

Virtual exhibition *A Chest Full of Digital Secrets*

The virtual exhibition *A Chest Full of Digital Secrets* is available online since 15th October 2021 on the website of the Ethnographic Museum (<http://www.emz.hr/skrinja/>) in Croatian and English. The goal of this virtual exhibition is to acquaint the general public with a portion of Museum's holdings (chests) that has not been integrally exhibited until now, by means of developing new educational content that would broaden the public's knowledge about heritage. Digital technologies are vital for the development of new museum practices, new forms of participation and interactivity between museums and audiences. Using digital technologies, museum institutions consolidate knowledge that is based on interpretation and contextualization. Digital storytelling plays an important role in the interpretation of collections, enabling visitors to get a better understanding and have an entirely new experience. The attention shifts from focusing on the displayed object alone, to creating stories around the object as the visitors' central experience. The virtual interpretation of the chests made it possible to explore the museum collection from a contemporary perspective, by creating and telling new stories around the objects, which affected the way people experience and perceive them.

New circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic required museum institutions to increase and improve access to cultural and artistic activities that were an alternative to physical experiences, using digital technologies. Limited social interactions changed the way we connect, perform research and implement innovations working in museums. In the current situation, museums have implemented existing programmes and activities in a virtual space, continuously upgrading them with content tailored to different groups of users. Adapting to these new conditions, museum institutions advanced their existing content and found various innovative ways of presenting heritage in order to draw visitors and motivate them to visit the museum in person as well.

The starting point for the creation of this virtual exhibition was the long-term research of Museum holdings, namely, the Furniture Collection, during which museum objects were photographed and processed in the museum database M++ from 2019 to 2020. The Furniture Collection of the Ethnographic Museum comprises 141 chests from all parts of Croatia, as well as several examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, that were created, shaped and mo-



Picture 1. Front page screen of the virtual exhibition available at www.emz.hr/skrinja/en/index.html

dified by various interweaving cultural influences. The chests entered the Museum's holdings thanks to the dedicated work of numerous collectors who strived to record rural life in the 19th century, and which help us create a clearer idea and compare and observe long-term changes. Considering the number of chests and their material uniqueness, my intention was to present these chests to a wider museum audience in an educational and compelling way.

The aim of this virtual exhibition was to show how certain objects “tell stories” and how people used them, also relating certain aspects of daily life, from their purpose and usage, to manufacturing and decorating techniques, to object symbolism. In order to bring the Museum's rich holdings closer to visitors, they were offered the opportunity to virtually explore and gain a more detailed insight into the collection of chests through several sections (*About the Collection, Explore the Collection Highlights, Discover the Stories – a Chest Full of Meaning: The Wedding Chest and The Sailor's Sea Chest, and Secrets Hidden in the Chest*). The first section about the chest collection highlighted the most interesting pieces accompanied by detailed descriptions



ŠKRINJINE TAJNE

Najstarija škrinja u zbirci pokućstva potječe vjerojatno iz 18. stoljeća, jer ukazuje na stariju tradiciju izrade te vrste pokućstva. Riječ je o ormaru (škrinji) koji je u muzejskoj dokumentaciji upisan pod nazivom ormar, starinski, od izdublenog lipovog debila koje je prerezano na pola. Umetnuta su mu vrata od hrastovih dasaka. U unutrašnjosti se nalaze tri police koje su služile kao pregrade. Police leže na šikama zadržavajući u rupe probušene u stijenu ormara. S obzirom da je u muzejski fondus došao početkom 19. stoljeća, odnosno, kupljen je 1931. godine od Ignacija Keretića koji je bio župnik u Žazini u Posavini, prije dolaska u muzej imao je izuzetno dugu povijest.

