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TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN SACRED ARCHITECTURE

TRADYCJA I NOWOCZESNOŚĆ W ARCHITEKTURZE SAKRALNEJ

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present the relationship between tradition and modernity using as examples some selected objects of sacred architecture designed by Bogdan Treter. The research method consisted in a detailed analysis of selected projects from the 1930s and 1940s in the context of the trends in architecture prevailing at the time. It should be noted that Treter interpreted the existing patterns in an original and creative way. Despite the fact that his works clearly show forms referring to tradition and respect for the past, modern motifs are also visible. Although innovative concepts sometimes appear in sacred architecture, it is mostly conservative and based on motifs from past epochs. In the case of Treter, it is worth emphasizing that while combining history and tradition he uses modern technologies and aesthetic standards.

Keywords: sacred architecture, regionality, tradition, modernity

Streszczenie

Celem pracy jest przedstawienie relacji między tradycją, a nowoczesnością na wybranych przykładach architektury sakralnej. Relacje te zostały zaprezentowane na twórczości Bogdana Tretera. Metoda badań polegała na analizie wybranych projektów z lat 30. i 40. XX w. w kontekście ówczesnych trendów w architekturze. Należy nadmienić, że Treter interpretował istniejące wzorce w sposób indywidualny i twórczy. Pomimo, że w jego twórczości wyraźnie zauważalne są formy nawiązujące do tradycji, to jednak i wątki nowoczesności są widoczne. W architekturze sakralnej czasami pojawiają się motywy o charakterze nowatorskim, ale w wielu przypadkach jest ona zachowawcza i bazuje na wzorcach minionych epok. W przypadku Tetera należy podkreślić jego łączenie historii, tradycji, a jednocześnie wykorzystanie współczesnych technologii i wzorców estetycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura sakralna, regionalność, tradycja, nowoczesności

1. INTRODUCTION

Subsequent architectural epochs are often represented by sacred objects. The originality of sacred architecture makes it an important achievement in terms of style that is sometimes innovative but also based on past models which were exactly copied or became creatively interpreted artefacts and a combination of tradition and modernity. It is worth noting that this

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kind of architecture was often significantly influenced by the investor, the project's author as well as the time and place of its implementation.

2. ARCHITECT BOGDAN TRETER

Examples of the integration of tradition and modernity in sacred architecture with a clear dominance of traditional and historical forms can be noted in the projects of Bogdan Treter (1886–1945). This is due to the time when the objects were implemented as well as to the author's convictions about the value of regional and historical motifs and landscape protection. B. Treter is the author of projects of four churches completed in the 1930s and 1940s, four extensions and adaptations of churches, many designs of sacred interiors and several church projects that have not been implemented.

B. Treter's² projects will be used as examples of the integration of tradition and modernity.

3. DZIANISZ

The first sacred object he completed was the church in Dzianisz near Zakopane which he designed in collaboration with Stefan Meyer in 1931. It was built in 1932–1937. Its form is a compact composition of piled up elements. The whole is composed of the cuboid main nave covered with a gable roof and preceded by a tall, slender tower on a square plan, the presbytery which is lower and narrower than the nave and enclosed on three sides, and the side aisles which are covered with pent roofs. The church is a wooden log construction while the tower is a timber frame structure. The whole object rests on a low, stone foundation.

The tall, slender tower is placed in the axis of the facade and is a predominant element in the church composition deciding about its vertical character.³ The loftiness of the tower is further accentuated by the steep roof over the main nave and the roofs of the lateral aisles. The tower's tapering walls are crowned with the overhung belfry. The whole structure is covered with a tent roof topped with a conical helm in the form of a spire with four small towers in the corners.⁴ The main entrance to the church is placed in the axis of the tower. The composition of the side elevations makes reference to the stepped form of the object: from the uppermost part, i.e. the tower, through the main nave, to the lowest part – the presbytery. A similar solution has been used with regard to the plans of the depth of the elevations backgrounds. The nearest is the side aisle which is the lowest part of the church, then follows the main nave which is higher and, finally, the tower which is the highest part. A similar gradation occurs in the rear elevation where the presbytery crowned with a pentagonal roof and flanked by the side aisles is in the foreground while the stepped view of the main nave, which is higher and wider than the presbytery, and the axially placed tower are in the background. Despite the horizontal lines of the roof ridge and the eaves of the roofs over the main nave, the lateral aisles and the presbytery, the church has a predominantly vertical form.

