

THE STATUE OF SAINT JOHN OF NEPOMUK FROM THE SLIVNICA MANSION PARK – OVERLOOKED WORK OF JOSEPH STRAUB

KIP SVETOG IVANA NEPOMUKA IZ VRTA DVORCA SLIVNICA – ZANEMARENO DJELO JOSIPA STRAUBA

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Primljeno / Received: 20. 4. 2018.

Prihvaćeno / Accepted: 11. 6. 2018.

Prethodno priopćenje

Preliminary communication

UDK / UDC: 73Straub, J.

[7.034.7:730] (497.4)“17”

2-526.64Iohannes Nepomuces, sanctus

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk from the Slivnica Mansion Park – a masterpiece of baroque art. The statue has not yet been presented, analysed or assessed. This paper explains its iconography and focuses on its significant characteristics. Based on a critical stylistic analysis, the statue is attributed to Joseph Straub, a late baroque sculptor who worked in Styria between 1743 and 1756. It is critical that some way be found to preserve the statue, because currently it is at the mercy of inclement weather, causing decay or even destruction.

Key words: Joseph Straub, late baroque sculpture, statue of Saint John of Nepomuk, Styria, Slivnica Mansion, 18th century

Ključne riječi: Jožef Straub, kasnobarokno kiparstvo, skulptura sv. Ivana Nepomuka, Štajerska, dvorac Slivnica, 18. stoljeće

In the vicinity of Maribor, the river-bed of the Drava becomes wider, flowing into a lowland called Dravsko polje. This region and other valleys beside the Drava River, in Slovenia and in Croatia, are dotted with mansions. Some of them have survived untouched for centuries, some have been rebuilt and sadly most are badly preserved. Many are important examples of profane architecture in the area beside the Drava. Often, they were surrounded with beautiful gardens with garden plastics that are now mostly grown over. Many of garden decoration have been lost or destroyed over the centuries.

This is true of the Slivnica Mansion near Maribor,¹ which is of noteworthy excellence. However, both the park and the architecture of the mansion are seriously decayed. Also nothing from the interior remained, since it was plundered.

In this article, I focus on a statue from the Slivnica Mansion Park. When I first visited the park in autumn 2016, I observed a statue completely covered with ivy. However, it was no doubt a masterpiece

¹ STOPAR, Ivan. *Grajske stavbe v vzhodni Sloveniji. Knj. 1, Območje Maribora in Ptuja: občine Maribor–Pesnica, Maribor–Pobrežje, Maribor–Rotovž, Maribor–Tabor, Maribor–Tezno, Ptuj*. Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete 1990, 124 – 128; KEMPERL, Metoda. Fuchsov načrt za dvorec Slivnica pri Mariboru, *Kronika: časopis za slovensko krajevno zgodovino*, 55/1, 2007, 13–16; SAPAČ, Igor and LAZARINI, Franci. *Arhitektura 19. stoletja na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana: Muzej za arhitekturo in oblikovanje, Fakulteta za arhitekturo 2015, 71, 122, 124–125, 608 [with there listed bibliography].

of baroque art was hidden under the leaves. Its high quality is very evident, so it is surprising previously not being analysed nor discussed in art history literature.²

THE STATUE OF SAINT JOHN OF NEPOMUK

The statue represents a male saint standing on a pedestal, placed on a decorated stone block supported by a large base made of brick, which was added latter. The statue itself is 235 cm high; at its widest point, it is 110 cm wide and at its narrowest 90 cm. The figure is in counterpose, with the left leg engaged and the right leg resting at the side. The left hip gently moves to the side. The saint's head is turned to the left and looking slightly downwards, since his gaze is fixed on a crucifix that rests in crook of his left elbow. The saint is wearing a rochet – a short liturgical tunic – with a high collar and buttons clearly visible on the neck. Over the rochet, he is wearing a mozzetta cape trimmed with fur resembling ermine. The clothing, his stance and the positioning of the crucifix identify this as a statue of St. John of Nepomuk.³ The depictions of Saint John of Nepomuk in the 18th Century mostly followed the standardised types.⁴ The first iconographic type, which became the most common one, was started with the statue on Charles bridge in Prague from 1683 that was set on the very place of the saint's martyrdom.⁵



Figure 1. Old photograph of Slivnica Mansion (© Regional Archive Maribor).

Comparing the two statues, it is evident that the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk from the Slivnica Mansion Park is based on the Prague (proto) type – although there are some differences between them: in the placement of the crucifix and some other details. Some of the details as well as attributes have also been lost over time. In particular, the more exposed parts of the statue – the face, left arm and crucifix – are seriously damaged, mostly due to weather conditions. Furthermore, the palm of

² There is a note about the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk standing in the Slivnica Mansion Park only in: STOPAR, I. 1990, 126.

