BARBARA BALÁŽOVÁ

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SUMMARY

In this fictional view of one woman — Joanna Emerentiana Rothenstein —, the wife of a painter and probably also a paintress herself, at the end of her life (in 1723 she was 67 years old), we look through an open window to the Early Modern period. The book portrays the world of an artistic community in Kremnica (Kremnitz, Kőrmöcbánya) between 1723–1736. A constructed diary of this historical person, faithfully written on the base of the real archival sources, presents to the reader different events which influenced and formed the daily life of people, especially painters and sculptors, in the Early Modern period.

There are short accounts of the life and art of twelve Baroque artists in Kremnica in the second part of the book, and the extensive information given about some of them clears the ground for new research, especially art historical research, in the future.

The main aim of the third part, a scientific study, is to explain not only to art historians, but also to curious readers, with examples illustrating all the conditions and all the strategic ploys, how one became a successful man and artist in the urban society of the Early Modern period.

At the present time it is not easy for Slovak art historians to characterize Baroque sculpture in Central Europe in the first third of the 18th century. The strange and continual instability of the territory on which they are moving is influenced by various important factors. Decisive here is not only the fragmentariness of the artistic works surviving from this period, but also a conspicuous neglect of the basic research, and this, when one takes into account the absence of any methodological discussion, of necessity makes every bold enquirer face the task of cutting the Gordian knot.

Till now art historians have accepted only two main lines, presented en bloc in 1998 in the most recent synthetic publication devoted to Baroque art in Slovakia; the end of a conservative sculptural style of the 17th century, characterised by Olaf Engelholm's workshop in Levoča, described in the words "...the glory of an ornamental form and handicraft..." and, on the other hand, the formation of Baroque sculpture in Bratislava and Western Slovakia thanks to its direct contact with the Viennese court. In the opinion of Ivan Rusina, author of the chapter Tradition and Innovations of Sculpture, devoted to the Baroque sculpture of the second half of the 17th century in the above-mentioned publication, artworks of this orientation "...do not exceed the artistic limits of the isolated masterpieces...". With its strongly formalistic orientation, the book in question, from the Slo-
Nak National Gallery's cycle *History of the Fine Arts in Slovakia*, does not accept any other possibility of classification. But does this described polarity sufficiently illustrate the situation in sculpture at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, or does it only reflect the current stage of art historical research?

The authors of this publication of 1998 presented their common interpretative concept of Slovak Baroque art as an attend at a plurality of art-historical viewpoints. "We tell the story of the art of those two centuries in connection with the key events, persons, artworks, problems, which significantly marked the character of artistic creation." However, the titles of the 27 chapters, organized in three chronological levels, reflect rather an intention to trace separately a formal line of development, which was conditioned by the particular names of artists and their workshops in the specific art disciplines - in architecture, painting, sculpture and handicraft - with a detailed focus on some sub-groups: portrait, still-life, landscape, drawing, sketch and icon, or alternatively funeral sculpture or jewellery.

It is only with great difficulty that a view of Baroque art and culture in Slovakia directed through this kind of lens can measure up, within a Central European scale of values, to the quality of the artworks presented, because the reader continually confronts Slovak art deriving from the periphery and elite art of the high culture, the latter being epitomised, especially in the 18th century, by the art of the Viennese court. All the authors accepted the geographically specific development of Baroque art - in Western Slovakia, in the Central Slovakian Mining Towns or in Eastern Slovakia, but in their definitive texts one feels very strongly an attempt to give the reader a filter, through which the artistic development of certain areas is interpreted in connection with the migration of foreign artists to Slovakia.

Acceptance of the local influences on Baroque art does not extend to making any attempt to describe the stratification of the meaning of Baroque art for the separate social groups of Early Modern society. This form of description is already significant for historical anthropology when dealing with classical subjects or such topics as the historical development of the family, history of birth and death, history of rituals, history of daily life or history of mentalities. The use of similar scientific methods in the searching and interpretation of art history could be very stimulating. In this relatively conservative discipline we could uncover an entirely new horizon of our thinking, by accepting the fact that the concrete local society, small group or individuality could represent an independent unit of behaviour, which is later discussed in a broader context.

Very expressive are the words of Richard van Dülmen, and his words are valid not only for the history of culture but also for the his-
tory of art: "Therefore we need not take our point of departure from a closed understanding of culture, in which all people had the same share. Citizens and farmers, workers and nobility cannot be estimated from the same point of view and they follow different interests. The plurality of lifestyles is quite as characteristic of the old world as it is for the modern world. This extension of the cultural conception makes it possible to know the modes of life of the lower layers of society, as well as non-European peoples, in their specificity and simultaneously in their dependence. This broadly defined conception of culture ultimately embraces not only the canon of "the middle-class" world, but also the tradition, ways of life and the world of needs and interests of individuals and social layers, which cannot be interpreted having regard only to one single goal. The difference of life practices and of the divergent mental constructions means that it is not possible to talk about one, but only about many cultures. The value of culture is not measured hierarchically according to elite European models, but according to the value and meaning which it had for the concrete individual or social group. By renouncing absolute standards, one eventually refines a sense of the plurality and equal worth of cultures."

In reaction to the universally valid panoramic conceptions, in which the human being was the last object of interest, absorbed into historical anthropology - there was a search for a new subject of study in the humanities in the 1970s: a system of interpretation of the historical process from the point of view of the immediate participants. Historical anthropology puts the concrete individuality with its behaviour, thinking, feelings and suffering into the centre of the historical analysis, and a particularly strong feature of this method is the analysis and reconstruction of life experience and relations. These are used for the analysis of system and by this means one can reconstruct the process of the subjective absorption of the objective reality.

