

Restoration of the Chapel of Padre Faria in Ouro Preto, MG - Brazil

DE MARCO Meniconi Rodrigo Otávio^{1, a}
and DE OLIVEIRA Benedito Tadeu^{2, b}

¹Ladeira João de Paiva, Brazil

²Rua Tomé Afonso, Brazil

^arodrigomeniconi@uol.com.br, ^bbeneditoo@uaigiga.com.br

Abstract The article deals with the restorations made in 2004, describing in addition several previous interventions, in particular, the work made by restorers from the Institute for National Historic and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN, in the 1940's, wherein still resonated the procedures of Viollet-le-Duc. The article seeks to illustrate the double pathway that characterizes the role of Brazilian architects in the first steps in our modern architecture, showing how this very chapel could have served as inspiration for one of the most significant creations of the architect Oscar Niemeyer: the Chapel of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the Pampulha Complex in Belo Horizonte. This claim is justified in the operation of various factors, as much those relative to the esthetic and ideological motivations of the Modernist Movement in Brazil, as those linked to the programmatic operation of these architects in two professional sectors; that of the renovation and conservation of the architecture of the Baroque Mineira and the employment and use of its vocabulary in the production of our first modern architecture.

A comparison, albeit superficial, between the Chapel of Padre Faria and that of Saint Francis reveals the presence of common points; the same simplicity and austerity in the overall treatment, the employment of the same principles in the distribution and articulation of the spaces and volumetric solutions, the use of similar compositional elements, equal sensibility in the positioning of the monument in relation to the surrounding landscape, the attainment of the effects of light and shade in the interior, the same pictorial treatment of the surfaces and the integration of the various forms of artistic expression as the result of the achievement of a mystic and contemplative atmosphere. The restoration work demonstrates these historic, artistic and environmental values.

Keywords: Architecture, preservation, historical heritage

Introduction

The Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary of Padre Faria of Ouro Preto was probably constructed in 1710, originally consisting of a small chapel designed to accommodate the image of Our Lady of Delivery. Around 1740 the White Order of Our Lady of the Rosary was moved there, with the result that the original adobe chapel was replaced by a new construction, more elegant and solidly built with stone and mortar, and now dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. In the middle of the XVIII century, 1756, in commemoration of the grant of a papal indulgence, an imposing cross with three traverse bars was erected to decorate the churchyard.

The wainscot of the nave was painted in oils in 1927, and in the same period the principal facade was completely remodeled, during a stylistic restoration, carried out by the engineer Epaminondas de Macedo, at the initiative of Gustavo Barroso, director of the National Historic Museum.

While it altered an historic document and a particular artistic expression, the modification of the frontispiece, carried out in conformity to criteria and styles of Viollet-Le-Duc, did not seriously compromise the figurative values of the monument.



Figure 1, Figure 2: The Chapel of Padre Faria, before and after the stylistic restoration (IFAC/UFOP archives, Ouro Preto, MG, Brazil)

The previous facade, possibly remodeled when replacing the original, had a curvilinear pediment obtained by means of the articulation of concave and convex segments.

With the creation of the Institute for National Historic and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN, the chapel was designated an historical building in 08/09/1939. Its bronze bell, bearing the engraved date of 1750, was the only one to toll for the deceased Tiradentes, martyr of the (Minas Conspiracy), patron of citizenship and national hero, and hanged in Rio de Janeiro in the 21st of April, 1792. Later, President Juscelino Kubitschek would take the bell to Brasilia to ring in the inauguration of the new national capital on the 21st of April, 1960.

Description and Critical Analysis

Constructed on a site originally at the limits of the village of Padre Faria, the Chapel constitutes one of the prominent marks in the city landscape, playing a part in the configuration of the neighborhood and marking the beginning of a ravine formed by the river in this stretch, but also acting as a reference point in the urban fabric as a whole. Placed on a green and open site, the building was not constrained by the limits and structure imposed by the road system or neighboring constructions. As a result the conception uses a scheme employing a collection of small blocks, with a separation and hierarchy of the various environments and compositional elements, and placed within a large space that articulates and unifies them. Arranged along a predominant axis, the chapel's entrance faces north towards the river, while the rear points towards the Itacolomi Peak, in the south. This solution, conforming to an ancient traditional architectural arrangement, also ensures a rich and fertile dialogue between the building complex and the principal natural elements that shape the local landscape, contributing much to the complex's grace. The volumes thus placed are configured in forms that are differentiated, with specific plans, orientations and details, unity being assured by the harmony and simplicity that characterize them, by the continuity of the projections and decorative profiles, by the use of the same materials and coverings used in the treatment of the facades and, above all, by the scrupulous placement along the length of the principal and secondary axes, following the cardinal points.

The bell tower, located to the west, stands alone, and thus compensates in part for the imbalance in the complex, by creating a counterpoint to the excessive severity and immobility of the right lateral facade. Its treatments and modeling solutions are identical to the principal volume, its singularity being provided by roofing in the form of a transitioned square hip or pyramid roof.

The placement of the papal cross with three transverse bars, more than eight and a half meters high and bearing the date of 1756, confirms and emphasizes the principal compositional elements adopted, being located in front of the portico, in line with the same principal axis that reoccurs throughout the building. Vividly contrasting with the simplicity and sobriety of the other volumes, the cross is an

exceptional sandstone sculpture, noteworthy for its dimensions, quality of the masonry work, and richness of ornamentation.

