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## PUBLIC MEMORIALS OF ST. JOHN OF NEPOMUK IN EASTERN SLAVONIA

*Ivan Roth, Public Memorials of St. John of Nepomuk in Eastern Slavonia. Slavonski Brod: The Croatian Institute of History – Department of the History of Slavonia, Srijem, and Baranja, 2016, p. 178.*

Croatian Institute of History – Department for the History of Slavonia, Srijem, and Baranja, published in December of 2016 the book *Public Memorials of St. John of Nepomuk in Eastern Slavonia* authored by Ivan Roth. The young historian of art, Ivan Roth, dealt with the research of monument plastics in his master's thesis, so the book, as he states himself, is the expanded version of his thesis which was titled "Public monuments of St. John of Nepomuk in Slavonia" which he defended in 2014 at the Department of Art History of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. The extensive field and archival research across numerous cultural institutions (archives, libraries, museums, and conservatory departments) was rewarded by a neat, quality, and functional edition representing a noteworthy attempt by the historical institute in Slavonski Brod in promoting the art history papers tightly connected to the cultural and religious history of the post-Ottoman Slavonia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The book consists of an **Introduction** (7-8), two thematic chapters– **John of Nepomuk, saint and martyr** (9-29) and **Iconography and Typology of the Representation of St. John of Nepomuk** (31-38), then a **Catalogue** (39-87), **Conclusion** (89-90), **Reproductions** (91-161), **Bibliography** (163-172), **Summary** (173-174), **Summary** (175-176) and **About the Author** (177-178). The contents are articulate, concise, and pithy, and the text is clear and understandable to the wider public which may not be expert in the art history branch.

In the introductory part, the author describes the art production and legacy, the reach of orders and the stride in the public monument plastics in the area of Slavonia after the Ottomans left during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the center of the research are public religious monuments (the public ones are highlighted) created in the baroque and classic era dedicated to the known Habsburg saint John of Nepomuk. The sacral public monuments are tied to the vocalization of the piety of an individual and the community, but are also the bearers of the Church-political message. On the one hand, the public monuments of St. John of Nepomuk speak of the important dogma of the Catholic Church in the post-Trident time – the sacrament of confession and reconciliation, and are connected to the Habsburg cultural legacy of spreading influence in the newly acquired areas on the other hand. The author is led by the postulate of “signs in space” affirmed in the *Ikonografija nakon Tridentskog sabora i hrvatska likovna baština* book by the PhD Sanja Cvetnić.

The first thematic chapter, **John of Nepomuk, saint and martyr** (9-29) consists of several smaller sub-chapters representing the saint through hagiography, the reasons of canonization, the history of spreading the veneration with the support of the Habsburg dynasty and the orders of the Church and the presence of spreading and its specialty in the outer areas of the Habsburg monarchy, in Eastern Slavonia. In hagiography, he is known as a martyr saint, and the unfounded thesis of the protector of the confessional secret is also tied to him. In the post-Trident reform and the time of conflict with the reformers, the veneration of saints gains a wider meaning, not only within the teachings of the Catholic Church on sanctity and saints and sacraments, but also as a marker of identity and a symbol of an area under the rule of the Habsburgs. The representation of the saint’s cult in the various religious centers speaks on the transferors and various forms of spreading veneration by the highest representative government (the Habsburgs), over the local noblemen, more wealthy citizens and Church orders (Jesuits and Franciscans) to the ordinary folks who condition vows, folks pieties, processions, and village festivities by their commitment. The author also highlighted the literary contribution to the spreading of veneration. The separate sub-chapter **Veneration of St. John of Nepomuk throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century** (27-29) deals with the cultural-historic aspect of the modern age because it comes from the focus of research by inquiring about the symbolic cessation of the veneration of saints for political reasons and general material destruction of monuments in the Homeland War in Eastern Slavonia.

For the purpose of recognition and typological determination of the individual public monument, the author designed the second thematic chapter **Iconography and Typology of the Representation of St. John of Nepomuk** (31-38). A statement that the Slavonian examples of the public monuments of that saint have no direct Czech templates is highlighted. They have Vienna and Austria templates and that the general iconography templates come from various sources. According to the type of public monument, the author differentiates between a sculpture on a column (stone base), chapel, and the sculpture in the niche of the construction. According to the place of placement for the monument, the author differentiates those found most frequently along bridges, which is a connection to the act of a martyr death, or highlighted places, town squares or in front of churches. Public monuments in front of houses by esteemed individuals are a specialty. In general, the character of St. John of Nepomuk is recognizable by the stable and usual iconography, and there are almost no deviations in practice. A note by the author could be highlighted from the chapter that public sculptures were polychromed and we perceive almost all of them as monochrome (“gray”) nowadays.

The **Catalogue** (39-87) in which public monuments are divided by a geographical key into monuments from the areas of Srijem, Baranja, Osijek, Slavonski Brod, and Požega gives quality to the edition. The Osijek examples of public monuments are separated into a separate category due to their number, and the ones from Požega are added to the list for their significance, even though they step out of the observed area of Eastern Slavonia. Every catalogue unit is equipped with basic specifications (author, time of creation, material, original and current location, as well as dimensions) and a textual description containing archival sources, notes from the history of the monument (if it has any historical interest), current state and a detailed art description with the necessary iconographical explanations. The Catalogue shows an ability to acquire valuable pieces of information or uncovering forgotten sources which opens a space for argumentative setting of new dating and attributions of public monuments. According to the usage of published or unpublished sources, a variety of field work and visits to numerous institutions is visible. There is also value to be found in the review of the current state of monuments, giving insight into the genesis of maintaining monumental heritage i.e. the relationship towards the monument during in time. The author of the book, in this manner, also becomes a spectator. Also, the relations towards the protection and renewal of monumental heritage can be observed. The author was sufficiently critical towards that, with good

reason. In so doing, he stated some examples of the monuments of St. John of Nepomuk which received replicas due to the incorrigible state. However, the replicas are of a weaker significance or their restorers freely interpreted some unknown and lost portions of the source. Also, the author highlights those examples where appropriate conservatory actions were used which permanently saved monuments from further degradation. The author points to the appropriate reproduction in every example of a public monument. Concluding that some public monuments are being processed and appraised for the first time, the existence of any kind of reproduction is useful. The map of Slavonia served as an addition to the book. On it, the author showed public sculptures, chapels and churches dedicated to St. John of Nepomuk, as well as lost public sculptures or torn-down chapels.

In the **Conclusion** (89-90), the author considers that a detachment from the usual art valorization was made by the research, in favor of the iconology sphere and the general study of cultural, church, art, social, and political history. Regarding St. John of Nepomuk as a kind of protector of the Habsburg Monarchy, a prevalence and intensity of veneration in the newly acquired areas is recognized. Even though the edition is of a smaller volume, it is equipped by the necessary scientific apparatus (notes which dutifully follow the text and an encompassing bibliography), a very clear goal of research and a widespread catalogue analysis. The book *Public Memorials of St. John of Nepomuk in Eastern Slavonia* serves as incentive for further research by the author, and it also serves as an example of successful cooperation between professions for the branch office of the Croatian Institute of History in Slavonski Brod.