

“Eternal Battle” with Compromises and Constraints: Revitalisation of Medieval Architecture

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Abstract. In the interests of the Catholic Church and German merchants, from the 13th to the 14th century, the territories of the present-day Latvia and Estonia, then called Livonia, were Christianized with the methods of the Crusades and included in the international economic processes. The feudal states of the German Order and bishops were established to keep the lands of the conquered Baltic tribes in obedience. Their main task was to guarantee the security of the west-east trade routes and to develop the economy in their own interests. To protect their borders and roads, the German Order, bishops and their vassals built dozens of fortresses, most of which are now in ruins.

The Dobele Castle is a fortress built in the 14th century for the administration of a larger area, consisting of a small convent-type castle and a large courtyard fortified with protective walls to station troops and deploy weapons. As a result of the Livonian Wars, the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia was established in 1562, and the Dobele Castle became the property of the Duke. In the second half of the 16th century, one of the first Lutheran chapels in the Baltics was built in one wing of the medieval fortress, and the Landtag meetings were held there regularly. At the turn of the 16th-17th centuries, the dukes' residential building was erected adjoining the medieval castle. However, since the 1730s, both the castle and the chapel had been abandoned and, by the 21st century, were in ruins.

Respecting the public desire to change the emotional semantics of the castle ruins in the city centre, and in cooperation with the Dobele municipality, the architect Pēteris Blūms since 2008 has been looking for an optimal solution for the conservation of the ruins and revitalization of the chapel. The intensive construction and conservation stage began in 2018 and concluded in 2021 with the revitalization of the chapel and its adaptation to multifunctional applications. Under the leadership of the experienced architect Pēteris Blūms, many technical and technological solutions were developed for considerate treatment of the historical walls and their visual appearance, as well as for the provision of service and comfort that meets modern requirements.

Key words: medieval architecture, ruins, conservation, revitalisation, chapel

Why restore?

In the history of the north-eastern part of Europe the process of Christianisation began in the second part of the 12th century. The territories of the contemporary Latvia and Estonia had already been invaded from the east by the rulers of early Slavonic states of Pskov, Smolensk and Polotsk. The eastern territories of the contemporary Estonia and Latvia underwent Christianisation according to the orthodox Byzantine ritual. The coastline of the Baltic Sea in the north-west marks off Estonia and Latvia, and it is from this direction that Danish and German missionaries, pilgrims, tradesmen and knights at the end of 12th century invaded Baltic territories. German knights and bishops exercised repressive Christianisation, abolished Slavonic tributary obligations, introduced Roman Catholic confession, and secured the border of the Holy Roman Empire in the east of contemporary Estonia and Latvia.

In a very short time – from 13-th to 14-th centuries – the bishops on mission and military organisations established in Latvian and Estonian territories several feudal units – bishoprics and

Teutonic Order states. To defend them, a network of fortifications and an unusually big number of castles of different sizes were built. Evaluating only the most significant castles, Estonian historian of architecture Armin Tuulse considered 62 castles of the Teutonic Order, 34 episcopal castles with 6 fortified monasteries, and at least 37 fortified settlements of their vassals or liegemen [9, 433]. During the First Livonian War in the 16th century between the Teutonic Order and the Russian tsar Ivan the Terrible, and the next Russian invasion during the Northern War in 1710 under the tsar Peter the Great, mostly all medieval castles and fortifications were damaged, and by today 90% of them have turned into “romantic ruins” in Latvia’s and Estonia’s ecosystems, with only about 10 % having been adapted to museums as well as administrative and cultural functions.

