

Authentic Ruins or Authentic Reconstructions?

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Keywords: authenticity; Hungary; reconstruction; restoration; ruins

Introduction

Exploring the afterlife of ruins is a complex task involving architectural, social and heritage conservation considerations. Indeed, the social perception of architectural works has an impact on the perception of ruins; since the intervention that saves the ruins is also a contemporary architectural act, this social control is conspicuously present in all the life cycles of built heritage. This has of course been the case also in the past and it is therefore important in our analysis to bear in mind the lessons of the history of heritage conservation. Of particular interest here is the issue of reconstruction.

The way ruins are perceived and treated depends to a large extent on their historical, cultural, and social context. Differences in the architectural approach to ruin restoration are evident between different continents and periods. Today, as a result of globalization, we often witness almost personally the destruction of World Heritage sites or of national monuments and we continuously face the international challenge of finding a comprehensive solution for the management and protection of ruins that is appropriate in all cultures. This was the main goal of twentieth-century heritage protection charters, mainly in a European context, but these attempts have often failed precisely because of cultural differences. In addition to the cultural relationship with destruction, one cannot ignore the changing climatic conditions and the evolving level of construction techniques, which in the case of ruins make a fundamental difference from the practical point of view.

A study of the history of conservation theory reveals different approaches to the destruction of architectural heritage: some see destruction as patination, or fragmentation as a bearer of historical authenticity, while others see them as an unacceptable loss, the glorious past confined to oblivion; some even see ruins simply as something useless and discardable. As pointed out by Petzet,¹ a fundamental question in the treatment of a historical monument is the lapse of time between its destruction and restoration: the longer the time span, the more professional and ethical questions arise about the architectural intervention. However, the destruction of a World Heritage site, such as in the case of Palmyra destroyed by ISIS or more recently the partial destruction of the Aleppo citadel in the earthquake, is judged differently in comparison with the loss of a built heritage asset important merely to a narrow ethnic group. Whatever led to the destruction of a monument, all these factors must be kept in mind before restoring it to its original state. As Carbonara states: “The general problem of reconstruction is the loss of architectural context, the total recovery of which is impossible,”² the main problem with ruins is the loss of their original historical and structural milieu and the disintegration of the intangible values they represent. It is this unity that is difficult or impossible to replace.

1 Michael Petzet, “Kopie, Rekonstruktion und Wiederaufbau” [Copy, Reconstruction and Rebuilding], *Jahrbuch der Bayerischen Denkmalpflege* 42 (1988): 175–179.

2 Giovanni Carbonara, “Architettura e restauro oggi a confronto” [Architecture and restoration today in comparison], *Palladio* 34 (2005): 102.

Monument preservation is a contemporary architectural activity at any time of its application; together with a specific practical methodology its theoretical basis is decisive. Since the twentieth century, the terminology of the practical part, i.e., the way in which interventions are carried out, has been designating the following three main intervention methods: conservation, restoration, and reconstruction. Furthermore, there are three basic architectural approaches to any restoration work: a high-tech intervention based on strong contrast, assimilation or analogy that implies copying the original, and what Carbonara³ calls “the third way,” the critical intervention with a “pre-relation to memory” where the distinction between old and new reinforce historicity and authenticity.

Renato Bonelli (1911-2004), one of the fathers of critical restoration and of the Venice Charter,⁴ clearly indicates that architectural restoration is a typically modern concept that consciously changes the appearance of a monument. The goal of restoration, unlike that of reconstruction, is to recreate the original appearance by using contemporary architectural tools and not to rebuild it.⁵ In such so-called didactic interventions that are not based on formal reconstruction, the ground for authenticity is the expressed distinctiveness, that is, the contrast between the original remains and the new addition, but in all cases, it is at the service of the original remains. Thus, a monumental intervention creates a “non-preexisting” situation. This is especially true in the case of modern interpretive additions to ruins as interventions that create “contemporary ruins” by replacing destroyed elements with modern “prostheses.” However, with the reevaluation of modern architecture of the twentieth century, these didactic monumental restorations are now under threat. The demolition of modern buildings after the Second World War and even the rebuilding of historicized buildings that once stood in their place, or the analogous or completely hypothetical reconstruction of medieval ruins, are aspects of an increasingly common phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe. They are motivated on the one hand as a “historical justice” and on the other hand by tourism. Such interventions not only lead to the destruction of valuable modern architectural monuments, but also threaten the continuity of the stratification of historical architectural periods especially from an urban point of view. They can also lead to dangerous and discriminatory processes in terms of value protection.

To examine the afterlife of ruins the following questions should be examined: What is the current professional and social perception towards the previous methods of ruin protection? How are our interventions influenced by cultural and historical contexts? What is today's social perception of ruins? What impact will our new technical capabilities have on the protection of ruins? Will the reinterpretation or reconstruction of ruins make them more accessible and acceptable? In what ways can authenticity be ensured in future presentations of ruins? In this paper we will examine the issue of the afterlife and especially the reconstruction of ruins in contemporary Hungarian examples, in the light of the professional and social perception of ruins.

From Restoration to Partial Reconstruction

The modernist approach to the restoration of ruins that dominated European heritage conservation in the twentieth century generally created a relationship of juxtaposition between the old and the new: the original archetype guided the hand of the designer of the new with concern for historical authenticity. In this relation of juxtaposition, the relationship between the old and the new played a fundamental role, culminating in the distinction between the old and the new architecture. The definition of conservation and restoration of the Venice Charter⁶

3 Ibid.

4 ICOMOS, *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter 1964)* (Venice: ICOMOS, 1964). https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/venice_e.pdf

5 Bonelli Renato, *Architettura e restauro* [Architecture and restoration] (Roma: N. Pozza, 1959).

6 ICOMOS, *The Venice Charter 1964*.

did not cover the issue of partial reconstruction, that is, what is beyond the restoration. What is more, or different about the partial reconstruction of the monument compared to these didactic or interpretative additions? Here, in any case, we must refer to the difference between the terminology used in different countries and the one used in international recommendations. The main difference between the concepts of restoration and reconstruction in Anglo-Saxon terminology concerns the addition of new parts and materials. However, in the German and Italian terminology, which is at the basis of European terminology, restoration is a more creative activity, yet one that is more protective of the original layers of the heritage, and in which the role of contemporary architecture is rather based on intentional contrast.