The same contrast can be observed, albeit in a more pronounced fashion, between the external and internal architectural solutions and the creation of internal environment of the chapel. The orientation, respectively from the east to west, of the lateral facades and the meticulous opening of interstices serve to create rich effects of light and shade, with variable effects as the result of the various positions of the sun and lighting conditions. Such effects demonstrate the skill employed in the construction of the chapel, employing light as the principal element of baroque space, and thus amplifying the desired sensations.

With the revival of Brazilian colonial architecture, in particular the Baroque Mineiro, promoted by the Modern Movement in the 1940s, the Chapel of Padre Faria was to serve as inspiration for one of the principal works of the architect Oscar Niemeyer: The Chapel of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the Pampulha Complex in Belo Horizonte. In this project, he conceived of the building as an articulation of three distinct volumes: the nave back to back with the sacristy, a bell tower and a belfry, treated with the same simplicity and austerity and using similar compositional elements, equal sensibility in the placement of the monument in relation to the surrounding landscape, creation of the effects of interior light and shadow, and the same pictorial treatment of a mystic and contemplative atmosphere.



Figure 3, Figure 4: The Chapel of Padre Faria and the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi in the Pampulha Complex in Belo Horizonte. Photo: Benedito Tadeu de Oliveira, private collection

Static Constructional Analysis and Restoration Interventions

The foundations of the Chapel of Padre Faria are direct and continuous, being comprised of masonry foundations of stone and lime mortar. Vertical suspension is achieved through weight-bearing mortared masonry walls. The structure of the floor is made up of wood beams supported by a new foundation of reinforced concrete, laid down in the last restoration. The structure of the roof is composed of wood trusses and covered by curved ceramic tiles. The building does not display any signs of destabilization, maintaining its static system intact.

Only the large papal cross in dressed masonry, located in the churchyard, shows a slight list to the left, there also being a small play in its base. Due to the collapse of the old churchyard wall, and the erosion of the slope between the chapel and the watercourse, the most likely hypothesis is that the list is the result of the loss of material beneath its foundation; monitoring has been in progress since the beginning of the work in 2004 to establish the real cause of the phenomenon in order to establish its eventual continuity or stabilization.



Figure 5, Figure 6: Papal cross of three transverse bars, in the first decades of the 20th Century and at present. (IFAC/UFOP archives, Ouro Preto, MG, Brazil) and photo: Benedito Tadeu de Oliveira, private collection

The entire churchyard is circled by a wall of unmortared quartzite blocks. Three openings, provided with metallic gates and stone cattle grids, constitute access to the area. With the purpose of providing greater comfort and safety to users of the complex, removable structures for covering the cattle grids have been installed.



Figure 7, Figure 8: Construction work on the subterranean washroom and the restoration of the chapel roof. (IPHAN archives, Ouro Preto, MG, Brazil)

The washroom installed inside the bell tower was demolished, and the environment was restored in accordance with the original treatments. A new public washroom was placed below ground in the churchyard, in such a way as to not interfere with the reading of the rest of the complex.

The external covering of the walls and openings were in a regular state of conservation, with the most significant losses occurring in the wainscot of the nave and the wooden doors. In the case of the wainscot, there was significant loss of paint due to water action and the deterioration of the supporting wood elements. A dust cover of aluminized sheeting was placed under the roof to provide better internal protection. The integral decorative elements - altar pieces, pulpits, chancel screens, balustrades, candlesticks, furniture and images – were cleaned and consolidated.



Figure 9, Figure 10: Restoration of decorative elements integral to the chapel (IPHAN archives, Ouro Preto, MG, Brazil).

The masonry elements were restored with the same care, the more significant stones being consolidated, reintegrated and reconstructed by experienced technicians. The existing building installations – electrical, lighting, plumbing and alarm systems – were inspected, replaced and enhanced as a result of on-site modifications and the requirements of the various planners involved.

The restoration work on the Chapel of our Lady of the Rosary of Padre Faria began in February 2004. The work was undertaken with the support of the Cultural Incentive Law, coordinated and administered by the Carmo Museum of Sacred Art and with the exclusive sponsorship of the Banco BNP Paribas Brasil S/A. This undertaking also received support from the Parishes of Pilar and Saint Ephigenia, of the Community and Lay Order of Padre Faria, from the Municipality of Ouro Preto and the Institute for National Historic and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN

The chapel of Padre Faria, which according to the Mayor of Ouro Preto Angelo Oswaldo de Araujo Santos symbolizes among its many churches the entire saga of Ouro Preto, was returned to the community of Ouro Preto in December of 2004.

Participation in congress sponsored by ci@fapemig.br

References

- [1] Ávila, A, Gontijo, J M M, and Machado, R G (1980). *Barroco mineiro. Glossário de arquitetura e ornamentação*. São Paulo: Fundação João Pinheiro, Fundação Roberto Marinho, Companhia Editora Nacional.
- [2] Machado, L G (1973). *Barroco mineiro*. São Paulo: Editora USP/ Perspectiva.
- [3] Mello, S de (1985). *Barroco mineiro*. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense.
- [4] Meniconi, R A (1998). Questão do patrimônio: arquitetura, memória e gestão das cidades. in *Cadernos de Arquitetura e Urbanismo. V. 6 e N.6*. Belo Horizonte: Editora PUC-MINAS, 45-58.
- [5] Santos, A O de A (1995). *Ouro Preto: Capela do Padre Faria*. São Paulo: EBLIC, Banco CCF Brasil S/A.