

The ceiling paintings dating from the 3rd quarter of the 17th century of the Mariabrunn pilgrimage church in Vienna Hadersdorf.

System of decoration and conservation-restoration

Ivo Hammer, Vienna

Baroque Ceiling Paintings: Theory and Practice

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Abstract:

Emperor Ferdinand II, proponent of the violent re-Catholicization of predominantly Protestant Austria in the first half of the 17th century, brought the Augustinian Barefoot Order to Vienna in 1630 and in 1636 donated the new construction of the Mariabrunn pilgrimage church in Vienna Hadersdorf, which also served as a court hunting church. The extremely magnificent furnishings of the church building, consecrated in 1655, were severely damaged by fire during the second Turkish siege in 1683 and restored in a partially modified form.

At the beginning of the 1990s, a team from the Federal Monuments Office removed the whitewashing from the previously unknown wall paintings that were still preserved in four pillar chapels. Technically, the wall paintings are a mixture of fresco and lime painting, they were probably made soon after the completion of the stucco decoration. In accordance with the form of decoration customary at this time, the paintings fill small fields that are framed by stucco cartouches made of pearl and cyma sticks. A special feature is the colored version of the stucco with floral elements in green, black and red. B. Saints Sebastian, Rochus and Wilhelm the Hermit, attractively painted emblematic still lifes and putti. The wall paintings could come from the circle around Carpofofo Tencalla.

Ladies and gentlemen

thank you for the invitation

2 Mariabrunn, interior

Today I present to you ceiling paintings that have not been published and also not noticed in the literature so far (most recently in 2008 in the *Austrian Journal for Art and Monument Preservation*), They belong to the center of the Habsburg Counter-Reformation and re-Catholicization of Europe, which are connected with the names of the Habsburg Emperors Rudolf II (1552, Vienna-1612, Prague, since 1576), Matthias I (1557, Vienna-1619, Vienna, since 1612 HRR) (and

his confidante, cardinal and "religious reformer" Melchior Klesl (1552, Vienna-1630, Wr. Neustadt, 1569, converted at 17), Ferdinand II (1578, Graz – 1637, Vienna, since 1619 HRR) and Ferdinand III (1608, Graz – 1657, Vienna, since 1637 HRR).

3 Imperial Foundations

Many of the religious order churches founded or newly built in the course of the Counter-Reformation are imperial foundations, including the Dominican Church, the Mariabrunn pilgrimage church and the Augustinian church of St. Rochus in the third district of Vienna.

4. Location, facade, history

Emperor Ferdinand II, proponent of the violent re-catholicization of a largely Protestant Austria in the first half of the 17th century, brought the order of the Augustinian Barefoot to Vienna in 1630, established the Augustinian church as a court church and in 1636 donated the new Mariabrunn pilgrimage church in Vienna Hadersdorf, it also served as a court hunting church.

Mariabrunn has existed as a place of pilgrimage since at least the 15th century. Legend tells that a statue of the Virgin Mary was said to have been thrown into a well by the troops of King Mathias Hunyady / Corvinus of Hungary in 1467. Emperor Maximilian I. had a stone chapel built there in 1490 for the miraculous sculpture that was lifted from the well.

5 Ottomans, Destructions

The cultural-historical importance of the paintings is not easy to overestimate: Most of the churches from the time of re-catholicization in the first half of the 17th century have been destroyed, renovated in the 18th or 19th century or disfigured by restorations

Of course, destructions during the siege of Vienna by the Ottoman army of Grand Vizier Kara Mustaf Pasha from July 12 to September 12, 1683 play a special role.

The second Augustinian suburban church in Vienna, the Rochuskirche in the Third Municipal District, the Carmelite Church in the Second District and the Church of the Brothers of Mercy, also in the Second District, suffered destruction by fire. The former stucco decoration of the nave vault has to be imagined roughly as it is still preserved in the Dominican church in the city center. Parts of the interior of the Jesuit Church in Vienna, which was originally consecrated in 1631 and renovated by Andrea Pozzo in 1705, may still show some traces of the original decoration of the vault.

