

THE SPIRIT OF A PALACE

Its Role for the Preservation of the Munich Residence

HERMANN J. NEUMANN
Bayerische Schlösserverwaltung
Schloss Nymphenburg 16
D-80638 München
Germany
hermann.neumann@bsv.bayern.de

Abstract. The Munich Residence in the heart of the bavarian capital, severely damaged during World War II, has suffered several losses of its tangible heritage during the 600 years of its existence. But the thesis should be allowed that the special tradition and historic character, the nurture of the fine arts as well as stately representation, or in short: the dignity of this place allowed the central palace of the Wittelsbach family to outlast the centuries in a special quality – including its building fabric. But the reverse proposition should be represented in this text as well: that it is the prudent preservation of the palace’s outside, its characteristic layout and interior that offered the opportunity to preserve the sense of a cultural and historic center at this place. Future risks for the adequate preservation of this palace can only be mastered if the specific spirit of the Residence is the guideline for both responsible maintenance and adequate uses of the building.

Roots and Development of a “Spirit of the Munich Residence”

Bavaria proudly looks back on more than 1,400 years of history. The complicated tradition of its governments and the corresponding residences goes beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to know that the Wittelsbach dynasty that governed Bavaria from 1180 to 1918 made Munich its single residence in 1506, developing the palace into one of the most splendid centers of power in central Europe. There have been several attempts to identify the specific spirit of this palace complex, starting with a 1644 work by Baldassare Pistorini that describes the Residence and its significant interior in detail (Schmid 1685). For the context of this paper, three aspects should be adequate.

A PLACE FOR THE TRADITION OF SOVEREIGNTY

As early as in the mid-14th century Munich had achieved a special political significance when Emperor Ludwig the Bavarian (reign 1314-1347), a Wittelsbach, reigned the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation from here. Ludwig is deemed as one of the most significant European monarchs of the late Middle Ages (Rall 1986). But his residence, the partly preserved Old Court (Alter Hof) had strategic disadvantages which forced Ludwig's successors to build a fortified castle on the border of the city. Since this New Fortress (Neuveste) proved to be more viable than the Old Court, the duke family moved to the New Fortress until 1540 (Meitinger 1970).

As it promised global influence, the idea of a Bavarian emperor was not only kept alive over the centuries, it even became an obsession. Huge amounts of money and countless lives were sacrificed for this ambition. However, the emphasis of this effort was on political propaganda, displayed in stately architecture. Developing the New Fortress into the Residence, Duke Maximilian I (reign 1598-1651) raised the monument to this ideology (Kraus 1990). He went down into history as Bavaria's first Elector (Kurfürst) and as one of the most significant monarchs of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648).

Maximilian's direct predecessors determined the scope of the new palace, the later Residence, by the Antiquarium. This seventy meter long hall displaying antique sculptures was later transformed into a ballroom and amended with richly decorated gardens.

The representative display of the whole country by a cycle of paintings showing Bavarian towns and castles in combination with a number of splendid busts of Roman emperors manifested a political program – the claim for the crown. After 1600, when the Antiquarium was completed, Maximilian accomplished his own interpretation of the same theme: the sequence of a splendid reception courtyard (called Emperor's Courtyard), a grand staircase, a two-story ballroom with adjacent living quarters for the emperor and other distinguished guests that by far exceeded the creations of his predecessors.

But only Maximilian's great-grandson, Elector Karl Albrecht, had a realistic chance to take over the emperor's crown from the Habsburg family, close relatives who did not have a male successor. He assigned his favorite architect François Cuvilliés, trained in France, with re-designing the elector's apartment (Braunfels 1986). The resulting Rich Rooms (Reiche Zimmer), together with the ancestral portrait gallery

and a new wing of the palace that housed the collection of paintings again demonstrated the claim for highest power together with an elegant style of living. The thereby created Bavarian variation of the Rococo style became a model for probably the highest cultural bloom that the small country in the heart of Europe was to achieve.

A PLACE OF RELIGIOSITY

Maximilian's personal piety as well as the claim for leadership that was clearly demonstrated by the catholic party gave the religious aspect an important role in the Duke's architectural program. Maximilian placed a statue of Saint Mary into the center of the Residence's new main façade towards the city. The court chapel was also dedicated to Mary. The additional private chapel of the ducal family held a collection of relics. Its walls were decorated in scagliola, a stucco technique typical for the Residence, which gave the polished walls the look of pietra dura or even watercolor paintings. Together with gilded stucco on the ceiling and precious furniture, this decoration gave the chapel the character of a treasury. Its textile treasures, numerous tunics and altar decorations, have been preserved.

