

Small Sacral Objects as a Landscape Determination in Croatia

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Abstract. Occurrence of small sacral architecture in Croatia dated from the period of the first record of Croats existence (from early Middle Ages onward). Regardless the place (urban agglomeration, rural area or open landscape such as fields, forests, meadows, mountains and the like) where people live they have always been followed by small sacral architectures. They are characterized by architecture and garden design, occurrence purpose and use, appearance place and almost always determination of the space it is located. The purpose is always related to a religion belief being the symbol of the Christian affiliation. Materials and methods used are common for investigating landscape values such as field touring and valorization, historical research of archives, photographs, clipping archive, recording new data, making surveys and the like. This paper aims to prove specific values of small sacral architecture within the landscape values of Croatia and represent this aspect of human intervention as a specialty of traditional belief and space design.

Keywords: small sacral objects, Croatia, Slavonia, landscape

INTRODUCTION

Occurrence of small sacral objects in Croatia can be divided into several main spatial and logic orientations. It can be concluded that they appeared to thank saints or Godhead persons (votive chapels and minute churches -poklonci); to protect field, mountain or forest workers from thunder; to take care of travellers on roads or see (road crosses); to designate border (border stone sculpture); to point out a certain holy place (miracle water source and the like); remembrance to some event or a crossroad sign). Some authors consider chapels and minute churches as a mode of settlement and place symbol; as places of the social interaction and monuments i.e. place protecting and generating memory to some events important for the communion (Belaj and Urem, 2010). In spite of being recorded in the Register of protected cultural heritage due to very valuable architecture and art (frescoes, drawings, sculptures, fences and the like), valorization of complete architectonic wholes (building and the garden) has not been conducted yet. This paper aims to show design of small sacral architectures in Croatia and their great value within determination of a complete landscape value of the place they originated from.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper contains: field collected data, required photo-material; available literature studied; valorization of space and landscape values done relative to landscape typology. Polls of the place residents where the oldest chapels and minute churches (poklonci) had been found were conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The area of the Republic of Croatia is characterized by several special relief units such as plain, mountainous region and Mediterranean area. Landscape typology was described as: agricultural, rural, urban, forest, marine and the like. Within each of the landscape type there are architecturally different designed small sacral buildings occurred repeatedly during the centuries. They become a value determinant of both landscape and traditional culture. They are incorporated in all human activities and their value is the same in the pure nature, urban or rural agglomeration.

By the historical tradition, reasons of their appearance are diverse. By the purpose they may be divided into several basic orientations (Tab. 1). From Tab. 1 it can be concluded that cross is mostly widespread used but, by the arrangement density and place where it is always seen, small sacral objects represent the landscape determination. For example, unlike Istria where there are no crosses (mostly chapels or minute churches (poklonci), other parts of Croatia are characterized by thickly spreaded crosses. Chapels are always votive or grateful as well as minute churches (poklonci). While landscape crosses occur equily in both arable and natural agglomeration, chapels and minute churches are more related to rural and urban ones.

Terminology varies depends on the county and in most cases they are crucifixes, road crosses, field or milestone crosses, chapels and minute churches (poklonci) (Tab. 2- Poll 2009.g., Alka Turalija, villages: Koritna, Babska, Legrad, Koprivnica, Vinica, Dubrovnik, Ugljan, Roč). According to Španiček the term “poklonac” is unknown as such in Slavonia and these architectural forms are called here “chapels” or “small chapels” (Španiček, 2002).

This is also the case in Istria. Dubrovnik and Konavle (surrounding) residents call them small churches. Regardless aforesaid terms other ones are often used such as crucifix, saint (at saint), cross (at a cross) and by the water (if a small sacral object is related to a miracle water and the like).

Architectonically, each object is relative to both the period it originated from and architecture of the place it was constructed. Thus, one can distinguish baroque chapel built in Istria (Fig. 1) or baroque chapel built in Slavonia (Fig. 2).