Recognizing the difference between restoration and partial reconstruction can shed light on the background of the growing criticism of modern restoration approaches and the increasing demand for full reconstruction. In the didactic additions, the use of modern materials visibly different from the original structures was based above all on their own logic of use or tectonic properties. Especially recommended by the first international charter,⁷ the use of reinforced concrete for such modern prostheses was consciously conceived according to the new possibilities offered by monolithic technologies. Indeed, its very use was a contrast to traditionally complex historical structures. In such additions, the aim was only to formally recapture architectural details and structures that had been partially or completely destroyed. Contemporary architectural layers were added to already multi-layered monuments, especially to ruined monuments, using new materials that alluded to original forms by representing the architecture of their time with their own tectonics. But they also created an unfinished appearance, which due to their fragmentary nature can be physically fragile and transient. This fragmentation further required the visitor to know and recognize the original archetype in order to visually complete or consider it further. If this code system that complements fragmentation with a sense of incompleteness did not work or was not in harmony with the original ruins, the focus was on aimless modern architectural self-expression rather than on understanding. In many cases this led to aesthetic problems and to the loss of the artistic value of the monument. Such early “philological restorations” were a divisive issue for society throughout modern Europe.

By examining the solutions seen in the restoration of the Roman Colosseum and the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum, we can come closer to understanding archetypal examples of didactic distinction.⁸ Both restorations were the joint work of Raffaele Stern (1774-1820) and Giuseppe Valadier (1762-1839),⁹ who took an approach to architectural additions surprisingly “modern” for the early-nineteenth century. In the case of the Colosseum, we are talking more about restoration, and the additions made by Luigi Canina (1795-1856) in the 1850s have almost the formal abstraction typical of modern architecture. The addition to the Arch of Titus, on the other hand, can be described as a partial reconstruction. It is interesting to note that these interventions produced the same shock in the minds of people at that time as the contrasting monumental restorations do in the minds of today. In both cases, the emphasis is on restoring to the original form, but the difference lies in the new architectural formulation. In the parts of the Colosseum added with bricks, the tectonics of the different material contrasts with the original tufa,¹⁰ giving the new parts a temporary quality and expressing the possibility of reversibility. However, for the addition to the Arch of Titus, limestone similar to the original was used to complete the travertine structure. Here, the smooth surfaces and simplified architectural details of the new parts contrasted with the patinated and weathered original. In

7 ICOMOS, *The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments (The Athens Charter 1931)* (Athens: ICOMOS, 1931). <https://www.icomos.org/en/167-the-athens-charter-for-the-restoration-of-historic-monuments> Adopted at the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, Athens 1931.

8 For more on this topic, see Ákos Zsembery, and Toshikj Maja, “Modern Monument Preservation in Hungary: Should We Conserve the Modern Prostheses of Restoration?,” *studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 7 (2019): 220-235, <https://doi.org/10.54508/SITA.7.15>.

9 Having been proposed by Stern (1806) and completed by Valadier (1824-1826).

10 The use of bricks as a visible surface was not typical of the architecture of the ancient period.

the case of the latter intervention, a step was taken towards reconstruction that showed the difference between the old and the new only in the integrity of the formal elements. This “fine distinction,” unlike the restoration of the Colosseum, took away the strong didactic act that would make this intervention a truly modern approach to restoration.

However, the above engineering approaches seen in the early conservation movements were suppressed by the practice of historicism and thus purism. The term restoration, especially in Anglo-Saxon and French areas, has taken on a negative connotation essentially meaning the restoration of a building to its perceived original state and involving the destruction of many historic layers of monuments. The need to distinguish between old and new, and even its almost dogmatic character, was reintroduced by modern architecture between the two world wars. The thinking of Camillo Boito (1836-1904) and Gustavo Giovannoni (1873-1947), followed by the theoretical work of Cesare Brandi (1906-1988) and the birth of the Roman “critical school,” put restoration on a new footing. Particularly interesting and valuable is the practical work of Franco Minissi (1919-1996), who can rightfully be called the father of modern didactic restoration. In Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, Minissi made extensive use of modern materials to recreate historic forms. The consequence of his work best highlighted the fact that these materials are no more resistant to environmental stress than the fragmentary remains of historic structures. Rather than a patina, works of this period are characterized by wear and tear which has unfortunately led to their recent major rebuilding or demolition. The social perception of the modern approach to the restoration of ruins had thus deteriorated significantly by the end of the twentieth century.

Architectural restoration and partial reconstruction therefore differ in their architectural approach: the former tends to rely on contrast, the latter on analogy in the relationship between old and new. In the case of partial reconstruction, it refers to a clear representation of the original forms, using original or equivalent material. In both cases, authenticity is sought in the relationship between the new and the old parts, but there are differences in the “subtlety” of the distinction that may not seem crucial at a first glance, but becomes so when the intervention moves towards reconstruction.

Complete Reconstruction – in the Name of Sustainability?

Partial reconstructions will sooner or later lead to full completion, as the reconstructed parts will shift the focus on themselves. This in turn fundamentally changes the relationship between the original and the new parts in the case of ruins. Instead of the juxtaposition seen in the case of conservation and restoration, in partial or total reconstruction the new architecture forces the original into a subordinate position. Therefore, the complete reconstruction of authentic ruins based on hypotheses may raise ethical questions in addition to scientific and professional reservations. Indeed, in the case of complete *in situ* reconstruction, the ruin itself often becomes a victim of the restoration. In fact, the purist restorations of the late nineteenth century replaced unusable ruins with usable and sustainable buildings. Instead, today we approach reconstruction in a way very different from what was intended a century ago.¹¹