Sergej Vrišer, who was the leading Slovenian art historian to have focused on baroque sculpture in Styria, must have known about the statue, since I have found a photo of the statue in his personal photograph collection that is kept in the Regional Archive in Maribor. What I find surprising is that despite rather significant characteristics, he did not attribute the statue to any author. (The photo is kept in the folder with respect to the location (Slivnica), without any further other information or note.)

³ For information with respect to his life and martyrdom see: HERZOGENBERG, Johanna von. S. v. Johannes von Nepomuk, in: *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, 7, Rom – Freiburg im Breisgau – Basel – Wien: Herder 1974, coll. 153-157; HLAVÁČEK, Ivan. Johannes von Nepomuk und seine Zeit, in: *Johannes von Nepomuk 1393–1993* (edd. Reinhold Baumstark, Johanna von Herzogenberg, Peter Volk), München: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum 1993, 13–19.

⁴ For the iconography of Saint John of Nepomuk see: HERZOGENBERG, J. von. 1974, coll. 155–157; MATSCHE, Franz. Die Darstellungen des Johannes von Nepomuk in der barocken Kunst. Form, Inhalt und Bedeutung, in: *Johannes von Nepomuk. Ausstellung des Adalbert Stifter Vereins*, Passau: Passavia 1971, 35–62; VOLK, Peter. Nepomukstatuen. Bemerkungen zu den Darstellungsformen, in: *Johannes von Nepomuk 1393–1993* (edd. Reinhold Baumstark, Johanna von Herzogenberg, Peter Volk), München: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum 1993, 27–35.

⁵ For the statue see: MATSCHE, F. 1993, 114–120, catt. 23–30. Later other iconographic types were also developed, among which the apotheosis of Saint John of Nepomuk became the most common one.

the right hand is missing as well as the upper part of the head. However, we can be sure that at one time there was a palm branch in the saint's right hand. Observing the head of the saint, it is evident that he must have worn a hat. It was made from a separate piece of stone and then fixed to the main stone. It is likely that the hat fell off and was lost over the centuries.

In addition to the common iconographic features, the statue also displays some individual elements, particularly in the representation of the saint's body and face as well as in his clothing. Examining the latter, the three tassels on the lower hem of his ermine mozzetta cape are especially significant. Furthermore, the mozzetta cape is tied in a bow with – once again – tasselled ends resting on the saint's chest.

The face has also not been spared from damage: both the nose and the beard have partially chipped off. But at least parts of the curly beard and wavy locks of hair, falling on the shoulders, are preserved. Observe how a lock of hair curves around on the right shoulder, creating an open space between the hair and the neck.

Regarding its monumentality, physicality and overall high quality as well as the stylistic characteristics and details, the statue must have been made by a renowned sculptor in the 18th century. Furthermore, significant similarities between this statue and the documented works of Joseph Straub suggest that the latter might be its author. Note, however, that Joseph Straub predominantly worked in wood. In fact, the documented works of Joseph Straub, which are thus the most reliable for stylistic comparisons, are all made in wood.



Figure 2. Statue of Saint John of Nepomuk in the Slivnica Mansion Park, covered with ivy, autumn 2016.

JOSEPH STRAUB – A STONEMASON OR NOT?

The discussion between Sergej Vrišer and Blaž Resman regarding Joseph Straub's competence in stonemasonry was triggered by question about the authorship of the Plague Monument in Maribor.⁶ Even though many arguments and opinions have resulted, the question remains unsettled to this day.

Admittedly, working predominantly in wood does not exclude one's abilities to work in stone and vice versa. Consider, for example, some other baroque sculptors that were competent both in wood and in stone. As examples, some contemporary Styrian sculptors include: a brother of Joseph Straub, Philipp Jakob Straub,⁷ Josef Stammel⁸ and Franz Christoph Reiss.⁹

But most importantly, certain characteristics in shaping the body, the drapery and the details of Saint John of Nepomuk seem to reflect the personal style of the artist. In this article, I show that these details may convincingly be attributed to Joseph Straub when compared to the documented works by this scul-

⁶ RESMAN, Blaž. Kipa frančiškanskih svetnikov v Šiški – Straubova ali Robbova?, *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 3, 1998, 51–72; VRIŠER, Sergej. Vsakemu svoje – Robbu in Straubu, *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n.v. 35, 1999, 319–321.