6. Rapid reconstruction of Mariabrunn

In the contemporary accounts, the Procollum of 1683, it is reported that "only the flame-eaten walls remained" (ad Fontes Marianos, *com non nisi muri, et hi flammis exesi restarent*) but "by the benevolent support of our pious Emperor Leopold (I.) this reconstruction took place so quickly that, after a few cells for the brothers' dwelling had been built, the church at Mariabrunn was cleaned and restored within a year and had again assumed a thoroughly appropriate shape and thus offered the possibility to solemnly celebrate the titular feast of the Visitation of Mary on July 2, 1684. (Translation from Latin: Franz Weninger)

According to our research, the destruction of the brick building by fire mainly affected the vault, the decoration of which has disappeared except for a few traces, in the presbytery the plaster on the brick vault has also been renewed. Overall, however, the building structure was largely preserved in 1683, so that parts of the original ceiling paintings could still be found in the side chapels. In the years 1990-1996 we removed the whitewashing of the paintings.

7. Design

The church of Mariabrunn shows a typical Jesuit building form: a single-nave pillar church, a hall with 3 bays corresponding to 6 pillar chapels, plus a retracted presbytery and a corresponding triumph arch.

The mighty three-axis façade consists of layered giant Tuscan pilasters with cranked entablature and curved gable and round-arched niches on the side. In 1729 an ante-porch and sculptures were added. The wall pillars are structured with pilasters with volute capitals, angels' heads and fruit hangers, the wall panels between the pilasters with round arch niches.

8. Interior

The cranked entablature, which completes the pilaster arrangement, is continued to the western wall, but not into the chancel. The room is lit by lunette windows in the side chapels, lunette windows above the entablature and a tall rectangular west window. The lunette windows are cut into the barrel vault of the nave. The double pilasters of the wall pillars are continued in the vault as belts. The barrel vault of the organ gallery in the west is separated from the nave barrel in two steps.

9. Choir

The walls of the rectangular, recessed chancel are each structured with three pilasters, from which the groined vault emanates. The wall is divided between the pilasters with passageways and gallery openings.

10. Conservation-Science Study

The barrel vault of the nave was originally richly stuccoed. Our investigations have shown that the remains of the stucco were knocked off after the fire.

11. Conservation-Science Study vault

On the triumphal arch, elements of the stucco of the ceiling of the hall have been preserved from the construction period. A comparison with the preserved ceiling of the Dominican Church gives an idea of the original ceiling stucco.

12 side chapels

In four of the six side chapels, a large part of the original ceiling stucco from 1655 has been preserved, albeit partially damaged by soluble wall salts. In the first half of the 18th century, the side chapels with altar retables were elaborately decorated with paintings and sculptures. In the two middle side chapels, the original wall decoration has disappeared under marbled wooden fittings from 1709 (to the north, Tolentino altar) or stucco marble from 1723 (to the south, Eustace altar). Richard Dietrich created a new pulpit as early as 1706. In 1734 the west gallery received a new stucco decoration and an organ by Gottfried Sonnholz.

13 stucco sculptures of the wall niches

The furnishings from 1655 also include 6 life-size stucco sculptures in the niches of the side chapels: Evangelists in the two western chapels, one apostle figure each in the western niches of the Cross Chapel and the Belt Brotherhood Chapel. The niches are made of red marbled stucco lustro, the surface polished with Venetian soap, borders and seams gilded.

14 Chronology of monument preservation

The chronology of the interventions in the interior from 1983 is interesting in terms of the history of monument preservation.

After the interior had received a new whitewash every 50 years since 1684 (approx. 1731, approx. 1784, approx. 1809, approx. 1860. It was probably painted with distemper in 1909, since then the historical tradition of care has been interrupted and nothing more happened.

The interior was accordingly in a less than appealing condition.

A craft renovation of the interior was planned for 1983. Remnants of wall painting were found in the area of the organ gallery when the electrical wiring was renewed. It was only at this point in time and only through the direct involvement of the restoration workshops of the Federal Monuments Office under the department management of Manfred Koller that a scientific conservation study took place under my direction as the head of mural painting/architectural surfaces conservation, initially at the Anna chapel. We found a very unusual, possibly unique floral painting on the stucco, which according to our stratification studies and corresponding laboratory analyzes is certainly original, i.e. from 1655.