11 The statement of the Hungarian National Committee of ICOMOS about the tender for the reconstruction and touristic development of the ruined church in Zsámbék in 2023 is very interesting: “Nowadays, heritage ideology, nostalgia fashion, mass tourism and populism are putting more and more pressure on professionals to reconstruct, i.e., to rebuild the ruins in their material form. Of course, social demands cannot be completely ignored, but their enforcement must not endanger or eliminate outstanding individual values. The radical transformation of the historical situation, ignoring the authenticity aspects of monument protection, the elimination of the state of ruin, the complete reconstruction, cannot result in the protection of values, but only in neo-historicism for other scopes, such as tourism or economic purposes.” <https://www.icomos.hu/index.php/hu/dokumentumok/hazai/nyilatkozatok/26-actual/nyilatkozatok/294-ajanlasok-a-zsambeki-tervpanyazat-kidolgozasahoz-es-ertekelesehez>

But how does the purist approach of historicism differ from today's reconstruction? The answer lies in the time elapsed since then. The "contemporary" architecture of historicism did not differ in material or technique in any relevant way from the architecture of earlier historical periods, so the "restorations" of the time were rather reconstructions according more to the logic of material and technique, which placed the value of the layers of later periods behind the unified artistic value. Since these layers, which were not without value, were removed, the simultaneous didactic presentation of elements from different eras, and thus the question of distinction was irrelevant, because to them it had no importance in terms of authenticity. Since then, a holistic approach to value preservation has made a big difference. After more than a century of pre-modernist architecture, which took advantage of the opportunities offered by the industrial revolution and overcame historicism, the theories of the conservation movement found their breeding ground. It also required the rigorous approach to restoration that characterized the new Italian intellectual currents, embodied in the theoretical work of Boito, Giovannoni, Brandi and Bonelli. In terms of the valuation and restoration of ruins, the destruction of the world wars, especially in the aftermath of World War II, brought about an important change in the approach. The reconstruction or preservation of devastated historical districts and artistic monuments continues to provoke professional and social debates.

In most cases, reconstruction is driven by the need for a usage because conserving fragments requires their constant monitoring and maintenance. In addition, in recent decades there has been an increased focus on restoring the heritage of the national past, more for the purposes of "historical justice" or "tourist attraction development" than primarily for a good use. Such an approach and the rejection of fragmentation will, in the long run, lead to a re-evaluation of the ruins and the need for their reconstruction.

The concept of reconstruction in today's sense is more often used in the context of rebuilding after the destruction of the Second World War, often with the aim of regaining national identity. The term itself, by definition, is not mentioned in the Athens Charter of 1931¹² or the Venice Charter of 1964, but only occurs to set the upper limits of the then clearly defined restoration procedure, which the Venice Charter summarizes by stating that "It must stop at the point where conjecture begins."¹³ In the international recommendations for the protection of monuments, the concept of reconstruction is first clarified in the text of the *Charter for the Protection And Management of the Archaeological Heritage*.¹⁴ Furthermore, the *Charter for the conservation and restoration of the built heritage*,¹⁵ which was supposed to supplement the Venice Charter,¹⁶ was a reaction to the problem of reconstruction clarified in the Lausanne charter of 1990 and could not avoid adopting a position that should be considered as generally anti-reconstruction.¹⁷ This Charter could not but recognize the social and cultural diversity and the failure to standardize previous international conventions, and in some cases even

12 ICOMOS, *The Athens Charter 1931*.

13 ICOMOS, *The Venice Charter 1964*, Article 9.

14 ICOMOS. *The Charter for the protection and management of the archaeological heritage (1990)* (Lausanne: ICOMOS, 1990). https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/arch_e.pdf
Prepared by the International Committee for the Management of Archaeological Heritage (ICAHM) and approved by the 9th General Assembly in Lausanne in 1990.

15 ICOMOS, *The Charter for the conservation and restoration of the built heritage (The Charter of Krakow 2000)* (Krakow: ICOMOS, 2000). https://icomosubih.ba/pdf/medjunarodni_dokumenti/2000%20Krakovska%20povelja.pdf

16 <https://www.icomos.org/en/participer/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/157-thevenice-charter>

17 ICOMOS, *The Charter of Krakow 2000* was signed on 26 October in Kraków at the end of the international conference entitled "Cultural Heritage as Foundation of Development Civilisation." The initiative, promoted by the Polytechnic of Krakow with the support of ICOMOS, is the result of joint work by universities from all over Europe.

took a lenient approach to the issue of reconstruction. The Krakow Charter¹⁸ was certainly preceded by a number of national conventions, the most interesting of which are perhaps the Dresden Declaration from 1982¹⁹ or the Italian National Charter from 1996.²⁰ The concept of reconstruction was already specifically mentioned at that time, and reconstruction was neither actually interpreted nor relevant in Italian practice today.

Although it is a phenomenon of our time, the approach to reconstruction in European practice is far from being uniform. For a century our charters have acted like a modern manifesto, so it is no wonder that they are now looking for acceptable ways to soften somewhat in the face of the social and professional resistance that surrounds them today. Charters or international conventions and recommendations for the protection of heritage, as they are more recently known, are a kind of double-edged sword in our time. As they become more and more sensitive to social change, they are more and more conflicted and their professional formulation becomes more and more permissive. This can be seen in the Burra Charter,²¹ which has undergone several “updates,” but also in the Riga Convention.²² Particularly interesting is the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage from 2018,²³ which, among other things, deals with the concept of reconstruction along the lines of concepts such as: universal values, authenticity, the role of local community involvement, reflection, “resilience” and “better reconstruction,” risk management (prevention), etc.

Therefore, it can be seen that the protection of ruins faces necessary modern requirements such as sustainable development, development of cultural assets or cultural diversity. But the wrong interpretation of sustainability in the case of the ruins rewrites the hierarchy of values because in the case of reconstruction the decisive factor will not be the ancient and historical value, but the functional and aesthetic values. The international spreading of the terminology of monument preservation in the twentieth century has always excluded reconstruction, especially because of its conflict with basic concepts such as authenticity or distinctiveness. What are the difficulties posed by authenticity in the reconstruction of the remains of a long-ruined building? The answer to this question is more architectural and practical than theoretical. The following analysis of reconstructions carried out in Hungary aims to evaluate this aspect.