⁷ SCHWEIGERT, Horst. *Philipp Jakob Straub: 1706–1774: ein Grazer Barockbildhauer*, Graz: Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt, 1992.

⁸ SCHWEIGERT, Horst. *Die Barockbildhauer Johannes Georg und Josef Stammel: eine stilkritische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Graz: Leykam, 2004.

⁹ VIDMAR, Polona. Kamnite skulpture Franca Krištofa Reissa za samostana Žiče in Marenberk, *Redovna umetnost in njen kontekst=Art of religious orders in context*, 20/ 2, 2015, 71–94, 156–157.



Figure 3. Joseph Straub, Saint John of Nepomuk in the Slivnica Mansion Park, detail of the head.



Figure 4. Joseph Straub, Saint John of Nepomuk in the Slivnica Mansion Park.

ptor. Below, I discuss them one by one and conclude with a discussion of the statue's future destiny.

First, observe the position of the right knee and the way the cassock creases above the thigh – the fabric tightly fits the thigh but ends with a deep crease below the hip. The same feature can be seen on a wooden statue of Saint Anthony of Padua that once formed a group of four main figures on the high altar in the Minorite Church of Saint Peter and Paul in Ptuj dating in 1752.¹⁰ The altar was destroyed in the Second World War, but the figures were saved. Today, they are reinstalled on a high pedestal above the altar in the very same church. Next, consider the rightmost saint on the altar of Saint Anthony of Padua in the Church of Saint Mary in Podlehnik¹¹ – this statue features the very same flat region above the knee and an identical crease below the hip. Both listed statues are documented works of Joseph Straub and both have in common the described V-shaped crease under the knee. This detail is not featured on the statue of John of Nepomuk in the Slivnica Mansion Park, but there is still a significant similarity.

The second characteristic is the most significant crease, formed by the lower hem of the cassock

¹⁰ For the high altar in the Minorite Church of Saint Peter and Paul in Ptuj see: VRIŠER, Sergej. Mariborski baročni kiparji, *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, 4, 1957, 88–89; VRIŠER, Sergej. *Kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem v 18. stoletju*, dissertation, Maribor 1961, 65–66; VRIŠER, Sergej. *Baročno kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem*, Maribor 1963, 89, 168; VRIŠER, Sergej. Doneski k baročni podobi minoritske cerkve v Ptuj, *Ptujski zbornik*, 5, 1985, 339–344; VRIŠER, Sergej. *Baročno kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem*, Ljubljana 1992, 123–124; PERNAT, Amadeja. Baročna oprema minoritske cerkve, in: *Minoritska zbirka. Del 1, Ostanki srednjeveškega slikarstva in kiparstva ter baročne oltarne plastike iz prvotne minoritske cerkve sv. Petra in Pavla*, Ptuj: Ptuj: Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj–Ormož, 2014, 26–40.

¹¹ For the altar of Saint Anthony of Padua in the Church of Saint Mary in Podlehnik see: VRIŠER, S. 1957, 90; VRIŠER, S. 1963, 93, 168 ; VRIŠER, S. 1992, 133, 235.



Figure 5. Comparison of the details: Joseph Straub, Saint John of Nepomuk in the Slivnica Mansion Park, detail of the drapery; Joseph Straub, Saint Anthony of Padua from the high altar in the Minorite Church of Saint Peter and Paul in Ptuj; Joseph Straub, the statue of saint on the altar of Saint Anthony of Padua in the Church of Saint Mary in Podlehnik.

between the feet of the saint. Sergej Vrišer described this kind of crease as a »funnel-shaped, open crease« and analysed it as a stylistic hallmark of Joseph Straub.¹² Indeed, it can also be seen on the figures of saints on the altar of Saint Anthony of Padua in Podlehnik and on the figures on the altar of Saint Roch in Videm near Ptuj.¹³ On the other hand, the four main statues from the main altar in the Minorite Church in Ptuj do not exhibit this feature: although the fabric creases greatly, it does not rebound when it reaches the ground.

The third characteristic is the artificial fluttering-effect of the drapery. We can see the same formation on the statue of Saint Elisabeth from the high altar of the Church of Saint Joseph in Studenci¹⁴ and a rather similar formation on the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk from the same church. Both statues are now kept at the Regional Museum Maribor.

The stylistic analysis of the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk from the Slivnica Mansion Park convincingly suggests Joseph Straub as its author as well as dating from around the 1750s.

