

RIGA CATHEDRAL - BALANCE BETWEEN RESTORATION AND USE

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Introduction

Riga Cathedral is the seat of the Archbishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL). On July 25, 1211 during a solemn ceremony, Bishop Albert laid the foundation stone of the cathedral. Ever since, the Cathedral has undergone and survived rebuilding and extension, countless reconstructions and restorations, as well as repair works. The accomplishment of these works was often defined by the competence and experience characteristic of the time, as well as different political and economic aspects. As a result, Riga Cathedral nowadays displays a whole variety and mixture of different architectural styles – from late Romanesque to Art Nouveau. Nowadays Riga Cathedral not only preserves historical, architectural, artistic and cultural values, but also is actively involved in spiritual and social life and activities of Latvia.

Building history

The foundations of Riga Cathedral were laid in 1211 following the principles of Romanesque Cathedral building. Initially the rectangular choir with three semi-circular apses was built, and in subsequent construction stages the nave and two apses supplemented it. During the

construction process the Romanesque architectural style was gradually replaced by the Gothic, and the original material used - limestone blocks - was substituted by red bricks. As a result, the proportions and composition of the Cathedral changed. The original design of the interior included a spatial division by eight cross-shaped piers and single height vaults for the naves and aisles. The construction of the Cathedral was completed in the second half of the 13th century.

In the first half of the 15th century the height of the nave was increased and the church was remodeled from a hall-to basilica-type building, at the same time occurred the heightening of the tower. The Cathedral was further extended during the 15th centuries, e.g. the compartments between buttresses were transformed into flank chapels, and the tower acquired a steep pyramidal spire.

The current Baroque spire was built in 1776 (master Kramer). The Baroque pediment and cupola roof of the east side chancel appeared in 1727.

In 1959, Soviet régime arguing that the parish cannot maintain the church, banished the parish from Cathedral and on the ground of renovation works

removed all with religion related items including the altar, sculptures, chairs etc..

The first worship was held shortly before independence at 1988. Only twenty years after Independence on July 9 2005, the Parliament of Republic of Latvia adopted a special law concerning Riga Cathedral, which returned the rights of the ownership to the Cathedral back to Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) and assigned setting up a special board of administration of the Cathedral.

The State of Conservation of the Riga Cathedral

Riga Cathedral was included in the World Monuments Fund (New York, USA) Watchlist 2006 of 100 most endangered Monuments of the World. Despite a lot of carried out restoration works since 2005 still today all the problems in the Cathedral is not solved:

- The biological damages of wooden constructions in the upper part of tower are observed. The damages are caused by fungus and wood-fritter due to lack of ventilation and water condensation of inner side of cooper roof covering;
- The gaps and cracks in the masonry constructions and vaults due to biodegradation of wooden piles in the foundation and settlement of the soil;
- The artistic heritage objects are damaged by humidity, salts and unsuitable climatic conditions;

Balance between use and conservation

The different kind of problems during conservation activities must be balanced:

- The microclimatic conditions necessary for heritage objects and amenities for human activities (concerts, visitors);
- The space and time for the parish activities (Services, Sunday school and etc.) and conservation works;

Social activities

During the conservation process a lot of social activities to ensure the public involvement were carried out, like:

- A special home page with direct online translations of conservation works was introduced;
- To explain a conservation projects, per example, Organ facade restoration, a special movies were prepared;
- To stimulate the interest of the next generation in the Heritage a special Children day was introduced. The children can take part in different attraction, per example, to made a wooden organ pipe together with organ master;
- A special social movement "My Cathedral" is organized by Dean of Cathedral to restore the public importance of Riga Cathedral and to give to monument a new and modern value. The movement tries to create a new Cultural center of the Riga. In movement participates popular personalities of Latvian culture and art, as freewill ambassadors, but the main aim of the project is to attract as many people of different generations who Cathedral is a personal and important as a significant event in their lives;

- Most important and most difficult is to ensure uninterrupted Cathedrals life (service, concerts, visitors) during the conservation works.

Conclusions

The actual state of conservation of religious heritage sites is deeply related

with public attitude to the religious sites.

To get good results in the conservation works extremely important is to ensure public involvement.

Conservation works should not or as minimum interrupt the daily life of the heritage objects.