About Hungarian Reconstructions

The history of monument protection in Hungary has all its roots in the European theory and practice. Initially, as part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, it developed alongside

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ ICOMOS. *Declaration of Dresden on the “Reconstruction of Monuments Destroyed by War.* (Dresden: ICOMOS, 1982). <https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/184-the-declaration-of-dresden> At the invitation of the ICOMOS National Committee of the German Democratic Republic, participants from 11 countries held a symposium in Dresden from November 15th to 19th, 1982 on the subject of the “Reconstruction of Monuments Destroyed by War.”

²⁰ *National Charter on Aspects and Methods of Protection and Restoration of Monuments and Monumental Complexes in Italy*, 1996.

²¹ ICOMOS Australia, *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (the Burra Charter): Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Cultural Significance and Conservation Policy* (Sydney, New South Wales, Australia: ICOMOS Australia, 1987).

<https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf> The Burra Charter was first adopted in 1979 at the historic South Australian mining town of Burra; minor revisions were made in 1981 and 1988. Following a five-year review, more substantial changes were made resulting in this version which was adopted by Australia ICOMOS in November 1999.

²² ICCROM, *Riga Charter on authenticity and historical reconstruction in relationship to cultural heritage.* (Riga, Latvia, ICCROM, 2000) Adopted by the Riga Meeting held in 2000.

²³ UNESCO, *Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage* (Warsaw, Poland: UNESCO, 2018). <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1826>

the protection of German heritage, and from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards it was increasingly characterized by an Italian theoretical and practical background. As a result, until the end of the twentieth century it remained at the forefront of European practice, not only intellectually but also in practice. It is this complexity of the protection of historical monuments in Hungary that has determined its approach to reconstruction as the most challenging kind of monument intervention in our time.

In Hungary, the perception of reconstruction has changed a lot during the last two decades. As the millennium approached, the country was paying off decades of debt when it decided to restore the medieval remains of historic royal centers like Esztergom, Visegrád, Székesfehérvár, etc. However, at that time there was still no question of a complete reconstruction meant to return a ruin to its original state, although there was already a strong public demand for restorations keeping with the original. Towards the end of the millennium, the Hungarian practice of monument protection went through an interesting period from an architectural point of view, where the recommendations of the Venice Charter were largely taken into account, but with postmodern influences. This is the most clearly visible in the transition to the partial reconstruction of monuments. After World War II, Hungary was one of the few countries that consciously avoided reconstruction in the post-war recovery. The national rhetoric for the protection of monuments, especially in the restoration of ruins, developed a distinct mixture of the earlier Italian philological restoration and the critical restoration that also pervaded from the 1960s onwards in architectural restoration, equally under the Italian influence. Even partial reconstructions were preceded by very thorough planning supported by meticulous research and allowed only on small areas in relation to the original ruins. The emergence of full-scale reconstruction in Hungary only began at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Like architectural restoration, full reconstruction is not without didactics! Nor is, in fact, the distinction. And this is due to the methodological characteristics of the entire restoration of the monument. According to architectural methodology, the conceptual reconstruction is the basis of the conceptual solution, where the scope, method and chosen architectural language of the addition are determined. It is also where the hierarchy of values is established, where authenticity is asserted and, most importantly, where the “magical boundary” is identified and formulated, i.e., where the limits of the hypothesis are defined. If the decision is made at this stage to move the intervention consciously forward and not stop where the conjecture begins, it can only stop where the conjecture stops for whatever reason. Everything that happens after cognition and interpretation is therefore already a pure and responsible architectural solution: design logic, architectural approach and language, and didactics.

In Hungary, some individuals see in architectural reconstruction the promise of a rebirth of the Hungarian monument protection, while others see the opposite: a return of the spirit of purism, a kind of neo-historicism. Architectural restoration can never be independent of contemporary processes, but there are some principles that remain unchanged precisely because of the nature of cultural heritage. These are the existential principles or dogmas of heritage conservation that have matured over the last two centuries. These are the points that, if ignored, will damage something, and put the legitimacy of the entire intervention in brackets.

We will analyze hypothetical reconstructions of ruins in Hungary that are instructive examples of the problems that have arisen in relation to the afterlife of ruins. This paper does not deal deliberately with the buildings dating from historicism currently being rebuilt in the former Buda Royal Castle, which had been damaged by the destruction of Second World War, demolished for political reasons and are now being rebuilt for similar reasons. What is more exciting in the examples studied is the layering not only of architectural history, but also of the monument preservation history.



Evolution of Architectural Reconstruction in Hungary

The appearance of partial reconstructions in Esztergom (2000-2008; architects: Tibor Gál, Lajos Ónodi Szabó) and Visegrád (2007-2016; architect: Zoltán Deák)

The larger prime examples of partial reconstruction at the turn of the millennium were the Esztergom Royal Castle and the Visegrád Royal Palace. Modern restorations in the twentieth century previously created important monumental layers on these medieval ruins. In the case of Esztergom Royal Castle, there may be an addition that has an impact on the original remains, not only in substance, but also in architectural appearance. Here the hypothetical reconstruction was deliberately avoided and the distinction between old and new was heavily influenced by respect for the restoration of the late 1930s, which showed Italian influences. The result of the construction works carried out on the castle in several stages until 2006 is a very interesting architectural ensemble of interventions from a monumental point of view, which carries the architectural stratification of the twentieth century, but its detailed presentation is beyond the scope and purpose of this article. (Fig.1)

However, the restoration of the Visegrád Royal Palace (Fig. 2) is a much more significant step towards reconstruction. Here, despite the reconstructive additions, the building complex remains a ruin. The reconstruction of the Renaissance courtyard with the inner loggia and the first floor, based on carefully documented scientific hypotheses, is incomplete. This is particularly exciting from a didactic point of view. However, in this partial reconstruction, following the discriminating logic of didactic restorations, the contemporary additions are double; in the same period two layers are simultaneously built on top of the original ruins: an analogical approach, recreating the original forms from original materials and didactic a layer based on discriminations, identical in material but different in form from the original. This dichotomy, despite the intervention on a scale several times larger than the original ruins, still creates a sense of incompleteness.

