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ICONS BY *ZOGRAF* PAINTERS, MONASTERIES OF FRUŠKA GORA AND THE SERBIAN NATIONAL IMAGINARY

Introduction

The Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) is located on the most frequented pedestrian street of Belgrade, Knez Mihajlova. In the peak of tourist season 2013, from mid-July to mid-September, it hosted the exhibition *Art of the 18th c in the collection of Matica Srpska Gallery*, where the vast majority of exhibits consisted of icons and religious prints. In the speeches delivered during the inauguration, the peculiarities of the 18th c Serbian painting were evoked and extolled, consisting on the one hand of its “native” and “uneducated” character, and on the other, of its relationships with the art of Western Europe. Among the speakers were both prominent representatives of the Academy and high-ranking government officials, including the minister of culture of the Serbian Republic and the cultural secretary of the autonomous government of Vojvodina¹. In spite of the presence of a couple of clergymen at the opening ceremony, there was no official representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the speeches a clear overtone sounded: the exhibition confirmed the Western connections of Serbia, expressed in the “baroquization” of icon painting, which simultaneously underscores the local values, conveyed by the “native style” of icons called *zograf icons*. In this way, the musealized 18th c icons were inscribed into contemporary Serbian geopolitics, arranging elements of the Serbian national imaginary in its particular order (on Serbian national imaginary cf. Živković 2011).

Using objects manufactured long before the time horizon of “modernity” (however this horizon can be defined) so as to legitimize contemporary identities, goals, or political demands is nothing special, and attributing identity meanings to artistic styles has a long

¹ Founded in 1826 in Pest, Matica Srpska is the oldest Serbian cultural association. Since 1864, it has been located in Novi Sad, currently the capital of the autonomous region of Vojvodina.

tradition. It can be argued that the 18thc icons from Vojvodina, together with their places of origin and long preservation at the monasteries of Fruška Gora, share the fate of frescoes from monasteries in Raška, Kosovo and Metohija, used for yet another construction of Serbian national identity². An object that originates before the time horizon of modernity and enjoys the status of a heritage monument seems to always get involved in politics, both on a micro- and a macro-level (cf. Klekot 2012, 2014a). The policies of subsequent systems and governments that result in particular material and institutional solutions (affecting both the physical existence of the thing and its existence in social memory) constitutes the macro scale involvement. The micro scale political involvement of a monument is constructed within heritage expert discourse and the expert practices of conservators, historians, art historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, who by attributing certain historic and aesthetic values to a thing, or a place, legitimize them as historic monuments. In so doing they make them into objects of cultural policy on the macro-level of a nation-state, a region, or the world. In the case of Serbian icons there is yet another factor at work on both levels, important for their heritagization: the Orthodox religion. This is the case because of both the status of icon representations in Orthodox Christianity (cf. e.g. Ouspensky 1992), as well as due to the extremely important role the Orthodoxy has always played in Serbian identity projects (Gil 2005).

This article concerns the heritagization of Orthodox icons from Serbian Vojvodina. Heritagization here is understood as the process of inclusion of tangible and intangible things into the value system, on which the category of heritage is based. Heritagization, as well as other methodological issues concerning heritage, are discussed in the first section of this article. The next section is dedicated to the place Vojvodina occupies in the Serbian national imaginary. In following, I elaborate on the question of *zograf* icons and their “folk” character. Subsequently, the heritagization of those icons and their musealization are discussed, as well as the heritagization of Orthodox churches and monasteries inhabited by monks or nuns.

I employ here the material from my fieldwork in Vojvodina, which consisted of ethnographic research in Fruška Gora in July and September of 2013, and in April 2014³. Observations and informal talks took place on tourist routes, in the vicinity of monasteries and on their premises. During my fieldwork I took part in the so-called Little Marathon (every year in Fruška Gora two big events for mountain hiking lovers are organized: the Big

² An exhibition of the copies of wall paintings from Kosovo and Metohija was inaugurated on the 15th of February 2013, in the Frescoes Gallery of the National Museum in Belgrade.

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Marathon in May and the Little Marathon in September) and in Easter celebrations. Part of the fieldwork were also informal talks and more formal interviews with experts professionally involved in the conservation of monasteries and the musealization of icons, both in Novi Sad and in Belgrade. It was during this part of my fieldwork that I attended the inauguration of the exhibition described in the first paragraph of this article. The exhibition at SANU, as well as at the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church and at the Frescoes Gallery of the National Museum in Belgrade allowed for interesting observations, which I rely on in this text. The heritagization of Fruška Gora concerns icons and monasteries – which are my subject here – as well as the landscape and nature, to which I dedicated another article (Klekot 2014c). Here, therefore, I will focus on the cultural heritage directly related to the Orthodox religion.

