

THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE IN PERIAM, TIMIS COUNTY IN ROMANIA

PETROMAN CORNELIA, PETROMAN I., MARIN DIANA, VĂDUVA LOREDANA, FRAIU
GIANINA, MERCE IULIANA, POPUŞ MIRELA

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Timisoara
Faculty of Farm Management
Calea Aradului, nr. 119, Timisoara
c_petroman@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a detailed list and description on the main elements of religious cultural heritage of Periam Commune in Romania. In order to promote religious tourism and genealogical tourism, we need to identify man-made resources – particularly Baroque ones, considered unique in this part of the world. The Baroque – a universal, aesthetic concept and phenomenon with periodical, differentiated appearances – took shape in Central Europe in the 17th century. It has been included among the main categories of spirituality and *forma mentis*: together with Classicism and Romanticism, it is a Utopian type of contemplation of the existence of a fundamental way of living and feeling. The Commune of Periam, an old Romanian locality and port to the Mures River, in the vicinity of Sănnicolau Mare, was attested documentarily ever since 1330. Its main assets are both natural and man-made, but it is remarkable due to its Baroque monuments – the Church John of Nepomuk, the statue of the Holy Gift, and the statue of the Crucifixion.

Keywords: Periam, sculpture, Baroque, John of Nepomuk, resources

INTRODUCTION

As far as the origin of the term “Baroque” is concerned, among the hypotheses developed so far, the most plausible for the term adopted in the history of fine arts is the one focusing on the idea of strange, odd, bizarre – all of which with a negative connotation at the beginning. The spread of prejudices and of the negative acception of Baroque were caused by the persistence of classical aesthetics whose rigours compromised the Baroque ever since the 17th century, when the duality “Classical = perfect”, “Baroque = imperfect” appeared. Designating, at the beginning, a negative concept, a non-value, the term Baroque underwent several mutations until it turned into a positive concept, accepted as such and acknowledged as part of the spiritual heritage of mankind. The basic element of this era was the polarisation of the feelings and trends: on the one hand, the feeling of *vanitas*, of uselessness and futility; on the other hand, the wish for living such as expressed by the Antique *carpe diem* (HIDE, 1999; VLĂSCLEANU, 2005).

Central-European Baroque

The Baroque art is close to the believer's soul: it even reflects, in Giulio Carlo Argan's conception, the religiosity of the former and not the religiosity of the artist. The Baroque artistic phenomenon operates at the level of collective consciousness with symbolic values belonging to the millenary tradition of Central Europe: their reinterpretation makes up the individuality of the style in relation to the universalism of the previous period. The era conventionally named “Baroque” is the richest one in expression of all Western civilisations: the variety of expressions is increased by the circulation of the forms which makes the “unity” in diversity of the Baroque art. This “internationalism” is not contradicted by the religious differences in contrast with the nationalism of the next

century, when artists lived isolated within the narrow circle of the culture they belonged to (PETROMAN AND PETROMAN, 2006; VLĂSCLEANU, 2005) .

The completely new way of seeing art resulted in the need for reorganising education and for developing specific institutions – “academies” in which the artists could improve and also have theoretical debates. Political antagonisms that resulted in wars could not stop the wandering masters in search of orders and meeting different civilisations on their way.

Appearance of the Baroque in Banat in the 18th century

Supplying artistic images for the ideological discourse promoted the art of the 18th century Banat turned into a local variant of the Baroque, similar to other variants in the Romanian Principalities, in Transylvania and in the areas where it originated (BOCȘAN, 1986; PÂRVULESCU, 2002; PETROMAN, 2010). The variety of forms and of themes determined the evolution of the Baroque: it differentiated step by step within the same style, acquiring shades characteristic to the different areas and so much different from the initial impulse. But it is this diversity of the forms that is important: this makes the Baroque different from the art practiced in the neighbouring provinces with which it kept a permanent contact and from where it imported masters.

There was, all over the province, an intense activity of modernisation concretised in new cult buildings and in addition of Baroque decorative elements to the existing ones. The initiators and Maecenas of these buildings were mainly representatives of imperial families, but they were also secular and clergy dignitaries. These milestones of the evolution of the Banat province, once annexed to the conglomerate made up by the nations of the empire, shaped the circulation of modernisation trends in other provinces as well (HEINZ, 1998; PETROMAN AND PETROMAN, 2006; PETROMAN, 2010).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Present case study was carried out in the Commune of Periam. Its goal was to identify some Baroque monuments specific to the rural Banat Baroque as man-made resources for the development and promotion of new forms of genealogic tourism, cultural tourism, and religious tourism, and as an entertainment means for the bed and breakfast whose project is being materialised and that will be our new job.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Commune of Periam, whose coordinates are 46° 05' N and 20° 87' E, is located at the crossroads between Dj 682 Beba Veche – Arad with Dj 692 Timișoara – Dn 6, 45 km from Arad and 50 km from Timișoara.