Fig. 1: Esztergom Royal Castle after partial reconstruction (above and above on opposite page)

Fig. 2: The Royal Palace of Visegrád after partial reconstruction (opposite center)

Fig. 3: Báthory-palace in Nyírbátor after the hypothetic reconstruction and the interior of one of the rooms (opposite below)



Beginnings: Nyírbátor Castle (2007; architect: Zoltán Wittinger)

The excavation of the remains of the former Renaissance castle from an eighteenth-century granary building and its hypothetical reconstruction came as a surprise to the Hungarian heritage profession. This was the first hypothetical reconstruction in Hungarian architecture after World War II. The complete reconstruction has been carried out only on the main building, while the surrounding fortifications and the remains of the extensions of the former courtyard of the castle are an intervention that adds didactic elements to the ruins. The most striking feature of the reconstruction is the roof construction of the building and the coverings on the floor surface. In both cases it is noticeable that the floor covering, which is entirely based on assumptions, and the “contemporary” roof and vaults are remarkably different from the previous ones. (Fig. 3) It is the same kind of didacticism that we see in modern restorations, only here the two different architectural layers were created in the same period and by the same artist. The architectural details of the hypothetical reconstruction are designed to reproduce the original, although the pillar balustrade, window frames and balustrade show the characteristics of the period in which it was built, both in form and in its Altaic design. Unfortunately, this means that the original Renaissance ornamentation has more likely been altered. The appearance of the whole ensemble, despite the complete reconstruction, shows fragmentation, both in the exterior and in the interior turned into a shabby panopticon.

Iseum Savariensis – Szombathely (2004; architect: Tamás Mezős)

One can say this is one of the most important settlements of ancient Pannonia, the birthplace of Saint Martin, Savaria, today's Szombathely. The former Iseum and its surroundings have long been a well-known archaeological site, and its monumental presentation, radiating the spirit of the Venice Charter, was designed in 1962 by Gyula Hajnóczy (1920-1996) using the “quasi-anastylosis” method.²⁴ This outdated presentation was replaced in 2004 by a reconstruction of the sanctuary. (Fig. 4) The early plans of the architect Tamás Mezős included an *in situ* 1:1 reconstruction of the ruins, based on the results of thorough archaeological and architectural-historical research.²⁵ However, plans changed as construction neared and resulted in a steel-framed structure reminiscent of an ancient sanctuary. The architectural details were simplified in form and the final result was a more massive reconstruction with a new museum function. Hungarian literature has long sought a precise term for the completed monumental restoration, but the terms “replica” and “1:1 model” do not really fit the contemporary intervention. A contemporary building built on top of the original ruins cannot be considered an authentic reconstruction because its abstracted forms do not attempt to represent the richness of the original details. As seen in the previous example, several structural defects mar its authenticity. It is not known what exactly led to the rejection of the hypothetical reconstruction, but it can be concluded that the current state of affairs is fixed in the memory of the population as Iseum. The reconstruction, even if it cannot be considered partially authentic, therefore assumes the role of the original in the collective memory.

Diósgyőr - Castle (2010-ongoing; architects: Gyula Cséfalvay)

The ruins of a medieval castle with four towers in Diósgyőr, Northern Hungary, are perhaps one of the most interesting examples of complete reconstruction in several stages. Completed in 1975, the conservation was one of the most famous presentations of ruins in Hungary,

24 Research findings and documents related to the completed restorations were regularly published by Professor Hajnóczy. For more see Gyula J. Hajnóczy, *Pannónia római romjai* [Roman Ruins of Pannonia] (Budapest: Műszaki Könyvkiadó, 1987).

25 Tamás Mezős, “A szombathelyi Iseum helyreállítás-története és új elvi rekonstrukciój,” [The history of the restoration of the Iseum in Szombathely and its new principle reconstruction] *Építés - Építészettudomány* 33, 3-4 (2005): 245-288, <https://doi.org/10.1556/eptud.33.2005.3-4.5>.



Fig. 4: Iseum Savariensis – before and after the reconstruction

based on designs by Károly Ferenczy (1925-2007) and conforming in every respect to the recommendations of the Venice Charter.²⁶ The hypothetical reconstruction of the remains, which slowly decomposed over the decades, is still ongoing today, based on thorough research. In the course of this long-term work, it is interesting to see the changing attitudes of the profession and of society. As the mass of the former ruin multiplies, so do the costs that threaten its completion. But a much bigger problem is that quality is also greatly affected. Differences in architectural approach can already be detected between the different stages of reconstruction. The initial

²⁶ See Károly Ferenczy and András Gergelyffy, *A diósgyőri vár* [Diósgyőr Castle] (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalat, 1961).



Fig. 5: Diósgyőr Castle before and after reconstruction, and on new plans (opposite page)

meticulous reconstruction covering every detail is increasingly transformed, as time passes and costs are rationalized, into a model building with stone covering applied to a concrete frame. As a result, stability problems arose during construction, so financial difficulties took away resources destined to reconstruct the interior spaces. Thus, even if the full reconstruction is completed, the problem concerning the function of the building will come to the fore.

An addition at this scale would create a serious tension between the many reinforced and stacked stone coverings and the original bare stone walls. The didactic distinction that legitimizes new interventions and tries to provide credibility is grotesquely expressed in the various forms of these stone surfaces, although all research has shown that the walls of the castle were plastered! Serious problems are also indicated by the fiercer professional debates in the specialized press between former collaborators – theorists, researchers and architects –becoming more and more heated precisely because of the way of completing the work. Hypothetical reconstructions involve many compromises and ethical questions that, in the case of Diósgyőr castle, were not answered in sufficient depth during the preparatory stage. Most experts in Hungary believe that the project, which is clearly intended for tourism, has long been based on unprofessional motivations.

