

The Peak of Jože Plečnik's Ecclesial Oeuvre: the Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Belgrade

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Summary

The paper deals with the architectural evaluation of the Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Belgrade, Serbia, done by a Slovene architect, Jože Plečnik, in 1929. The study is based on a research of available historical sources with a critical approach to analysis and architectural evaluation, as well as a contemporary fieldwork and an on-site analysis. The paper offers a brief overview of Plečnik's engagements in various public projects throughout Europe, followed by an analysis of a wider historical and

social context within which the site of the Franciscan convent and later parish church in Belgrade emerged. Furthermore, the paper provides an insight into the historical development of the site inside the framework of the Franciscan Province Bosna Argentina. It also gives a critical examination of the stylistic approach to the project for the church, and its later alterations made by Plečnik's successors. Moreover, its contribution to ecclesial architecture, significant structural novelties, interior decoration, furnishing and works of art produced for this project, according to Plečnik's ideas, are historically analysed and examined.

Keywords: Jože Plečnik; Belgrade; architecture; Bosna Argentina; parish church.

Vrhunac sakralnog opusa Jože Plečnika: župna crkva Svetog Ante Padovanskog u Beogradu

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Sažetak

Rad se bavi valoriziranjem arhitekture župne crkve Svetog Ante Padovanskog u Beogradu, za koju je projekt izradio slovenski arhitekt Jože Plečnik 1929. godine. Rad se temelji na istraživanju dostupnih povijesnih izvora, objavljenih radova i studija, te suvremenim terenskim snimanjem, praćenim kritičkim evaluiranjem nalaza. U radu je dat kratak pregled Plečnikovih angažmana na nekoliko javnih projekata diljem Europe, nakon čega slijedi analiza šireg povijesnog i društvenog konteksta u kojem je nastala franjevačka rezidencija u Beogradu. Nadalje, dat je povijesni razvoj lokaliteta u okviru Franjevačke provincije Bosna Srebrena, kojoj rezidencija pripada i danas. U radu se kritički ispituje stilski pristup projektu crkve, te njegove kasnije preinake koje su izvršili arhitekti angažirani nakon Plečnika. Nadalje, analizira se i ispituje doprinos sakralnoj arhitekturi, značajne konstrukcijske novine, unutarnje uređenje, opremanje i umjetnička djela izrađena za ovaj projekt, a prema Plečnikovim zamislima.

Ključne riječi: Jože Plečnik; Beograd; arhitektura; Bosna Srebrena; župna crkva.

Introduction

The complex of the Franciscan convent and parish church in Belgrade has played an important role not only in the religious, but also in social and cultural life, of both Roman Catholics and adherents of other denominations in Belgrade. In the late 1920s, its historical importance and glory that traced its position in the Balkans were highlighted by the involvement of a widely recognized Slovenian architect, Jože Plečnik, in the construction of the new parish church. Besides having been heavily commissioned for a variety of architectural engagements during his career, Plečnik was especially devoted to ecclesial architecture. Along with many successful designs all over Europe, this church in Belgrade is often considered to be the crowning jewel of Plečnik's sacred architecture.

Firstly, this paper will show the historical background and common discourse of development of that particular site, which ultimately became a part of the Bosnian Franciscan Province of Exaltation of the Holy Cross - Bosna Argentina, headquartered in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Afterwards, an overview of Jože Plečnik's work will be presented in order to properly understand the position of that church in his architectural oeuvre. The complex consisting of a convent building and a parish church, with the latter one being the focus of this work, will subsequently be presented, evaluated and put into the contemporary context.

Besides the on-site work and research, which is the most important source for the evaluation and understanding the architecture itself, published sources are also very important contributors to the findings. Foremost, those sources are Petar Krečič's book titled *Plečnik, the Complete Works*, published by Whitney Library of Design, New York in 1993, and Damjan Prelovšek's paper "Plečnikova Cerkev Sv. Antona Padovanskega V Beogradu"¹ published in 2020 in *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, followed by Hajna Tucić et. al's book *Crkva Svetog Antuna Padovanskog Beograd* (Eng. St. Anthony of Padua Church in Belgrade), published by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the City of Belgrade (*Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture grada Beograda*) in 2011, and Marko Karamatić's book titled *Franjevačka Provincija Bosna Srebrena: Šematizam*, published in Sarajevo by the Franciscan Provincial in 1991.

1 The paper is a sort of a resume of Prelovšek's series of findings focusing on Plečnik's church in Belgrade.

Jože Plečnik

Jože Plečnik was born on January 23rd, 1872, in Ljubljana. Plečnik was born as the third surviving child in the family of Andrej and Helena. The eldest sister Marija was born in 1864. Andrej, born in 1865, studied theology and became a priest, while Janez, born in 1875, studied medicine in Vienna.²

Jože was not an exceptional pupil and failed the first year of the Gymnasium. Afterwards, his father, a carpenter by profession, hired him as an apprentice in his shop. His later engagement at the School of Applied Arts in Graz, where he enrolled in 1892, was in furniture design. His teacher Leopold Theyer, an architect, soon noticed Jože's marvellous talent following by Theodor Mueller, a Viennese industrialist, who offered him a job in a design office in Vienna. He stayed in Graz for two years, until his brother managed to persuade him to enrol in the Academy of Fine Arts (*Akademie der Bildenden Künste*) in Vienna. He submitted his portfolio to Otto Wagner, who succeeded the deceased Karl Hasenauer in 1894 as the Head of the Special Class for Architecture, but Plečnik failed to enrol in the studies. Before the next attempt, which was successful, Plečnik spent a year working for Wagner in his studio. Being more than four years older than other students did not bother Plečnik. He soon became the best student in his class: Marco Pozzetto, who was one of the first people to publish a notable research on Plečnik's life in 1968 in Turin, states that he "[...] managed to advance from a façade for a housing block to a parish church."³