The investigations and further conservation work found intensive support from the diocesan conservator Hlltigund Schreiber and by pastor Franz Weninger.

15 Restored painted floral decoration

In view of the historical importance of this find and for strategic reasons of monument preservation - to raise the awareness of professionals for the aesthetic effect of this form of decoration - we have restored the paintings in the gallery area on the basis of the existing original remains. However, during further investigations 8 years later we found no remains of this painting on the other pilasters of the nave wall. It is possible that this was an attempt at decoration that was not continued with this intensity.

However, the side chapels and the associated dividing arches do have floral painting. (I'll get back to that).

16 Craft or Conservation-Restoration?

In 1990, a craft-oriented company worked on the uncovering of the ceiling paintings in the Girdle Fraternity Chapel. ¼ m² mural was exposed in 2 days resulting in unacceptable damage. This is not just a problem of the job image and the lack of specialized university education at the time. It is also a problem of the awareness of the prevailing art history and of university education, also a problem of the awareness of monument conservators, i.e. art historians or architects. During the repair of the chancel of the presbytery and the restoration of the stucco (Luise Höfing) we uncovered the fresco paintings in the four cartouches of the triumphal arch. The time required for the exposure and for the retouching was - despite the use of modern devices such as e.g. pneumatic micro chisel, rotating rubber eraser, rotating glass fiber per square meter approx. 250 h, i.e. eight times more of the performance hours as required by the craftsmen. Even the General Conservator of the Bundesdenkmalamt in 1982 described similar conservation and restoration work as a "utopia of monument preservation" instead of demanding appropriate quality assurance.

17 Conservation-Science Study

Accompanying scientific conservation studies showed that the wall paintings on the reveal of the triumphal arch were not whitewashed after the fire of 1683, but only during the recent renovation around 1731. The original surface of the wall painting was heavily sooty.

18 Conservation-Science Study entire interior

The recent Conservation-Science Study of the interior by the BDA/Hammer and interns: Eschebach, Schlegel Preis, Tinzl in February 1991 brought the following overall result:

19 wall surfaces 1655

The brick masonry is plastered very smooth with an approx. 2 cm thick plaster made of slightly hydraulic, very "fat" lime mortar with a grain size of the probably unwashed sand of approx. 0-2 mm and an additive of brick dust (smooth lime). The surface is carefully compacted and has a very fine, barely noticeable yellowish-pink appearance due to the brick dust and the fine fraction of the sand. Despite the careful compaction, fine early shrinkage cracks can be seen due to the high proportion of lime in the mortar.

20 stucco work 1655

As usual, the stucco work is applied in several layers, the kyma rods and the astragalus are cast and contains powdered limestone as a filler.

All surfaces are covered with a thin white limewash.

Between the double pilasters of the walls there are three-colored consecration crosses belonging to this layer.

As mentioned, the niches of the figures are marbled red, with a black shield for the inscription and a red-brown conch.

The stucco of the dividing arches of the side chapels, including the edges of the pilasters, and the stucco of the side chapels themselves are partially gilded with red and yellow Poliment and oil as a means of application (partly also leaf metal), partly also silver-plated. All surfaces of the side chapels, including the dividing arches with their pilasters, are decorated with floral paintings using the Secco technique. The form of the floral decoration changes from chapel to chapel.

21 stucco polychrome 1655

The backgrounds of the stucco work are painted green with copper green. The floral paintings are on what is probably a white background

(which appears gray today, probably due to traces of the smoke of the 1683 fire). The predominant color is copper-green, with black streaks, in the side chapels also ochre streaks.

22 flowers, fruits

The flowers and fruits (roses, sunflowers, lilies, pomegranates, etc.) are differentiated with bright colors such as red, ochre, and smalt blue.

23 dividing arches, pilasters

Festoons on the pilasters of the dividing arches on the one hand, and patterns of long, reed-like leaves on the other. For technical reasons, the secco paintings are not very well preserved. The retouching is - and I would like to point this out with regard to the overall aesthetic presentation in Mariabrunn - sometimes a little more intensive than one would wish in the sense of respect for the authenticity of the paintings. Here the wish of the parish community for readability and decorative continuity sometimes prevailed.