The ratio between the old and the new parts of the castle completely subordinates the original remains. The didactic tools used, which are increasingly characteristic of modern restorations, are more comical than serious in the case of reconstructive additions at this scale. All of these will become evident in the last stage of the reconstruction of the Diósgyőr castle – the design of the roof. As we have seen in other hypothetical reconstructions, these architectural details are the least known to researchers who therefore tend to try to fit the roofs into the mass reconstruction with a neutral appearance. However, in the case of this castle, a very distinct majolica ceramic tile roof pattern has been chosen to contrast with other deliberately muted architectural surfaces and details that had been adapted to the originals precisely for a “subtle fit.” Such didacticism clearly leads to a kind of architectural schizophrénia. (Fig. 5)

Füzér Castle (2012-ongoing; architect: Mihály Rudolf)

The last example is a fully completed hypothetical reconstruction of a castle ruin, also in Northern Hungary, based on the plans of architect Mihály Rudolf. Among the expert debates about reconstruction, the statement of the architect Zoltán Bereczki is worth mentioning. It is not actually about reconstruction, but about a new construction period with an architectural language close to the original.²⁷ Indeed, the reconstruction, like any intervention in the monumental field, is a new layer in the history of the ruins, but this layer closes open questions. Its purpose is obviously the same as that of the modernized guard building, but its relationship to the original is very different.

Füzér Fortress is an overtly “contemporary fortress;” its walls do not display the kind of didactic need to distinguish between old and new, as we saw in the example of Diósgyőr. Here, the scale of the extension carries different meaning since the reconstructed building is “only” almost double the mass of the original ruins. Subtle differences in the roughness of the original and new plastered surfaces show the difference, while the new parts, especially the roofs, no longer show the same pronounced difference like in the examples above. The current “sterility” in the appearance of the hypothetical upper castle based on research will fade with time, and the contrast between the unfinished parts and the new upper castle is still a contrast. This will disappear after the completion forecast in 2025. The lower castle below the reconstructed upper castle has also been restored, but in a very different spirit: a restoration using more contemporary architectural elements. (Fig. 6)

²⁷ Zoltán Bereczki, “A füzéri vár legújabb kiépítéséről” [About the latest construction of the Füzér castle], *Országépítő* 27, 2 (2016): 18-21.

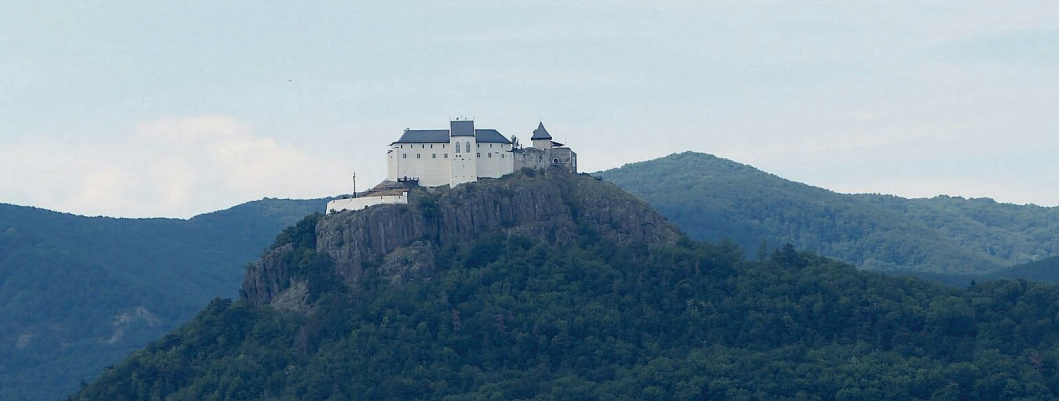


Fig. 6: Füzér Castle before and after the reconstruction (above)

Fig. 7: The interior space of the reconstruction of Füzér castle in the present day (below)



The interior spaces of the Füzér castle reconstruction (Fig. 7), however, raise even more intriguing questions about the relationship between old and new. Here, too, contemporary materials and forms appear in the vaulting of the upper spaces, which contrast sharply with sections reconstructed from hypothetical drawings also made in this period. Here we can talk about the difference between what looks old and new in the case of the upper row of halls. In the reconstructed chapel, on the other hand, we do not see such an emphasized didactic distinction, the additions of the original broken surfaces and architectural details only contrasting with the original in their superficial subtlety. Instead of fragmentation, we see a complete unity enhanced by the furniture, pulpit and altar that imitate the atmosphere of medieval furniture. It is by the reconstructed and painted Gothic arch that the difference in the approach of “contemporary interventions” is the most visible.

Even in the case of reconstruction, professional analyses, at least in Hungary, try to justify or refute the validity of such restorations using the wording of the Venice Charter, such as the most quoted sentence: “any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp.”²⁸ And the “signs of the time” seem to be considered valid by both opposing modernist and traditional historicist approaches to architecture based on analogy with their own architectural language. (Fig. 7)

In the examples above, the new reconstruction layer in any case included the surviving elements from the great monumental restorations of the twentieth century, which, as we have seen, were not taken into account during the overall reconstruction, and were even demolished. However, the most fascinating aspect in the new reconstructions is the didactic distinction designers make between the original remains and newly built additions that follow their original architectural language! This is not a contrast due to the architectural toolbox of reconstruction. By the contemporary architectural layers also created by the designers of the current restoration of their own hypothetically restored building parts (reinforced concrete vaults, contemporary-looking roofs), they already show an architectural approach contrasting with the previous didactic restorations. Here one can detect a kind of “architectural schizophrenia” which may have been caused by the differences between the architectural logic of the historic period and the contemporary one. Such reconstruction requires the use of additional and different means to ensure authenticity. These are the tools of museology, and there are fascinating differences between museology used in restoration and museology used in reconstruction.

Didactics in Reconstruction – the Role of Technology and Museology in the Presentation of Ruins

The main task of didactics is to clearly convey to the visitor the information gathered about the original monument during its restoration. Failure to do so calls into question the authenticity of the intervention. There are architectural and museological methods for this. The limitations of architectural didactics have already been stated above, but contemporary museology offers almost unlimited tools that, despite their immaterial qualities, cannot be separated from material interventions. Architectural restoration and museology can thus complement each other, that is, strengthen or weaken each other.