Later, when Plečnik started his private practice, he undertook all kinds of commissions, of various sizes, locations, and types, trying not to compete with famous Viennese mainstream architects, but to develop his own course. Besides Zacherlhaus (1903-1905) in Brandstätte 6, in Vienna's 1st district, most of his designs were quite away from the city centre, like Langerhaus (1900) in Beckgasse 30, in 13th district. His engagement as the family architect of Zacherl family helped him to improve his skills in various types of design and strengthen contact with their strong Catholic connections.⁴

2 PETER KREČIČ - JOŽE PLEČNIK, *Plečnik, the Complete Works*, Whitney Library of Design, New York, 1993., p. 13.

3 *Ibid*, p. 16.

4 *Ibid*, p. 29.

In the 1910-1913 period, Plečnik did a project for the *Heilig-Geist-Kirche* located in Ottakring district in Vienna. It is, actually, the foremost church in Austria made of reinforced concrete, which was used for both the construction and the façade decoration.

After an unsuccessful attempt to succeed Wagner at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Plečnik went to Prague in 1911. His friend, architect Jan Kotěra, invited him to come and teach at university. One of his most significant projects in Prague was the renovation of the Prague Castle - *Hradčani* (1920-1934), after the commission done directly by the Czech president Tomáš Masaryk.

Plečnik stayed in Prague until 1921, when he moved to his hometown Ljubljana, in order to teach again at the newly founded Department of Architecture at the Technical Faculty of the University of Ljubljana. Besides many other notable masterpieces, some of his best projects were designed for his hometown: the Slovene National and University Library (1930-1941), *Tromostovje* -bridges over the Ljubljanica River (1929-1931) in the very centre of Ljubljana, the Ljubljana Open Market (1939-1942), and many others. Due to his strong connection with the church and ecclesial orders, his engagement at the university was heavily reduced during the communist regime.



Figure 1. Jože Plečnik (1872-1957);
a photograph taken in 1930⁵

When Plečnik's general idea and contribution are concerned, it has to be noted that his work did not use to be as appreciated as it is now, mainly because it was not a part of the mainstream CIAM (Fr. *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*) in 1928, which produced certain consequences. However, today, he is a recognized re-

5 *Ibid*, p. 72.

representative of the 20th century architecture⁶ and one of the leading reformers of sacred architecture in the period.⁷

His most important ecclesial commissions, besides the Convent and Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Belgrade, are: *Heilig-Geist-Kirche* in Ottakring, Vienna (1910-1913), the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord in Prague (1928-1939), the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Šiška, Ljubljana, (1925-1927), the Church of the Archangel Michael on the Marsh in Črna Vas near Ljubljana, (1925-1939), the Church of the Assumption of the Lord in Bogojina (1925-1954), etc.

Plečnik would often be compared to Antonio Gaudi, not only because of his dedication to form Ljubljana into a new Acropolis, which was, actually, one of his greatest ideas, just like Gaudi had for Barcelona, but because of his strong dedication to ideas of Christianity and strict life of a religious Catholic adherent. His older brother Andrej, obviously, had a strong influence on that. Jože Plečnik has officially been proposed for the canonization in the Roman Catholic Church.⁸

Plečnik died on January 7th, 1957, in Ljubljana, and received an official state funeral in the Žale Cemetery, a part of which Plečnik himself designed in 1942. Many notable people, architects, and some politicians were present at the funeral.

Historical background

From Saint John Capistrano to Bosna Argentina

Although the present convent and parish church in Belgrade belong to the group of newer convents in the OFM⁹ Bosna Argentina, the

6 *Ibid*, pp. 7-11.

7 DAMJAN PRELOVŠEK, "Plečnikova Cerkev Sv. Antona Padovanskega V Beogradu", in: *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, vol. 25, no. 1, Ljubljana, 2020., p. 212.

8 LUKA VIDMAR, "Gaudí in Plečnik: od kulturne kanonizacije do cerkvene beatifikacije", in: DARKO DOLINAR - JERNEJ HABJAN - MARKO JUVAN - MARIJAN DOVIĆ (editors), *Studia litteraria 22, Kulturni svetniki in kanonizacija*, Inštitut za slovensko literaturo in literarne vede ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 2016., pp. 309-324.

9 OFM - *Ordo fratrum minorum*, The Order of Friars Minor, founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209, is a fraternity. In a more complete fulfilment of their baptismal consecration and in answer to the divine call, the friars give them-

Franciscan presence in the wider area of Belgrade had been recorded even before the Ottoman campaign on the Balkans, when that Catholic Order had at least one convent and a church there. By the beginning of the 17th century, the Jesuits also had the convent in Belgrade,¹⁰ while the Capuchins founded one in the early 18th century.¹¹

Even though very few reliable sources are available to provide us with the in-depth analysis, some of them are, nonetheless, sufficient for understanding the early Franciscan establishment in Belgrade. The first Franciscan convent in Belgrade was the Convent of Saint John of Capistrano. It was situated just under the Belgrade Fortress - *Kalemegdan*. Saint John of Capistrano, a Franciscan friar who led the crusade against the Ottoman Empire in 1456 and fought at the siege of Belgrade, restored the convent, which was named after him eventually. It remains unknown whether that convent had some remarkable architectural qualities or not.

