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THE ART HERITAGE OF NOBLE FAMILIES OF SLAVONIA AND SRIJEM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN LEGACY

LIKOVNA BAŠTINA SLAVONSKIH I SRIJEMSKIH PLEMIČKIH OBITELJI U KONTEKSTU EUROPSKOG NASLJEĐA

ABSTRACT

In the Gallery of Fine Arts, Osijek the art heritage of the European nobility is being kept and researched, and it is a part of the once copious art collections belonging to both foreign and domestic noble families which were living and working in Slavonia and Srijem from the beginning of the 18th to the middle of the 20th century (Odescalchi, Eltz, Pejačević, Hilleprand-Prandau, Normann-Ehrenfels). These are Italian, Austrian, German, Hungarian and Croatian noble families whose reputation was based on their political, economic or ecclesiastical power and influence in the Habsburg Empire. Their arrival in today's eastern Slavonia and Srijem is associated with the retreat of the Ottoman Empire and the integration into the Habsburg Empire, as well as the overall restoration. Introducing the material and the history of the family in the national cultural institutions is a challenge and an opportunity to connect with foreign cultural institutions and to present the family history and their artwork in the context of the European legacy. The Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek plans to research, estimate and present the artworks (ca 800 pieces) of the Slavonian noble families in one large international and multi-annual project named TheHidden Treasure of the European Nobility. In this megaproject, each family and their extant art heritage will be given a separate section which is to be linked with the countries from which these families originate, and which are associated with the history of each family (Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Serbia). The realization of such exhibition projects can also be accomplished through financial support of the European cultural funds and cooperation with the museums from the abovementioned European countries.

Key words: Gallery of Fine Arts, Osijek, Slavonia and Srijem, collections of noble families, art heritage, European legacy

SAŽETAK

U Galeriji likovnih umjetnosti, Osijek čuva se i istražuje likovna baština europskog plemstva, dijelovi nekadašnjih bogatih umjetničkih zbirki, stranih i domaćih velikaških obitelji koje su živjele i djelovale od početka 18. do sredine 20. st. na prostorima Slavonije i Srijema (Odescalchi, Eltz, Pejačević, Hilleprand-Prandau, Normann-Ehrenfels). Riječ je o talijanskim, austrijskim, njemačkim, mađarskim i hrvatskih plemićkim obiteljima koje su svoj ugled temeljile na političkoj, gospodarskoj ili pak crkvenoj moći i utjecaju u Habsburškom carstvu. Njihov dolazak na prostor današnje istočne Slavonije, Srijema vezan je na uzmak

Osmanskog carstva i integraciju u monarhijski sustav te cjelokupnu obnovu. Predstavljanje građe i povijesti obitelji u nacionalnim kulturnim ustanovama izazov je i prilika za povezivanjem sa stranim kulturnim institucijama i predstavljanje povijesti obitelji i njihovih umjetnina u kontekstu europskog nasljeđa. Galerija likovnih umjetnosti u Osijeku planira istražiti, valorizirati i prezentirati likovnu građu (oko 800 jedinica) slavonskih velikaških obitelji u jednom velikom međunarodnom i višegodišnjem projektu pod nazivom Skriveno blago europskog plemstva. U mega-projektu svaka će obitelj sa sačuvanom likovnom baštinom dobiti zasebnu dionicu koja će se pokušati povezati sa zemljama iz kojih obitelji potječu i koje su vezane uz prošlost svake obitelji (Italija, Njemačka, Austrija, Mađarska, Bugarska, Srbija). Realizacija ovakvih izložbenih projekata moguća je i uz financijsku potporu europskih kulturnih fondova i suradnje s muzejskim institucijama, iz spomenutih europskih zemalja.

Ključne riječi: Galerija likovnih umjetnosti, Osijek, Slavonija i Srijem, plemićke zbirke, likovna baština, europsko nasljeđe

1. Introduction

Modern research of art heritage of the noble families in Slavonia and Srijem is related to the activity of the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek (GLUO). Its holdings contain a great number of artworks which originally belonged to these families, and therefore it is the initiator of a large international and multiannual exhibition project *The Hidden Treasure of the European Nobility*. The project aims to explore and present the valuable collections of artworks that were once housed in the palaces located in the area between Virovitica and Ilok.