24 colored stucco version: triumph arch, crest dividing arch

The triumph arch with the imperial insignia and the crests of the dividing arches with the coat of arms of the donors are also painted in polychrome. The angels on the triumph arch with flesh tones hinted at in yellowish pink, dark eye stars and eye sockets in the depths of the mouth, differentiated yellow painted hair and wings, with yellow loincloths and green cloaks.

25 vaults total Belt Fraternity Chapel

We may have here a historically unique combination of sculpted and painted stucco decoration.

26 Jesuit Church Venice, 1729

All I can think of spontaneously is the later, virtuoso pietra dura decoration of the Jesuit Church in Venice.

27 Girdle brotherhood Chapel c p 1655

As far as I know, the floral decoration and the figurative wall paintings, as mentioned at the beginning, are completely unknown, although they have been on view for 30 years. I am also far from being able to give a well-founded art-historical "classification" in terms of authorship, international comparative examples, the iconological and iconographic program, etc. We can safely assume that the murals date from the construction period, i.e. from 1655 or only a few years later. There is no indication that the figurative wall paintings were made much later. To stimulate further research, I would like to review the murals below. Here the Belt Fraternity Chapel, whose conservation and restoration we started in 1990.

It is a cycle of the plague saints Sebastian and Rochus, who were very popular with the Augustinians.

28 Girdle Brotherhood Chapel, tondo

In the middle of the dividing arch there is a tondo with putto and banner, wreathed with painted rose petals and the inscription: SS SEBASTIANE ET ROCH' ORATE PRO NOBIS. Left, to the east, the cycle to Sebastian, right, to the west, the cycle to Rochus. The wall paintings are partially covered by the altar structure from 1713.

29 Paraphernalia Sebastian

The paraphernalia of Sebastian's martyrdom are shown in small stucco areas: putti and still lifes, e. g. which refer to the armor of

Sebastian as an officer of the Praetorian Guard and to the torture with the arrows.

30 Sebastian Diocletian

In two prominent stucco areas on the dividing arch, which are clearly visible from the nave, we see two scenes: *Sebastian before Emperor Diocletian* and *Sebastian's capture*. After the first Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529, the two Ottoman horsemen – the second is hidden behind the first – point quite realistically to the impending danger of a renewed attack by the Ottomans, who, as is well known, ruled Hungary and the Balkans.

31 Sebastian Martyrdom

In the barrel vault of the side chapel, Sebastian's martyrdom is depicted in a rectangular stucco field, an unusual night piece. I was immediately reminded of Tintoretto's night paintings in San Rocco in Venice, but also of Guido Reni and Mattia Preti's paintings. However, Sebastian is not presented here as a beautiful young man with an immaculate body, but rather ugly in a peculiar way, realistically slumped in on himself, also in a scenic context, with the widow Irene and two helpers, certainly an unusual pictorial invention, possibly even unique.

The Trinity is depicted in the middle of the barrel vault, unfortunately not well preserved.

32 Paraphernalia Rochus

On the west side of the chapel the paraphernalia of the legend of Rochus: pilgrim's utensils, the cute dog who steals bread for Rochus to bring to the desert and another still life with objects difficult to identify, for example a gourd (or a cheese?)

33 Rochus as a pilgrim

On the dividing arch, clearly visible from the presbytery, two scenes from the pilgrim life of Rochus. The scene of prayer in Jerusalem provided an opportunity to show architecture *di sotto in su*.

34 Rochus heals those sick with the plague

Today largely covered by the altar from 1713, the scene with Rochus healing the plague and infecting himself in the process. Unfortunately, one of the bodies lying on the ground was destroyed by a slit for an electric line.

35 Chapel of the Cross: Passion cycle

The second eastern side chapel, the cross chapel, shows a cycle of the Passion in the figurative ceiling paintings.

