Brăila's Historical Monuments

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Abstract – The historic center of Brăila begins with "Trajan Square", a special cultural area with monuments that distinguish it among national cultural values: the Church of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel" and the "Maria Filotti" Theater. These heritage buildings in cities preserve the memory of the original structure.

Keywords – Church of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel", heritage buildings, "Maria Filotti" Theater

1. INTRODUCTION

The urbanistic ensemble "Trajan Square" represent the historic heart of Brăila and is home to several heritage structures, including the Church of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel" and the "Maria Filotti" Theater, both of which are architectural monuments in the Romanian Historic Monuments List. The majority of the structures in "Trajan Square" originate from the end of the 19th century. The front street of the buildings is closed, specific to commercial perimetres.

2. THE CHURCH OF THE "HOLY ARCHANGELS MICHAEL AND GABRIEL"

The Church of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel" was built in 1834 and was declared a temporarily historical monument in accordance with the Law for the Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments, as published in Official Journal no. 82 on July 29, 1919. [1]

Fig. 1 Excerpt from the Plan "The value of the built fund "Historic Center of Brăila Municipality"

It was declared a historical monument by the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 1160 on June 23, 1955. [1] The Church of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel" is listed as an architectural monument in the Romanian Historic Monuments List, with the code BR-II-m-A-02130. The architectural monument is part of the Historic Reference Area (SIR) 1, Historic Reference Sub-Area (SIR) 1a in accordance with the Urban Planning Document "Centrul Istoric al Municipiului Brăila," which was approved by Decision of Brăila Municipal Council no. 273 on July 14, 2010.

2.1. Historical study

According to the records of foreign visitors, there were six Muslim places of worship in Brăila in 1826, not mosques, but "Mesdjids," or halls of prayer comparable to those in Constantinople. They lacked the imposing grandeur associated with mosques, such as stone structures with oriental ceilings and domes, carved pilasters, and mosaics. [2] The "Mesdjid" in Brăila's center was converted into an Orthodox church in 1808-1810, and then again in 1831, receiving the patron saint "St. Archangel Michael." [1]

The old Turkish mosque was consecrated as an Orthodox church on March 8, 1831, at the initiative of Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich, the "superior head" of the Russian army during the siege and conquest of Ibrail. [1]

The metropolitan church, named "The Old Church", dedicated to Saints Michael and Gabriel, is roughly 250 years old and was first mentioned in 1834 in the Berroczy Plan [3], which was put out by Captain Baron Borroczy by order of General Kiselev and featured modernizing interventions all across the city. [4]

Fig. 2. The Borroczy Plan, 1834

The Berroczy Plan brought many improvements to the city, including connecting the port city by extending the road from Bucharest to the east, which was transformed into the city's urban axis, improving the street network and highlighting urban spaces, establishing barracks locations, schools, and the parceling of a plot of land outside the city, which was the first intention to expand the city beyond its limits. It also outlined the responsibilities of those who wanted to construct in the center plaza and on the main streets. The city's surface was split into four sectors named "paint": yellow, green, red, and blue, but it was also separated into slums: Armenian slum, Old Church slum, and Belvedere slum. The slums overlap the surface of the parishes and served as an unauthorized, but effective / practical,

model of territorial organization until the end of the 19th century: Saint Archangel Mihail Church slam, Saint Nicholas Church slam, Saint George Church slam, Carantinei slam, called Saint Spyridon Church slam since the beginning of the fifth decade. [5]

Fig. 3 Brăila's city plan – Sector delimitation, 1892

Because of the Russian initiative to convert the mosque into an Orthodox church, the church “Saint Archangel Mihail” became known as the „Russian Church or Royal Church”. [1]

Originally, the building's plan consisted of a single long, rectangular nave, but it was later modified to accommodate the Orthodox cult. Thus, to the east, a large semicircular apse was added, and to the west, a narthex built of burnt brick, as opposed to the unburned or superficially burned brick found in the old parts of the wall from the east. [6]

The intervention was completed by replacing narrow overlapping windows on the north and south facades with simple, broad, and rounded windows at the top. [7]

When the church was enlarged to the west by roughly 8 meters in 1862, windows identical to those on the north and south sides were added. The general concept of the internal space remains the same, distinct space; the division occurs only aesthetically and is caused by the cafas overlapping the narthex. [6]

Thus, at the end of the extension works, an architectural style that outlines the outside of the church, particularly neoclassical, could be seen. The shape and framing of the windows, pilasters that rhythm the clean walls and the triangular pediment in the middle of the western facade are all traits that identify this church as neoclassical.