Tab. 1

The basic orientations of sacral buildings from Croatia

Historical purpose tradition	chapels	crosses	Minute churches (poklonci)
1. Patron saints of –families, properties, houses, places..)	X	X	X
2. Thankgivings to – some saints and patrons	X	X	X
3. Vows to – saints, Holy Virgin, Jesus and the like	X		X
4. Calvaries and sanctuaries	X	X	X
5. Road crosses and crusifixes - patrons of travellers and roads		X	X
6. Milestones (crosses and crusifixes)		X	X
7. Field (crosses and crusifixes) – patrons of fields, crops, workers and farmers		X	
8. Miracle places – water, caves and the like	X X	X	X

Designed by: Alka Turalija, 2010

Terms "Small sacral objects" in the Republic of Croatia-Poll, 2009

Terms	Koritna	Babska	Legrad	Koprivnica	Vinica	Dubrovnik	Ugljan	Roč
Crusifix/Cross	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Small churches						X		
Road crosses	X	X	X	X	X			
Milestone crosses	X	X	X	X	X			
Field crosses	X	X	X	X	X			
Chapels	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Minute churches			X		X			

Designed by: Alka Turalija, 2010. g.

Turks conquered Slavonia in the period 1526 - 1552. Thus, during the 16th and 17th century very hard times were experienced by the Catholic church which was, prior the Turkish burglary, a dominant spiritual power in this region. When Turks came to this area they destroyed churches and monasteries turning the most beautiful ones into mosques. All clergy was dispelled and killed. This Slavonian devastated area was settled by Franciscans from Bosnia who tried to maintain religious life and comfort people. In spite of being often dispelled by Turks, their mendicant order was active without external influence. Thus Turks were followed by Franciscans in their conquests. Since Franciscans didn't leave the people they shared difficult fate with, commitment and closeness developed between them and believers. Franciscans, together with people, took a part in folk customs. Destruction of Catholic sanctuaries showed Turks' relation toward Catholics and their religion. Only 50 (approx. 10%) of almost 500 medieval parish, monastery churches and chapels were not destroyed, two monasteries in Našice and Velika (Slavonia region). All other churches were destroyed by Turks or time ravaged since they were not allowed to repair. Turks didn't allow people to build new churches using solid material (repairs were done rarely with the Emperor permission). Worship masses were conducted at graveyards, in the houses or even in the meadow at the improvised altar. So, out of the necessity, modest wooden churches began to be built. They were erected mostly in the 17th century when the Turkish intolerance was less towards Catholics (e.g. small wooden chapel near Cernik- Slavonia built in 1630). There were also some other wooden churches whose appearance was not known. They were likely simple and modest due to the then conditions. After Slavonia got rid of the Turks wooden churches and chapels started to be built (18th century). It was difficult for two reasons: urgent renewal of spiritual life required and poor financial situation which unabled building from the solid material. In the 17th century small wooden churches represented base of the suppressed religion. In the released Slavonia they were centers of spreading religion in the 18th century⁶. In the 19th and beginning of 20th century they gave way to masonry. However, Croatia suffered a patriotic war which predicted the further destiny of small sacral architecture. The Slavonia situation after the war was the same as the one from the post – Turk period (end of 17th and beginning of the 18th century). Many churches were destroyed and financial means were required for building new ones. Thus, simple churches and small sacral objects were built aiming to revive tradition of the national sacral architecture. The aforesaid brought a conclusion that small sacral architecture dated from 16th and 17th century continued its centuries old tradition which deserves our attention for it is a seldom cultural property with a powerful monumental message (Španiček, 1995; Cvetnić, 2002; Černicki and Forenbaher, 2008).

Many sacral buildings were damaged by both the direct and indirect war operations during our patriotic war and unprofessional treatment. For example, 328 sacral objects⁷ were

damaged in Đakovo and Srijem diocese. Total of 164 churches and chapels were destroyed (24 completely, 72 very and 68 less damaged): three monasteries were completely destroyed, four very and four less ; 10 cemeteries and 33 outdoor crosses (Tab. 3).

Tab. 3

Destroyed and damaged objects of the Catholic church in the Patriotic war

Objects	Completely destroyed	Very damaged	Damaged	Total
Parish churches	65	100	101	266
Other churches	51	70		306
Chapels	88	79	87	254
Parish houses and halls	66	85	135	286
Monasteries	7	24	49	80
Cemeteries	15	42	43	100
Outdoor crosses	88	16	30	134
Total	380	416	630	1426

The oldest monuments of the small sacral architecture preserved in Croatia region dated from IV century, fig. 1 (remains of the small St. John church within the nature reserve Talašćica). The most valuable are original designs of wooden chapels the oldest of which is St. Barbara chapel in Velika Mlaka from 1642 (Fig. 2). Some authors call crosses as “cross trees”. Many chapels and minute churches (poklonci) constructed in 16th and 17th century were destroyed during the Turks’ conquest. Wooden chapels located between the rivers Drava and Kupa have also been described and preserved.