Heritage and its anthropological studies

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, an American anthropologist, has defined heritage as “a mode of cultural production that has recourse to the past and produces something new” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2011: 126). What is important in this definition is its conceiving of heritage as a process (production is a process, after all), as well as its stress on the relationship between the past and the present. The idea of heritage as a process, rather than as a collection of things is to a great extent grounded in anthropology and related to important changes between 1972, or the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and 2003, when UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (cf. Klekot 2014b). The convention of 1972 was based on the modern Western category of the historic monument (and site) which was, in spite of its ethnocentric bias, universalized and applied to the whole cultural heritage of the world (cf. Smith 2006). As a result of revisions within Western philosophy and theory of science, which influenced developments in the meta-reflection of particular disciplines (themselves providing stimuli for the revisions), a plurality of discourses about the past was accepted. The entire process was grounded in the recognition of locality (in terms of both time and place) of any human perspective – the scientific included – and combined with the crisis of representation. In effect, critical analyses of academic history and scientific approaches to the past were formulated (cf. Domańska, ed., 2010), combined with the need to acknowledge ontologies and value systems substantially different from those approaches, which arose in the course of the implementation of the 1972 convention. What followed was the shift from “historic

monument” to “tradition”, and from object to process. Heritage was supposed to be defined less as a collection of things, and more as an attitude towards the past, comprising the engagement of the past in the process of cultural production. The conclusion is that the category of historic monument (and site), rather than conveying universal values is part and parcel of the heritage of the modern West.

Another important element of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s definition concerns the character of the relationship between the present and the past: heritage “has recourse to the past and produces something new”. Therefore, the relationship is defined as “having recourse to”: the present has recourse to the past in order to transform it in the process of cultural production. This relationship is totally opposite to the attitude proposed by academic history, what Hans-Georg Gadamer has called “historicism”. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes that the history concerned about the past cannot be grounded in scientifically conceived experiments; nevertheless, it can aspire to empirical ideals with the concept of historical research. This is a sort of research that by formulating criteria of objectivity establishes an insurmountable distance between the researcher and the object of their research. According to Gadamer, however, the distance to the past constructed by historicism (supposed to guarantee historical research its scientific objectivism) became in spite of its universalistic claims an apparatus for relativizing relativity past, future an present (Gadamer 2004: 206-210).

Yet having recourse to the past in order to engage it in the production of “something new” can be dangerously instrumental. David Lowenthal, to whom heritage is a bastard brother of history, has warned of this danger. If history means pursuing a “noble aim” of “meticulous objectivity” in representing the past, heritage not only does deform the past, in fact “its function is to do just that” (Lowenthal 1998: 106). Without deforming the past, says Lowenthal, heritage would not be able to serve its essential function of legitimization. “Heritage thereby attests our identity and affirms our worth. (...) passes on exclusive myths of origin and continuance, endowing a select group with prestige and common purpose” (Lowenthal 1998: 122, 128). The past transformed into heritage loses historical chronology and mixes up the epochs, with no care for precedence, succession and context; it acquires characteristics of myth. Even if the noble pursuits of history are futile (the author is aware of its role in “promoting patriotism”), “objectivity remains a holy grail for even the most engaged historian” (Lowenthal 1998: 109). Although both, heritage and history concern the past, the fundamental difference between them consists in totally opposite attitudes towards it:

history differs from heritage not, as people generally suppose, in *telling* the truth, but in *trying* to do so despite being aware that truth is a chameleon and its chroniclers fallible beings. The most crucial distinction is that truth in heritage commits us to some present creed; truth in history is a flawed effort to understand the past on its own terms (Lowenthal 1998: 119; italics in original).

Obviously, an instrumental approach to the past contradicts the definition of the scientist and academic, supposed to serve the truth. Lowenthal's argument becomes clear in this respect, especially if we consider the sort of political power that the instrumental approach to the past holds, and its ideological potential. A little step further and heritage can have recourse to the past in order to legitimize current violence. The question remains, however, whether the scientific, historicist approach is a good protection against instrumentalization and ideologization.

Nevertheless, "having recourse to past" can also be fathomed beyond Lowenthal's Manichean division into heritage that instrumentally appropriates the past and history that keeps a safe, if objectifying, distance. This can be conceived of as hermeneutic *Aneignung*: appropriation as a necessary condition for authentic interpretation, leading to understanding (Ricoeur quoted in Schneider 2006: 26). The category of *Aneignung* is applied in cultural analysis by anthropologist Arnd Schneider, who claims that "arguably, in a more general sense most cultural practice is appropriation" (Schneider 2006: 22). Cultural practice is for Schneider a constant process of interpreting otherness, which means that whoever appropriates "changes oneself as a result of interpreting the other's artifact (or any other cultural manifestation)" (Schneider 2006: 26). A hermeneutic perspective underscores the relationship between "appropriation" and "understanding", or comprehending the appropriated by the appropriating. However, at the same time, as Schneider points out, the act of appropriation is a transaction into which inequality is inherently inscribed. Therefore, from the Other's point of view, appropriation can have a negative sense and result in alienation (Schneider 2006: 25-30). There is a vast literature on the alienating work of the museum, especially in the context of so-called primitive art and ethnographic objects (cf. Clifford 1988; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; also Karp, Lavine, eds., 1991). In more recent years the same authors portrayed heritagization as a way of appropriating the museum by the appropriated, who were able to make a previously alienating space into a place of their emancipation (Clifford 2013; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2011).

From the perspective of Vojvodina

Vojvodina is nowadays the only autonomous region of the Republic of Serbia. It is located in the southernmost territories of the Pannonian planes, while its boundaries in the South are marked by the Sava river and the Danube⁴. Vojvodina became part of the independent Serbian state on the 25th of November, 1918, following the act of the unification of the formerly Austro-Hungarian Vojvodina with the Kingdom of Serbia (Andrić 2012: 499). It is to the Habsburg past that contemporary Vojvodina is indebted, not only in regards to its autonomy, but also to the ethnic diversity of its population⁵. The most numerous of its minorities – the Hungarians (13% according to the census of 2011) – have been represented in the local parliament since 2012⁶.