Unfortunately, the Ottoman campaign in 1521 was successful and Belgrade was conquered. The convent was demolished and the belonging church was transformed into a mosque. Later, in 1688, the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I, after a number of vital victories, reconquered the city. After the Treaty of Passarowitz on July 21st, 1718, Franciscan friars from OFM Bosna Argentina built a new convent consisting of two wings and laid down foundation stones for a new church. Actually, the old site, where the convent was located, was abandoned due to military and strategic reasons, and the Franciscans got the permission to temporarily convert one of the mosques and side buildings into a facility where they could perform liturgies and exercise pastoral care. After three years, on April 13th, 1721, the converted complex was officially blessed as the church. Soon after, on March 12th, 1728, the foundation stone for a new convent was laid. Friar Ivan Stražemanac, who later became the Provincial Superior

selves totally to God, their supreme love, through profession of obedience, poverty and chastity, which they are to live in the spirit of Saint Francis.

10 ANTAL MOLNÁR, "Struggle for the chapel of Belgrade (1612-1643). Trade and Catholic church in Ottoman Hungary", in: *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 60, no. 1, Budapest, 2007., pp. 73-134.

11 STJEPAN SRŠEN, *Kapucinski samostani u Osijeku, Beogradu, Zemunu i Novoj Palanki u prvoj polovici 18. stoljeća*, Državni arhiv u Osijeku, Osijek, 2011., p. 141; TOMISLAV ZDENKO TENŠEK, "Kapucini: Katolički red u svijetu i kod nas", in: *Radovi Zavoda za znanstveni rad Varaždin*, 12-13, 2001., pp. 105-114.

of OFM Bosna Argentina, was named the Guardian of the Convent in 1728. In just one year, he was in a position to build the eastern wing, and by 1730, the whole cloister was completed. That same year, on June 13th, on the day of the feast of Saint Anthony of Padua, the construction works on the new church began. Only nine years later, Belgrade was again sieged by the Ottoman army, and the Franciscan facilities, consequently, were demolished; after 1739, Franciscan activities in Belgrade were not recorded.¹²

As it had been expected, after the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, and their strong influence on the overall ecclesial life in the region, the Holy Apostolic See entrusted Bosnian Franciscans to exercise pastoral care in Serbia. Even though it formally happened in 1897, due to many complicated political and other issues, it was allowed just after World War I. On May 5th, 1919, The Holy Apostolic See requested from Bosna Argentina once more to take over the pastoral care in Serbia, and luckily, new parishes were organized, besides the one in Belgrade, in Glođani, Kraljevo, Niš, Peć, Smederevo, Šabac, Zjum, and Zlokućani.¹³

The Convent of Saint Anthony of Padua

The modern-day convent of Saint Anthony of Padua is located in Belgrade's downtown district of Crveni krst, near Zvezdara. The site is located between the streets *Pop Stojanova* and *Bregalnička*, with the official address of the convent being *Bregalnička 14*, and of the church *Pop Stojanova 19*.

During the first engagement of Friar Josip Markušić as the Provincial Superior of OFM Bosna Argentina (1928-1931), the projects for the

12 MARKO KARAMATIĆ et al, *Blago franjevačkih samostana Bosne i Hercegovine: povijest, kultura, umjetnost, turizam, prirodne znamenitosti*, Privredni vjesnik, Zagreb, 1990., p. 103; IVAN STRAŽEMANAC - STJEPAN SRŠAN, *Povijest franjevačke provincije Bosne Srebrne = Expositio Provinciae Bosne Argentinae*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 1993., pp. 329-337.

13 MARKO KARAMATIĆ, *Franjevačka Provincija Bosna Srebrna: Šematizam, Franjevački provincijalat*, Sarajevo, 1991., p. 42.



Figure 2. The Convent and the Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua: air view from the east; the photograph taken before 2011¹⁴

convent and the church were approved.¹⁵ The construction of the new convent in Belgrade was assigned to Blaž Misita-Katušić, the architect.¹⁶

14 HAJNA TUCIĆ - JELENA TOPALOVIĆ-KITANOVIĆ - SNEŽANA NEGOVANOVIĆ, *Crkva Svetog Antuna Padovanskog = St. Anthony of Padua Church*, Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture grada Beograda, Beograd, 2011., p. 4.

15 JOSIP MARKUŠIĆ, "Prilog o crkvenoj umjetnosti", in: *Dobri pastir*, 8, poseban otisak, Sarajevo, 1957., p. 7.

16 Blaž Misita-Katušić (September 15th, 1886 Kostajnica, Austro-Hungarian Empire - February 4th, 1961 Osijek) (MILAN BALIĆ, "Trideset godina zaštite spomenika kulture u Slavoniji 1945-1975", in: *Museology*, 19, Zagreb, 1975., pp. 147) He first enrolled in the studies of architecture in Vienna, then in Prague. He graduated architecture at the Higher Technical and Commercial School in Liège, Belgium in 1910. (DANICA PINTEROVIĆ (1962.): "In memoriam - ing. arh. Misita-Katušić", in: *Osječki zbornik*, 8, Osijek, 1962., p. 353; ZLATA ŽIVAKOVIĆ-KERŽE, *Osječka sjećanja, njihov život u našem sjećanju*, 2. dio. Studio HS internet d.o.o, Osijek; Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Baranje i Srijema, Slavonski Brod, 2011., p. 182) Some of his important projects from the period 1914-1941 are the Officer's Home in Topčider, Belgrade (1925-1927), the Belgrade Cathedral (1925) and competition projects for the Avala Sanatorium (1931) and the Aeroclub in Belgrade (1932), as well as Catholic churches in Kraljevo and Belgrade's municipality of Čukarica. (ALEKSANDAR KADIJEVIĆ, "Hrvatski arhitekti u izgradnji Beograda u 20. stoljeću", in: *Prostor*, 19, 2 (42), Zagreb, 2011., pp. 466-477) In addition to that, he worked on reconstruction projects for churches, castles, and fortresses. Some of the most important projects were in Kneževi Vinogradi, Beli