Digital development and virtual reality have also had a major impact on the presentation of ruins and ruin sites as monuments. The increase in reconstructions in recent decades is also influenced by the perception that merely preserved or partially restored ruins are “boring” and useless for tourism. But competing with virtual reality is dangerous for ruins. Large deployments, as we have seen, require serious decisions where reversibility can no longer be guaranteed. No wonder that easily replaceable virtual reconstructions are more

28 ICOMOS, *The Venice Charter 1964*, Article 9.

popular on the users' side. And here we must mention a very important point: the impact of digital reconstructions on real built reconstructions. Digital virtual reconstruction is now an indispensable part of scientific research before the intervention of the monument, creating realistic images and videos of the destroyed monument, based on historical analogies, and following the material and architectural logic of the period. However, these, although thoroughly researched, do not distinguish the hypothetical elements from the original or, in other words, do not aim to capture the levels of hypothesis. This is still a decisive factor for a factual architectural intervention. In the first phase of the reconstruction of Diósgyőr castle, György Szekér, an archaeologist-architect, in preparation for the architectural decisions set up a design methodology in which he categorizes the levels of hypotheses and compares them with the levels of intervention. He points out that what can be well distinguished in the theoretical reconstruction (the logical and the complete hypothesis) can no longer be represented by architectural didactic tools.²⁹

The issue of detailing is very important in reconstructions because architectural context has a fundamental influence on the quality of the built reconstruction. This is why the modern didactic restoration consciously stopped at the architectural formulation of hypotheses and we can see this in the case of the land-art interventions popular today. The extension made of wires by Edoardo Tresoldi in 2016 in the archaeological park of the municipality of Siponto almost started a fashion wave. However, "transparent additions" that push the limits of visibility now appear independently of archaeological monuments. And the use of drones and holograms has already appeared at ruin sites, changing the way reconstruction work is carried out. That is why we must put all these tools at the service of authenticity, whether architectural or museological. Therefore, if "digital authenticity" is separated from "architectural authenticity," they will be on opposite sides: the built reality will have to compete with the virtual reality provided to the visitors of the ruins' site.

Digital technology is more widespread and widely used in museology. In this case, the task of museology is to complement and help in the interpretation of architectural restoration. In addition to the exhibition, installations made of material relics, furniture and interior design elements play a key role. As the role of architectural detail in reconstruction increases, so do the tools of museology become more embodied in objects or even in "realistic waxworks." It is not at all typical to reconstruct wall paintings, stoves and other built-in equipment in a modern approach to restoration. However, digital projectors are a popular tool for all types of display, even in outdoor ruins.

The role of the ruins exhibition and the museology that follows is also to bring people into the realm of the value of historical monuments. But this personalization is much stronger in the digital world or virtual space than in architectural spaces. This kind of flexibility cannot be provided by classical architectural interventions. As in the case of didactic restoration with a modern approach, reconstruction also changes social attitudes, which are more complex, not primarily a matter of architectural taste and aesthetics.

The Perception of Reconstruction in the Twenty-first Century – Profession versus Society

As we pointed out at the beginning of this article, cultural context is a determining factor in how we see ruins. This has two dimensions: one is society's relationship with history, partly recognized in the built heritage, and the other is the cultural construct, especially the perception of interventions on historical monuments. In the first case, it is a matter of a more emotional

29 György Szekér, "A diósgyőri belső vár helyreállítási koncepciójának elméleti rekonstrukciós alapjai" [Theoretical reconstruction foundations of the restoration concept of Diósgyőr's inner castle], *Országépítő* 1 (2015): 9-13.

approach, where the ruins nowadays are perceived mainly in a negative light, as a reminder of destructive periods in history. In the second case, architectural tradition is important, the archetypes that can be found in the ruins despite their fragmentary nature. Recognizing this requires a degree of abstraction and architectural imagination on the part of the recipient requiring more intellectual energy than the information readily available. The historical context in which heritage conservation treats the original remains also plays a role in perception. This is why the perception of hypothetical reconstruction is so different in European practice: although it is increasingly accepted in Eastern countries, it is still alien and should be avoided in Mediterranean cultures.

In fact, the Italian approach developed between the two world wars and consolidated in the 1950s and 1960s had a great influence on contemporary interventions in the field of historical monuments. The “minimalist style” that dominates contemporary European architecture, based on architectural contrast and leading to spectacular architecture especially in historic settings, plays a major role. However, in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the aesthetic demand plays an increasingly strong role, the lack of which is often attributed to the modernist contrasting approach. However, the question of aesthetics was by no means alien to the modern concept of heritage conservation. Already between the two world wars, Giovannoni revealed the limits of philological restoration, and Brandi, Bonelli and Pane introduced the role of aesthetics in critical restoration. Notwithstanding, the modernist approach to ruin restoration that dominated the twentieth century is still dominant in Italian practice in the twenty-first century.

By the twenty-first century, globalization and military conflicts have nuanced the social and professional approach to ruin reconstruction. The manifesto-like prescriptive charters of the twentieth century have been replaced by more relaxed international recommendations. The notion of integrated heritage has broadened our perspective and our relationship with destruction. Newer international reconstruction recommendations are expected in their preparation for destruction, but also for reconstruction. Thanks to the flow of information, heritage conservation faces new phenomena such as the “democracy of comparison” after predictable disasters or “elite panic,” and what this implies: taking the initiative from civil society and metaphorically strengthening the demands of political and economic elites in heritage management.³⁰

In addition to conflict, another factor of the globalized world also has a spectacular impact on the afterlife of ruins, and that is the issue of sustainability and reconstruction? On the one hand, it is legitimate to eliminate so-called “brownfields” and use the existing built heritage instead of new construction to reduce the environmental footprint. However, in the case of a historically stratified ruin, this requires a very different approach. If the goal here is to circumvent the need for use and, at the same time, maintain the ruins on a permanent basis, the desired solution is to restore the ruins rather than reconstruct them in the name of sustainability. Care must be taken in the use of generally accepted concepts in the management of built heritage, because, as we have seen above, architectural options cannot keep pace with flexible changes in social demand, even with the help of digitalization. Therefore, wrongly formulated objectives lead to the use of wrongly formulated tools, and this can be particularly destructive in heritage conservation.