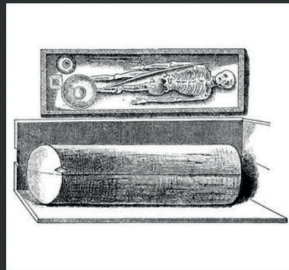


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Posebnost ovoga predmeta navela je na dublje istraživanje literature koja nam je ukazala na nove zanimljive činjenice.

Tako u knjizi „Siegwald Schick. Das Gräberfeld der Merowingzeit bei Ober Flacht“ nailazimo na reprodukciju škrinje srednjovjekovnih seoskih škrinja koja je izrađena iz prepolovljenog debila drva i potječe iz Oberflachta u Wittenbergu, s njemačkog groblja gdje je sačuvano 27 drvenih sanduka.

Smatra se da je i porijeklo njemačke riječi „Totenbaum“ – mrtvački lijes.



Vjeruje se da su škrinje za žito također bile različito oblikovane i da su u Sloveniji bile korištene škrinje iz prepolovljenog debila drveta, te da pripadaju starijoj izradi tradicijskog namještaja koji se temelji na improvizaciji, a poznata je srednjovjekovna tradicija njihove izrade u Njemačkoj, Švicarskoj, sjevernoj Francuskoj i Engleskoj.

Picture 2. Virtual exploration through the section *Secrets Hidden in the Chest*

and photos. If a visitor is interested in a more detailed display of the object, this is made possible by enlarging certain details, as well as by a more detailed description from the museum database. The second section invites visitors to explore the most unique examples of chests from the Museum's Furniture Collection and learn about different types of chests through numerous examples. The external appearance of the chest often revealed the importance of its content, thus, they appear in different shapes, manufactured from various materials, adorned with distinct decorations. The adornments were particularly susceptible to mutual influences and permutations. Special attention is devoted to the importance of adornments on individual chests, the details of which may be enlarged and studied more closely.

In the third section, titled *Discover the Stories*, the visitors may find more details about the story of the wedding chest and the sailor's sea chest. The chest played a special role in wedding customs throughout Croatia. It was an integral part of the bride's dowry and it was carried or transported to the house where the newlyweds would live, accompanied by various magical rituals in line with different local customs. The wedding chest was always beautifully adorned and richly equipped, because it was also an indication of the family's economic standing. The chest can also be perceived as an object belonging to the girl's intimate sphere, that is, the place where the girl kept her belongings and personal items.

In the following section, visitors can learn more about nautical chests, since the Museum's Furniture Collection contains several chests in which sailors stored their personal belongings during long voyages, i.e. sailor's chests. The holdings contain several highly interesting chests: one with a painted front depicting a city panorama and a series of ships sailing in the foreground, with the city with the French flag in the background, while the other has a painted front and the inside of the lid. These items may be examined together with an interesting and detailed story written in the form of a blog.

The fourth section, titled *Secrets Hidden in the Chest*, highlights an interesting story about a cabinet (chest), listed in the Museum's catalogue as a *cabinet, antique, made from carved out lime tree wood split in half*. Given that it became part of Museum's holdings in the early 20th century, i.e., it was procured in 1931 from Ignacio Keretić, a parish priest in Žažina in Posavina, it had a very long history before arriving at the Museum. Following a detailed research and comparison with other objects documented in literature, more information was obtained about its use and possible history.

This new digital storytelling platform offers in-depth research on individual objects and topics, directing it towards telling broader stories about these objects. The reinterpretation of museum objects opens up the possibility of creating new stories that will present the past in a new way and facilitate the understanding of today's audience. The Ethnographic Museum places special value on engaging and working with its users, who will be able to learn about the objects that museums present in the exhibitions or keeps in their collections, but the curators will also use this interaction with the users to learn more about the meaning of these objects. In cooperation with Radio Kaj, the museum engaged the public in various aspects and invited citizens to tell their stories on the topic of chests. A total of 460 citizens responded by writing posts about chests on the radio's Facebook page. To date, 8,600 visitors have viewed the online exhibition. The exhibition also received extensive media coverage.