

## Varaždinske Toplice, Church of St. Martin the Bishop Conservation of Baroque Altars of St. Catherine (St. Martin) and St. Barbara

Varaždinske Toplice was mentioned for the first time in the decree of King Bela III issued in Székesfehérvár in 1181 as the property of the Chapter in Zagreb. Parish church of St. Martin the Bishop (*sancti Martini de Toplica*), an important monument of Gothic-Baroque sacral architecture and an urban and historic landmark in Varaždinske Toplice, is located in the centre of the former citadel.

Church of St. Martin, a single-nave, longitudinal structure, was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in the same location as the previous church. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the bell tower was added, the church was completely restored and given a Baroque appearance.

After the devastating earthquake in 1880, Zagreb Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Stephen and Saint Ladislaus was renovated and, in 1882, marble altars of St. Barbara and St. Catherine from the Cathedral were donated to the parish church in Varaždinske Toplice. The altars are among the highest quality artworks from the Baroque period in northern Croatia, and they are the work of the exceptional Italian sculptor Francesco Robba (1698-1757). In 1885, shortly after the altars were donated, wall paintings with evangelists, Slavic saints Cyril and Methodius, and scenes from Jesus' life were painted in the church by Marko Antonini.

The altar of St. Catherine (high altar dedicated to St. Martin) used to be located in the north part of the nave of the Zagreb Cathedral, and the altar of St. Barbara (side altar on the north side of the church in Varaždinske Toplice) was across from it in the south aisle of the Cathedral. Both altars have the same compositions, but the attic, central relief on the retable and the layout of the saint sculptures differ. Architectural and decorative relief elements of the two altars were made using different types of marble (i.e. flat backgrounds of reliefs

were made out of yellow Verona marble, profiled frames and vegetative reliefs out of white marble, antependium centres and column shafts out of African marble, pilasters out of red marble from France, cornice profiles and volutes out of marble from Kranj, and stipes bases and altar stones out of black marble). Carrara marble was used for the sculptures of saints and angels, and reliefs portraying the saints' martyrdom. Wooden sculpture of St. Martin was later placed in the central zone of the altar attic of St. Catherine, and the plaster sculpture of St. Nicholas Tavelic in the attic of the altar of St. Barbara.

Department for Stone Sculpture of the Croatian Conservation Institute carried out extensive conservation on Robba's altars. Sculptures from both altars were examined in 2014, and extensive damage was observed. The altars were first disassembled, and all the parts that could endanger human lives were catalogued. The extensive process of restoring the altars began in 2015 with conservation and restoration research (laboratory analyses, art-historical and archival research, architectural drawings of the condition before conservation, probing, photo documentation, mapping damage and contamination etc.). Preliminary work (e.g. cleaning test) was also carried out during the first phase. It was followed by different methods for cleaning stone, extraction or stabilization of harmful water-soluble salts, connecting detached parts, reconstructing missing parts, conserving metal elements, restoring the gilded layer, tonal adjustment and retouching of marbled parts, and protection with chemical agents.

In 2018, conservation on the altars of St. Catherine (St. Martin) and St. Barbara was completed, thus preserving the outstanding opus of Baroque sculptor Francesco Robba, and contributing to a better valorisation of the important corpus of Croatian sculpture from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



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## Varaždinske Toplice, crkva sv. Martina biskupa Konzervatorsko-restauratorski radovi na baroknim oltarima sv. Katarine (sv. Martina) i sv. Barbare

Varaždinske Toplice spominju se prvi put u povijesnim izvorima u ispravi kralja Bele III. izdanoj u Stolnom Biogradu 1181. godine kao posjed zagrebačkog kap-tola. U središtu nekadašnjeg topličkog kaštela nalazi se današnja župna crkva sv. Martina biskupa (*sancti Martini de Toplica*), važan spomenik gotičko-barokne sakralne arhitekture te urbanistička i spomenička vrijednost Varaždinskih Toplica.

