recent decades in the international literature.

Also, the primary condition for such an encyclopaedic approach is to treat all aspects of the chosen topic and all case studies behind it. Which we can not claim to have done here: we studied the most common used and encountered aspects, alternating with exceptions in various cases. The time needed for an encyclopaedic study, which would have meant treating all existing material in archives and libraries, mainly due to the special momentum that characterised the restoration work from the beginning to 1977, lacked us.

It should be noted however, that we never had in mind a compendium, but a synthetic and critical paper, based on the study of archives, with the aim not of a final and undeniable word on this matter, but of bringing it in the public attention and possibly open it for discussions and future debates. Modern methods and materials used in restorations of the 20th century have always led to hasty conclusions regarding to their creators. By acknowledging them, we only get closer to understanding the frame-work and times in which they were made. We sought to confer a certain dignity to this subject, a position that is held in other countries, while in Romania it is skilfully avoided, ignored or openly and completely vilified, often without first having specific justification based on scientific documentation.

Certainly if we had had more time available, this written paper would probably have looked different, more complete, with many more case studies and more time for corrections, but the current conditions did not permit this. In the future, perhaps a return to this topic of research would lead to better results and to a volume that will contain if not all, then the majority of the restored monuments in Transylvania during the Communist regime, work which currently does not exist, but which would fill in a great void in the historiography of conservation history in Romania.

The subject came as a suggestion during our postgraduate studies attended between 2006-2008 when we presented a study entitled *Intervention works on built heritage in Cluj between 1947-1977*, after which in 2008, we proposed the resumption and extension of the same topic for the PhD studies, coordinated by Prof. Dr. Nicolae Sabău.

Here should be noted that throughout the research internship we attempted an objective analysis of the period governed by the Communist regime, especially because it is a completed historical period, having therefore the opportunity to observe things with the detachment specific to the temporal distance, an essential aspect for a relevant theoretical analysis of the subject.

If the unpublished information occupies a significant part of the work, providing a solid basis to start the analysis, the most substantial work was choosing and organizing large amounts of information scattered, lost or often divided between different institutions.

Therefore, the largest part of this study, critical but objective, desired to offer a different approach on the subject.

Given the complexity of the topic and the small number of publications that have treated it, at the present emerges an ever more acute need to deepen the systematic research of this subject that should be differentiated by regions and chronological periods.

Unfortunately, the impressive amount of information we have now, after finishing this chapter in history, has not been studied so far but marginally. Therefore, we believe that a new interpretation of this period of Romanian cultural life is needed.

The study begins with an introduction and a chapter on the author's methodological approach, the boundaries of the studied topic, the types of used sources and the terminology, which is primarily intended to clarify the terms used throughout this paper in order to eliminate any confusion, but also to present our position on some terms, in an area where the international approach lacks clarity.

Necessary in any systematic historiographical study, boundaries are meant to warn on the framework to be treated. Thus, for this study we established two large borders. First, the delineation of the geographic area of the topic: Transylvania, as shown by the title, but here must be noted that it should be understood in the narrow sense, without Banat, Maramureş and Crişana. Then chronological limitations are also included in the title, which refer to the period after the installation of the Communist regime in Romania in 1945 and until 1977, a year of major significance and implications

regarding the fate of monuments, as we shall see in the following. Our study aims to summarize and analyse such interventions and transformations experienced by the built heritage in Transylvania, in a period so controversial as the first 30 years of Communism in Romania.

Monuments are considered a primary source of research, even if sometimes they have been ravaged by time or aggression of recent town planning development.

The unpublished documentary material wealth, only tangentially studied and published sporadically until now, was also a primary source of study here, unlike other subjects where the historiographical sources prevail.

Among the most important sources are also the iconographic ones: drawings, sketches, paintings depicting the monument in the past, in various stages of its evolution.

The most difficult process was the identification of the bibliography for this subject, as only few publications dealing with it.

The importance of the sub-chapter dedicated to terminology comes from the fact that today we are the witnesses of an unprecedented diversification of the heritage protection methods, which is normally accompanied by a multiplication of professional terms. However, although this area is already a well established one, where the terms are meant to name different types of intervention, the international historiography show multiple preferences for one or the other, sometimes without taking into account their nuances. Thus the problem of terminology is highly contentious and controversial, especially because what was generally accepted in the past, has now become questioned, challenged or rejected.

The primary source for the sub-chapter on terminology is the study of Michael Petzet⁸, published in Romanian translation in 2010, having as author the former President of ICOMOS⁹, an important international organization with a valuable activity this area.