The works started on August 3rd, 1926 and were completed in November 1927, when friars moved in.¹⁷

As it is noticed in some other Franciscan sites in the Province, for instance Petrićevac near Banja Luka, or Dubrave near Brčko, the design of the convent building does not stand out of the overall impression of urban environment. Thus, it is quite well interpolated in the cityscape, following a horizontal and vertical street regulation. Moreover, very few details introducing the ecclesial character of the building were used.

Blaž Misita-Katušić, the architect, heavily engaged in the restoration and reconstruction of building heritage all over Yugoslavia, did a design appropriated to his current work. The convent is a semi-detached house, with the entrance from *Bregalnička* Street, located in the very



Figure 3. The Convent of Saint Anthony of Padua: a view of the entrance from the northeast, from *Bregalnička* Street (2013)

Manastir, Topolje, Bolman, Valpovo, Đakovo, Gorjani, Levanjska Varoš, Bijelo Brdo, Aljmaš, Dalj, Erdut etc., as well as the projects presented in this paper in OFM Bosna Argentina: the second church of Saint Anthony of Padua and the third convent of the Holy Trinity in Petrićevac (1930-1931 and 1927-1929), the convent of Saint Anthony of Padua in Belgrade (1926-1927), and the convict for external pupils in Franciscan Gymnasium in Visoko (1927-1928). (Z. ŽIVAKOVIĆ-KERŽE, *Osječka sjećanja, njihov život u našem sjećanju*, p. 182).

17 M. KARAMATIĆ, *Franjevačka Provincija Bosna Srebrena: Šematizam*, p. 42.

same courtyard as the church. It has three ground floors and a cellar, containing basic rooms usually found in a Franciscan convent.¹⁸

The entrance to the convent is on the northern side, over a porch, extending from the ground level for a couple of steps. The entrance porch is emphasised with the simple cubical form just beside it, reaching over the top roofline, flanking the view to the garden. Its street façade, east-oriented, is the only one treated appropriately and in accordance with its function. A rather simple and fairly empty façade is divided into background and foreground zones, discretely emphasized with one shallow angular Avant-corps, located on the corner of the house, and extending to the end of the roofline. It is finalized with a gable wall of the façade roof dormer, and treated in a simplified baroque manner. It is, however, decorated with two sets of secession-like stucco decorations, below the roofline. On the top, a bronze bust of Saint Anthony of Padua holding the Christ is emerging out of the wall plain; above it, a simple Latin cross is installed. Besides a simple roof cornice, outlining the house, those are, actually, the only significant architectural details worth mentioning. The rest of the building is plastered and coloured in a pale beige colour. The southern façade, oriented towards the garden, has symmetrically displaced windows, while the western façade holds only two simple balconies. The house has a complex roof, covered with sheets of tin metal.

As far as the general design is concerned, the convent building did not change its main characteristics over time. In 1990, it was reconstructed and renovated according to a project done by architect Vinco Grabovac.

The Parish Church of Saint Antony of Padua

The core of the site is the Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua. After Friar Markušić consigned the church project to Plečnik, a famous sculptor Ivan Meštrović, who will be subsequently engaged in furnishing and artistic decoration, gave his thoughts that Plečnik was the best possible choice; he added that even if Plečnik did not do

18 ANĐELKO BADURINA, *Uloga franjevačkih samostana u urbanizaciji dubrovačkog područja*, Institut za povijesne znanosti Sveučilišta, Odjel za povijest umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1990., p. 17.

his best, it would still be better than what other Yugoslav architects would do.¹⁹

Josip Markušić, who was entirely devoted to Plečnik, used to say: "I will do everything as you say. If you say that something should be made from clay, I will make it of clay, because I know that this will be the best way to make it."²⁰

Everything started in 1926, after the friars bought the construction lot, and built the aforementioned convent. Slightly prior to that, after the end of WWI, the Franciscan province in Slovenia got autonomy and employed Jože Plečnik to build a Franciscan church in Šiška. Certainly, that particular project for the church of Saint Francis was one of the recommendations for the Bosnian Franciscans, if not the number of prominent outstanding designs done by Plečnik all over Europe. A parish priest, Friar Grgić, was supposed to talk Plečnik into the project in 1928, but Plečnik refused at first. Just after numerous appeals and requests, Plečnik accepted the project.

