

"UGLJAN TRIPTYCH" AFTER THE RESTORATION

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The tripartite painting which represents Madonna with the Child in its central panel, and four scenes on each wing, has been found in 1954 in the yard of a village house in Ugljan near Zadar. However, it was not before the recent restoration that all of the artistic qualities have been revealed. Those are the punch work of aureolas on the golden surface, specific linear design in the modelling of draperies, outstanding values of colour, and even some iconographical elements. The most important was the possibility of a much better reading of the stylistic elements which, although iconographically conservative, and especially in the central panel tied to the Byzantine traditions, show that this triptych is artistically far more advanced than the kindred works of art. Together with the late-Romanesque and Byzantine schemes, it introduces inspired and fresh Gothic innovations in the treatment of figures and compositional relations. Those characteristics give it a special place in the frame of Adriatic painting in the early 14th century.

The tripartite painting representing Madonna with the Child on its central panel, and scenes from the life of Christ on the wings, was found by the parish priest A. R. Filipi in 1954 in a yard of a village house in Ugljan. The painting was bought by the Art Gallery in Zadar, and since it had been in a very bad state, it was immediately restored in the Restoration atelier of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) in Zadar. The action of conservation and cleaning was done by the academic painter Ivan Tomljenović, but because of the bad condition of the painting which was all eaten, blackened, with entirely damaged parts of the paint layers, he didn't dare to clean it fully, so after the restoration, the triptych was left quite dark, with unexpressive colours and unrecognizable details. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the triptych is an exquisite work of late-Romanesque painting.

The "Ugljan Triptych" (fig 1.), an important work of art of our cultural heritage has been presented to the public when I. Petricioli dedicated it a valuable study in 1964.¹ Beside the detailed description, Prof. Petricioli has pointed to the parallels, similar works in the frame of European painting heritage — the triptych in the Tyssen-Bornemysza collection and the triptych in the Stoclet collection — but also to those of the regional art heritage, primarily to "Madonna of the Benedictines" from Zadar. After he concluded that "the 'Ugljan Triptych' is so damaged that a narrower judgement on its stylistic and workshop affiliations won't, unfortunately, ever be reliable", on the basis of stylistic analysis and the congruence with the kindred works, Prof. Petricioli deduced that the triptych is "a product of the Venetian-Adriatic late-Byzantine painting from the beginning of 14th century."²

In 1964 the triptych was exhibited at the "Exhibition of the restored works of art", set up by the Institute for the Historical and Economical Sciences of JAZU in Zadar, and has also been presented in the exhibition catalogue where it was approximately dated into the 14th century.³ In 1971 it was reproduced in the book by G. Gamulin "Bogorodica s Djetetom u staroj umjetnosti Hrvatske", where it was

marked as the work of an unknown artist from the 14th century with the note saying: "It is so damaged that its real worth and importance is impossible to define."⁴

The "Permanent exhibition of the ecclesiastic art" was opened in 1976, and within it the "Ugljan Triptych", together with other works of Romanesque painting in Zadar has found its constant place. In 1987 the triptych was dis-



Fig. 3. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail - The birth of Christ, Zadar, SICU (before latest restoration, photo Ž. Bačić).



Fig. 1. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", Zadar, SICU (before latest restoration, photo Ž. Bačić).

played at the exhibition called "The Romanesque painting in Croatia". In the accompanying comprehensive catalogue, I. Fisković has reproduced it in colour, and dated it at the beginning of the 14th century. He also stated that "the triptych is virtuously painted according to the laws that ruled in the Byzantine painting tradition of the late Middle Ages", and that "its developed sense of proportion and harmonious relations within the minutely painted compositions and the skilled use of colours within the finely outlined scenes confirms the artist's knowledge already seen in the central representation of Madonna with the Child."⁵

In 1991, because of the dangers connected with the war, the triptych was given shelter in one of the cellar rooms, together with other works of art. Even though those rooms were basically appropriate for the deposit of works of art, they nevertheless had a different micro-climate from the exhibition halls where the works had been kept before. On some of them, especially on the paintings, the damages which had already existed, grew worse. Together with it grew the need to have the exhibits renovated once more. Therefore within the preparations for the renewed display of the "Permanent exhibition of the ecclesiastical art", the

"Ugljan Triptych" has been restored again, and this time thoroughly.