On the site occupied by the minaret of the "Mesdjid", demolished in 1829, the church bell tower was built, made of wood, brick and covered with tile, and which was equipped with three bells cast in Petesburg, in 1832. These elements were lost in the 1885 fire, and were rebuilt a year later by a wooden bell tower with a single 700 kg bell made from the former one's bells. [3] The bell tower's repair work was finished in 1923. The bell tower was constructed of brick and adorned with stone architectural details (Moldovan belt). The bell tower has a quadrilateral layout (the base is 9 x 9 m, approximately 22 m high). [1]

The church was repaired in 1902, with the fragility of the unburned and entirely burned brick walls being the main sources of degradation. As a result, the eaves were restored and the moisture on the south wall was eliminated.

The original structure, formerly known as the "Mesdjid", is supported by octagonal wood piles set in the exterior walls and free within, with substantial bracing.

Fig. 4 Illustrated postcard - The bell tower of the "Saint Archangel" Church, 1917

Fig. 5 The bell tower of the Church "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel", 2021

The middle portion of the roof's structure, which is likewise formed of smoked oak beams, appears to be from the 17th century. The ceiling is tastefully embellished. The image of the pantocrator, which is present in conventional Orthodox churches in the center of the nave dome, was painted on the "gobec," which was afterwards covered with stucco. Another distinguishing feature is the long, extended eaves (saceac), which are made of wood and joined together with a specific type of connection. [1]

In 1922, repair work was also completed: most of the walls were reconstructed, the roof's broken tiles were replaced, and the church was totally plastered and whitewashed on the outside. The damp areas of the ceiling were rebuilt, a new cement ceiling was added, and the wooden ceiling was polished with gold and silver in imitation of church themes. New icons, closely resembling Orthodox iconography, were produced in place of the fallen artworks. New pillars, beams, and boards have been installed across the floor. The woodwork and internal walls were repainted and ornamented with religious symbols, and parquet was put throughout. In the church and bell tower, electric lighting was installed. [1]

Fig. 6 Illustrated postcard The "Saint Archangel" Church, 1935

Under the leadership of the archaeologist prof. univ. dr. arh. Ionel Căndea, a number of 8 cassettes were executed in order to research the "Saint Archangels" Church. Thus, more than 30 archeological complexes were discovered, consisting of pits, 48 tombs, and the stone foundations of two buildings that preceded the current church: one of an earlier stage of the mecet and another of an old Christian church. As a result of this research it was discovered that the Church of St. Michael the Archangel is a former mecet, probably built in the early eighteenth century, which functioned until 1830, and was transformed into a Christian place by developing the building with an altar and a narthex.

Fig. 7 The Church of the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel", 2021

Over time, the following restoration work has been performed:

- replacement of the old iconostasis with a sculpted one,
- making a frame - pedestal sculpted with the icon of the Mother of God with the Baby in her arms,
- making the exterior mosaics of the Virgin Mary with the Infant (on the north side) and the Holy Archangel Michael (on the south side), artist Virgil Moraru,
- replacing the old stained glass windows with the restoration of the old ones by placing a cross in the center of the windows, taking into account a low degree of penetration of natural light so as not to affect the chromaticity of the mural and columns inherited from the old mosque,
- replacement of the rods in the northern and southern areas of the ceiling. [1]

3. "MARIA FILOTTI" THEATER

The "Maria Filotti" Theater is classified as an architectural monument in the List of Historical Monuments in Romania, with the name "Rally" Theater, today the "Maria Filotti" Theater, with the code BR-II-m-B-02097.

The architectural monument is part of the Historical Reference Area (SIR) 1, the Historical Reference Subzone (SIR) 1a according to the P.U.Z. "Historic Center of Brăila Municipality" approved by the Decision of Brăila Municipal Council no. 273 on July 14, 2010.