² A. Bialkiewicz, *Architekt Bogdan Treter (1886–1945). Twórczość i działalność*. Kraków 1987, doctoral thesis under the tutorial of prof. Józef T. Frazik, tapescript in Biblioteka Politechniki Krakowskiej.

³ T. Chrzanowski, M. Kornecki, *Sztuka ziemi krakowskiej*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1982, p. 585.

⁴ K. Palus, *Architektura sakralna regionu Podhala. Tradycja i nowoczesność*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2011, p. 65.



III. 1. The church in Dzianisz near Zakopane designed in 1931 and built in 1932–1937
III. 2. The church in Jablonka near Krosno built in 1936–1939

The design of the church's interior clearly refers to historical forms that traditionally occur in wooden sacred architecture. On the ground floor, the tower serves as a porch which leads to the four-span main nave axially closed with a slightly narrower presbytery. On both sides of the nave there are lateral aisles narrower and lower than the main nave. The span closest to the main entrance houses the choir accessed by the stairs from the porch. The nave is separated from the presbytery by a rood beam resting on two log supports. It is decorated with a sculpted sun motif typical of the Zakopane style. Mounted axially on the beam is a crucifix that reaches up to the ceiling. Below, there is a wooden chancel rail divided into regular squares separated by balusters. The spaces between the balusters are decorated with semicircular wooden studding forming the sun motif. The interior walls are divided into a regular system of squares and rectangles by means of horizontal and vertical laths. The spaces between them are filled with wood pieces laid in a herringbone pattern. The nave is separated from the lateral aisles by rhythmically spaced wooden pillars which support the ceilings of the aisles and the walls of the nave. The pillars have rounded bracing with wooden studding and support the profiled beam. Above them, axially, there are double log supports which are replicated at the same height in the axes between the pillars. The high altar is also made of wood. The front of the mensa is framed with pilasters and lined with wooden boards. The altarpiece is a triptych put on a flat pedestal with a decorative cornice. The tabernacle is placed axially in the pedestal and topped with a crucifix under a triangular cover. At the top of the altar there is a decorative cornice with the motif of the sun in the Zakopane style. Side altars were also designed as triptychs but their decorative details are much more modest. The low, openwork pews have a semi-circular motif of a panel with wooden studs and a crystal ornament consistent with the interior decor.

It can be said that the church architecture uses elements traditionally found in Polish wooden sacred buildings while the interior decoration and architectural details clearly resemble the motifs and details used in the folk art of the Podhale region and the Zakopane style.

The structure of the building is also based on solutions traditionally used in this region and, in a way, is a continuation of the local sacred architecture marking the identity of the Podhale region. However, it should be emphasized that all the elements were properly interpreted in architectural terms, and at the same time creatively developed and transposed. Despite the use of traditional forms, the modern trend is apparent.

4. JABŁONKA

In 1935, at the request of Antoni Kraiński (1883–1975), the landowner in Jabłonka near Krosno, B. Treter made a design of the church of Our Lady of Częstochowa.⁵ The church was completed in 1936–1939. It is characterized by compactness and homogeneity of form.

The church is covered with a broken-pitched gable roof that ends orthogonally over the presbytery. The roof is a dominating element in the building. Its height is three times bigger than the height of the walls. On the ridge, there is a two-storey bell turret set on an octagonal plan and topped with a tall, slender pyramidal spirelet. The church is made of wood using corner-notched log technique and is placed on a low, stone foundation.