Also, for the same chapter on terminology, we used paper *CO.RE. Patrimoniul Construit*¹⁰, an ambitious work based on the support provided by several authors, four specialists and personalities with an extensive experience in this area, which explores through out four essays the meaning of conservation, restoration, rehabilitation, revitalization, reconstruction, rehabilitation and renovation, providing for everyone interested in this area a number of theoretical and practical guidelines, supported by references and examples.

The attempt to provide a coherent and complete overall of the areas of cultural history can not be deprived of a return to the origins, by placing it in the history of the phenomenon, the attitudes of the early cultural heritage protection. All this is included in the second chapter of our study, which the universal evolution of this science is summarized. The material studied for this chapter on the history of this discipline followed the guidelines of similar works published in our country, but especially international titles, more numerous, wider and more comprehensive: Cesare Brandi¹¹, Alois Riegl¹², Jukka Jokilehto¹³, Françoise Choay, George Curinschi Vorona¹⁴, and Virgil Pop. This chapter is limited in size, not claiming to bring a unique and original perspective on the matter, but intended to make a natural introduction to the main topic of our paper.

The third chapter approaches the moment of birth and the early evolution of heritage protection methods in Transylvanian area, aiming to highlight the common practice with the universal phenomenon, but also its specific features, given by the social political and cultural local conditions. As main sources for this chapter we mention especially the documentary material found in the KÖH archives from Budapest.

⁸ Michael Petzet, *Principii internationale ale prezervării monumentelor*. În Seria *Caiete ICOMOS*, nr. 1, Utilitas Publisher, Cluj, 2010.

⁹ ICOMOS – International Council of Monuments and Sites (Comitetul Internațional al Monumentelor și Siturilor).

¹⁰ *CO.RE. Patrimoniul construit*. In the series *Caiete ICOMOS*, nr. 2, Utilitas Publisher, Cluj, 2011.

¹¹ Cesare Brandi, *Teoria restaurării*, Meridiane Publisher, București, 1996.

¹² Alois Riegl, *Cultura modernă a monumentelor. Esența și geneza sa*, București, 1999.

¹³ Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of architectural conservation*, Editura Butterworth–Heinmann Series in Conservation and Museology, Oxford, 1999.

¹⁴ Gh. Curinschi–Vorona, *Arhitectură. Urbanism. Restaurare*, Editura Tehnică, (1995), 1996.

The next chapter continues the analysis of protection and restoration activities in Transylvania in the 20th century, between 1918 and 1945, but here again we find a small chapter in size, somehow lacking in originality, as the largest part of the information was gathered from the numerous studies published by Ioan Opreș on this topic.

Our real personal contribution to the history of restoration in Romania is represented by the 5th chapter of our work, which deals with, as it is stated in the main title, Conservation monuments in Transylvania during 1945-1977. Here, the main source of documentation was the material present in the INP archives from Bucharest, and a few publications mentioned above.

Based on the analysis of case studies, this is the most comprehensive section of the paper, where we drew up some considerations on the applied methods in heritage protection work between 1945-1977 in Transylvania.

These interventions, planned and implemented in annual steps, took into account the characteristics of conservation site. The objectives pursued and achieved, however, were everywhere the same:

- Restoration of the main monument;
- The dismantling of uninteresting buildings;
- Restoration of annexes part of the main historical ensemble;
- Reconstruction of new elements - in exceptional cases - where their disappearance disturbed the ensemble;
- Arranging the environment in a proper way to enhance the entire ensemble;

The paper concludes with a chapter on the period after 1977 until the revolution of 1989, which ended the Communist regime in Romania and implicitly, a relatively uniform view on heritage protection.

The conclusions of our study are followed by appendices, which include, besides references and abbreviations, a list of illustrations that accompany the text.

Returning to the idea that this text is only intended to bringing to the attention of specialists this subject in order to present it for further discussions and research projects, we consider it vulnerable text that will become useful only when its challenges and errors will be shown. We assume this, emphasizing once again that it is our own personal point of view, detached and objective.

I want to stress again the need for research of our cultural heritage, although it suffered changes over time, considering that only by analysing the protection methods used by our predecessors, may we reach a fair and effective protection of historical monuments. Thus, by examples of the past, we have the duty to understand that we can leave behind a heritage preserved for future generations, or by taking superficial interventions, with inadequate materials and poorly tested, we may cause irreversible damage.