The author of the article has chosen the fortified Teutonic Order Master’s castle of the Dobele city (German *Doblen*) as a case study because of its very long history of construction and maintenance, complexity of architectural compounds, and an



Fig. 1. Ruins of the Dobele Castle with a view of the revitalised chapel [photo by the author]



Fig. 2. A.G.W. Petzold. Ruins of the Dobele castle. Water-colour, 1846



Fig. 3. Ruins of the Dobele Castle, 2000
[photo by the author]

impressive variety of ideas for its revitalisation and adaptation to the cultural needs of Latvia's society nowadays. Why so? When looking for patterns and motivations for revitalisation of the architecture, excellent theoretical basis of various national approaches to regeneration of cultural heritage was found in the book "*Geschichte der Rekonstruktion. Konstruktion der Geschichte*" that followed the Exhibition at the Pinacoteca of Modern Art in Munich 2010. But even this outstanding work with the descriptions of so many case studies may not give a definitive prescript to the Hamlet dilemma – "to revitalise or not to revitalise" one destroyed

monument or damaged artefact of ancient architecture, because the preservation of ruins is the same time an Ideal and Utopia [2, 178].

Already for several centuries poets and artists of the Romanticism had been inspired by ruins. The Estonia-born Baltic German painter August Georg Wilhelm Petzold (1794-1859) as an artist of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences in 1846 participated on an expedition and created several water-colour paintings with the ruined Dobele Castle [7, 25]. Before the era of photography they helped to fix the condition of the original substance, but at the same time embodied romantic love to artefacts of the past and artificial symbolic flair of a historical monument.

But the photo from 2000 with a contemporary view of the ruins conveys a feeling of emotional depression which in the middle of a growing city creates an unavoidable emotional contrast. The philosophical concept of the revitalisation of the ruined castle came along with the conscious public "drive" that motivated to look on the ruined Dobele Castle as a symbol of indispensable cultural identity and create in the public consciousness a more optimistic emotion that "the process is not finished yet", that "the ruins do not mean stagnation or death".

To what level does the conservation and restoration may invade the original substance? To what stage the reconstruction may be accepted an approach to recreate a historical truth or to build up an illusion of the past? These philosophic questions every National heritage board, historians, architects, restorers had to answer in endless debates with the society and find out compromises with emotional demands and rational solutions considering time, economic and understanding of cultural values.

First Protestant chapel as a value

At the end of 13th century the local tribal warriors under the pressure of the Teutonic Order gave up, left their Dobele Castle, moved southward and integrated in the territories of the contemporary Lithuania. The erection of the stone-built castle on the castle mound of a previous local Latvian wooden fortification is to be dated by the time of the Teutonic Order's Master Eberhard Monheim's arrival in 1335, and was motivated by a need to defend territories from the pagans. In the chronicle by Hermann of Wartberg, written between 1370 and 1378, this fact is described in the following way "*Anno 1335 idem magister construxit castrum Dobbeleen in carnisprivio contra infideles* [3, 76]. An old plan depicting the situation in 1659 exposes the whole complex of the castle with a spacious yard, buildings for the guard and the housemaster, as well as lengthwise extended residential building of the Duchess Anna of Mecklenburg, built in late 16th-early 17th century and being used until the beginning of the 18th century [4, 328].

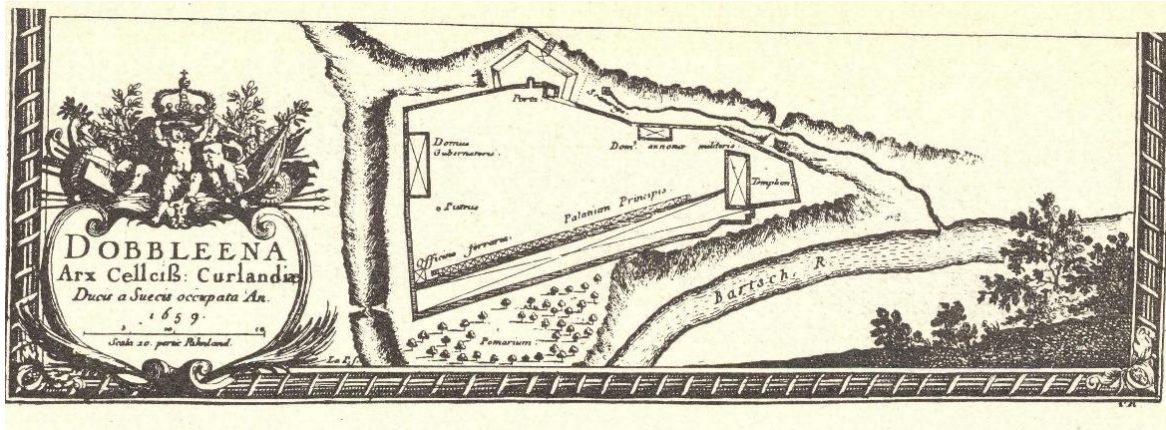


Fig. 4. Plan of the Dobele Castle, 1659



Fig. 5. Steel-and-glass construction as replacement of the ruined wall [photo by the author]