The mass settlement of Serbs in Vojvodina resulted from their mass emigration from the territories of the Ottoman Empire. This took place a couple of times at the end of the 17th c and during the 18th c, always as a way of escaping Turkish repressions in consequence of Serbian armed rebellions against the Ottoman authorities. The first big wave of emigration, called the Great Emigration of the Serbs in Serbian historiography, took place in September 1690 and was headed by the patriarch of Peć, Arsenije III Crnojević / Čarnojević. It was in August of the same year that the patriarch received from Leopold Ia privilege granted to the Serbs willing to live in his domain, which confirmed their freedom of faith (Eastern Orthodoxy), the right to use the Julian calendar and the right to elect a Serbian archbishop – an ethnarch, or ethnic/religious authority (the same rights the Serbian church enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire (cf. Gil 2005: 77)). Since the end of the 17th c century, the Habsburg policy in the northern borderlands of the Turkish empire consisted mostly of stirring up the local Slavs, in the hopes of gaining an opportunity to incorporate the rebelled territories into their own monarchy. Parallel to this, the territories of the southern borderland of the Habsburg empire, near the Turkish border, enjoyed the special status of military frontier and were populated mostly by the Slavs.

⁴ The area of Vojvodina is 21 506 sq km, the population 1 931 809, or 26.87 % of the total population of the Republic of Serbia (vojvodina.gov.rs).

⁵ There are over 20 ethnic groups living in Vojvodina; after the Serb majority (67%), according to the census of 2011, the biggest minority groups are Hungarians, then Slovaks, the Roma, Croats, Romanians, Montenegrins, and Rusyns: http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Knjiga4_Veroisповest.pdf. (4.04.2015).

⁶ The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (Savez Vojvođanskih Mađara), the local Hungarian political party, in the term 2012-2016 has 8 deputies in the 120 person parliament. The president of the SVM, Ištvan Pastor was elected the parliament speaker: <http://www.svm.org.rs/sr/home-sr> (4.04.2015).

About 70 thousand⁷ people settled in the territories north of the Sava and the Danube as a result of the Great Emigration of the Serbs (Andrić 2012: 258-259). This historic event occupies a very important place in the Serbian national imaginary; what makes it even more important is its very suggestive visualization by one of the most prominent Serbian painters, Pavle Paja Jovanović (1859-1957). Jovanović painted *The Great Emigration*, destined for the Millennial Exhibition in Budapest in 1895⁸. Not surprisingly, the painting was commissioned by the patriarch of Sremske Karlovci, which points to the crucial role the church dignitaries played in the Serb emigration to territories of southern Hungary and more generally, the role of the Orthodox Church in the political life of the Serbian nation. The patriarchy in the borderland territories was established in 1708, with its first seat in the monastery of Krušedol in Fruška Gora, and then in Sremske Karlovci. It became the most important Serbian institution in the newly settled lands (Andrić 2012: 267), where both the religious and the political power belonged to the Serbian ethnarchs. The patriarch Arsenije III, the leader of the Great Emigration, and Arsenije IV Šakabenta who led the emigration wave of 1737, were both patriarchs of Peć under Turkish rule, what automatically made them Serbian ethnarchs. In the Ottoman empire, the religious leader of the church was given the function of *milet baša*⁹, and this solution developed under the Turkish authorities was also adapted to the new situation (Gil 2005: 77). The Serbian ethnarchy under the Habsburg rule existed during the entirety of the 18th century, although it was not always easy to get the privileges granted by Leopold I affirmed by his descendants. Influenced by the political ideas of the Enlightenment, the Serbs themselves soon started questioning the ethnarchy and laying claims to the same rights that other inhabitants of the empire enjoyed. Yet with the ethnarchy in place this proved simply impossible as the Serbs were treated by the Habsburg authorities as a collective subject, not as individual citizens.

⁷ Later on, in 1737, with the patriarch Arsenije IV Šakabenta, at least 10 thousand people left for the Habsburg territories (Andrić 2012: 270), and in 1788, 50 thousand people escaped beyond the Sava river (Božić et al. 1973: 207).

⁸ The painting was commissioned by the patriarch Georgije Branković. However, he found the first composition to “lack dignity” and put pressure on the artist threatening to block his fee. Following the patriarch’s suggestion, the artist removed from the scene a woman with a child and shepherds with cattle, painting instead an armored rider and some footmen. He also changed the features of the patriarch Arsenije III, making him look more like the patriarch Branković himself. The improved version decorated the patriarchal palace in Sremske Karlovci. Nowadays it decorates the Synod Room in the Belgrade headquarters of the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 1896, Paja Jovanović painted another picture on the same subject, according to his first idea; a slightly smaller but much more popular rendition. The painter sold the rights to its reproduction to an enterprising art dealer. In the following decades oleographies of “The Great Emigration”, the version “with the woman and the sheep”, became an extremely popular patriotic decoration in Serbian homes. The painting itself is currently housed in the National Museum of Pančevo (Vojvodina) (Janković 2014).

⁹ In the multireligious Ottoman empire *milet* was a judiciary unit grouping believers of one religion, acting according to its rules. The word *milet* comes from the Arabic *millah* and is usually translated as “nation”; the head of the *milet* was called “basha”.