With Maximilian's successor Ferdinand Maria and his Italian wife, the Baroque style was introduced to Munich. To express the gratitude for the birth of the crown prince, a large church, consecrated to St. Cajetan (known as Theatiner church), was erected close to the Residence, beginning 1663. King Ludwig I (Bavaria became a kingdom in 1806) still contributed to this religious tradition in the 19th century by building the new All Saints Court Church (Allerheiligen Hofkirche) in Norman-Byzantine-Venetian style.

A PLACE FOR THE MUSES

Orlando di Lasso is known for the rich musical work he created at the Munich court of the late Renaissance. Mozart wrote his opera "Idomeneo" here. And Richard Wagner, who composed for Ludwig II from 1864 on, is seen in the context of the king's courtly cultural ambitions. Numerous other musicians and composers who worked for the Wittelsbach family are presently rediscovered and, like Agostino Stefani (1654-1728), internationally appreciated. As early as 1653 the first opera was performed in Munich. And exactly 100 years later the second opera house of the city was opened. This fine Rococo theatre,

built by François Cuvilliés, is one of the major achievements in the history of its style (Braunfels 1986).

Whoever loves Munich as a city of the fine arts first thinks of the collections of paintings in the Pinakothek and the sculptures in the Glyptothek which are presented in Neoclassical museum buildings since the 19th century. However, large parts of these and several other collections – e.g. numismatic, ethnological and treasury – have originally been compiled by the house of Wittelsbach and presented in the Residence or its neighborhood. The above mentioned Antiquarium with its splendid sculpture collection had a special role in this context in the late 16th century; it also housed the court library. At the same time, Bavarian rulers developed a specific passion for porcelain. It was bought in the Far East or in Meißen, which was groundbreaking in Europe in this field, or from their own manufactories, i.e. Frankenthal or Nymphenburg. King Ludwig I, who saw himself as a founder of a new cultural florescence of his country, set a special example by revitalizing the art of monumental fresco painting when he enlarged the Residence (1826-1842) in Neoclassical style (Neumann 2001).

In its zenith, the Munich Residence, estate of one of the great old European dynasties, appears sober and monumental on the outside, with precious interior. It is a rich, sophisticated building, several times amended in a wise and careful way, preserving the already existing parts. It is created to represent the ambitious political goals, the Christian ideals and the nurture of the arts to which twelve generations of builders felt obliged (Klingensmith 1993, Falthäuser 2006).

Threats to the “Spirit of the Munich Residence” in History

Several fires rather acted as a stimulus than as a drawback for further development of the building. But there were other threats for the Residence’s spirit: Fatal political developments such as the Swedish occupation in 1632, the wars of succession in the 18th century (all of which were lost), or the extinction of governing family branches. The latter would have caused not only a relocation of the center of power, but also of pieces of decoration. However, this was avoided by luck and diplomatic skill. It was not until the end of World War I that the management of the palace, well-attuned for centuries, came to a standstill. At least the heart of the court administration kept working and was able to prevent an invasion by revolutionaries.

After consolidating the circumstances, it was crucial to find a perspective for a new use of the palace with its several thousand rooms – and to clarify the property situation of the immense collections of art treasures, all the more as art and architecture often form an inseparable unit. A dislocation of parts of these collections would have had a fatal effect on the spirit of the building. The new government negotiated an arrangement with the former royal house that has proved its worth up to the present day. It assured the Wittelsbach family financial compensation and a right of use for the nationalized buildings and land which were from then on managed by the Bavarian Administration of Castles, Gardens and Lakes (or in short: Castles Administration). All the art collections, furniture and other treasures, however, remained in their traditional context, for the public good – especially as the Residence was to become a museum.

However, it proved impossible to establish a well endowed collection comparable to the St. Petersburg Hermitage. A first section on the main floor was open to the public by May 1920. After some structural adjustments, the significantly enlarged Residence Museum opened in May 1937 – only to close again a few years later because of World War II (Bayerische Verwaltung... 1937).

Contemporary witnesses talk about a barren, melancholic ambience that, instead of allowing visitors to savor the courtly atmosphere of the palace's erstwhile purpose, rather reminded of its loss. At least it was spared the occupation by the Nazi government and its propaganda machinery – other than the medieval Nuremberg Castle.