Access to the border customs is through Sânnicolau Mare – 19 km to Cenad to reach Hungary, 38 km to Jimbolia to reach Serbia, and 20 km to Nădlac to reach Hungary *via* Igriș and across the Mureș River, using a pontoon. It is an important railway intersection with access to Timișoara, Arad, Sânnicolau Mare and Lovrin.

The Periam-Port entertainment area is an old hamlet turned into a holiday village. It is located along the bed of the Mureș River, in the Flooded Meadow of the Mureș River. There is access to Periam-Port from the Dc 30 (5.2 km), where the Mureș River can be crossed in the Arad County, in the Commune of Semlac, on a pontoon.

The administrative territory of the commune covers 6447.28 ha, of which 4701.30 ha are arable. The localities measure 380.18 ha in Periam and 9.88 ha in Periam-Port, and count 1,610 permanent dwellings with 1442 households.

Ever since 1330, the old name of the commune has been mentioned as Priamus. The number of inhabitants before December 1989 was large – above 7,000 (together with the Village of Pesac) – but, after most Germans emigrated and after the youth left Romania to work in Italy and Spain, it dropped to 4,500. The ethnic groups its inhabitants belong to are Romanian, Hungarian, German, Serbian and Bulgarian. Among the heritages from the Germans that used to live in Periam is the elementary school in German, attended by other ethnic groups as well. Until 2008, the Commune of Periam was made up of Periam, Pesac and Periam-Port. After the referendum of 2008, Pesac became a commune, which left the Commune of Periam made up of only Periam and Periam-Port. It is one of the oldest villages of Banat. Because of the floods, it had to change location three times so far. If nowadays they use a drag to pull out the aggregates from the Mureş River, in the past they did it manually: they used horse-pulled wagons to carry the aggregates to railway carriages travelling on narrow rails. There used to be a brick factory in Periam-Port, an ice factory, and a hat factory.

The evolution of the population of the Commune of Periam is shown in *Figure 1*.

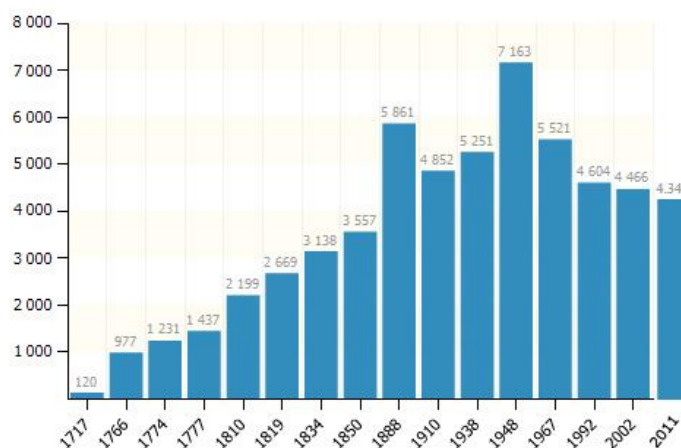


Figure 1. Evolution of population

Due to multiculturalism, each ethnic group has its own place of cult in Periam. They are as follows:

The Orthodox Church started to be built in 1926, after 1918, when Banat united with Romania, and Periam counted 5,000 inhabitants of which 450 were Romanians. The architect of the church was Josef Ortner. He finished the building of the church in 1927. The interior of the church was finished later: the woodwork was made by a local company, Bauer, and in 1933 the painter Imre Capsa from Arad made the iconostasis. The first Orthodox priest was Ștefan Vasilescu, in 1939.

The Haulik Church or The Church in the Park (*Figure 2*) started to be built in 1847 and was finished and sacred in 1856 by Bishop Haulik of Zagreb. The frescos in the church, made by Josef Proksch, were made using living models – personalities of the commune at the time. The huge cupola is said to be second in size after Athenée Palace of Bucharest (22 m in diameter). Nowadays, the Haulik Church is administered by the Greek-Catholics.



Figure 2. The “Haulik” Greek-Catholic Church

Monuments erected in the honour of heroes. A first monument, dedicated to the memory of the heroes of World War I, is located in the Cemetery of Periam. It was built in 1927 with money collected by the inhabitants. At present, there is not much to see and admire of it because it has been seriously damaged. A second monument (Figure 3), dedicated to the heroes of World War II, is located in the park, in front of the Haulik Church. It is a square piece of marble with the names of the heroes on it; on the front side of the monument, there is a bas-relief representing a wounded soldier. The third monument is dedicated to the anonymous soldier. It is located opposite the Haulik Church, in the park.



Figure 3. Monument of the Heroes of World War II and monument of the Anonymous Soldier

During the colonisation of Banat with Germans (1723-1765), they have built many cult buildings. John of Nepomuk became the protector of the colonists in Banat and, implicitly, of the colonists in Periam.

After the first quarter of the 18th century, after several ethnic groups of colonists migrated to Banat and settled there with the support of the Court in Vienna, certain new patron saints started to proliferate in the local iconography: Saint John of Nepomuk, Saint Barbara, Saint Donatus, and Saint Florian.

Of all these saint patrons, Saint John of Nepomuk became very popular among the Czech district employees settles in Banat due to the martyrdom of this faithful Christian.

