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Preface

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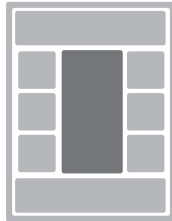
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ZUZANA FRANTOVÁ

HERESY AND LOYALTY

HEREZE A LOAJALITA



The Ivory Diptych of Five Parts from the Cathedral Treasury in Milan

Slonovinový Diptych z pěti částí z pokladu katedrály v Miláně

Preface

Ivan Foletti

Within our post-positivist perception of science, the question of a personal dialogue between the researcher and the subject of her/his research is almost taboo. Yet anyone who has become engrossed, at least for a while, in historiography, the history of her/his discipline, knows that the ability to study independently of her/his historicity, the historical context, as well as of her/his passions, is to a certain extent impossible. The modern scientist is obviously trying hard to achieve “objectivity”, the historiographer knows that this is a losing battle. That each step as well as the actual effort of absolute independence of thought is always determined, contaminated by the world in which the researcher lives, and by her/his personality. Therefore, I would like to devote several lines to the author of this book, which the kind reader has just opened, and consider why precisely her personality, abilities and finally her story have contributed to the writing of this completely exceptional publication.

Of course it is not possible – and it would probably be inappropriate as well – to tell the whole story of Zuzana Frantová. Nevertheless, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that in addition to uncommon intelligence, diligence and aptitude for the study of art history Zuzana Frantová has, said with an only slight exaggeration, an almost entire, unconcealed “second life”, because before she began her studies at the Faculty of Arts, Zuzana had apprenticed as ceramist. She had worked for many years as a craftswoman and she has not completely abandoned her potter’s wheel even since becoming a professional researcher. From the perspective of the market economy, her business did not leave a big footprint, but from the point of view of her formation – and now I look at the formation from an instrumental point of view of art history – her “second life” is crucial for the book you hold in your hands.

The story of research on the Diptych of Five Parts – which Zuzana Frantová very precisely and elegantly describes in the first chapter of her work – is based on the tradition of ivory studies on the boundaries of two historical schools: the Bolognese and Berlin schools. The most important studies dedicated to the Diptych come from Giuseppe Bovini, the founder of the modern “Ravenna School” at the University of Bologna, and from Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, probably the greatest authority for the study of late antique and early medieval ivory of the 20th

century. Both of these eminent scholars were looking at the ivory reliefs primarily – or only? – as at a stage in the history of the development of ivory carving in Ravenna. Their approach was largely formalistic and omitted the central decoration of both parts of the Diptych made with the *cloisonnée* technique. Right at this point, the historicity of Zuzana Frantová enters into the debate who, as an art historian and craftswoman, firstly examines each subject in terms of technique, craft practice, and materiality. Her attention was therefore immediately attracted by the jewellery *cloisonnée* neglected by the previous criticism. Thanks to her study of the jewellery, she managed to prove what the previous generations of researchers tried without any result: a clear dating and localization of the studied artefact. What previous historiography had proposed on the basis of very problematic formal comparison, the author has proved on the basis of technical and historical information. The epicentre of her reflection has therefore become the craft production on one hand and the structure and the possibility of the existence of a specialized workshop which could have created this artefact of high quality on the other. I will not anticipate the author's conclusions, but with her effort to understand the technique and craft workshops and production of late antique jewellers, Frantová is literally changing historiography.

Her work, however, does not stop only on this level: Zuzana Frantová, this time using the classic iconographic analysis based on the erudite work with the texts of the Church Fathers, especially Leo the Great, makes this interesting artefact the cornerstone of the debate at the Council of Chalcedon. She thus makes Ravenna the place of the reception of the Roman schemes and from ivory she creates a medium suitable for real propaganda. The author finally addresses the question of the function of the large ivory diptychs. Her proposal to consider them as the liturgical objects gives to the whole work a touch of the revolutionary. In very summary form, within a few dozen pages, Zuzana Frantová convincingly explains not only the subject of her study, but literally opens a new chapter into the study of the Late Antiquity *tout court*.

Her personal story, erudite work and methodological maturity thus come synergistically together in this small book. Its quality and innovation make it an important tool for future studies. It makes its author – this is her first monograph – one of the greatly promising figures of our discipline in general and of the Brno school of art history in particular, because with this book Zuzana Frantová just opens her systematic work on Ravenna, *sedes imperii*, and thus notionally, after an interval of nearly a century, follows the man who stood, albeit indirectly, at the establishment of the Seminar of the History of Art in Brno, Vojtěch Birnbaum, author of *Ravennská architektura: její původ a vzory* [Ravennan Architecture: Its Origin and Models] (1916).