⁵ A. Białkiewicz, *op.cit.*

Both the body of the building and the elevations have a uniform character. The one-axis façade consists of a tall, slender roof separated by a horizontal pediment canopy. Its upper part has a finish of wooden boards laid in herringbone pattern. Below the pediment canopy there is a rectangular twin window over the main entrance to the church with a slightly protruding vestibule covered with a gable roof. The eaves of the roof of the front elevation are horizontally joined by the pediment canopy whose pitch is broken over the vestibule. The façade is axially crowned with a slender bell tower. The side elevations consist of a high broken-pitch roof covered with shingles and corner-notched log walls lined vertically with three rows of boards. On the west, the roof ends with a vertical line of protruding pediments placed on the façade while on the east, it is enclosed by a diagonal line corresponding to the triangular enclosure of the presbytery walls. Despite the horizontally broken roof pitch and the protruding eave, the bell turret in the middle of the ridge and the slanting line of the roof on the east side make the side elevations look slender. The rear, or western elevation has one axis and is topped with an octagonal roof with a tall bell-tower, which also makes it look slender and stresses its dynamic character. The church is a three-nave basilica. The main entrance leads through the porch before the wide main nave which is axially closed by an orthogonal presbytery as wide as the nave. The choir is situated over the entrance in the nave. Adjacent to the nave are narrow side aisles. Around the presbytery there is an ambulatory as wide as the aisles and housing two sacristies. It can be said that the church projection is characterized by great compactness. The interior decoration is entirely made of wood and uniformly corresponds with the architecture of the church. There is spatial coherence between the nave and the presbytery. They have the same width and height and uniform architectural articulation. The walls of the nave, the presbytery and the side aisles have herringbone paneling. The ceilings of the nave and the presbytery also have herringbone paneling between the beams. The main nave is separated from the presbytery by a rood beam with an axially placed large crucifix on whose sides there are figures of the Mother of God and St. John. Below there is an openwork chancel rail with stylized balusters. In the main nave and the presbytery at the height of the ceilings of the side aisles there is a slat slightly offset from the wall, decorated with latticework composed of s-shaped lines, and under it are boards with rhythmically spaced sun motifs in the Zakopane style. The main nave is separated from the side aisles by pillars crowned with stylized ionic capitals and dovetails in the corners. The wall with the main entrance is divided horizontally by the choir rail which rests on two pillars exactly like the ones in the main nave. The floor in the church is made of black oak octagonal and square plates, cut across the grain. The interior furnishings include: the high altar, the side altars, the pulpit, the pews. The high altar was made to a design by Tadeusz Żurawski. The front of the mensa is filled with herringbone paneling. The altarpiece contains two slender pilasters. It is divided horizontally into two parts by a cornice with latticework. In the lower part there is the tabernacle placed axially between the pilasters while the upper part features a copy of the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa. The entire structure is topped with a cornice and a triangular pediment. The surface of the pediment and the surfaces between the pilasters are filled with herringbone paneling. Sun motifs in the Zakopane style are used as decorative elements. Designing the church in Jabłonka, B. Treter applied modernized forms of regional architecture. He used local building materials and emphasized the details used in wooden architecture. The height of the roof in proportion to the walls also refers to the regional building style. The interior decoration is characterized by high artistic quality and economy of details whose motifs

derive from regional folk art. However, while drawing on traditional regional forms, the author gave them a touch of modernity.

5. SKAWICA

Another church was built to a design of B. Treter in Skawica⁶ in 1937. The church consists of a rectangular, three-span nave, a presbytery which is slightly lower and narrower and ends orthogonally. There are annexes on a rectangular plan placed symmetrically on both sides of the presbytery. They house sacristies. The nave is covered with a high gable roof on whose ridge there is a bell turret. The presbytery has a gable roof which ends orthogonally. The nave is axially preceded by a porch on a square plan which is narrower than the nave. Above, there is a prismatic church tower covered with a helm. The elevations have a uniform architectural and artistic design. B. Treter designed plastered church set on a low, stone plinth.⁷ Stone decoration was also envisaged for the rhythmically spaced buttresses, corners of the tower and sacristy annexes. The façade is preceded by the cubic form of the tower with an axially composed pyramidal portal. Above, there is a slender, rectangular window with a triangular top and higher still, the belfry opening with a shutter. The composition of the elevation reveals the author's striving for symmetry. Despite the squat shape of the church, the facade gives it vertical features, and underlining its dynamics adds some slenderness. The project of the interior decoration has not been preserved. B. Treter might not have made it. However, it is possible to interpret the author's intentions with regard to the interior basing on the architectural and construction design. In order to increase the height of the interior of the nave and the presbytery, as well as maintain the proportion of the roof in relation to the external walls, B. Treter broke the ceiling plane along the nave on both sides introducing a flat ceiling only in the roof part. In the articulation of the side walls of the nave, a rhythmic arrangement of ogival arcades was used, in the axes of which there are slender rectangular windows with triangular tops. Probably the interior decoration of the church was intended to be as modest as its exterior. It can be said that in the design of the church in Skawica B. Treter used traditional forms derived from historical Polish architecture. However, they were originally interpreted, transposed and combined with the existing landscape in which the building was placed thus adding modernity to this kind of architecture. It is a variation of traditionalism remaining part of romantic – national decorativism.

