

Mario Buletić. *Objects of Memory - Collection of Souvenirs, Contemporary Interpretation of Traditional Culture / Oggetti della memoria - La collezione di souvenir, l'interpretazione contemporanea della cultura tradizionale*. Pazin: Ethnographic Museum of Istria / Museo etnografico dell'Istria, 2021., p. 159

Catalogue Review

On the cover of the new edition of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria / Museo etnografico dell'Istria "Objects of Memory - Collection of Souvenirs, Contemporary Interpretation of Traditional Culture" authored by senior curator Mario Buletić, there is a photograph of a postcard of Istria with symbols of certain places, cities on the peninsula such as the amphitheater in Pula, the lighthouse in Savudrija, mines and miners in Raša. This postcard is part of the presented collection and as such indicates the content of publications and objects that make up the collection. For many years, the Ethnographic Museum of Istria has been acquainting the public with its holdings through its publishing activities, and in this way informs about its museum work, development, and collection policy. Souvenirs are certainly, in that sense, one of the most exciting collections, because through them one can read the interesting dynamics and course of the creation of the object itself, as well as the interest of the profession to observe, analyze and present it.

This publication has its fundamental value in elaborating these facts, which makes it a useful material, something like a manual, and an indispensable literature for all those who studiously want to access the information of a complete museological process from general assumptions about museum collections to the formation of the collection (from heritage objects to souvenirs and back), its professional processing and analysis, even scientific consideration of souvenirs as a museum object throughout history until the application of classification models in processing and analysis.

The first chapter focuses on the poetics and politics of ethnographic museums, the path from the ethnographic collection to the museum, museums in the new social circumstances that followed in the 1990s, and even the creation of the collection for the preparation of the exhibition "From Medals to Identity Symbols" in 1999 and 2000, respectively, when it was officially presented to the public at the Ethnographic Museum of Istria in Pazin. The aim of this exhibition was to draw attention to the "transposition of traditional objects into souvenirs and consequently the possible transformation of traditional craftsmen into souvenir producers" (p. 23). This data is a kind of trigger for the further focus of research on this phenomenon.

The author further elaborates this in the second chapter entitled "Souvenir and its roles" (Material witness of memory, Cultural marker, Objects of tradition: material culture of personal and collective past, Souvenir as a gift, Between authenticity and consumerism

and Souvenir as a sign). It should be added that there are many visuals of objects on the pages, accompanied by descriptive legends that make it easier to understand the content itself. Thus, for example, in this section, along with photographs of *bukalets* (traditional Istrian wine jug) and brass goat figures, we can read: “Emphasizing regional affiliation/belonging on *bukaleta* - recognized as a representative object for Istria - is an example of unambiguous emphasis on cultural features through the medium of souvenirs. The goat is a trademark of Istria (...) Although it gained symbolic importance only in the early 1990s, there is no doubt that it represents one of the most important regional cultural markers” (p. 30). Thus, along with photographs of soap, wallets and pastel crayons donated to the museum by Joe Valencich from the USA, it is stated: “An object as a memorial or memorabilia. These objects are part of a package that an emigrant from Istria to the USA sent to his family in Istria. Apart from the fact that one of these objects has the character of a souvenir, all of them together emphasize the memory of the life situation marked by the emigrant experience and the relationship between the one who left and those who stayed” (p. 28).

The third chapter is dedicated in more detail to the Istrian souvenir, its appearance on the peninsula, the first souvenirs and the development and transformation that followed in crucial 1990s. That is when “the system of souvenir production was established, and in order to achieve this and encourage and increase production, the Association of Istrian Souvenir Producers in Poreč was founded” (p. 46). Once established, the Association provides very specific guidelines for achieving these goals. Also, the Association is credited for creating new categories of souvenirs that more clearly define the object. This chapter also contains pictures of objects, mostly those defined by the categories from the catalog “Istrian Souvenir” by Miličević and Mačina, but there are also “some examples of diversification of souvenirs – Glagolitic script, archeology, wall painting, modern history, typical products” (p. 52) which we find on the objects: wooden boxes, plaster brooches, miniatures of amphorae, profile of Josip Broz Tito, paintings with details of the Dance of the Dead by Vincent from Kastav from Beram and bottles of brandy on a vine stand.

The first part ends with conclusion, which is very valuable because it summarizes everything presented and introduces us to the second part of the publication in which the collection is professionally processed and analyzed in a way that accurately presents all categories and typologies of souvenirs (Structural categories, Descriptive categories and subcategories, Motivational and functional typology).

After that, the following two chapters describe the application of classification models in professional processing and analysis through a quantitative approach to basic classification (meta) data (Basic categories, Basic categories of Istrian souvenirs, Material, Locality and dating, According to qualitative interpretation of the collection) and qualitative analytical approach (Relationship of items from the Souvenirs collection with other museum collections, Architecture and home equipment, Economy, Social and spiritual culture, Production of textiles, clothing and footwear, Personal items, Relationship between the subject collection and the wider, non-museum context).

In order to categorize the objects of the collection, with the corresponding typologies, the author relies on the templates of Susan Stewart (when elaborating structural categories - collected and representative souvenirs), while to her individual and representative models he adds the category of David Hume - handicrafts, which differs from the representative category in that he singles them out by claiming that such items “become souvenirs at the moment they are consumed by the tourists” (p. 60). Until then, they only have the potential to become one. Furthermore, he relies on the questions that Hume asks when processing. On this basis he continues to evaluate the collection, adding practical graphs to bring the functioning of the mentioned models closer in the analysis of museum objects as well. Thus, he warns of questions (and answers) about: medium, authorial feature, relational attributes, narrative (positive) attributes, icon fetish.

From the concluding chapters, I single out the basic categories of objects from the collection defined by the author - handicrafts, which according to the previously mentioned definitions and properties imply the term Istrian souvenir and representative souvenirs “(...) which fit into the diverse market offer whose theme is Istria but do not correspond to the term Istrian souvenirs” (p. 78).

The author also classifies the Istrian souvenir into: copies of objects, miniatures with the same properties, souvenirs of use value that basically resemble the original object, industrially produced souvenirs and works of art inspired by archeology, sacral motifs, ethnographic and natural features of Istria. The connection between the items of the collection with other museum collections, with a detailed description, is shown through a large number of photographs, extremely interesting and richly equipped. Some of the most representative are shown in larger formats, such as the popular couple Barbie and Ken in Istrian folk costumes.

The publication ends with the chapter “Conceptual framework for the development of the collection Souvenirs, contemporary interpretation of culture” together with a photo album with thanks to those who made objects kept by the Ethnographic Museum of Istria, employees and colleagues who have collected them over the years. The entire content was translated into Italian by Carla Rott and Vanesa Begić. Corection and proofreading was performed by Jasna Perković. The graphic design was made by Tihana Nalić. The publication was printed in 200 copies in Printera, Sveta Nedelja. Support was provided by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, the County of Istria and the Republic of Croatia, the County of Istria and the Department of Culture and Homeland of the County of Istria.

Nuša Hauser