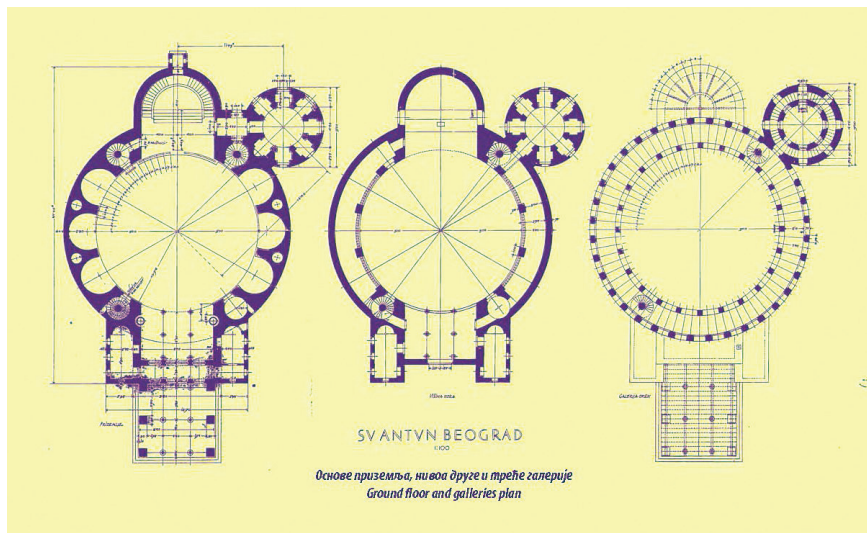


Figure 4. The Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua: Floor plan; a segment of the second project done by Jože Plečnik²¹

19 J. MARKUŠIĆ, "Prilog o crkvenoj umjetnosti", p. 7.

20 P. KREČIĆ - J. PLEČNIK, *Plečnik, the Complete Works*, p. 108.

21 H. TUCIĆ et al, *Crkva Svetog Antuna Padovanskog = St. Anthony of Padua Church*, p. 2.

In that design, Plečnik reflected the most to the projects done prior to Belgrade. Those were churches of The Holy Spirit in Vienna, Ascension of Our Lord in Bogojina, Saint Francis in Ljubljana, and Sacred Heart of Jesus in Prague. Some more apparent archetypes are, certainly, the Roman Pantheon,²² the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, and the Church of Saint Sergius and Bacco in Constantinople - today known as Istanbul.

The initial project, done in 1929, was shortly after changed by Plečnik himself, and the construction started according to the second project. The foundation stone was laid on October 6th, 1929; the church was consecrated on December 8th, 1932.²³ The church is devoted to Saint Anthony of Padua, and the commemoration of 700 years of the Saint's demise and canonization.²⁴

The main characteristic of the first project was a dome on a circular base with a slightly detached bell-tower: something that strongly refers to a mosque or, in the case of Belgrade, a traditional central(-ized) floorplan type of an Orthodox church. That is probably the reason why Plečnik abandoned that design, and not because of the costs or fear of improper construction, as it is usually considered.²⁵

It is quite complicated to give an in-depth depiction of the church, without referring some external to other internal elements, that Plečnik used in creating that masterpiece of ecclesial architecture. The church consists of the main 25-meter wide cylindrical volume, with a covered entrance porch, oriented towards the west, and a bell-tower, cylindrical as well. It is connected with the church and located on its south-eastern side. The main cylinder, which is actually making it a rotunda, is intended to be the key point for understanding the design of that church. It is dual, divided into the inner and the outer cylinder. On the first floor, in-between, there are (on both northern and southern sides): three apses, staircases to the bell-tower and further

22 DAMJAN PRELOVŠEK, "Plečnikova Cerkev Sv. Antona Padovanskega V Beogradu", p. 186.

23 M. KARAMATIĆ, *Franjevačka Provincija Bosna Srebrena: Šematizam*, p. 42; P. KREČIČ - J. PLEČNIK, *Plečnik, the Complete Works*, p. 109.

24 MARIJAN KARAUOLA, *Ljudi i krajevi*, 2, Matica hrvatska, Sarajevo, 2008., p. 148; H. TUCIĆ et al, *Crkva Svetog Antuna Padovanskog = St. Anthony of Padua Church*, p. 3.

25 PETER KREČIČ, "Crkva Sv. Antuna Padovanskog u Beogradu - ocena zaštite spomenika i smernice obnove", in: *Nasleđe*, 6, Beograd, 2005., p. 196.

levels, as well as a big apse, east-oriented. It is extending beyond the outer wall of the big cylinder and above the height of the ground floor, reasonably holding the altar. On the opposite, western side, there is an entrance. It is made in a simple cubical form attached to the main volume. Centrally aligned, there is a rounded window and it is covered with a discrete gabled roof. On each of the sides, left and right, two additional volumes are added, making a niche on the main entrance cube. In the niches, there are two chapels with apses. The entrance porch is located in front of the building. Two rows of columns are holding the gabled roof, covering the entrance. The columns are not interrupted and are moved towards the interior so that the last pair of columns is actually a part of the inner cylinder.

The outer cylinder is extended to the height of the roof. On the first, ground level, the main cylinder is holding the aforementioned apses