The restoration has been done by the academic painter Mario Kotlar, with the assistance of Jadranka Baković. The first probings have shown that there was a need not only for the consolidation of the present condition, but also for removing the darkened wax and colophony which had been used as a protection layer in the previous restoration, as well as the "patina of history".

It was only after this fundamental cleaning that all the artistic qualities of this work were noted, and those are expressed in the special painting techniques, such as the punch-work of aureola on the golden surface, specific linear design in modelling draperies, the outstanding values of colour, and even some iconographical elements, especially on the wings of the triptych. However, the most important was the possibility of a much better reading of stylistic elements which has shown that the "Ugljan Triptych" although iconographically conservative, is artistically far more advanced than the contemporary works of the same character, and that it, along with the late-Romanesque and Byzantine schemes, introduces inspiring and expressive Gothic in-



Fig. 2. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", Zadar, SICU - (photo Ž. Bačić).

novations in treatment of figures, and compositional relations (fig. 2.).

The triptych consists of the central panel (52x82 cm) with the representation of *Madonna with the Child* in the iconographical scheme called "Glykophilousa" within a carved frame and the composition of *Annunciation* above the arch, and each of the two moveable wings (26,5x82 cm) with four scenes painted on them: *The birth of Christ* (fig. 3.), *the Presentation in the Temple* (fig. 4.), *Transfiguration* (fig. 5.), *Christ before Pilatus* (fig. 6.), *Crucifixion* (fig. 7.), *Noli me tangere* (fig. 8.), *Ascension* (fig. 9.), and the *Five figures of the saints* (fig. 10.).⁶

The way the centrepiece differs from the scenes on the wings is visible at first sight. While the *Madonna with the Child* is still stiff in a Byzantine way, and basically painted in the manner of the late-Romanesque painting, the scenes on the wings show knowledge and acceptance of far more advanced influences, in many elements close to the manner of Duccio di Buoninsegna, whose works our anonymous master must have known. This is obvious in the way the compositions are set, but even more in the elements

which define spatiality (the rocky landscapes, parts of the architecture, the laying of plans)⁷, and in the lively treatment of the figures.⁸ Nevertheless, the limitations set by the Zadar milieu, but also of the cultural background we could name "Adriatic-Venetian", conditioned somewhat traditional approach in dealing with the painters' tasks, i.e. the emphasized consistence in transferring the iconographical patterns. However, within the frame set so strictly, the master of the "Ugljan Triptych" successfully resolved the problems of volume, spatiality (perspective), compositional relations and the liveliness of figures. Thus he joins the streams of Gothic painting in the first quarter of the 14th century. Those qualities can be seen on each of the scenes on the wings.

In the scene of *Nativity* (fig. 3.) which is, unfortunately, the most damaged one, the master has precisely drawn very convincing figures and their relations, as well as the illusion of quite sternly understood Byzantine iconographical scheme. Even more accent he has put on the precisely defined space in the scene of *Presentation in the Temple* in which the elements of architecture (especially the ciborium) slightly recall even Giotto's solutions (fig. 4.). Higher



Fig. 4. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail - The Presentation in the Temple, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).



Fig. 5. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail - Transfiguration, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).



Fig. 6. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail - Christ before Pilate, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).



Fig. 7. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail - Crucifixion, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).

quality in dealing with the illusion of the depth of space shows the scene of *Christ before Pilatus* (fig. 6.), which is also considerably damaged. Behind the figures in the first plan, the architectural elements painted in perspective create the sense of spatiality which is even more lengthened by the peaks of cypresses behind them, in the third plan. The scenes of *Transfiguration* (fig. 5.), *Crucifixion* (fig. 7.) and *Ascension* are distinctly conservative in their iconography. They strongly cling to prescribed patterns, even though in realization they show a certain degree of forwarding towards a far more advanced artistic sensitivity. The crucified Christ repeats that painting manner which we know from the monumental crucifixes by Giunta Pisano and Cimabue, and quite a number of figures in the scene of *Ascension* (fig. 9.) are convincingly placed in the space of the scene, and that is done in a way which is quite different from the way the Byzantine plans overlap. The scenes with *Christ appearing in front of the two women* and *Christ appearing in front of Mary of Magdala* slightly recall the works of the 14th century Venetian miniature painting, especially in the way the trees are painted (as branches with two or three leaves). *Five saints* (fig. 10.) in the last field are painted in a completely defined Gothic manner as characters on a polyptych, independent from each other and realized in a lively pose with a detailed elaboration. Unfortunately, this is one of the most damaged scenes on the triptych.