It is in the context of the Serbian fight for political and citizenship rights that the name of Vojvodina appears for the first time. In May 1848, during the Springtime of the Peoples, “Serbian Vojvodina” was proclaimed in Sremske Karlovci. Despite the fact that after the fall of the revolution, Serbian Vojvodina’s constitution of 1848 fell into oblivion, the Austrian emperor added to his titles the one of the “Great Vojvoda of the Serbian Vojvodina” (Ilić 2012: 24). According to the 1921 centralistic constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the country’s territory was finally divided in 1929 into regional units called *banovina*, based more on geographical criteria than on historical regional divisions (Božić et al. 1973: 431, 437). Thus, from the map of the new country disappeared both the names reflecting its ethnic diversity (new administrative units were mostly named after the rivers), and its regional history, among them the name of Vojvodina. The country came back as an autonomous province of the Socialist Serbian Republic within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In the Serbian national imaginary, Vojvodina is associated with several pictures. Marko Živković describes the *loci communes* of this imaginary in the following way:

To the South, the rolling hills and rich soil of Serbia’s heartland rises to the mountains of epic patriarchalism, the Byzantine frescoes, the afterglow of the vanished Serbian Empire, and the Ottoman legacy. To the East, in the distance, Moscow – the Land of the Slavic Soul but also of Communism as an alternative. And a gaze over the rivers to the northern plains reveals the direction from which the European civilization comes to Belgrade, and it comes mediated by the Serbs educated (...) “over there (*preko*)”, the so-called *prečani* (lit. “overthereians”) who got their new ideas and their civilizational veneer in the former Habsburg lands – the third-rate Europe (Živković 2011:44).

Vojvodina is “plains to the North from where the European civilization brings its suspicious gifts” to the Serbia proper (Živković 2011:44). Vojvodina is hence inscribed as a point on the world axis of cultural and imaginary divisions between the global South and the global North, which, as Živković rightly notes, became manifest in Europe again, when after the fall of the Iron Curtain the division between the East and the West started losing its importance. If, as Živković (2011: 56-60) claims, a Serb describes his cultural identity placing himself somewhere (depending on the occasion) on the continuum between a stereotypical German and a stereotypical Gypsy, then Vojvodina will be closer to Germany than the rest of Serbia, and will be so not only for a Belgrade inhabitant looking from across the river, but also for itself. This is at least what can be inferred from an essay by a Vojvodinian activist and medical doctor, Miroslav Ilić, in which he ponders over the concept (by the way, of 19thc origin) of Vojvodina as a “Switzerland of the East” (Ilić 2012: 47-53).

The same importance for the Serbian national imaginary as the axis South-North bear meanings of landscape forms: “the mountains of epic patriarchalism”, broad river valleys, as well as the “northern plains”. It is not only the romantic power of landscape and nature, but also opinions about highlanders and lowlanders, deeply ingrained in modern popular wisdom and rooted both in geographic determinism manifest in certain parts of Serbian ethnography and anthropology, as well as in the ethnopsychology of Serbian ethnogeographer, Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927). According to Cvijić’s concept of “Balkan ethnopsychological types”, the Balkan world can be divided into emotionally unstable, violent, rebellious and power-seeking “Dinaric highlander fighters”, and peaceful, sociable farmers from the lowlands and river valleys, who live in traditional communities called *zadruga*. Cvijić himself valued highly the “Dinaric highlanders from Šumadija”, while in the lowlanders he saw contemptible bearers of the *rayah*¹⁰ mentality: submissive, servile, unable to rebel, pragmatic and egoistic, worshipping the authorities and practicing “moral mimicry” (Živković 2011: 79-84). Yet having accepted Cvijić’s systematics of Balkan types represented by the highlanders and the lowlanders, it is possible to defend their opposite hierarchy, as some modern ethnographers do¹¹, pointing to the fact that it was the lowlanders who established the modern state, while the highlanders have only been destructive aggressors (Živković *ibid*; Bošković 2005: 12). One modern writer from Novi Sad describes Vojvodina as a country of peaceful, rational and collaborative farmers: “Our peasants lean on the Fruška gora with their feet in the Danube and they see to the end of Europe. The others (highlander newcomers) do not have the breadth (of view) and do not know how to look. They see nothing but mountains up to their noses, only the sky, vertically (...) here we celebrate others’ successes and we pay for our own drink” (Novaković in Živković 2011: 87-88).

The *zografs* and their icons

During the opening of the exhibition at the SANU, with which I started this text, some of the speeches alluded on the one hand to the “baroquisation” of icons, and on the other, to their “native” and “uneducated” character. The latter were associated with the so-called *zograf icons*, extensively touched upon in the opening speech of their most prominent student, Dinko

¹⁰ Literally „cattle” or „flock” – the term used by the Turks for their non-Muslim subjects.

¹¹ „The highlander/ lowlander opposition was projected on the Serbian-Croatian opposition and then recursively reproduced on both sides as they discovered their own internal highlanders and lowlanders” (Živković 2011: 77).

Davidov. The exhibited *zograf* icons were placed in the most representative gallery room where the official part of the opening ceremony took place. The room's interior was visible from the Knez Mihajlova through the big windows. The *zograf*s were dated to the end of the 17thc or the first half of the 18thc and from the formal point of view they resembled the objects, which Polish literature usually calls "folk icons". In both cases the Byzantine iconography and style were clearly recognizable, but visibly transformed, simplified and made more schematic: the outline is more articulated, the hues more contrasted.