Social and especially political demands have the greatest impact on the professional side of restoration in terms of authenticity and architectural quality. The socio-political point of view is one-sided, because it considers relevant only the historical values that are important for its own cultural and ideological perception and sees the ideological basis for its ideology in the renewal of these values. It tries to achieve this through well-defined methods, in which architectural reconstruction faithful to the original plays an important role. In this way, the

30 John Bold, “Introduction: Reconstruction: The Built Heritage Following War and Natural Disaster,” in *Authentic Reconstruction: Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage*, eds. John Bold, Peter Larkham, and Robert Pickard (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1-25.

holistic, objective and scientific approach to values is replaced by a guided hierarchy of values, which communicates its own prejudices as universal truths and even presents them to the profession as ethical standards. Fragmentation is not compatible with the politics of memory and tourism, but there is no concrete, authentic idea of completeness. As can be seen from the Hungarian reconstructions described above, all of them were inspired by spectacular but architecturally inadequately considered theoretical models of mass reconstruction based on analogous archaeological assumptions. It is therefore not surprising that their architectural quality is far below that of the original monument. The restorations in Esztergom or Visegrád from the 1930s, which recognized and respected the historical stratification, have stood the test of a century both aesthetically and architecturally, but the same cannot be said of the currently faltering reconstruction of Diósgyőr Castle or Füzér Castle. The obvious flaws in the architectural forms observed in the reconstruction of Nyírbátor Castle not simply call into question the authenticity of such reconstructions, but are completely wrong. In 1893, Camillo Boito, writing about purist restorations, quotes an ancient Oriental saying: "It is a shame to deceive our contemporaries. It is a greater shame to deceive posterity."³¹ The great theorists of the twentieth century in the field of monument preservation also pointed out that the complete reconstruction of a fragmented monument partially destroyed over time that carries many layers of history is more an ethical issue than a professional one.

Conclusion

Any reconstructive intervention is a rejection of the passing time, that is, a struggle with time. Form and material are the bearers of the intangible elements of heritage and therefore, the restoration of these elements that we want to restore is primarily a material and formal requirement. Research is now at a stage where we can extract much more information from the remains than before, so our hypotheses become better and our interventions boulder. The need for personal contact and personal experience is also becoming increasingly important, a so to speak "subjective heritage." At the same time, disposable prostheses, 3D printing, testable hypotheses all weaken the role of the theoretical foundation. In today's "sharing" society, everything is measured by "likes and clicks," and from there the question is only about "smart" presentations: personalized heritage protection. Therefore, the impact of digitalization on the presentation of ruins must be examined not only from a professional but also from a social perspective. The ruins of humanity's great cultures can be reconstructed before our eyes in videos available online, and VR headsets bring the experience up close and personal. These theoretical reconstructions obviously have a different relationship with the user than the original ruin has with the visitor. Conceptual reconstructions lack layering, but architectural reconstructions do not. While a computer model can give a visual sense of the succession of periods in their progression, a static reconstruction cannot. Therefore, there is a need for a "tactile" relationship with memory to aid cognition and understanding. As we have seen, it is precisely this experience that the built reconstruction can deprive the visitor of: personal contact, knowledge and subjective adaptation of the processes, which neither "ready-made visual information" nor digitalization can replace.

Cesare Brandi, in his famous theoretical writing, defines it as follows: "The work of art must be examined as a set of layers of interventions, with the tools of critical cognition, based on aesthetic and historical layers: that is, age is not an absolute value in itself, and aesthetic value must be taken into account in the decision. [...] Restoration is not a return in time to a past state of memory, but an intervention which must restore the work to legibility, in the order of its stratifications."³² These stratifications play an important role in the reconstruction process

31 Camillo Boito, "I restauri in architettura. Dialogo primo," in *Questioni Pratiche di Belle Arti: Restauri, Concorsi, Legislazione, Professione, Insegnamento*, ed. Camillo Boito (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1893), 3-32.

32 Cesare Brandi, *Teoria del restauro* [Theory of Restoration] (Roma: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1963), 25.

and in laying the foundations for it. Such layers can be the following in the life of memory: creation, addition, reconstruction, destruction and finally reinterpretation. The latter can be: reading, interpretation, reinterpretation, transcription, or facsimile representation. A fundamental question arises here: is reconstruction not an arbitrary closure of stratification? Or is it just another architectural layer to be evaluated and preserved or destroyed in the future? Hanno W. Kruft is rather pessimistic: “No one will ever have the courage or the determination to destroy reconstructions because they lack authenticity. Furthermore, there will always be someone willing to reconstruct the reconstruction that has been destroyed.”³³

All interventions in the area of monuments are created with a double purpose: scientific or professional (the one that cares and knows) and social or socio-political (“usage” to whom it is directed). While in classic interventions in the field of monuments, conservation and restoration, the scientific need is strongly expressed in the actual architectural presentation, in the case of partial or complete reconstruction the social or political will is much more prominent. In the case of the scientific basis, the original historical value and methodology are important, while on the social side, identity, popular history and their representation are more important. On the scientific side, there is also a more objective component because science has already achieved its goals through theoretical reconstruction. On the social demand side, there are more subjective aspects, in which practical reconstruction is rooted. Reconstruction has also become a sensitive issue, since it is precisely the establishment of a reductive national and cultural identity that is achieved, mostly with the support of tourism.

The afterlife of ruins therefore appears bound to remain an ever-changing problem for the future. The finite nature of built reconstruction and the variability of digital capabilities will continue to affect ruins. In their perception, tradition and invention will continue to be equally important in the future, so that the evolution of the cultural context and the construction technology will affect both the creator and the recipient. The triad of cognition, understanding and action is the eternal driving force of human creation, but experience shows that built reconstructions do not allow this. The built result of the reconstruction will slowly assume the role of the original in the public consciousness, but with a coded message from the reconstruction era. For each of us, ruins can convey personal messages from the past, messages that can never be replaced by purely architectural or scientific methods.

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33 Hanno Walter Kruft, “Rekonstruktion als Restauration? Zum Wiederaufbau zerstörter Architektur” [Reconstruction as restoration? To rebuild destroyed architecture], *Kunstchronik* 46, 10 (1993): 587.

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