However, on November 9, 1940, the Residence was hit by one of the first air raids. Further attacks followed in March and October 1943 as well as in March 1944. Eventually, after a major airstrike by the British Army on April 24 and 25, 1944, the Residence burned down (Permoser 1997). But it was not totally destroyed: most of the vaulted rooms in the ground floor and of the incombustible structures survived, as well as most of the movable decoration and works of art which had been relocated or at least documented as examples. This heritage was saved thanks to the anticipatory work of the Castles Administration – and especially of some construction and museum experts who did not take fright in showing their doubts about the victory of the Nazi regime.

Successful Preservation Until the End of the 20th Century

In architectural questions, the Castles Administration maintained a high degree of autonomy. Already before the disaster of World War II, it was very much committed to preservation – not least due to the influence of the Bavarian architect Rudolf Esterer (1879-1965). He became acquainted with the fading traditional spirit of the Residence when he worked for the court during the last years of the monarchy. Being a dedicated member of the Arts and Crafts Movement, he developed a Preservation Theory and published it widely when he had a university teaching position. When the Bavarian government initiated a preservation program in 1933 that concentrated on the long neglected castles, he had the chance to put his theory into practice. Heading the construction department of the Castles Administration, he was able to set up a special team with its own office in the Residence shortly after the fire disaster of April 1944. It was charged with the recovery of cultural artifacts and clearing away the debris, but also with the protection and documentation of the ruins, thereby laying the foundation for the reconstruction of the building.

In the war, the young Swiss architect Tino Walz (1913-2008) joined the construction team of the Castles Administration. He had studied architecture in Munich, living with Rudolf Esterer in his apartment in the Residence; so he got to know the palace very well. It turned out to be a cast of fortune that Esterer could employ this able and open-minded young man – who did not have to join an army – in the Residence right after the destruction.

Only a few years ago Tino Walz admitted that he had been working for the Allied Reconnaissance, fighting against Nazi Germany under the screen of an inconspicuous occupation. After the end of the war, he was able to use his good connections to the American occupying forces for the benefit of the Residence.

In 1945, Germany lay in ruins. Many people had lost their home in the air raids, many historic buildings – representing large part of Germany's cultural identity – had been destroyed. Soon people started to clear the rubble stone by stone and to rebuild the houses. And they began to discuss the future fate of historic buildings such as the Residence. There were voices suggesting to break down the ruins and to replace them by new buildings to mark a new beginning in a democratic Germany.

But the team around Rudolf Esterer and Tino Walz had other plans. As early as 1945, first considerations included the construction of a theatre in the Neoclassical Throne Hall. While many people were demoralized and in great need after the war, many also longed for theatre and music. Art and culture sparked their optimism. This had already been considered before the end of the war by a group of Munich artists and intellectuals; Tino Walz was very active in this group. The Castles Administration and especially the destroyed Residence suggested itself as a focal point of such activities. This was the place to search after the indestructible nucleus of the historic and cultural values of the country – and to praise them, for the good of the monument. This group, soon named “Friends of the Residence”, most probably developed the idea to create an event location in the Residence – which soon proved to be successful.

While only a humble stage was inaugurated in the former furniture storage on May 8, 1946 (the first anniversary of the end of the war), it brought cultural life back into the palace, thereby paving the path for a reconstruction of the building in its former spirit. That is, not the much too large and unattractive museum that had existed from 1920 to 1939, but the spirit of the cultural and representative center of the whole country that it had been from 1540 to 1918.

Comparable German palaces that have been damaged during World War II had a different fate: that in Karlsruhe became a museum, that in Hannover a parliament, those in Berlin and Potsdam were blown up. Only the Munich Residence regained such an abundance of high-level functions that resemble those of a historic royal residence.

A detailed description of the reconstruction of the Munich Residence, which was completed only in 2003, would go beyond the scope of this article (Faltlhauser 2006). But the conditions and principles that especially enforced the aura and the high quality of courtly culture even in a republican society shall be summed up in the following.

- The organizational structure of the construction works within the Castles Administration, set up by Rudolf Esterer in 1944, was essential for the consistency and coherence of the post war restoration and reconstruction of the palace. Esterer’s successors as well as the responsible staff animated this architectural strategy with great commitment.