Crkva sv. Martina, jednobrodna longitudinalna građevina, sagrađena je tijekom 15. stoljeća na mjestu gdje je već bila crkva, a temeljito je obnovljena i barokizirana u 18. stoljeću, kad joj je pridodan zvonik.

Zbog preuređenja zagrebačke katedrale Uznesenja Blažene Djevice Marije i svetih Stjepana i Ladislava, nakon razornog potresa 1880. godine, topličkoj župnoj crkvi darovani su 1882. godine mramorni oltari sv. Barbare i sv. Katarine, koji pripadaju najkvalitetnijim ostvarenjima umjetnosti baroknog razdoblja na prostoru sjeverne Hrvatske, a rad su vrsnog talijanskog kipara Francesca Robbe (1698. - 1757.). Nedugo potom, 1885. godine cijelu crkvu oslikao je Marko Antonini zidnim slikama, među kojima se ističu scene s prikazima iz Isusova života, evanđelisti i slavenski svci Ćiril i Metod.

Oltar sv. Katarine (glavni oltar topličke crkve, posvećen sv. Martinu) nekad se nalazio u sjevernom dijelu lađe zagrebačke prvostolne crkve, dok je oltar sv. Barbare (bočni oltar na sjevernoj strani lađe topličke crkve) stajao odmah nasuprot njemu u južnoj lađi katedrale. Oba oltara jednake su kompozicije, a razliku se u predjelu atike, središnjeg reljefa retable te u rasporedu kipova svetaca. Arhitektonski i dekorativni reljefni dijelovi dvaju oltara načinjeni su od raznih vrsta mramora (tj. ravne pozadine reljefa od žutog veroneškog, profilirani okviri i vegetabilni reljefi od bi-

jelog, središta antependija i tijela stupova od afričkog, pilastri od crvenog francuskog, profilacije vijenaca i volute od kranjskog, a baze stipesa i menze od crnog mramora), dok su kipovi svetaca i anđela te reljefni prikazi mučeništva svetica izrađeni od kararskog mramora. U središnju zonu atike oltara sv. Katarine naknadno je postavljen drveni kip sv. Martina, a na onu oltara sv. Barbare gipsani kip sv. Nikole Tavelića.

Odjel za kamenu plastiku Hrvatskog restauratorskog zavoda proveo je opsežne konzervatorske radove na Robbinim oltarima. Budući da su tijekom pregleda stanja kamene plastike na oba oltara 2014. godine zapažena brojna teža oštećenja, najprije su provedeni interventni radovi (s oltara su demontirani i katalogizirani svi dijelovi koji su zbog pada mogli ugroziti ljudske živote). Godine 2015. konzervatorsko-restauratorskim istraživanjima (laboratorijskim ispitivanjima, povijesno-umjetničkim i arhivskim istraživanjima, izradom arhitektonskih nacrti postojećeg stanja, sondiranjem, izradom fotodokumentacije, mapiranjem oštećenja i onečišćenja i dr.), počeo je opsežan zahvat obnove oltara. U prvu su fazu bili uključeni i preliminarni radovi (npr. probe čišćenja). Uslijedile su različite metode čišćenja kamena, ekstrakcija ili stabilizacija štetnih vodotopivih soli, spajanje odvojenih dijelova u cjelinu, izrada rekonstrukcija nedostajućih formi, konzerviranje metalnih elemenata, obnova sloja pozlate, tonsko ujednačavanje i slikarski retuš marmoriziranih dijelova te zaštita kemijskim sredstvima.

Radovi obnove oltara sv. Katarine (sv. Martina) i sv. Barbare dovršeni su 2018. godine, čime se ostvarila težnja očuvanju vrhunskog opusa baroknog kipara Francesca Robbe, ali se time i pridonijelo mogućnosti kvalitetnije valorizacije toga važnog korpusa hrvatskog kiparstva 18. stoljeća.