The northern part of the castle shows another building added to the ducal residence as a perpendicular appendix. And this is an essential object for the current article, the chapel. Because of the orientation in the representative and large yard and the excellent visibility of the landscape already in the 15th century, the corners of the medieval castle accommodated four oriel-towers with a very decorative ogive frieze in the Gothic style of the time. But in 1711, the chapel was covered with tiles, and the towers – with roofing iron.

The first Protestant chapel in the Baltic countries, built just a few years after the foundation of the Duchy of Courland, illustrates the result of the ducal prescript from the 28th February, 1567, to establish 70 Lutheran parishes and to build 70 new churches [5, 5]. The Duke of Courland, Gotthard Kettler, was motivated to give a public encouraging example and, in the last quarter of the 16th century, he ordered to transform the former wing of the Teutonic Order's castle and adapt it to serve as an annual assembly hall for the nobility – the Landtag. Historic photographs from 1905 illustrate the ruined chapel with broken vaults and walls, and nobody could imagine that the ducal chapel once had been covered with three magnificent vaults. Looking at the well-preserved Protestant chapels of the Gottorf castle in Schleswig (Germany) and Frederiksborg on

the outskirts of Copenhagen (Denmark) we may imagine a similar picture in Dobele too, because the inventory from 1711 describes the chapel in the following words: “painted altar, pulpit, confessional and benches, marble baptismal font and the ducal box with a fireplace” [8, 128]. Until 1730, some of the premises in the castle were still in use and service was held in the chapel, but very soon after that the castle was abandoned and turned into ruins.

How to restore?

Monitoring by the National Board for Protection of Cultural Heritage and protection of authenticity in the chapel ruins present just one side of the coin, while the other is the immaterial gain for the public. In this situation the architect Pēteris Blūms, by launching his project, since 2008 has tried to position the conservation of the ruins as a process that brings back not only the semiotic of the CASTLE amidst the city, but also links the consciousness of the population to an upcoming self-evaluation and understanding that “this is not RUINS any more”, it is something more, asserting life and progress [6, 19]. From the very beginning, when contemplating the methods of protection and revitalisation, the architect P. Blūms did not think of benefits like comfort, heating, ventilation or a possible new function. The initial idea was to protect the authenticity of the entrance, walls, windows and the remaining part of the only oriel-tower. With a view to this, the approach to and methods of conservation have been very innovative.

The crumbled part of the facade wall was not filled up with a similar stone-and-brick mixture imitating the original substance, but replaced with a steel-and-glass construction like a huge window with an additional option for an alternative exit. The broken wall below one of the six windows permitted to accommodate the entrance for disabled persons. The window apertures were closed with neutral steel structures that were filled up with regular glass plates. But each of the window frames is different in size and had to be carefully fitted into the apertures.



Fig. 6. Exhibition room in the former eastern tower [photo by the author]



Fig. 7. Revitalised former chapel [photo by the author]

Three centuries of the ruined building had washed out of public memory the fact that there used to be a basement with windows under the chapel, too. The archaeological excavations cleaned the basement as a utilitarian space and opened the windows that let light in. Every architectural and technical solution is original from the point of view of design, construction and craftsmanship. Technical infrastructure like staff kitchen, WC, lockers and even the underground space of the former basement were made attractive by means of contemporary design and IT solutions.