After approval from clergy and imperial authorities (1726), John of Nepomuk became the patron saint of Banat, and May 16 became the most important festival of the city of Timisoara.

Timisoara counted, at the time, the Congregation of Saint John of Nepomuk and of the Holy Virgin after the model of similar Congregations in Vienna and Prague.

The first statue erected in Timisoara is that of Saint John of Nepomuk in 1722, after the archetype of the Vienna artist Mathias Rauchmiller. The statue is of modest size (1.20 m tall); the material used to make it is grit stone, easy to work, but perishable, which led to the degradation of the statue in time.

In Periam, the *Statue of Saint John of Nepomuk* has a serpent-like line, suggesting a slight counter-post; at its feet lies a *putto*, and a crucifix is supported by its right shoulder; the

entire composition is set on a profile pedestal. In this case, there may be analogy with the statue of the saint located in the courtyard of the Roman-Catholic Church parish in Iosefin (a district of Timisoara).

„*The Crucifixion*” (Figure 4) is a *rondo-bosso* sculpture erected in 1802 in Periam, by the roadside. The author is anonymous and the monument is made of grit stone. The body of Jesus tormented by the pain is lifeless and the physiognomy is schematised; above it, the figure of the Celestial Father overlooks the episode (bearing a globe in His left hand and the dove of the Holy Ghost in His right hand); at the foot of the crucifix lies the nature-size statue of *Mater Dolorosa*. The artisanal way in which the statue was made suggest the training level of the master left anonymous. The conservation status is mediocre: the statue must have undergone successive, undocumented remakes.



Figure 4. The Crucifixion and Mater Dolorosa

The John of Nepomuk Church. The first church of the commune was built in 1743 of wood. Because of the frequent floods in the older part of the village, the church was abandoned and it turned into ruins. In 1772, they built the *Altdorf Church* (Engl. *Old Village Church*) right opposite the school. It was built in 1772 upon the order of Queen Maria Theresa. Its saint patron is John of Nepomuk (Germ. *Johannes auf Nepomuk*) who is also the saint patron of Banat. There are four bells in the tower; during the restoration in 1938, the painters – the Ferch brothers – made murals. The church belongs nowadays to the Roman-Catholics. The John of Nepomuk Church in Periam is on the list of national Romanian heritage. It was declared a historical monument and it is recorded in the national database with the code number TM2NP06272.

John of Nepomuk was a priest and martyr. He was born in 1350 as Johannes Welflin, near Nepomuk, and he died in 1393, in Prague. According to the legend, he got killed by the king because he did not want to break the rules and disclose the queen’s confessions. The priest was sanctified only in 1729. There are statues of the priest along the routes – one of them is in Periam (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Statue of Saint John of Nepomuk

The painting in the altar was made by an Austrian painter. It represents Saint John of Nepomuk who is also the saint patron of the church. The lateral paintings represent Saint Anna and Saint Wandelin – the latter one the protector of the migrants from the Rhein-Mosel-Saar area.

According to historical data, in 1837, the priest Josef Lonovic wrote in the visiting protocol in Periam since 1805. There were four bells in the church tower, each of which installed in the memory of a certain saint – Saint John of Nepomuk, Saint Maria, Saint Nicholas and Saint Donatus.

In 1938, the priest was charged with the decoration of the interior walls of the church. The paintings on the ceiling were made by the Ferch brothers. Franz Ferch from Periam made the moulds for the four paintings on the ceiling and his brothers, Andreas and Rudolf, made the decorations. The paintings contain elements specific to life in Periam such as traditional Banat costumes in the painting “Lasset die Kleinen zu mir kommen” (Engl. *Let the children come to Me*) or traditional costumes from the migration period in the painting “Das Gebet der Ahnen” (Engl. *Prayer of the Ancestors*). The painters were criticised for the latter painting and it almost was rejected by the Bishop because it represented the priest and the judge of the village on their knees in front of the saint patron of the church, Saint John of Nepomuk, up in the clouds. The lateral walls of the altar were painted by the Ferch brothers too, but they were later on whitewashed. Upon the priest’s request, the local painter was asked to try and recover the paintings, but the lime in the whitewash had damaged the paintings and they were lost forever.

The roof of the tower was made of wood tiles. The clock would sound every quarter of an hour and was maintained by the community. The church was whitewashed outside and there were no paintings inside. There were 46 benches waiting for the faithful ones.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to promote religious tourism and genealogical tourism, we need to identify man-made resources – particularly Baroque ones, considered unique in this part of the world. The monument erected in memory of Saint John of Nepomuk is particularly beautiful: the statue of the protector of the Catholic colonists in Banat was made after the archetype made by Vienna artist M. Rauchmiller.

Another Baroque sculpture is the Crucifixion; located in the vicinity of the church, it represents the contorted body of Jesus Christ, with a schematised face and overlooked by the Celestial Father holding a globe in His left hand and a dove in His right hand. At the foot of the statue, there is the statue of Mater Dolorosa. The entire complex is located in the churchyard.

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