The young and dedicated team of the Residence Construction Office closely cooperated with experienced senior colleagues (among them Engelbert Völk with his solid, conservative style) and with spe-

cialists for historic techniques. The about 9,000 architectural drawings of that time show a thorough consideration of details as well as far-sighted concepts which proved its worth until the end of the long construction period.

A high degree of authenticity could be achieved in the restored or reconstructed style rooms, using the extensive collection of original parts as well as a documentation of the pre-war situation by photos and drawings. While there were irreplaceable losses, especially in the long underestimated wings from the 19th century, the essential architectural treasures, dating from the late Renaissance, early Baroque and Rococo, were saved. They are the indispensable setting for the rich collections of furniture and accessories, providing for their adequate effect.

Searching for new functions of the huge building, a wise combination of uses was found that reflects those of the former royal residence. Governmental representation survived in a series of rooms which offer an equally appropriate setting for events of a republic, such as the reception of state guests.

After the restoration of the palace, most of its traditional art collections returned to the Residence, be it in the recreated collection rooms, the Treasury (Schatzkammer), the State Coin Collection or other rooms, some of them style rooms, some neutrally designed.

The Residence houses academies and research institutions that bring bustling activity from morning to night to the building, just like in the days when it was the seat of the Bavarian court.

Most impressive is the return of the court's rich musical and theatre tradition to the Residence. Besides the traditional theatres, a concert hall (the Herkulessaal in the former Throne Hall) and four smaller halls open their doors for the performing and dramatic arts; in the summer, open-air performances take place in the Courtyards.

Only recently (June 14, 2008), the Cuvilliés Theatre was reopened after restoration, the festive ceremony and opera premiere being part of Munich's 850. anniversary celebrations. Exactly 50 years before, reopening the same theatre had been a highlight of the Residence restoration. The then groundbreaking restoration of the Rococo auditorium, the creation of a new, richly decorated foyer, a completely new stage machinery and the successful connection to the other historic rooms of the palace made the Cuvilliés Theatre a focal point of the idea of reconstruction. The successful renovation that preserved the

qualities of the 1950s gives reason for an optimistic outlook on the further nurture of the Residence's important musical qualities

The Recent Past – Summary and Outlook

Major changes of society and its values have their effects on the Munich Residence and the efforts to preserve it. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Castles Administration's "reconstruction generation" of the 1950s retired. Up to this time, the documentation of restoration works, the integration of new scientific findings and scientifically based techniques – nowadays indispensable – had not been attached adequate weight. In the meantime the work of earlier generations of conservators have of course been evaluated. Several publications and exhibitions not only celebrated the accomplishments but also questioned some outdated approaches, such as the negligent treatment of some of Klenze's works or some losses in favor of ambitious new creations. The last major achievement of the reconstruction, the All Saints' Court Church (Allerheiligen Hofkirche) set new standards with its bare brickwork interior that impressively reminds of the war destructions.

In recent years, the architects of the Castles Administration and the cooperating State Construction Offices face new demands. The technical equipment that was installed during the construction boom of the 1950s is outdated and has to be replaced. New security demands to protect both the treasures and the visitors require costly investments, competing for ever scarcer public money. In this context, concerns about the loss of "merely" decaying historic building fabric has to stand back behind security concerns that often entail legal risks. Far-reaching interventions that are necessary to refurbish the technical equipment often challenge the architecture. The rare quality of a consequently maintained "masterstroke", accomplished during the early reconstruction period, might fall victim to everyday construction practice since there is an increasing lack of individuals that are comprehensively educated in historic architecture.

New museum concepts that meet the rising demands of the visitors with new infrastructure compete with silent State Apartments, where visual interference is unwanted.

In our secular society the religious aspect, once very important for the Munich Residence, is at risk to be marginalized more and more in the museum presentations. On the other hand, museum concepts de-

iving from the 20th century have to be brought up-to-date to withstand the competition of new attractions.

The rich choice of event rooms, including the courtyards, increasingly attract ever more gigantic and insensitive installations. “Fan miles” and “party zones” with plastic tents, huge speakers and giant advertising panels impend to take over the royal palace. In this case, the century-old spirit of Bavaria’s cultural heart that survived thanks to the successful and sensitive reconstruction after World War II would be lost after all.

We can only hope that a sound and responsible administration, dedicated builders and architects, conservators and art historians, together with an alert public that wants “their” Residence to be preserved in the way they love it since centuries, will give the spirit of this place a chance in the future.

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