Fig. 8 Excerpt from the Plan "the value of the built fund
"Historic Center of Brăila Municipality"

3.1. Historical study

The building has been called the Rally Theater, the Royal Theater, the Communal Theater, the State Theater and since 1969 it has been named after a great artist of Brăila origin, the "Maria Filotti" Municipal Theater. [8]

At the end of the 19th century, the transformation works of the Rally Inn began, so one of the classic styles of architecture was chosen - the Baroque. The Baroque transposes the Renaissance humanism strongly influenced by Ancient Rome, in a new light, emphasizing the triumph of the state and the absolute church.

The Rally Inn, owned by Brothers Ienache, Demosthenes, and George Rally, consisted of an old 16-room building with storerooms around the courtyard and a new three-story building. [3] Although the performance hall of the Rally House was used for theatrical events, its gallery endangered the safety of the citizens, a fact recorded by the police chief Costache Bacalbașa in 1859. Following the expertise of the architect D. Poenaru, rehabilitation measures of the building were taken. [1]

In the following period, the city of Brăila hosted special artistic performances: tours of some famous actors such as those led by Fany Tardini, Costache Caragiale, Iorgu Caragiale, Matei Millo, Mihail Pascali.

The collapse of the ceiling in the casino hall of the "Rally" building, causing great damage, determined taking of measures to consolidate the resistance structure, including the theater hall, by introducing iron beams and reinforcements. [1]

Due to the loans for the renovation works, the Rally brothers had to sell the building to Dumitru Ionescu. [3] The ensemble, of three levels, was composed of:

- On the ground floor: 12 shops in front of St. Archangels Square and the Royal Street, with several rooms, three large halls with marble stairs, but in the courtyard there

were two dining rooms, cafe and kitchen, two galleries and a large hall , a printing workshop and a garden with a theater stage.

- On the first floor: 18 rooms, including two large dance halls and one for theater with lodge and stage and two large halls with marble stairs.

- On the top floor: 23 rooms, of which 19 for the hotel, a long hall and two halls, and in the courtyard, wall buildings, in which were the installation of electric light (power generator), and one for printing, wrapped in tiles.[1]

The center of Brăila is starting to change its architectural appearance, the cause of trade and economic development. The process of buildings individualization begins, the architectural styles being distinct.

Fig. 9 The plan of the former Hotel Rally made by Dumitru Ionescu, 1919

The building was named "Dumitru Ionescu" and the performance hall known as the "Royal Theater". After the death of Dumitru Ionescu, in 1919, the building became the property of the City Hall of Brăila. [9]

Fig. 10 Illustrated postcard Royal Theater, 1878

Fig. 11 Illustrated postcard Royal Theater, 1917

Between 1980 and 1988, extensive consolidation and restoration work was carried out as part of a project by the architects Viorel Oproescu and Doina Juncu, as well as the plastic artist Virgil Mihăescu.

The following interventions were required: the construction of a new main entrance from Trajan Square, the construction of a monumental hall on four levels in direct connection with the new entrance, made by covering the former courtyard, rearranging the foyers, increasing the playground a second room - Studio Room, the creation of public

facilities (bathrooms, buffet), and the creation of public spaces on the ground floor of the building (bookstore, antique shop, shops selling art items).

According to the project for the rehabilitation of the main building from 1980 to 1988, the following were found, before the works began: the construction, executed on load-bearing masonry, had the floors above the basement of vaults on metal beams, and also the same type of floors above the ground floor; there were some wooden floors, some parts over the first floor and the whole attic floor; the brick foundations did not show any visible degradation, failure, or damage; on the area from Lenin Square, wall weavings were made, as well as the filling of the rubble; the horizontal cracks in the wall of the performance hall indicated the stabilization of local compaction phenomenon, which has manifested itself in recent years. The rehabilitation works of the building were made but some of the structural elements remained unconsolidated, which caused further degradation. [10]