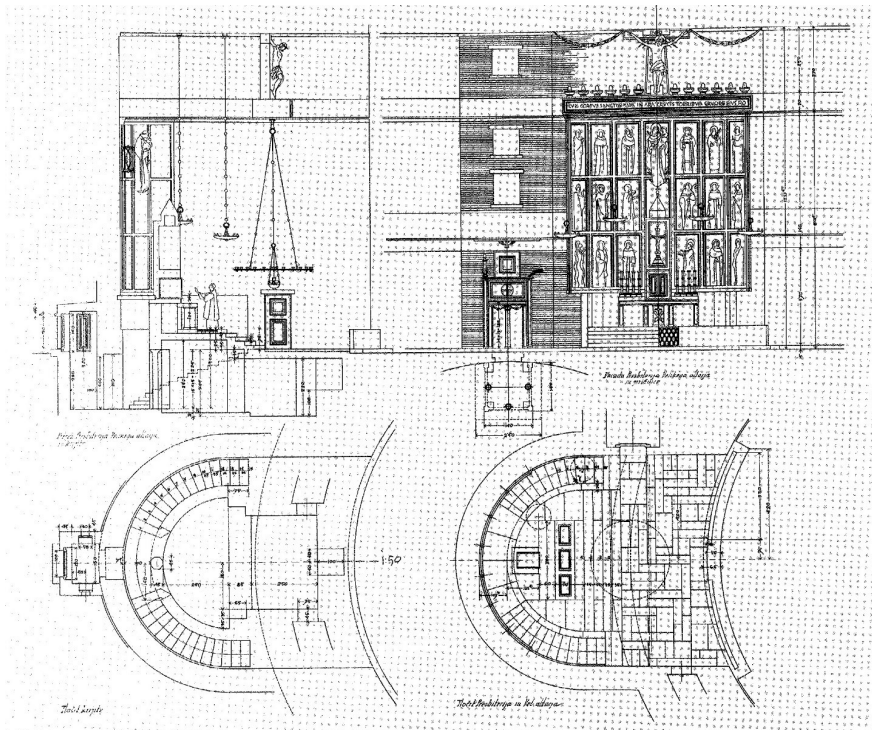


Figure 5. The Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua: the design of the main altar with 14 stations of the Calvary; a segment of the second project done by Jože Plečnik²⁶

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 200.

on both sides. In height, they are reaching until the 2nd level of a horseshoe-shaped ambulatory, which is, actually, a viewing gallery, but parted with an apse on the eastern side. The circular staircases, also hidden between the outer and the inner cylinder, lead to that level. The main apse surpasses the side apses with the height of the viewing gallery; its footprint is reaching outside the outer cylinder and is covered with a simple plain roof.

The height of the first floor is subdivided into two levels with a solid white concrete cornice outlining the inner perimeter. Only the next cornice, which divides the gallery and the lower level, is visible from the outside, but it does not extend to the bell-tower perimeter. Another cornice divides the upper level of the gallery and sits on top of the outer apse marking the 3rd level ambulatory, outlining the perimeter of the whole church. The main cylinder is crowned with two more cornices, framing the window stripe. On the top, unlike in the first design with a dome, the space is covered with a flat, coffered wooden ceiling, crowned with a shallow cone outside.

The bell-tower, typologically on the halfway between a campanile and a traditional one, is placed on the south-eastern side of the church. It is 52 meters high and has 9 meters in diameter. Instead of windows that follow the outline of the staircase leading up to the top, like it was first planned, the rectangular windows are held in horizontal stripes. On the very top, one west-oriented round window is sitting just below the circular cornices framing the end of the bell-tower, which might be a place for the clock that has never been installed. Like the main volume, the capital of the tower is finished with a horizontal strip of windows and one detached volume holding the cross.

The plan of the entire church recalls the well-known image of Saint Anthony with the infant Jesus, where the nave, apse, and portico together represent Saint Anthony, and the bell-tower stands for Jesus.²⁷

The materials used are brick and reinforced concrete, which even more emphasizes the strength and strictness of the project. It can even be said that the combination of the construction frames and materials corresponds to the mid-1970s or 1980s.²⁸ The roofs are covered with sheets of tin metal. Inside, the main structural materials

27 P. KREČIČ - J. PLEČNIK, *Plečnik, the Complete Works*, p. 108.

28 H. TUCIĆ et al, *Crkva Svetog Antuna Padovanskog = St. Anthony of Padua Church*, p. 5.

are the same, but the interior along with its furnishing is far more de-segregated and is all about making special ambient and scenarios. The interior furnishing started in 1934, according to Plečnik's designs.



Figure 6. The Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua: an interior view of the main apse (2013)

As it has already been described, the inner cylinder is reserved for the congregation and space between the inner and the outer for the apses. The main altar is located in the eastern apse, more or less decorated according to Plečnik's project. In the foreground, on the height of the second perimeter cornice, there are a transversal beam and a column hidden behind the vertical part of the cross, which is on the outline of the scene. In the background, there is a statue done by Ivan Meštrović. His 2.75-meter high sculpture of Saint Anthony on the main altar is installed in 1956, slightly prior to Plečnik's death in 1957. Even though Plečnik designed his own version of Saint Anthony holding the Christ in front of the people - the congregation, no adequate sculptor could be found to produce it.²⁹ It remains unknown exactly how Meštrović got the commission.

29 J. MARKUŠIĆ, "Prilog o crkvenoj umjetnosti", p. 4; M. KARAUŁA, *Ljudi i krajevi*, 2, p. 152.



Figure 7. The Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua: an interior view of the southern apses (2013)

Two other altars were done according to Plečnik's ideas: the first altar on the right side of the main apse is devoted to Mary's Annunciation and the other to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the first to come on the left side of the main apse. The statues for both altars were done by Božidar-Bože Pengov, a noticeable Slovenian sculptor. *The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus* was built at the end of 1935, while *Mary's Annunciation* was built in August of 1938, with the statue of Our Lady installed in 1939.³⁰

By the beginning of World War II, only the main altar and two side apses were decorated. The interior works were obviously halted during WWII, and they continued in the post-war era, with even stronger momentum.

