

Mirjana Margetić. Production of Textile, Dressing, Footwear, Menswear and Womenswear and Personal Items / Produzione di tessuti, indumenti, calzature, abbigliamento e oggetti personali. Pazin: Ethnographic Museum of Istria / Museo etnografico dell' Istria. 2018, p. 99

Catalogue Review

In 2018, the Ethnographic Museum of Istria / Museo Etnografico dell' Istria (hereinafter EMI/MEI) published the Collection Catalogue entitled “Production of Textile, Clothing, Footwear, Menswear and Womenswear and Personal Items” - “Produzione di tessuti, indumenti, calzature, abbigliamento e oggetti personali” by the author Mirjana Margetić, a museum advisor, educator and curator. The Collection Catalogue was released as the fifth catalogue to meet the requirements of the edition Collection Catalogues of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria, which finally in an adequate manner presents the interesting collections of EMI/MEI and their history to the broader public. Interestingly, irrespective of the fact that it is a single edition, the catalogues differ from the visual aspect, in other words, the design and form of the textual part and visual identity of the catalogues has been left to individual affinities, inspiration, the preferences of the curator in charge of them, as well as the time of publishing. The fact that the publisher Lidija Nikočević, Ph.D., does not insist on uniformity that may in turn result in monotony, is something that makes a quality difference, in my opinion, primarily in terms of encouraging individuality and diversity.

In 2008, the old collections were disband. They had been formed according to the material they had been made from and new ones were formed, which placed the exhibited objects into a wider context. As a former curator of EMI/MEI in charge of the former Textile Collection (that did not get its own independent catalogue), which at the time actually included only textile, I personally had to “reach out for” what at the time was Wood and Metal Collection and select those objects that were in connection with textile production or processing in order to meet the requirements of the exhibition. Consequently, I was delighted by the information that a new collection had been formed, which was both more thematically linked and more comprehensive. The latter fact not only makes work easier for curators during the exhibition, but it also much more effectively contextualises objects and their understanding. Moreover, I was even more delighted by the information that the collection was also accompanied by a catalogue! The redesigned and renamed collection in 2018 was finally provided also its guide. It is important to point out that in 2019 the Croatian Museum Association granted a special recognition award for museum publications to the EMI/MEI and the author of the catalogue.

When you “unbuckle” the paper *belt* (which contains the motif from the actual belt), i.e. when you take out the Collection Catalogue from the paper belt, you are faced with dark brown covers, whose colour was definitely not randomly selected. The colour of the covers is the colour of natural brown wool that was used for making most of upper body apparel, which is the most visible in Istria and hence also a woman’s dress with a belt strap, in local Istrian idiom referred to as *tkanica* or *pas*, whose one name shows that in the past, primarily in the region from where population arrived to Istria whose name for this item remained in use was of another colour, in local idiom referred to as *modrna* (!). This extremely meticulously designed catalogue, for which the designer Tina Erman Popović deserves credit, comprises of 99 pages. It is bilingual (Croatian-Italian) and it comprises of the Introduction and six chapters.

In the Introduction the curator of the Collection introduces us to the very beginning when objects for the Museum started being collected. The Museum was founded after World War II, after Istria had been annexed to Croatia and Slovenia (within what at the time was Yugoslavia), when “the interest of national ethnology was focused on rural culture” (p. 7) primarily of Slavic/Croatian population (p. 8). The importance of textile objects for this orientation was shown in the fact that the first inventory number E1 was allocated to a women’s clothing item locally referred to as *čerma*. The author also provides statistical data concerning the acquisition of museum objects for the Collection during the period from 1958 to 2016 and introduces us also to more important acquisitions that were significant for the Collection, periods in which acquisitions or supply of museum objects for what at the time was textile collection were decreasing and those when it was intensifying yet again, warning us simultaneously also of some specific changes – less and less object were acquired by purchase on site during field research, and purchases from collectors became more common.

Donations are another way in which museums collect their objects. During previous periods, individuals from whom museums purchased a larger number of objects frequently used to donate some objects as well. Hence, during that period the number of donors exceeded the number of donated objects. During the period from 2002 to 2006, the number of donors was smaller, but their donations were more substantial. The reason behind it was that family heirloom of a specific individual in question (that they themselves value and evaluate, at least through preservation and caring for the objects in question) continued being adequately preserved and eventually also presented, frequently with all the corresponding information from both personal and family history in connection with the object/s. All the previously mentioned shows the ways in which the attitude of the Istrian people (locally referred to as *Istrijani*) towards heritage changed over time. After World War II and at the beginning of industrialisation, objects of traditional origin were sold and very frequently also destroyed (I remember when I was working as a curator at EMI/MEI, doing field work, I heard from many informants that they were almost eager to get rid of the “old junk” that was in the way and was considered as evidence of the previous hard and humble living conditions). That in turn resulted in a “scarcity” of such objects (primarily since at the time the museum policy focused on collection of objects of rural origin, which in turn could lead to some kind of “saturation” of museum storage rooms with a specific type of objects).