The building is composed of: the central building, with a height of S+P+2E and an irregular shape in plan, located on the eastern, northern and partially western and southern boundaries, with two main facades, on the east and south sides; Berechet house, with a height regime S+P+1E+M, located on the south side of the lot; the body of the Thermal Power Plant, with height regime from S+P+1E, located on the western limit; the body to the west of the Berechet house, with a height of P+1E, located on the southwestern limit of the lot. In a total area of over 5,000.0 sqm, the restored building consists of components of great artistic value:

- The monumental hall (created in the place of the inner courtyard) with a fascinating stained glass window made by Virgil Mihăescu, stairs on three levels, flanked by white marble balusters by Rușchița;
- Three foyers, one of which is a museum point of the Brăila Theater; three foyers, one of which is a museum point of the Brăila Theater;
- Performance hall with 370 seats, an invaluable jewel, with paintings and bas-reliefs of the ceiling from which descends the bunk chandelier (800 kg), composed of 150 arms and 1000 needles and crystal leaves;
- Built-in curtain with gold, silver and silk thread in over 800 shades;
- Conference and reception room (150 seats) and Studio room (100 seats). [8]

The building is emblematic in Trajan Square. The architecture style of the building reflects the influence of the Baroque style through its complex, rich and dynamic design. The most obvious detail of the Baroque style is the abundance of decorative elements. The structural elements are detailed and carved, with wavy designs. The presence of a performance hall is indicated by the elevated and vaulted ceiling. The main ornamental motif is based on the kingdom of plants. The current use of the building is that of a public institution that provides general-interest services and houses "Maria Filotti" Theater.

In 2010, the project "Restoration and Consolidation of the "Maria Filotti" Theater" was realized, financed by European Regional Development Funds and designed by S.C. INGEDIA ROMANIA S.R.L., subcontractor S.C. POLARH DESIGN S.R.L.

Although the building underwent a lot of rehabilitation works, they were superficially executed. Also, the seismic activity (1940, 1977, 1986, 1990, 2004) significantly affected the building, requiring consolidation works. Damage to the building in 2010 included: masonry cracks, roof damage, visible infiltration inside - stucco infiltration, damage to textiles ornaments, incorrect roof slopes, lack of thermal insulation of the attic, discontinuity in downpipes, damage to masonry basement brick due to excessive humidity, lack of toilets, lack of access ramps for the disabled, lack of an elevator or a lifting platform for access to the performance hall, wooden carpentry at doors and windows were degraded, lack of a ventilation and heating-cooling system that meets comfort standards. [11]

Fig. 12 "Maria Filotti" Theater, 2021

The strength project established a series of technical measures for the stability and safety of the construction, so the rehabilitation consisted in: making reinforced concrete diaphragms to strengthen / stiffen the entire structural assembly of the main building;

removal of non-important partition walls; making holes in the load-bearing walls at the same time as making compensating reinforced concrete frames in these areas; filling gaps in existing brick walls; injection of cracks in brick walls with epoxy resins or cement laitance; making reinforced concrete belts under the wooden floor above the second floor; replacement of wooden floor elements; construction of a system of reinforced concrete pits and belts for anchoring attics; strengthening the north blind wall and the clock wall; wrapping the curved lintels; monolithization of the dome support ring; making the wooden frame + terrace structure; construction of the metal structure to support the roof over the performance hall; construction of the metal structure to support the central skylight; construction of the elevator foundation; making the hatch for equipment access to the pumping station. [12]

4. CONCLUSIONS

The city of Brăila had a remarkable economic evolution, especially after the first half of the 19th century, an evolution that influenced the built edifices. Today, the real estate patrimony of Brăila is having a valuable existing built fund. The article started from the premise that the analysis of the criteria for survival through conservation is not enough and that these buildings must be valued. In the process of enhancement, it can be noticed the existence of a tendency to translate the philosophy of conservation in the scientific field. Civil engineering has precisely this mission of integrating the function with the form of the present through restoration as a way to find the past in the present for the future.

Many influences from the architecture of other states contributed to the development of the architecture of the city of Brăila, from which building principles and architectural forms were borrowed and whose presence was strengthened by the harmony of coexistence and culture.

An expression of these principles is grouping these buildings, with different architectural styles, in the public square of the city - "Trajan Square", and which contributed to the creation of an exceptional civic center of the city.

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