Markušić's engagement was terminated in 1940, after his transfer to Jajce. Friar Eduard Žilić was appointed as the Guardian in 1945,

30 M. KARAMATIĆ et al, *Blago franjevačkih samostana Bosne i Hercegovine: povijest, kultura, umjetnost, turizam, prirodne znamenitosti*, p. 103; P. KREČIČ, "Crkva Sv. Antuna Padovanskog u Beogradu - ocena zaštite spomenika i smernice obnove", p. 196.

continuing the works.³¹ Plečnik engaged his assistant from Ljubljana, architect Anton Bitenc,³² and architect Harold Bilinić,³³ most notable for very close connections to Ivan Meštrović, to work on the remaining altars in the middle apses, second from the right and left: Saint Joseph and Saint Francis. In the third apse from the right side, the big confessional was put in 1953, and a new statue of Saint Joseph in 1954.³⁴

31 P. KREČIČ, "Crkva Sv. Antuna Padovanskog u Beogradu - ocena zaštite spomenika i smernice obnove", p. 196.

32 Anton-Tone Bitenc (Ljubljana, January 6th, 1920 - June 14th, 1977). Bitenc started his undergraduate studies of architecture in Ljubljana in 1939, in the class of Jože Plečnik. Before his graduation in 1947, Plečnik commissioned him as a technical draftsman. Shortly after, Bitenc was appointed in the Ministry of Constructions, but already in 1949 he received the position of a teaching assistant in the class of Jože Plečnik, at the Technical Faculty. Later, Bitenc was proven to be the last architect who was appointed to work as Plečnik's assistant, contributing to most of his works. He was especially engaged in the projects of building heritage protection, preservation and presentation; with featuring projects for Slovenian medieval towns - Otoka, Strmol, Begunje, Bistro, Zemon, Lapidarium and the exhibition complex Emona, a Roman site in Ajdovščina, an archaeological museum in Celje etc. Among others, the projects in focus were the reconstruction of the Ursuline Convent in Ljubljana (1970-1975), the reconstruction of the ground floor of Plečnik's Gymnasium, the remodelling of Plečnik's Square (started in 1966), and remodelling of Borštnik's Square (1972). A vast part of his oeuvre belongs to the renovation projects of altars and liturgical equipment following the decisions of the 2nd Vatican council; these include the projects for the Ljubljana and Maribor Cathedrals, the pilgrimage church in Brežje, churches in Beltinci, Borovnica, Breznica, Črnomelj, Dolsko, Dravlje, Dutovlje, Gorenja Vas, Hotedršica, Izlake, Kamnik, Kokrica, Vič, Loški Potok, Moravče, Smednik, Šempas, Škocjan, Škofja Loka, Tržič and in Žire. <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi1018480/> - HELENA SERAŽIN, *Bitenc, Anton (1920-1977)*, Slovenska biografija - Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti - Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU.

33 Harold Bilinić (Split, August 7th, 1894 - Zagreb, 1984). Bilinić graduated architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence in 1922. After the graduation, he worked first in Zagreb and then in Buenos Aires (1926-1932). Upon the return to Croatia, he continued working in design offices in Zagreb. His most notable works are closely related to Ivan Meštrović's monuments, designing the complementary architectural projects. Some of the most important commissions are Njegoš's Mausoleum in Lovćen (1952-1974), Family Račić's Mausoleum in Cavtat (1922-1923), Otavci Mausoleum (1928-1931), the Monument to the Unknown Hero in Avala, Belgrade (1938), the Museum of Revolution in Zagreb (1938) and Meštrović's Villa in Split (1939). <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=1955> - PREMIER TOMISLAV, *Bilinić, Harold*, Hrvatski bibliografski leksion - Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža.

34 *Ibid*, p. 197.



Figure 8. The Parish Church of Saint Anthony of Padua: the entrance portico (2013)

Soon after, in 1957, Plečnik died in Ljubljana and Janez Valentinčič,³⁵ one of his most devoted pupils and a close associate, gave his best to ensure the church would be completed. In 1959, he did the project of the marble stone floor, benches, and the entrance portico.³⁶ Even though Plečnik did his own project for the floor, it remains unknown why the contractors did not follow it. In 1960, Valentičič completed the project for the bell-tower, slightly changing Plečnik's project from 1939. The construction works were completed in 1962,³⁷ even though the bell was prepared as early as in 1940.³⁸ There is another interesting fact about the tower, which is actually leaned, due to inconsistency in soil subsidence over time. The concrete slab, connec-

35 Janez Valentinčič (Ljubljana, November 17th, 1904 - June 7th, 1994). After the graduation in 1927, under the mentorship of Jože Plečnik, he started working as an architectural supervisor in Ljubljana. In 1931, his university career initiated, first on the position of Plečnik's teaching assistant, and afterwards as an independent professor. Moreover, he was three times selected for the Dean's position. Besides his university engagements, his architecture was almost entirely devoted to sacred architecture. While working as Plečnik's teaching assistant, Valentičič was engaged in projects like the first project for the National University Library (1930-1931), a chapel in Preska near Medvodah (1934), a church in Upper Rečica (near Laško 1935), the enlargement of a parish church in Rakek (1935), Verčon's Vila in Lapad near Dubrovnik (1936), a new bell-tower for the church in Martinjak near Cerknica (1939), the regulation of walls of the Medieval Ljubljana in Vegova Street (1939), the enlargement of a church in Mokronog (1940), Bajlečev's Vila in Murska Sobota (1943), Capuchin Convent in Štepanja Vas (1944) etc. By the end of the 1930s, Valentičič already had his private projects. The most important ones are: the reconstruction of a local square in Tržič (1937), Zajec's Villa in Šmarci near Kamnik (1938), Vilhar and Pengal's Vila in Stožice (1940), a laboratory for the University of Ljubljana (1946-1949), the National Liberation War Monument in Šmartnem on Paka (1950), France Bevk's House in Vikrča (1952), a facade of a music school in Ljubljana (1952), Hančič's House in Kamnik (1954), Gostiš's House in Ježica (1955), the extension of a parish church in Lenart (1959), the adaptation of a parish church in Šmarje near Kopar (1961), a bell-tower on a parish church in Tuhinj (1963), an interior redesign of the Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Čukarica, Belgrade (1964). <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi756262/> - DAMJAN PRELOVŠEK, *Valentinčič, Janez (1904-1994)*, Slovenska biografija - Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti - Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU.