As it was explained in the leaflet accompanying the exhibition and in the captions provided in the gallery rooms, for Serbian art the 18thc meant the gradual departure from the Byzantine tradition and the reform of religious painting.

In times of the slow decline of the Byzantine art tradition, the *zograf* icon painters appeared (...) this painting takes its basic ideas from traditional piety, but representation-wise it uses a very particular poetics. Observing the strict rules of icon painting, those masters (the *zograf*s) stood out in particular with their feeling for decoration, their use of elements of baroque ornaments and the formal manner approaching baroque. Their individuality in terms of poetics, its rhetoric and decorative abundance make these paintings a particularly precious part of artistic heritage and example of the art of Orthodox culture (information provided in the gallery room).

The art historian Dinko Davidov characterized the *zograf* icons in the following way: "there was no mystics nor religiosity in them in the medieval sense of these terms", because if a Byzantine icon inspired "cold reverence and worship", the *zograf* one "searched for the simplest, intimate relation between the saints and the humans" (Davidov 1977: 7). The *zograf*s were travelling icon painters, with no permanent links to a village, a township, or a monastery, even though there also were monks among them. They rarely painted for the great dignitaries of the Church. These dignitaries, meanwhile, held in their custody the old icons and relics brought around from the South¹². They also relatively quickly became interested in painting and architecture that bore clear features of baroque style, to which they got access both through their contacts with the Russian Orthodoxy (via Kiev) and because it was then the dominant style in the Habsburg domains. The patriarchy of Sremske Karlovci chose the official route for the artistic development of Serbian painting when it stood for the baroque. Subsequently, since the mid-18thc, the small churches constructed immediately after the arrival were replaced by bigger and more glamorous baroque buildings.

Davidov clearly suggests that the Serbs felt the strong urge to also appropriate their new lands in a symbolic sense, and the *zograf*s played a very important role in the

¹² For instance, the relics of prince Lazar killed in the Kosovo Pole battle were moved from the Ravanica monastery to the Vrdnik monastery in Fruška Gora, which got the new name of Nova Ravanica.

accomplishment of this task: “neither earlier, nor later on the Serbian painting worked in such a haste and momentum (...) it was a church-political task of extreme importance” (Davidov 1977: 8). According to the data he quotes, during the first three decades of the existence of the Karlovci patriarchy in its territory, there were 2,297 icons painted in 110 churches. If we remember that Serbian villages in Vojvodina of the time consisted mostly of scattered dugout and semi-dugout huts (Andrić 2012: 307-310), the effort put into erecting and decorating churches, even the most modest ones, was a clear declaration of the value of the hierarchy. At the same time, the piety of the common folk living in the villages was only partially based on the sacraments and on canonic rituals, and insufficient education of the village clergy only enhanced this state of affairs. In this aspect, the conditions in which the Serbian Orthodoxy had found itself under the Ottoman empire were similar; only the number of priests was even more limited and the symbolic appropriation of the landscape by building churches was impossible. The Serbian settlers who had crossed the Sava river and the Danube were therefore rather reluctant in resigning from their “old faith of the forefathers”, or “folk religion”, which often not only included long Christianized pagan rituals like *krsna slava*¹³, but also meant the cult of pagan deities. Hence subsequent bishops of Sremske Karlovci faced the difficult task of “Christianizing the savage, uncouth borderlanders” (Gil 2005: 32). Furthermore, an important part of their mission was to ensure the appropriate education of icon painters and to make certain that church art followed the rules of the canon, which actually meant the end of *zograf* art.

The two currents in Serbian art of the 18thc were clearly defined in the spacial arrangement of the exhibition. The *zograf* icons were exhibited in the hall with the big windows onto Knez Mihajlova and in the main gallery entrance. In a suite of several smaller rooms along the perpendicular, smaller street of Vuk Karadžić (the gallery is located in a corner building), there were portraits and prints. The second big hall at the end was filled with icons with visible influences of Western art styles. In this way, two artistic worlds were presented and valued in a subtle way. Davidov ends his chapter dedicated to the formal analysis of *zograf* icons with the following statement, “Let us repeat one more time that they (*zograf* icons) do not belong to cultural heritage alone, but they are part of the ever living art” (Davidov 1977: 19). The premise that belonging to “living art” increases the significance

¹³ The celebration of the patron saint of the family, originating in a pagan idea of a family deity presiding over the house of the patriarchal kin and protecting it. The ritual was Christianized by the Serbian Orthodoxy but contains still several symbolic elements of pagan origin. *Slava* is celebrated by many contemporary Serbian families and in 2014, it was inscribed onto the UNESCO representative list of intangible cultural heritage.

(“not... alone, but...”) reflects the value hierarchy constructed in the discourse of modern arts and letters: timeless values of “ever living art” are higher than those of “cultural heritage”, entangled with time and prone to change. Discovering those values in *zograf* icons means both their elevation to the position of fully-fledged members of the field of art, deserving exhibition in an art gallery, and their emancipation from the ethnographic or historic museum, dedicated to exhibiting “culture”. The juxtaposition of cultural heritage and art points to the fact that in the processes of constructing the modern values of an object and its subsequent musealization, two separate systems of evaluation are in use (cf. Clifford 1988: 215-251). Further, this juxtaposition hints at an existing hierarchy of those systems.