They are the domestic and foreign families: the Counts Pejačević (Virovitica, Našice, Retfala, Podgorač), the Princes Odescalchi (Ilok), the Counts Eltz (Vukovar), the Barons Hillebrand von Prandau and the Counts Normann-Ehrenfels (Valpovo).

The above-mentioned Croatian, Italian, German, Austrian and Hungarian noble families based their reputation on their political, economic or ecclesiastical power and influence in the Habsburg Empire. Their arrival in today's Slavonia and Srijem is associated with the decline of power of the Ottoman Empire and the integration into the Habsburg Empire and its restoration.

2. About the family history

The history of these families during the two and a half centuries (from the end of the 17th century until World War II) is inextricably linked to their estates in Slavonia and Srijem where they had impressive palaces, manors, mausoleums and villas. Over that time, thanks to their great economic power, they played an important role in the political, social and cultural development not only of this part of Croatia, but also Europe. They carried out a number of state, military and ecclesiastical functions, and they were awarded important medals. Economic power also influenced the cultural level in which they followed the Central European trends in the construction of architectural complexes, interior design, fashion, music, literature and acquisition of artworks.

The Pejačević Family came from Bulgaria in the late 17th century and in the second half of the 18th century they divided into Virovitica, Našice and Ruma-Retfala family branches. On the territory of the former Habsburg Empire (Našice, Sopron, Budapest, Vienna, Virovitica, Podgorač, Retfala, Ruma) they had a series of castles, town palaces, mansions and other buildings. One of the most prominent Pejačević family members in the Croatian

historiography is most definitely Count Teodor Pejačević, who was ban and a member of the Našice branch. (Picture 1)

Picture 1 Vlaho Bukovac, Ban Count *Teodor Pejačević*, 1903



Source: Archive of Gallery of Fine Arts, Osijek

The Odescalchi Family came from Rome in the late 17th century to the Srijem area. Their rise was based on the ecclesiastical power of Pope Innocent XI who was born into the Odescalchi family (Picture 2). He played a key role in helping Emperor Leopold to defend Europe against the Ottoman Empire and to form the Holy League. The princely family had many estates and palaces in Italy, from Como in the north to Bracciano in the south. However, a part of their great economic power came from the estate on the fertile slopes of Fruška Gora in Srijem.

Picture 2 Unidentified sculptor Pope *Innocent XI Odescalchi*, ca 1688



Source: Archive of Gallery of Fine Arts, Osijek

The German Counts Eltz came in the early 18th century from the Rhine area to Vukovar on the Danube. The most significant family seat, next to Eltville, was the famous Eltzburg castle. Their reputation was based on the medieval knight tradition, as well as on performing a very respectable function of archbishop and prince-elect of Mainz, responsible for the election of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The most significant family member was Phillip Karl von und zu Eltz (Picture 3), who received the title of count and the right to purchase the Vukovar estate.

Picture 3 Unidentified painter Archbishop and Prince-elector Count Philipp Karl Eltz, ca 1734



Source: Archive of Gallery of Fine Arts, Osijek

The Austrian Baron Petar II Antun Hillebrand von Prandau (Picture 4) held the high court office in Vienna and in the early 18th century he was awarded the Valpovo estate along the Drava River. In the 19th century the Barons Prandau formed marital ties with the German Counts Normann from Ehrenfels, who administered the Valpovo estate until the World War II.

Picture 4 Ephraim Hochhauser King's secret advisor *Baron Petar II Antun Hillebrandvon Prandau*, ca 1748



Source: Archive of Gallery of Fine Arts, Osijek

3. About the history of art collections

After building the palaces on their new estates (in the 18th and early 19th century) they started buying artworks from foreign artists, usually from the areas where they traveled and lived (Austria, Germany, Italy, Hungary). In the later periods, in their collections there were more

and more works from the domesticated foreign and local artists. In the late 19th and early 20th century they were commissioning and buying works from domestic artists. This strongly encouraged the development of Croatian art of the period. In their art collections the so called *galleries of ancestors* particularly stand out; they are the graphic or pictorial representations of important people, and through them every noble family demonstrated their historical and social status. Most of the preserved artworks are portraits commissioned from the late 17th to the mid-20th century. The other genres were preserved to a much lesser extent, namely still lifes, landscapes, allegories, religious paintings and prints covering different themes. By studying the formal and stylistic characteristics of the preserved artworks, by putting them in a time perspective and by understanding the family history and genealogy, it is possible to reconstruct the commissioners and the occasions with regard to which particular works were created, and to identify the direct or indirect influence on the works of fine art outside the family collections. This mainly refers to the architecture of their palaces, mansions, mausoleums, chapels and churches which were under their patronage, but also to the impressive portraits of the prominent family members. These works were commissioned for various institutions and organizations in which these people had a significant role. The role of certain family members as patrons of fine art was particularly explored.