36 Paraphernalia Passion

The paraphernalia of the Passion include not only putti holding instruments of suffering and heads of angels, but also two still lifes in a prominent position, with instruments of suffering: lantern, robe, torch, sword and ear of Malchus, halberd and dice on the west side and, clearly visible below Carrying the Cross, the Purse and the Pieces of Silver, the Paten of Washing the Hands, the Sponge of Vinegar, the Spear of the Side Wound, the Pitcher and the INRI Tablet.

37 Passion I

In the barrel vault of the chapel, unfortunately partially covered by the altar from 1714, we see 3 scenes: Gethsemane (Mount of Olives), Flagellation and Crowning with Thorns with mocking. Very narrative, with a penchant for graphic storytelling, all three scenes in a nocturnal

darkness. For the crowning with thorns, the painter seems to be using older models.

38 Passion II

Both scenes, the Descent from the Cross and Ecce Homo, appear in a prominent position on the east side of the dividing arch, which is clearly visible from the nave. Both scenes were damaged by salt damage, possibly directly by the fire, and have been retouched accordingly.

39 Passion III

On the west side of the dividing arch, clearly visible from the presbytery, we find the last scenes of the Passion cycle: the Descent from the Cross and the Entombment. The stocky figures and the delicate colors are conspicuous.

40 NEMOMUK CHAPEL

Due to their state of preservation, the ceiling paintings of the Nepomuk chapel are less attractive. The iconography of the representations, of which I cannot even show all of the images in full, is as yet unknown.

41 NEKPOMUK II

Maybe one of you can give a hint to the subject of the paintings. I only show this here to present the material to be examined.

42 Anna chapel: William of Malavalle

The fourth side-chapel with preserved ceiling paintings from 1655, the St. Anna chapel on the north side of the church, contains the legend of St. William of Malavalle, a saint particularly venerated by the

Augustinian hermits, born in Poitou, who led a *'bad life'* and was converted to Catholicism by the Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. William died as a hermit in Malavalle near Siena.

43 William of Malavalle II

According to legend, he went on pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela in full armour. He was canonized in 1202 by Pope Innocent III.

44 painting technique

Some few words about painting technique:

The two detailed shots of the Girdle Brotherhood Chapel clearly show through the carton *engravings* that they are fresco paintings. At the same time, however, one can see from the tiny damaged areas that the grainy lime painting is detaching in a layer from the white wash underlying the painting. The grainy surface structure indicates sand as an aggregate of the lime paint. The impasto, i.e. the traces of the brushstroke indicate a pasty consistency of the paint. The paint was not re-compacted after application, not "polished" as Vitruvius puts it. The incipient sinter skin led to partial separations during the painting process, even in areas that were not executed as secco paintings from the outset, such as the paintings of the Anna Chapel and the Nepomuk Chapel.

45 Fresco-secco

We can discern two different systems for transferring the image idea to the wall: on the one hand, the cardboard with the 1:1 design, which is placed on the plaster surface that is still damp and plastic. The brush handle, which is pressed onto the wall along the cardboard drawing, leads through the slightly damp paper to grooves, "engravings" that remain visible during the painting process.

46 *quadratura*

On the other hand, the *quadratura*, i.e. the linear-perspective construction of shortened views of architecture developed to perfection in the 17th century, think of the famous "*Perspectiveae pictoroum atque pictorum*" by Andrea Pozzo from 1693-1702. The corresponding lines are scratched directly into the still-damp mortar or whitewash. Interestingly, in the depiction of Rochus in Jerusalem, both methods are used side by side, with the same goal of depicting architecture perspective, but at the same time the carton engraving of the kneeling figure is dispensed with. Conversely, in the depiction of Rochus with the plague sufferers, the *quadratura* as a scratching is dispensed with, but the cardboard is intensively traced with the brush stick.

47 Engravings and uncovering

The carton engravings lead to additional problems when uncovering them, because the overlay is difficult to remove there.

48 author?

I do not want to comment on the authorship of the ceiling paintings, I lack the specialized knowledge of the historic sources. The comparison offered here with Carpoforo Tencalla's signed wall painting in the Dominican church, the Battle of Muret from 1776, i.e. twenty years after Mariabrunn, may be far-fetched, but it at least encourages the scholarly attention to the wall paintings in the pilgrimage church of Mariabrunn they merit.