The question why in the discourse of Serbian academia the term “folk art” does not apply to the *zograf* icons remains; unless “folk art”, in spite of the name, is not part of art, but of culture. Generally speaking, in Serbian academic discourse (similarly to its Polish counterpart) the term “folk” is a description of otherness (social, formal and other), elaborated by the educated classes and used by them in the modern national project. There are, however, important differences between Polish and Serbian versions of the Herderian project (for the Polish discourse cf. Węglarz 1994; for the Serbian: Rapacka 1995; Gil 2005), mostly resulting from the different position of the folk in linguistics and in literature. Some members of the Polish intelligentsia have tried to elevate the highlander dialect from Podhale to the position of literary language, but because of the limited reach of the idea and the relatively late appearance of the texts, they have been interpreted rather as a kind of “intelligentsia folklore”, resulting from a rather benign *peasant-mania*. In the case of the Serbian intelligentsia, the situation was different: both the enlightened rationalist Dositej Obradović (ca. 1740-1811) and the romantic Vuk Karadžić (1787-1864) decided on the change of language. In 1783, Obradović ceased writing in so-called Slavic-Serbian used by the Orthodox Church and the educated classes and started using the “folk language” (Andrić 2012: 285), the same language that was made the national literary language thanks to Vuk’s reform. The folk is therefore part of the Serbian national project in a very different way than it is of the Polish one: it is otherness appropriated in order to for it to be fully internalized, rather than decontextualized and appropriated only to produce alienation.

For the argument on icons, it is significant that the language abandoned was the idiom of the Serbian Orthodoxy, as “folk speech” was used for weakening the role of the Church in the modern national project. On the one hand, it resulted from ethnarchy becoming obsolete in the modern political order, based on the political rights of citizens and the separation of church and state. on the other from growing discrepancies between the secular ideas of the

Enlightenment, “based on the rotten light of the reason”¹⁴, and the Orthodox concept of the world, in which the truth can be accessed by enlightenment in the theological sense, resulting from the Revelation. “The folkloristic paradigm imposed on the (Serbian) culture in the 19th century – writes Polish scholar Dorota Gil – together with Serbian “epic identity” of Romantic origin (into which not the Orthodoxy is adopted, but the “folk religion”) resulted (...) in disturbing the balance within the Orthodoxy itself” (Gil 2005: 124). In her very well documented analysis, Gil explains that the Serbian Orthodox Church not only attempted to find itself in the Serbian national project, but also struggled to play an important role. Placing “the Serbian” over other values¹⁵ resulted in *svetosavlje*, or a version of Serbian Orthodoxy based on national ideology and constructed around the cult of Saint Sava, a medieval saint from the Serbian royal family of Nemanjić (Gil 2005: 19-41).

It can be argued, accordingly, that in Serbian discourse on identity “the folk” as appropriated by the intelligentsia was used in order to exoticize the Church, while “the folk” as appropriated by the Polish intelligentsia became a device for socially exoticizing the peasants. Therefore, the *zograf* icons, even if they speak in “folk speech” (being formally “folk” in their decorations, *horror vacui*, or strong colours), they cannot be folk art, because being “folk” in the sense defined by the “folkloristic paradigm” would question their relationship to the Orthodox Church, as it is the other part of the dichotomy, originally established in the field of linguistics and literature. The icons cannot be “folk art” also regarding the division of disciplines: Yugoslav ethnography¹⁶ did not study images used by “the folk”, neither in the Orthodox, nor in the Roman Catholic context, as it defined “folk art” according to the criteria of the social origin of the author, not of the public. So the imagery was left entirely to the art historians. By heritagizing the *zograf* icons as “art”, and not as “folk” (and therefore not as “culture”), the exhibition at the SANU gallery gave them the timelessness of “ever living art”. In this way some of the essential figures of the modern reflection on time are mobilized, as heritage is an important element of modern time construction. In the modern ontological order, “the folk” and “art” are time-wise juxtaposed to “history”, which means linear time and changes resulting from its flow. Constructing its object of study, modern anthropology juxtaposed the anthropologist immersed in historical

¹⁴ Expression used in 1981 by ieromonah Amfilohije, the patriarch of Montenegro-Primorje, writing about Dositej Obradović (quoted in: Gil 2005: 110).

¹⁵ Nationalistic tendencies in Eastern Orthodoxy, which grew throughout the second half of the 19thc, became an urgent question and were addressed by the Council of Orthodox Churches in Constantinople in 1872. The Council declared ethnophiletism a heresy (ethnophiletism denotes preference given to national ideas over Christian universalism) (Gil 2005: 37).

¹⁶ Ethnography in the context of both Polish and Yugoslav academia means the discipline originally based on the same principles as the German *Volkskunde*.

time to the native “without history” (Fabian 2003; Wolf 2010), and ethnography constructed its object – “the folk” – in a similar manner (Węglarz 1994). “The folk” and “the primitive” were not susceptible to change, the state before the fall into modern historicity. Art, on the other hand, functions for the moderns as a religion allowing them via its rituals in museums and galleries access to the truth and the absolute in spite of this fall (cf. Duncan 2005). In this model of modern theodicy, art allows to transcend the vicissitudes of history, while the folk is never touched by these vicissitudes. Thus, the heritagization of icons as art puts in motion their potential liberation towards the absolute, which their heritagization in the order of “the folk” would never do.