New old space and its functions

After the restoration the chapel had turned into multifunctional space for exhibitions, workshops, concerts and other events, but the former eastern tower with the help of metal and concrete

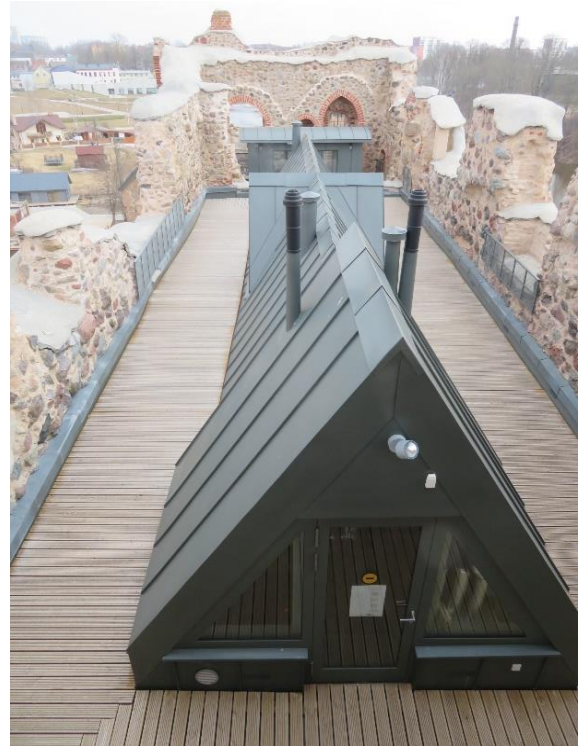


Fig. 8. Sightseeing route and technical equipment on the chapel roof [photo by the author]

constructions was divided into two floors like it had originally been and adapted for two exhibition rooms. One of them, in aesthetically neutral showcases displays the artefacts of the period when during first millennium AD the Dobele Castle served as a fortification for pre-Christian Baltic tribes.

The second exhibition room tells about the history of gardening and pharmacy in the 1630-1640s, when the Duchess Elisabeth Magdalena got very deeply interested in cosmetic and medicinal properties of different flowers, trees and herbs. In 1640, the chemist and botanist Marcus Ruhel reported that roses were in full bloom in the Dobele Castle gardens, in particular the *Province* species. He asked which products the Duchess would prefer to be made of petals: “Rose sugar, syrup, honey or flowers” and added that for the Duchess he had added a bowl of red currants and three figs downed by the wind [1, 41].

The revitalisation of the chapel interior caused the integration of new stairs as well as innovative hoisting steel-and-metal-lath constructions for disabled persons. Niches and former door apertures leading to the medieval latrine were turned into showcases with the help of framed glass constructions while technical pipelines and cables can be visually traced running through the damaged chimney and fireplace in the corner of the chapel. Wooden balks (beams), painted in the colour of the walls, were carefully inserted into holes cut into the original material of the walls.



Fig. 9. Oriel-tower after conservation
[photo by the author]



Fig. 10. Coverage of the upper part of walls with fibro-concrete
[photo by the author]

The idea of how to hide the revitalised chapel inside the ruined walls from the outside view was realised with the help of a deepened new ceiling between the outer walls that does not encroach on the outer silhouette of the ruins. Besides, the roof terrace on the ceiling has a double function, offering a sightseeing route for the visitors and displaying the ground heating and ventilation boxes that are otherwise hidden from the spectator.

The highest point of the ruined chapel – the south-west oriel-tower – was first made accessible only during the conservation works in 2016. It surprised the architects by the amount of the damaged walls and fragile original constructions. To stop further erosion it was necessary first to stabilise

the walls, window apertures and decorative details of the tower. Following the studies on late medieval stylistics, the architect Pēteris Blūms used the method of anastylosis to fix the erupted window aperture and the twin arch, and levelled the upper part of the wall. Further, the conservation goal was to devise the construction in order to reinforce the walls of the oriel-tower to the extent that the spiral-shaped stairs and steel columns could support a post-modern spire, to protect the walls from atmospheric pollution and create symbolic decoration for the silhouette of the ruins.