Finally, those who were emotionally or in any other way attached to the objects that they had inherited, are currently realizing that preserving them in chests in their own house is not necessarily the only and it is frequently not even the best way of family heirloom preservation. The role of museums has been recognized and hence even the role of EMI/MEI in the processes of adequate valorisation and representation of this both family and regional culture, through which the former owners are given an opportunity in which their family history becomes the history of Istria in both a more formal and a more visible manner. That important difference is visible also in the story about the history of the Collection and the ways of its consolidation.

The second chapter is dedicated to explaining the processes required for textile production and it refers to the processing of basic raw materials used in clothing production in Istria – wool, flax and hemp. There were many complex processes that led to the creation of a thread and that preceded weaving. Consequently, their understanding is required for gaining insight into the functions of objects used in the process, which have been more comprehensively described and presented in the third chapter. In this chapter we get to know also more details about a fact that is well-known among ethnologists, yet perhaps utterly unknown among the visitors, that in Istria, men (not women, with some exceptions) were involved in weaving both at the professional and semi-professional level, which is untypical for Slavic peoples and shows Central European influence.

The third chapter provides descriptions and presentations of a large number of different tools for textile processing (from distaff and spindle to *krosna*, i.e. weaving loom) and other aids used for the actions described in the second chapter in the collection are addressed in a separate, third chapter. The latter chapter also presents saddlebags. This object is a type of homemade fabric used at farms such as, for example, while sowing.

Since women's clothing items account for the highest proportion of textile objects in the Collection, the fourth chapter that addresses the issue of women's *traditional clothing* comprises of the largest number of sub-chapters. These chapters provide an overview of different women's clothing types in Istria by small geographic entities, following the analysis started in her doctoral thesis by Jelka-Radauš Ribarić, Ph.D. and further elaborated in her book entitled *Women's Traditional Folk Dress in Istria*. An overview has been provided of traditional women's clothing of the local population from Vodnjan belonging to autochthonous Italian inhabitants from Istria, as well as women's clothing of descendants of Montenegrin settlers in Istria (1657) from Peroj. Traditional women's clothing in Vodnjan and in Peroj visibly differs from the clothing worn in other parts of Istria and due to its rarity it is considered among the most valuable objects both in the Collection and in the Museum in general, primarily due to the fact that the Museum does not own many clothing items that show the multiculturalism and pluriethnicity of Istria. A separate chapter has been dedicated to underwear. It is only starting from the year 2000 that greater attention in collecting was paid primarily to this clothing segment. This segment has not been tabooed (and it should not be tabooed!) and visitors frequently find it in general very interesting. They not only admire the beauty of the preserved underwear (in this case women's underwear, which most often belonged

to wealthier urban inhabitants), but also the presented traditional hygienic solutions, such as those in case of women's monthly period. It is important to point out that EMI/MEI (currently) does not own men's underwear, which is evident from the following chapter. This chapter ends with an overview of a rich collection of women's stockings, footwear and jewellery, which also includes hair jewellery.

The next chapter presents men's *traditional clothing*. Mirjana Margetić gives an explanation necessary for understanding the fact why the museum owns less men's *traditional clothing* than women's *traditional clothing*. In fact, men were the first to stop wearing the *traditional clothing* because of their departure from rural areas for the cities in search for work where they adopted the urban, worker clothing style. Out of only 201 objects linked with clothing and men's accessories, as much as half of it refers to accessories such as tobacco pouches, walking canes and shaving kits. According to the information provided in inventory cards, it is evident that the Museum does not keep men's clothing that would be considered as one belonging to the local autochthonous Italian inhabitants from Istria or, for example, the inhabitants of Peroj.

What follows is an even less represented part of the Collection (in terms of numbers) that is linked with the children's clothing culture. It is only since 2005 that the collection of children's clothing and accessories has started increasing, which I bring into connection with the work and activity of the author of the Catalogue on work and collection of objects for a part of a new permanent exhibition of EMI/MEI which, in accordance with the accepted concept, is dedicated to the topic of childhood in Motovun area.

All the chapters are accompanied by high quality photographs taken by Tanja Draškić, Nikolina Rusac and Dragan Dimovski, as well as by reproductions of available drawings, picture postcards or old photographs or visual materials showing clothing or some of the procedures linked with the Collection (which in turn shows a necessary overlapping of museum collections). This relatively newly formed collection of EMI/MEI has been presented to the broader public in an adequate manner through this Catalogue.

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