The heritagization of churches and icons

When an icon becomes “artistic heritage”, its agency changes. The point here is not about working miracles, but about producing substantial changes in the spaces where the icon is, in its new elements and in the attitudes of humans. I have already alluded to the sacral character of museum space and the ritualization of contact with artworks there, but obviously there are differences between the ritual in a church and in a museum. In both places the icon is revered, but the expressions of worship differ, especially in terms of human engagement. Humans move differently, use different tones of voice and voice techniques, the gestures they make differ, as does the way they enter in direct contact with the icon. The space organization and its forms correspond to the differences of practices. In the museum space, the majority of sensorial practices are focused on discipline, reducing the use of the senses except for sight in order to facilitate concentration on the exhibit. In the Orthodox Church, the message of the liturgy is addressed to all the senses, the practices of worship comprise quick changes of bodily posture in sequences of repeated movements, and the greatest mystery happens behind the closed doors of the iconostasis, making sight seemingly much less important. The museum is a temple, which de-sensualizes and disembodies contact with the object of cult. In effect, modern art worshippers, educated in museum bodily practices, eagerly exoticize the worshippers of other cults and their practices using the terms of “sensualism” (cf. Lubańska 2007, 2014). The musealization of things provides a strong and vivid model for expressions of reverence towards things, which is originally modern and Western but has been universalized via the “unescoization” of world culture. In the museum there are both icons and the Stradivarius violin, as if the way the violin virtuoso could worship her violin, or the Orthodox

believers revere their icons were invalid, or at least less perfect than the museum way of paying reverence to things.

Limiting sensorial contact with a thing to its minimum, the museum worships unalterable and unadulterated materiality, which is protected by conservation practices. From the perspective of the believer the material form of an icon, susceptible to changes and transient, is not what is revered. Instead it is its power of working miracles, which belongs to what is perennial about the icon and to what the icon represents. This different approach to the materiality of icons has been acknowledged by their conservators. A Belgrade painting conservator working for the academy of art and conservation run by the Serbian Orthodox Church to whom I spoke, was convinced that the conservation practice in the case of icons destined for a museum should be different than in the case of those destined for the cult. In both cases the formal integrity of the piece should be restored according to its “actual state”. In the case of museum icons, the “actual”, means “archaeological”. Thus, no reconstruction is done where the filling in of defects is not required by the icon’s material integrity and the material feature of its old age. Further, defects are kept visible where they do not interfere with the formal integrity of the icon, similarly to darkened hues, especially in the case of gold, etc. In the case of icons destined for cult worship what should be exposed in conservation are the features which make them look sacred: gold should be restored to its shining brightness and the defects filled in, in all the places where they could disturb eye contact with the sacred scene represented.

According to the conservator, both approaches are legitimized and it is the icon itself that defines the methods of its conservation. These depend on the space the icon is supposed to work in, and it can work well in both. Of slightly different opinion was the director of the Belgrade Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. “In some cases”, he said, “the Church regards museums and keeping things in museums as a necessary evil (...) The artworks in churches did not appear because of art, but it is art that works because of a greater idea, expressed in an artistic form”. The place or church art should be then in churches and monasteries, and there it should be exhibited. The museum as a “necessary evil” is a safe harbor for stranded pieces of church art. A substantial part of the Belgrade museum collection originates from the monasteries in Vojvodina, mostly in Fruška Gora¹⁷, removed during WWII to Zagreb by Croatian art historians, who, paradoxically, saved them from destruction by the Ustaša and Nazi soldiers who plundered the majority of Fruška Gora monasteries

¹⁷ During WWII, the region of Srem together with Fruška Gora was incorporated into NDH (the Independent Croatian State), while a major part of Vojvodina was under Hungarian rule.

(Davidov 1977: 27). The recently refurbished museum has a relatively compact exhibition and the objects are mostly shown in big glass cases in a rather traditional way. However, Orthodox Church music is played here in a discrete way. A woman visiting the exhibition when I was there crossed herself and slightly bowed in front of one of the cases.

Almost all of the monasteries in Fruška Gora were damaged during WWII, plundered or completely destroyed, and the vast majority of them was abandoned. In Novo Hopovo, one of the oldest and best preserved monasteries, works aimed at eliminating the traces of war damages began in 1949. From 1953-1960, the impressive 17thc frescoes were uncovered in the church and submitted to conservation. Novo Hopovo is the only monastery in Fruška Gora where the inside of the church (on the nave pillars) contains extensive written information about the history and the art of the frescoes, including the dates of their conservation. The most frequented monastery of Krušedol, which suffered the least during the war and which also has magnificent polychromies, does not heritagize them in this way.

Novo Hopovo is also one of the Fruška Gora monasteries still inhabited by monks rather than nuns. With the re-settling of the monasteries and their gradual rehabilitation in the 1990s, and to a greater extent after 2000, a number of them were changed into nunneries. The nuns sometimes ventured alone, beginning solitary efforts at rebuilding the monastery and restoring the church, as was the case of Mother Antonina from Petkovica. “Two times the *vladika* tried to re-settle Petkovica with monks. Finally he decided to approach the abbess of Grgeteg”, the biggest nunnery in Fruška Gora, where Antonina was a nun. Since 2001, when her solitary mission in Petkovica began, Mother Antonina has succeeded in convincing the local authorities to build an electricity line and a tarmac road. In co-operation with local conservators from Sremska Mitrovica, she had the historic 16th century church reconstructed and restored (the conservation works were still on when I visited the place), and the house and outhouses raised. She had a fish pond dug, a vineyard planted, the water source timbered and a decorative wall with arches and icons built around it. Now in the nunnery three nuns are living with her and her own mother who became a lay sister (at the time of my visit she was already permanently bedridden). The church in Petkovica was built in the same style as the one in Novo Hopovo, the so-called Morava style, and decorated with frescoes in the second half of the 16thc.