In the light of all mentioned visual qualities of the "Ugljan Triptych", it is worthy to emphasize the parallel with the triptych in Tyssen-Bornemisza collection which is its iconographical twin, but in realization obviously more conservative, so one gets the impression that the master of the "Ugljan Triptych", under the pressure from his environment (the ordering party), uses some older, formal patterns which are characteristic of the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century, even though he is, in the matter of style, a partaker of the artistic culture which is thirty years younger and more advanced.¹⁰

The difference between the painter's treatment of the central scene with *Madonna and the Child* and the scenes on the wings is also a reflection of the cultural climate, and it can be seen in the still strongly present, typical Byzantine awareness of the sanctity of the painting, which is still concentrated on the centrepiece, and which in narrative and formally less important compositions gives way to the western relationship with the painting, seeing it as a medium through which one can contact the holy persons, but is not anymore a holy item by itself. This phenomenon is more or less characteristic of the whole painting on wood of the *Trecento*.¹¹ In the considerably more conservative milieu of the Dalmatian community, this phenomenon is even more obvious.



Fig. 8. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail – Noli me tangere, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).



Fig. 9. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail – Ascension, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).



Fig. 10. Anonymous painter, "Ugljan Triptych", detail – Five figures of the saints, Zadar, SICU (photo Ž. Bačić).

Thus, the "Ugljan Triptych" is seen as a product of a distinctly defined cultural and artistic climate in which still considerably powerful traditions of the Romanesque-Byzantine art dictate the iconographical strictness, and explicitly archaic treatment of the central scene with the *Madonna and the Child*. Nevertheless, the spirit of the new sensitivity finds its reflection in the considerably more realistic definition of the space, volume and figures¹², as well as in the emphasized psychological characterization of figures and their relations. On the basis of those qualities, it is possible to generally date the "Ugljan Triptych" into the third decade of the 14th century¹³, and define it as a product of a Zadar workshop and one of the most important works of the early-Gothic painting in Dalmatia before Paolo Veneziano.

¹ I. PETRICIOLI, *Triptih iz Ugljana*, *Peristil*, 6-7, Zagreb, 1963-64, pp. 29-35; the same work, only updated, has been published again in the book I. PETRICIOLI, *Tragom srednjovjekovnih umjetnika*, Zagreb, 1983, pp. 85-93.

² I. PETRICIOLI, *ibid*, 1983, p. 92.

³ *Izložba restauriranih umjetnina*, catalogue, Zadar, 1964.

⁴ The author was mistaken saying that the triptych had been displayed in the sacristy of St. Frances monastery in Zadar.

⁵ I. FISKOVIĆ, *Romaničko slikarstvo u Hrvatskoj*, exhibition catalogue, Zagreb 1987, pp. 118, 134-135.

⁶ A detailed description of all scenes was brought by I. PETRICIOLI (1983, pp. 85-90) so I find it unnecessary to repeat it here.

⁷ In the scene *Christ before Pilatus*, the spatial laying of plans is even more pronounced (even though not with the same standard of quality) than Duccio's.

⁸ The figure of St. Joseph in the Nativity scene is markedly analogous to Duccio's one on the fragment in the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

⁹ The difference is not only related to the elements of painting. Even the preserved parts of the carved decoration on the "Ugljan Triptych", (the corkscrew colonnettes, the trefoil arch, the palmettes) witness the shift of artistic taste. The differences are even more noticeable in the treatment of the punch-worked aureolas of Madonna and little Christ, where, instead of the harsh simplicity of dots in a row which we find on the triptych from Tyssen-Bornemisza collection or the one from the Stoclet collection, here we find a rich floral ornament done in the manner of entirely Gothic sensitivity.

¹⁰ This phenomenon can be seen on some other works of Gothic painting in Zadar, even though in different conditions and realizations: Menegolo's "Triptych of Madonna from Varoš", the "Madonna of Health" by Blaž Jurjev, the "Polyptych from Ugljan" by Ivan Petrov from Milan, and the destroyed polyptych from St. Mary's church, by Petar Jordanić.