In the course of several approaches to the conservation of the ruins a number of methods for the protection of the upper part of the walls had been tested and applied in the volatile Baltic climate. The oldest and simplest one was to cover the ruined wall with a layer of concrete or cement, or lime mortar. This method has been known already from the 19th century, but it provided only a short-time solution of the problem. The method practised by us over the last 30 years with the coverage of turf put on synthetic canvas of geotextile does not give a long-lasting effect and may cause infiltration of water inside the wall. The contemporary solution used by the architect Pēteris Blūms may bring to mind a similarity with the forms of Antonio Gaudi's "sky garden" architecture. However, separated by a cellular plastic pad, the upper layer of fibro-concrete has been emphasized by our experienced architect as the method with a long-term guarantee. Furthermore, the legitimacy of such an approach has already been demonstrated on other medieval objects of architecture in Latvia.

Conclusion

Every conservation and, moreover, revitalisation express the characteristic handwriting of the architect, his vision and talent, the result of synergy between the architect and the craftsmen, as well as embody the features of the time and the level of material culture and economics. On the one hand, the case of the revitalisation of the Dobele Castle chapel with the means and approaches of the 21st century fixes the authenticity of the historic substance; on the other hand, it witnesses the gains of the public who may emotionally evaluate the benefits they have obtained. The case study on the conservation and revitalisation of the ruined Dobele Castle serves to illustrate the architect's response to the social demands and documents the contemporary approach to the philosophy of protection of monuments of medieval architecture in Latvia.

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Kopsavilkums. Rakstā „*Mūžīgā cīņa* starp kompromisiem un ierobežojumiem: viduslaiku arhitektūras revitalizācija” ir veltīts 14. gadsimtā celtās Vācu ordeņa Livonijā pilsnovada pārvaldnieka – komtura – Dobeles rezidences konservācijas un restaurācijas pasākumu kompleksa raksturojumam. Kopš 2008. gada ir tikusi realizēta arhitekta, restaurācijas teorētiķa un praktiķa Pētera Blūma izstrādātā koncepcija. Pēc pirmsrestaurācijas izpētes ar Eiropas savienības fondēto līdzekļu un pašvaldības finansiālo atbalstu vairāku gadu garumā pakāpeniski ir tikusi īstenota šī pilsētas centrā novietotā viduslaiku arhitektūras pieminekļa konservācija, daļēja restaurācija un revitalizācija. Tās sociālais uzdevums bija jaunā kvalitātē gan emocionāli, gan fiziski atdot Dobeles pilsētas un novada sabiedrībai par neglābjami erodējušu un tādēļ no kultūras pieminekļu atjaunošanas viedokļa bezcerīgu kultūras objektu. Dobeles pilsdrupu kompleksa kā Vācu ordeņa konventa pils saglabāto daļu unikālā vērtība ir 16. gadsimta otrajā pusē par agrīnu protestantu kapelu pārbūvētais korpuss. Saskaņā ar arhitekta Pētera Blūma koncepciju šī pilsdrupu daļa ir tikusi konservēta ar tradicionālām metodēm un aizsargāta no tālākas mūru erozijas. Atsaucoties pilsētas sabiedrības un pašvaldības publiski paustajām domām par pilsdrupu revitalizāciju kā sociāli optimizējošu uzdevumu, restaurācijas projekta autors atrada gan tehnisku, gan vizuāli estētisku risinājumu kā piešķirt kādreizējās kapelas korpusam praktiski izmantojamas ēkas īpašības, nenodarot kaitējumu pilsdrupu autentiskumam un arhitektūras vizuālajam tēlam. Revitalizācijas rezultātā 2021. gadā noslēgušies pilsdrupu konservācijas, restaurācijas un adaptācijas pasākumi ir atdevuši sabiedriskai aprītei viduslaiku sakrālās kultūras pieminekli – kādreizējo pils kapelu. Tās pieejamību gan plašai sabiedrībai, gan apmeklētājiem ar īpašām vajadzībām nodrošina ar mūsdienu tehniskajām iespējām radītas arhitektūras detaļas. Viduslaiku kapelas mūros iegūtā un revitalizētā vairāku līmeņu telpa rada precedentu drupu stāvoklī esoša arhitektūras pieminekļa sociāli atbildīgai adaptācijai par mūsdienu sabiedrību optimizējošu objektu un muzeificētu kultūras norišu vietu.