Another 16th century monastery made into a nunnery is Đipša, its church also built in the Morava style, but complemented in the 18thc with a high narthex covered with a baroque campanile. Inside, there are new polychromies in the Byzantine style and gaudy hues, and a new iconostasis shining with gold. Surprised by these developments, I asked about the place

while talking to a conservator from the Regional Historic Monument Conservation Centre in Novi Sad. This was the Centre responsible for the conservation works in Đipša church, finished two years before. As no sources concerning its decoration, or traces of polychromies survived, the decision was taken to plaster the interior white. The conservator apparently was not aware of new polychromies and seemed surprised by my enquiry. “You see, this is the way they are”, he sighed. “But don’t tell the colleague that you have just met here. Đipša was her work and she would be upset. She invested a lot of heart into the work”. According to the conservator, who has been involved with works on monuments of Orthodox architecture since the 1980s, the law on safeguarding historic monuments should be applied in co-operation with the Church in a “creative” way. Otherwise, nothing will be done, as the law does not enforce the co-operation of the church authorities with the state conservation services.

There were colleagues from Sicily visiting us , he said. They showed us a church they have there, in Sicily, such a long church. And all along the walls it had, in more or less half a meter distance, little angels flying, out of plaster, I mean, the putti ... very nice, baroque. I mean, I saw it only in a picture. They were showing it as a unique monument. But those angels, they are two or three hundred years old, there were some wings missing, some noses ... So I asked, “What will you say to the priest?” Ours would like to have new angels. Obviously we can repair everything, but it is not true, it is not the original substance, and we want to keep what is original. “How do you communicate with priests?”. And he says that there are priests graduating in conservation and that they have more specialists than there are in their center. That’s Italy. And we don’t know what to do because our priests have no education conservation-wise.

Is education in conservation or art history going to make Orthodox clergy look differently at heritagization and become more prone to agree to follow the material integrity of a monument and the rules of musealization? The pragmatics of conservation, or the *ekonomia* in the language of the Orthodox priests, helps both sides to negotiate common strategies. It is less the lack of education, however, and more the reluctance towards the universalizing aspirations of heritage discourse appropriating church art and buildings. On the Church side, there is also a lack of confidence in the modern value system and the Western arts and letters embedded in it, of which art history and conservation are part and parcel. This lack of confidence becomes sometimes confrontational, questioning not only Western values or culture, but culture as such. The bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, canonized in 2003 by the Serbian Orthodox Church, wrote that it would be of no surprise,

If the Orthodox Church wrote a prayer against culture, which is the corpus of all evils. If there is a prayer against pride, and against hate, impiety, violence, theft, perjury, blasphemy, inhuman treatment – so why shouldn’t there be a prayer against culture, which is the corpus

of all evils? (...) There should be a day of prayer established by the state, when all of the nation will pray to God for its salvation from culture (quoted in: Gil 2005: 180).

Obviously, highly confrontational ideas like the Day of Struggle Against Culture proposed in August 2002 in the daily *Danas* by the professor of literature Mirko Đorđević (2002) are not shared by many. However, contempt towards “all, that doesn’t serve your salvation”¹⁸ can be found among the owners and inhabitants of Church monuments, declared at the same time, national heritage under state protection. After all, can the question of repairing – or not – a broken wing of a plaster putto serve your salvation? The question of the universal value of heritage and the sense of heritagization practices becomes unavoidable. If the concept of heritage is not grounded in the concept of culture, if its identification is not done according to historic and artistic qualities – will it still be valid? In an extensive study of conservation and heritage theory confronted with the task of the conservation of religious architecture, Britta Rudolff comes to the following conclusion: “Heritage preservation, assisting heritage to reach into its truth, is a permanent reconstruction. Not a reconstruction of heritage expressions, but a reconstruction of the narratives of identity and a reconstruction of the awareness that meaning is born(e)” (Rudolff 2010: 284).

Conclusion

The peculiarities of the icons from Vojvodina and of the monasteries of Fruška Gora facilitate the observation of paradoxes inherent to the process of heritagization taking place in a society, where in constructing collective identities the Western system of modern lay values collides with the system developed within Orthodox Christianity. In the heritagization process two different concepts of materiality, or substantiality and time are at play. The categories of “heritage” and “culture” used in international documents belong to the first system. The second uses the term “heritage” in its discourse on metaphysics, while “culture” – stereotypically conceived as the Western modern form of leisure – is an obstacle on the way to salvation. Both systems are used in the construction of modern national identity. Once they meet, the recontextualization of things and buildings made for religious purposes takes place. What pragmatics require from this process is to freely and aptly move between the two values systems, as neither of them separately can encompass all of the complicated reasons for why people care for the *zograf* icons and Fruška Gora monasteries.

¹⁸ This reprimand I heard in response to a question asked in one of the monasteries.

Keywords: icons, heritage, identity, Christian Orthodoxy, Serbia, Vojvodina

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