Fig. 1. Remains of the St. John church
Source: Nature park Telašćica, 2010



Fig. 2. St. Barbara chapel in Velika Mlaka
Source:hr.wikipedia.org/

Continuity of building small sacral objects remained preserved and their design is in harmony with architecture and landscape of the period they originated from. Determination of the agricultural landscape whole can not be imagined without a cross or crucifix protecting: crops from diseases, pests or hail and a farmer from lightening (Fig. 3). Crossroad of many paths within urban and rural area is determined by a cross or crucifix (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). It is commonly that crucifixes are located under the mulberry tree (*Morus alba* or *Morus nigra*) which used to designate main roads in a line of trees (Fig. 5). There are fences surrounding cross, crucifix or tiny church (poklonac). They belong to a pertaining garden which almost always accompanies such an object. Apart from the garden full of flowers, a vase with flowers is also obligatory staff (Fig. 3; Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).



Fig. 3. Field crusifix,
Thanks to keeping off hails,floods
and frosts, patron of crops and
farmers; Source: Alka Turalija, 2009.



Fig. 4. Crusifix
on the crossroads
Source: Gabrijela Jurić,2009



Fig. 5. Crusifix under
the mulberry tree (*Morus alba*)

Many tiny churches are located by the roads (Fig. 6) and remind people of some event or vow. Some of them are incorporated in a walking trail or landscape units (Fig. 7), yards (Fig. 8), fences (Fig. 9) or house facades (Fig. 10). People often cross themselves or pray in front of them. Thus, prayer is a daily Croats tradition on places where small sacral objects are constructed.



Fig. 6. Road minute church
Source:Gabrijela Jurić, 2009



Fig. 7. Minute church within a walking trail
in the landscape garden; Source:Alka Turalija, 2009



Fig. 8. Minutechurch in the yard
Source: Gabrijela Jurić, 2009



Fig. 8a. Minute church in the barton
Source: Gabrijela Jurić, 2009



Fig. 9. Minute church as a part of the wooden fence; Source: Gabrijela Jurić, 2009



Fig. 10. Minute church as a part of stone wall; Source: Gabrijela Jurić, 2009

There are also some other customs leading to small sacral objects construction. Traditionally, they are located in the vineyards and worship St. Vincent or St. Martin. While St. Vincent deserves credits for protecting vineyard from various disasters and is related to the first vineyard cutting (Fig. 11), St. Martin convert must into wine and is meritorious for wine quality (Fig. 12). The vineyard protector fiest is celebrated in vineyards throughout the Republic of Croatia on 22 January starting with blessing vineyards and prayer. St. Martin fiest is celebrated on 11 November whereby must turning into a quality wine is blessed. Calvaries are mostly related to some miracle or saint water sources. These are pilgrim places and are widespread in almost all places in Croatia (Fig. 13; Fig. 14).



Fig. 11. St. Vincent fiest in the vineyard Source: Alka Turalija, 2009



Fig. 12. St. Martin statue Source: Alka Turalija, 2009



Fig. 13. Calvary in Bapska Source: Alka Turalija, 2010



Fig. 14. Chapel in Bapska, miracle water source Source: Alka Turalija, 2010

Small sacral objects can be seen very often in the Slavonia region. Landscape with their appearance varies and they can be found in both urban and rural agglomerations as well as in fields, forests and cliffs.

CONCLUSIONS

After considering the small sacral objects frequency within Slavonia region and throughout Croatia it can be concluded that they are basic characteristics of arable land in Croatia. Within the traditional and cultural values, these objects represent a collection of various entities related to Roman Catholicism of Croatian people. Expression of religion and saints worship became the main determination of all landscape types in the Republic of Croatia. By the design they are architectonically very different (crosses, minute churches, chapels and the like), each of which consists of several garden-technical elements: object, fence, garden. In spite of being recognized as especially valuable architecture or art monuments and law-protected, landscape architecture has not valued them properly. Thus, real valorization within the different landscape types is forthcoming. This paper aims to incorporate small sacral objects into valorization of landscape values as a basic determinant defining them.

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