After World War II the art collections of the noble families from Slavonia and Srijem ceased to exist in their original setting. Thanks to the efforts of the staff of a special commission at the then Ministry of Education (the so called KOMZA), the artworks were rescued from physical destruction and assigned to the Croatian museum institutions (Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek, Našice Local History Museum, Museum of Slavonia in Osijek, Vukovar Town Museum, Virovitica Town Museum, Valpovo Regional Museum, Ilok Town Museum, Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, Strossmayer Gallery and Department of Prints and Drawings of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb, Croatian History Museum in Zagreb, Modern Gallery in Zagreb, Zagreb City Museum).

A large part of the materials was submitted without proper documentation, and afterwards the artworks were not systematically processed nor considered in the context of their creation or provenance. It was a kind of DAMNATIO MEMORIAE process over the heritage of a social class which became undesirable, given the new political circumstances after World War II. Therefore, the job of identifying the scattered materials from the collections of noble families lasted for years. The identification was based on the relatively poorly preserved pre-war archival materials (e.g. lists or inventories of the manors, wills, surviving photographs of the interiors of palaces) and the post-war lists of materials compiled by KOMZA.

4. Modern research of the heritage of nobility

Intensive research of the art heritage of the nobility in Slavonia and Srijem began in 2001. That is when the Pejačević family's heritage in the holdings of the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek was explored, and the results were presented in the master's thesis of Jasminka Najcer Sabljak titled *The Art Heritage of the Pejačević Family in the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek*. The field of research was expanded to several other families, resulting in a doctoral dissertation by the same author titled *The Art Collections of the Landowning Families in Slavonia and Srijem*. The results of this research were included in the realization of the exhibition project *The Art Heritage of the Pejačević Family*, led by Jasminka Najcer Sabljak from the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek and Silvija Lučevnjak from the Našice Local History Museum. They managed to identify most of the artworks which had been transferred after World War II from the Slavonian palaces of the Pejačević family to the National Museum in Osijek (today the Museum of Slavonia Osijek), and afterwards to the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek and other Croatian museums.

At the end of 2013 a big study and thematic exhibition *The Art Heritage of the Pejačević Family* was set up in the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek. The exhibition was set up in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb at the beginning of 2014, and it will be transferred to Našice and Virovitica. The possibility of its presentation in Ruma (Serbia), Sofia (Bulgaria), Sopron (Hungary) and Vienna (Austria) is also being considered. Intensive work on further research and opportunities for presenting the art heritage of other noble families is being carried out. As part of the permanent display of the Vukovar Town Museum in the newly renovated Eltz Manor the heritage of the Counts Eltz is displayed, and it is linked to the museums in Eltville, Eltzbürg and Aschafenburg.

The permanent display of the Ilok Town Museum contains the scarce heritage of the Odescalchi family which has been preserved, and it needs to be associated with their palaces and manors in Rome and the rest of that region.

The Valpovo Regional Museum has in its permanent display a part of the rich art heritage of the Hillebrand von Prandau and Normann-Ehrenfels families, and their history needs to be associated with their heritage in Vienna and Rothenthurm (Austria), Athens (Greece) and Ehrenfels in Germany.

5. Conclusion

After examining the background of the families presented, as part of the project *The Hidden Treasure of the European Nobility*, it is possible to associate the materials researched with the culture of the countries the families originate from. These artworks have been preserved and handed over as legacy to future generations representing the prime evidence of our cultural history, directly linked to the European legacy. With these exhibitions the Gallery of Fine Arts in Osijek will present the most significant part of its holdings and also demonstrate how artworks from the collections of noble families can be presented as part of our cultural identity. This research is not only aimed at presenting the artworks in museums, but also at including this knowledge in the process of revitalization of the palaces of noble families in this area, as a vital part of cultural tourism. With such presentation of its heritage the eastern part of Croatia will be included in the map of the common European cultural heritage.

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