¹¹ In that direction an illustrative example can be Duccio's altarpiece from the cathedral in Siena. The side scenes, and especially those painted on the back are visually and in style far more advanced than the central scene.

¹² Again it is worthy to draw parallels with the triptych from the Tyssen-Bornemisza collection, where, for example, in the scene of *Crucifixion*, the iconographical perspective and the unnatural position of Christ's body on the cross is far more emphasized than on the same scene of the "Ugljan Triptych", while the figures of saints in the lower field of the right wing are markedly stiffer, stylized and iconographical more conservative.

¹³ One should also have in mind that the fragments of inscriptions on some of the scenes are written in Gothic majuscule script (compare I. PETRICIOLI, *op. cit.*, 1983, pp. 86-90). It is hard to believe that this script was in use in Zadar before the second quarter of the 14th century.

Trodjelna slika s prikazom *Bogorodice s Djetetom* u centralnom polju, te po četiri scene na krilima, pronađena je 1954. godine u dvorištu jedne seoske kuće u Ugljanu. Budući da je bila u iznimno lošem stanju, odmah je restaurirana u Restauratorskom ateljeu JAZU u Zadru. No izrazito loša očuvanost slike, koja je sva bila izjedena, pocrnjela, s potpuno oštećenim dijelovima slikarskog premaza, i tada važeći principi pri restauraciji, uvjetovali su i opseg radova na umjetnini. Nije uklonjen zatamnjeni površinski sloj “povijesne patine”, a nedostajući dijelovi su nadopunjeni preizraženim retušem. Stoga su ostali skriveni inače vrlo izraženi likovni elementi umjetnine, kako u njezinoj polikromiji, tako i u crtežu.

No i u takvom, vrlo lošem stanju očuvanosti, vidjelo se da je riječ o vrlo vrijednom djelu poznog romaničkog slikarstva. Godine 1964. posvetio je “Ugljanskom triptihu” vrijednu studiju I. Petricioli, pa je tako i šira javnost upoznata s ovim značajnim djelom naše kulturne baštine. Pored detaljnog opisa, ukazao je i na paralele, to jest na slične radove u okviru europske slikarske baštine: triptih u zbirci Tyssen-Bornemisza i triptih u zbirci Stoclet, ali i one u domaćoj baštini, prvenstveno zadarsku “Bogorodicu benediktinki”. Na osnovu stilske analize i podudarnosti sa srodnim djelima, utvrđuje da je u pitanju “produkt venecijansko-jadranskog kasno-bizantskog slikarstva iz početka XIV stoljeća”.

Godine 1991. triptih je, uslijed ratne opasnosti, zajedno s ostalim zadarskim umjetninama, pohranjen u sklonište. Neodgovarajući uvjeti u tom prostoru, bitno drukčiji od mjesta u stalnom postavu, prouzročili su na umjetnini određena oštećenja, pa se javila potreba za ponovnim restauratorskim zahvatom. Već su prve sonde pokazale da je potrebno ne samo konsolidirati postojeće stanje, nego ukloniti potamnjeni vosak i kolofonij kao zaštitni sloj iz prethodne restauracije, ali i tzv. “povijesnu patinu”.

Tek nakon tako temeljitog čišćenja uočene su sve likovne odlike umjetnine izražene posebnim slikarskim tehnikama, kao što su puncirane aureole na zlatnoj podlozi, specifični linearizam u oblikovanju draperija, izrazite kolorističke vrednote, pa čak i neki ikonografski elementi, posebice na scenama sa krila triptiha. Najznačajnijom se ipak pokazala mogućnost znatno boljeg očitavanja stilskih elemenata, po kojima je “Ugljanski triptih”, premda ikonografski konzervativan i, posebice u centralnom polju, čvrsto vezan uz bizantske tradicije, likovno daleko napredniji od srodnih umjetnina, te uz kasnoromaničke i bizantske sheme, uvodi nadahnute i izražajne gotičke inovacije u tretiranju likova i kompozicijskih odnosa, što mu daje posebno mjesto u okviru jadranske likovne kulture ranog 14. stoljeća.