36 D. PRELOVŠEK, "Plečnikova Cerkev Sv. Antona Padovanskega V Beogradu", p. 186.

37 P. KREČIČ, "Crkva Sv. Antuna Padovanskog u Beogradu - ocena zaštite spomenika i smernice obnove", p. 197.

38 M. KARAMATIĆ, *Franjevačka Provincija Bosna Srebrena: Šematizam*, p. 42.

ting the floor constructions of the church and the bell-tower, was later cut apart, and the problem was solved. Furthermore, Valentičič did the design for an organ in 1965, which was done by company of Franc Jenko from Št. Vid close to Ljubljana, in 1966. Two octagonal chandeliers were also designed by Valentinčič in 1972.³⁹

Among other interesting furnishing details, confessionals are compelling. The church holds the first confessional for deaf people, as well as other confessionals that have been fully designed in accordance with the corresponding sacraments, maintaining the privacy and trust between the single believer and the priest, and the rest of the congregation.⁴⁰ Moreover, it brings the understanding of the confession and relationship to the church to a new level.

After subsequent changes from the Second Vatican Council, some details on the altar were changed,⁴¹ but unfortunately, Plečnik's endeavours to complete the interior fully failed in the end. The absence of the missing altars and other details is apparent. It can even be said that all the works that were not done by Plečnik directly are not worthy of being in the church.⁴²

One of the interesting outlooks on Plečnik's church in Belgrade relates it to the simultaneous construction of the greatest Orthodox church in Belgrade - the Church of Saint Sava on Vračar, the biggest church in the Balkans and one of the biggest in the world, the furnishing of which has not been completed yet. There are many opposing viewpoints addressing the success of each of the churches. Even though architects that won the competition for the Saint Sava's Church, Bogdan Nestorović and Aleksandar Deroko, were acknowledged architects and had already accomplished numerous successful projects, Jože Plečnik has probably been recognized as genuinely the greatest architect in the former Yugoslav region.

"An interesting fact is that one of the designers of St Sava's Church, Aleksandar Deroko, spoke affirmatively of St Anthony's at the very moment that other Belgrade architects and public opinion criticized

39 P. KREČIČ, "Crkva Sv. Antuna Padovanskog u Beogradu - ocena zaštite spomenika i smernice obnove", p. 197.

40 J. MARKUŠIĆ, "Prilog o crkvenoj umjetnosti", pp. 3-4.

41 M. KARAUŁA, *Ljudi i krajevi*, 2, p. 153.

42 P. KREČIČ, "Crkva Sv. Antuna Padovanskog u Beogradu - ocena zaštite spomenika i smernice obnove", p. 205.



Figure 9. The Parish Church of *Saint* Anthony of Padua: the interior view of the entrance with the organ on 2nd level (2013)

his project for St Sava's Church and made jealous comments on the erection of the Franciscan church. Perhaps the most paradoxical of all is the fact that in spite of all the differences - from those in the attitude towards the creative process to the different confessions the two churches represented - it was in the same, the earliest and the most sumptuous, period of Byzantine art that models for both modern Byzantine churches were found: Justinian's. And while Belgrade was happy with the outcome of the realization of the Church of St Anthony of Padua as early as the 1930s, now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we still cannot know when it will become happy with the outcome of the realization of the Church of St Sava, the greatest Serbian educator.⁴³

The Church of Saint Anthony of Padua has been proclaimed a Monument of the Culture in the Republic of Serbia.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The history of the Franciscan site in Belgrade was set off by the famous Saint John of Capistrano in the XV century, who marked its future ecclesial position. In the recent history, the Franciscan site in Belgrade was raised to the rank of a convent and institutionalized within the OFM Bosna Argentina, the Franciscan province with its seat in Sarajevo.

On the site, there are a convent building designed by architect Blaž Misita-Katušić and a convent and a parish church designed by Jože Plečnik. Plečnik designed a monumental, and yet a revolutionary simple building, full of multi-layered denotations, which perfectly fit into the Franciscan ideas, as well as the iconography of the Christianity overall. The paper presented the process preceding the construction, the highlights of the construction history during Plečnik's involvement followed by the contributions by his successors. The

43 TANJA DAMLJANOVIĆ, "Dva hrama za dve konfesije - traganje za modernovizantijskim", in: *Nasleđe*, 6, Beograd, 2005., p. 84.

44 H. TUCIĆ et al, *Crkva Svetog Antuna Padovanskog = St. Anthony of Padua Church*, p. 6.

evaluation of the architectural and structural features is connected to the artistic decoration outlining the interior architecture.

That church represents a significant milestone in the history of sacred architecture, as far as the architectural values of the sacred rooms are concerned. With each of his previous designs, Plečnik set a unique study for this project, featuring the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Belgrade as a compelling masterpiece with its memorable structure, form, materials, aesthetics, and the atmosphere.