ABOUT THE SLIVNICA MANSION

The architecture of the Slivnica Mansion has received some attention from Slovene art historians. The building history, architecture and ownership were studied by Ivan Stopar,¹⁵ while unrealised plans for adaptation, dating from the end of the 18th century, were discovered and presented by Metoda Kem-

¹² VRIŠER, Sergej. Donesek k baroku v Slovenski Bistrici, in: *Zbornik občine Slovenska Bistrica*, Slovenska Bistrica: Skupščina občine, Kulturna skupnost, 230.

¹³ For the altar of Saint Roch in Videm near Ptuj see: VRIŠER, S. 1957m 90; VRIŠER, S. 1963, 168; VRIŠER S. 1992, 235.

¹⁴ For the high altar from the Church of Saint Joseph in Studenci see: VRIŠER, S. 1957, 88; VRIŠER, S. 1961/63? 65; VRIŠER S. 1963, 86, 88, 168; VRIŠER S. 1992, 121–123; VRIŠER, Sergej. *Cerkev svetega Jožefa na Studencih v Mariboru*, Maribor: Župnijski urad sv. Jožefa 1999, 14–17.

¹⁵ STOPAR, I. 1990, 124–128.

Stopar summarized from the literature, that the Slivnica Mansion was build in 1493 by Jurij Kolonič. In 1608 the mansion was sold to the Herberstein family and in 1738 to count Franc Ludovik Khuenburg. From its latter owners we have to point out Klemens Brandis, who was the main initiator for neo-Gothic rebuilding and count Franz Schönborn, who was the last owner (STOPAR, I. 1990, 124–126; *Krajevni leksikon dravske banovine: krajevni repertorij z uradnimi, topografskimi, zemljepisnimi, kulturnimi, gospodarskimi in tujskoprometnimi podatki vseh krajev dravske banovine*, Ljubljana: Uprava Krajevnega leksikona dravske banovine, 1937, 421).

perl.¹⁶ The latest findings were published in a comprehensive catalogue of 19th century architecture in Slovenia, but regarding the Slivnica Mansion, the focus of research has been on the rebuilding of the mansion in the 19th century.¹⁷ There is only a short note about establishing an extensive park with a tree-lined avenue and a complex of outbuildings around the mansion that took place simultaneously with the neo-Gothic reconstruction of the mansion (between 1859 and 1863).¹⁸ The statue of Saint John of Nepomuk is not mentioned there, and neither is it in the selected bibliography accompanying the catalogue.



Figure 6. Joseph Straub, Saint John of Nepomuk in the Slivnica Mansion Park, significant crease.

THE DEPICTIONS OF SLIVNICA MANSION

Fortunately, some depictions of Slivnica Mansion do exist, testifying to how the first estate with a park looked and how it developed over time.

The oldest depiction of Slivnica Mansion was made in graphic in 1681 by Georg Matthäus Vischer. In front of the Slivnica Mansion, we can see the fenced garden, divided into four parts with a decorated arch near the building. At the right edge, a path leads from the mansion to the nearby village of Slivnica.

The next depiction is a lithograph from the Old Kaiser's Suite from about 1830. It shows the mansion on the right and the village of Slivnica with a church with a bell tower to the left of the depiction. Significantly, a straight tree-lined avenue leads from the main road to the mansion – an avenue that still exists today.

In Kuwasseg's lithography from 1845, the architecture of the mansion is the same as in the earliest depictions, but the area in front of the building is changed. It appears as a meadow with trees. There are only two decorated columns standing in line with the entrance to the mansion.

In the lithograph from an 1864 album entitled *Einst und Jetzt* by Carl Reichert, we can see the results of the neo-Gothic rebuilding of the mansion – the architecture can be identified as that which can still be seen today (in an extremely bad condition). In previous depictions, the main entrance was through the eastern façade. It was later moved to the north-eastern façade of the building and is emphasised both by the architecture of the mansion itself and by a circular driveway, ascending a little on both sides of the entrance and framed by two columns on each side.

Besides these depictions, some photographs were also saved. As in the depictions, the photographs also do not show the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk, since they are focused on the architecture. Still, we can see how the park was organised. The park shown in the photographs is from the most recent period. It is well seen how the area descended from the semi-circular driveway – there was also a staircase and some decorated columns with simple stone vases set on top. Unfortunately, only some ruins of the columns remain, hidden in the bushes, while the whole design of the park has been dramatically altered by the more recent construction of a football pitch and enlargement of the road running next to the mansion.

¹⁶ KEMPERL, M. 2007.

¹⁷ SAPAČ, I. and LAZARINI, F. 2015.

¹⁸ SAPAČ, I. and LAZARINI, F. 2015



Figure 7. Old photograph of Slivnica Mansion (© Regional Archive Maribor).

THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE SAINT JOHN OF NEPOMUK STATUE

As to the present location of the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk (in the park, to the west of the mansion), the following question has to be addressed: is today's location the original one or not? The argument in favour of the present location being the original is the closeness of the water, namely the Polana Stream, since traditionally statues of Saint John of Nepomuk were set on bridges or somewhere

close to rivers and lakes.¹⁹ On the other hand, the present location of the statue is marginal with respect to the orientation and organisation of the estate and its main axes (it appears that this was also the case in the past, since the path to the mansion and to the main entrance was on the other side).

This evidence presents a strong argument in support of the proposal that the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk was originally set in some other location. There are three locations that seem to be appropriate: (i) on the estate at any point on the tree-lined avenue,²⁰ (ii) near the bridge over the Polana Stream, close to the mansion²¹ or (iii) on or near the bridge over the Polana Stream in the village of Slivnica, where the main road was.²² All three suggested locations seem to be adequate – considering the usual location of the statues of the saint as well as the usual prominence of such statues. However, we do not know when and why the statue was moved, since there is no information about it.

THE DESTINY OF THE STATUE

Today, the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk is neither well-presented nor preserved. Unfortunately, that is also true of the Slivnica Mansion and its park as a whole, which suffered even greater destruction.

It seems that the employees of the Cultural Heritage Service, Regional Office in Maribor and the residents of Slivnica have been aware of this. In 1999, there was a correspondence between the Cultural

¹⁹ MATSCHE, F. 1971, 35–62; VOLK, P. 1993, 27.

²⁰ One famous example of such location can be named: the Statue of Saint John of Nepomuk in the park of Dornava Mansion (Cf. VIDMAR, Polona. Kiparska dela v vrtu dornavskega dvorca, in: *Vrtna arhitektura 18. stoletja v srednji Evropi: raziskovanje, rekonstruiranje, ohranjanje: zbornik mednarodnega simpozija, dvorec Dornava 2011=Gartenarchitektur des 18. Jahrhunderts in Mitteleuropa: Erforschung, Rekonstruktion, Erhaltung: Sammelband des internationalen Symposiums, Schloss Dornava*, Ljubljana: Slovensko konservatorsko društvo 2011, 58–73 [with bibliography bibliografy].

²¹ The bridge over the Poljana Stream near the mansion is drawn on the situational plan that is kept in the National Museum of Slovenia in Ljubljana, dated around 1860. Beside the bridge, the semi-circular driveway to the mansion is also well seen as well as the road leading to nearby village of Radizel. We can assume that the bridge existed even earlier.

²² The bridge over the Poljana Stream in the village of Slivnica must have existed around the mid-18th century, since there is a description from that time stating: »Beside the local ponds, there is a 4 *Schritt* wide and 2 *Schuh* deep stream, over which there is a built bridge« (*Slovenija na vojaškem zemljevidu 1763–1787. Opisi, 6. zvezek; Josephinische Landesaufnahme 1763–1787 für das Gebiet der Republik Slowenien. Landesbeschreibung, 6. Band*, Ljubljana: Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2000, 111).

Heritage Service, Regional Office in Maribor and the mayor of the Hoče – Slivnica Municipality²³ about moving the statue of Saint John of Nepomuk from its current location to the stone wall in front of the church in Slivnica, just about 1500 m eastward, where a stone statue of Saint Joseph and the Christ Child attributed to Joseph Straub was already set. It was proposed that a roof should also be made for the statue. There was an agreement that when the mansion was repaired and renovated, the statue would be moved back to the park. Despite that agreement, the transportation of the statue did not happen and neither was the roof constructed.

The statue is therefore at the mercy of inclement weather, causing decay or even final destruction. Bearing in mind the quality of the statue as well as its importance in the development of baroque sculpture in the area beside the Drava, it is critical that some way be found to preserve the statue.

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²³ The correspondence is saved in the archive documentation of the Cultural Heritage Service, Regional Office in Maribor.

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SAŽETAK

U radu se raspravlja o kipu Svetog Ivana Nepomuka iz vrta dvorca Slivnica – remek djelu barokne umjetnosti. Navedeni kip do sada nije bio izlagan, analiziran ili vrednovan. Ovaj rad objašnjava njegovu ikonografiju i fokusira se na njegove značajne karakteristike. Na temelju kritičke stilističke analize kip se pripisuje Josipu Straubu, kasnom baroknom kiparu koji je radio u Štajerskoj u periodu između 1743. i 1756. Od ključne je važnosti osigurati očuvanje kipa, budući da je trenutno izložen na milost i nemilost surovim vremenskim prilikama koje uzrokuju njegovo propadanje, pa čak i uništenje.