6. NIEGOWIĆ

In 1925, B. Treter made sketches for the first projects of the church in Niegowić.⁸ In the initial version, the architect proposed a building in modernist style. However, he was aware

⁶ In the Archives of the Treter Family, *Teki Tretera*, Archiwum Narodowe in Krakow, Oddział V – materiałów kartograficznych i dokumentacji technicznej, there is the project of the parish church in Skawica signed by B. Treter and dated 1937. In the Parish Archives in Skawica, Józef Merenda is mentioned as the author of the project of the church built in 1938–1945. The completed church differs only slightly from B. Treter's project.

⁷ The church is made of brick and is not plastered.

⁸ Niegowić is a village in the River Raba Valley, 20 km to the south of Krakow, P. S. Szlezzynger,



- III. 3. The church in Skawica implemented in the years 1938–1946
III. 4. The church in Niegowić realized in the years 1949–1966

that this project may not be approved by the investor. This is demonstrated by B. Treter's letter to the parish priest in Niegowic, where he wrote *it is quite likely that my project will not be welcome by the Committee members*.⁹ The architect was not mistaken and the following year he presented another concept of the church. The Diocesan Conservator, Fr. Dr. Tadeusz Kruszyński introduced only a few changes. The final version of the project was approved by the Diocesan Curia and the Building Department of the Provincial Office in Krakow in May 1930. Construction was planned to start in 1940 at the latest.¹⁰ Due to various adverse circumstances, the construction of the church did not start until August 1949. In September 1966, the church was consecrated. It is a three-nave church on the Latin cross plan, with a two-span main nave, transept with arms projecting outside, and a presbytery slightly narrower than the main nave.¹¹ Between the arms of the transept and the presbytery there are rectangular annexes with a sacristy and a side entrance. On one side, the transept was extended by a chapel on a square plan closed by a semicircular apse. The elongated presbytery, which is slightly narrower than the nave, was closed with a semicircular apse. The nave is axially preceded by a porch on a square plan with annexes on the sides and a staircase to the choir. The presbytery, nave, transept arms and chapel are covered with gable roofs while the sacristy, entrances to the side aisles and to the presbytery have gable roofs with pitches broken diagonally. The side aisles are covered with shed roofs. Above the entrance on the south there is a tower with a high helm. The body of the building is designed as a composition of piled up architectural elements. It consists of the angular tower, the main nave, the slightly elongated presbytery and the annexes housing the sacristy and chapel which are significantly lower. The entire church is made of brick and has a low sandstone plinth around. In the vertical division, all the corners, rhythmically spaced buttresses and the apse closing the chapel are decorated with sandstone. The intended interior decoration can only be recreated using the construction drawings as no project by B. Treter has been preserved. Perhaps it was never made. The main nave has a barrel vault with lunettes, the presbytery has a barrel vault closed with a conch while the ceilings of the side aisles are flat. Architectural articulation of the interior was uniformly carried out by means of divisions in the form of wide arcade arches which in the upper part of the nave correspond with duplicated windows with semi-circular tops. It is hard to accurately assess B. Treter's intentions regarding the design of the church in Niegowic because its construction began four years after the architect's death. He had made several versions of the project and finally taking the investor's requests into account. It can be said that despite traditionalism and a certain prevalence of external forms over the internal content, the architectural form proposed by B. Treter demonstrates a clear thread of modernism. The traditional forms used by the architect were not mere imitation. The architecture of the church was created on the wave of national romanticism but, despite traditional features, was functional and connected with the contemporary times.

Początek drogi. Pierwsza parafia księdza Karola Wojtyły pod wezwaniem Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Niegowici, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Teologicznego Księży Misjonarzy, Niegowic 2016.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

¹¹ A. Bialkiewicz, *op.cit.*

7. CONCLUSION

Bogdan Treter was an artist combining many disciplines of art such as architecture, applied art, painting, conservation of monuments. He was an expert on folk art, the Podhale folklore and nature protection. He was formed in Krakow, in a specific artistic atmosphere combining many creative trends, where national themes were found in architecture, sculpture, painting and applied art.¹² Although he is also the author of modernist projects, his work was largely dominated by national motifs. While analyzing the architecture of the completed churches to his design, it should also be taken into account that they were created for the investors with traditional tastes. The initial version of the project of the Niegowic church envisaged modernist architecture but the investor's decision was vital for the final shape of the building. It ought to be emphasized that B. Treter interpreted the existing models in an original and creative way. Despite the fact that his works clearly refer to tradition and demonstrate respect for the past, they also bear distinct traces of modernism.

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¹² M. J. Żychowska, *Miedzy tradycją a awangardą. Problem stylu w architekturze Krakowa lat międzywojennych*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 1991.