The method of historical anthropology is conditioned by the preservation of the specific type of archival material, and for this reason it is not usual to proceed in this way in art history, because here the research of historical sources is still understood as an additive and accessory aid, filling up the ordinary scientific research. The above-mentioned period of the second, third and forth decade of the 18th century in Baroque sculpture in Slovakia is very strange, especially thanks to the fact that most of the artworks from this period were very quickly overlayed by the Late Baroque Gesamtkunstwerke. The missing archival research, which could shed some light on this question, is sometimes dismissed with a vague general statement: "After the historically eventful but, in the field of art, fruitless 17th cen-
tury, the sculptural production of the 18th century not only produced the high achievements of Baroque art in Eastern Slovakia but it also became one of the most fruitful periods in the entire history of Slovak art." These words of Vladimir Beskid, in the already-mentioned publication devoted to Slovak Baroque, are cited also by Ján Papco, author of a further chapter, Baroque in Central Slovakian Mining Towns. In his opinion the situation in this area was analogous with Eastern Slovakia: a miserable period of stagnation of architectural and artistic development in the 17th century dragged on until the 4th decade of the next century, when after the arrival of the Viennese painter Anton Schmid and the sculptor Dyonisius Staneti from Silesia, the Baroque revitalisation of Central Slovakia began.

Art historical investigation in recent years very clearly shows us how over-simplified this opinion is and how many flaws it conceals. Actually, there are now no reasons for such a constructed polarity of Baroque art in Central Slovakian Mining Towns: step by step in the archival material the names of many other artists appear - painters and sculptors active in this territory, and among them one of the heroes of the narrative in the first chapter, Johann Philipp Mernick, takes a noticeable place. The profile of this sculptor, who lived in Kremnica in the first third of the 18th century, can be drawn only in outline. Thanks especially to the archival material, it is possible to discover where he lived, how he was living, how he behaved, what relations he had with his neighbours and with the whole community, how he provided for his existence and which types of problems he wrestled with during his life... Giovanni Levi, one of the leaders of the Italian school of microhistory, offers a very well-turned characterization of this method: "This is a self-portrait, not a group portrait." The term used, self-portrait, is very suitable: the view of the observer is formed through the information regarding the observance and behaviour of the concrete individuality in the town society of Kremnica in the first third of the 18th century. Of course, one could accept the argument that the transposition of one human being into the centre of the analysis could be the source of an excessive subjectivity; on the other hand, every interpretation of the art historian has an element of construction, which only in part corresponds to the objective reality.

By description of the representative individuality we can comment also on the general posing of questions: for example, stressing the need to portray the social status of the town artist in the society of the Early Modern period in our country. In contrast to the favourable and attractive observation of the court artist, the definition of the role and importance of art for middle-class society, the so-called third class of Baroque society, is less frequent and is unreaso-
nably overlooked and ignored. On the other hand, the new examination and retrospective projection of the position of the town painter or town sculptor plays a very important role in the interpretation of Slovak Baroque art, because in our territory from the 14th century onwards the town was a unit, by no means negligible, of the regional, political and industrial segmentation of the entire country.

Regarding the definition and differentiation of the social status of the Baroque artist, we can operate with some conventional or ordinary models: in the social stratification the free artists with the title court or academic artist stood at the highest point; in Central Europe their numbers rapidly increased, especially after the official establishment of Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts in 1726. In the lower echelons was the domestic artist with a good town origin, together with other workers on the borders between art and craft he was a part of the lower class so-called Kleinbürgertum, and he was strictly under the control and social rules of the conservative Early Modern town society. There was also a member of another social layer, who worked on other lines, independent of the world beyond his monastery - the lay brother of one of the monastic orders. At the other end of the scale of importance stood freelance travellers without any organisation and concrete relations, so-called vagrants, who were hired in different places by different patrons and donors.

At first glance, the fact that in the town tax-register of Kremnica in 1718 sculptor Johann Philip Merrick and painter Andreas Bary appear in the last group with bakers, druggists, dyers, candy-makers and glass-blowers could uphold the idea of the guild organisation of the town artists, together with the fact that we have many archival sources about other craftsmen's guilds of the artistic orientation in Kremnica. Apart from several guilds covering many specialisations, there existed in Kremnica a guild of joiners and glass-blowers, a combined guild of stonemasons, masons and carpenters, a guild of goldsmiths and a closely connected community of engravers in Kremnica's mint with special privileges dating from the 15th century, and this society very strongly respected the structure of traditional guild organisation.

There was a contract of entry which defined every condition of an apprentice's entry into a sculptural workshop, and these conditions respected the articles of other guilds in our country between the 16th and 18th century. One such document, a contract of entry of Georg Andreas Rosenauer into the sculptural workshop of Johann Philip Merrick in "the noble and free art of sculpture" from the 25th July 1726, is preserved to this day in the Kremnica town magistracy section of Kremnica archive. But an unanswered question, involving the social status of the artist, concerns the existence of painting and sculptural
guilds at our territory in the age of Baroque: preserved archivalia confirm that not only in the 18th century, but also in the previous century, there was no guild of painters nor sculptors in Kremnica.

On the 22nd of August 1616 the Kremnica town magistracy received a complaint from Philip Drexler, a painter from Banská Bystrica (Neusohl, Besztercebánya), against joiner Peter Hildebrandt, who, it is said in Drexler’s letter, also carried out contracts for paintings, exceeding his joiner’s education, for knockdown prices. But the main trump was in Hildebrandt’s hands: in the Central Slovakian Mining Towns in that period there was no guild of painters - "... selten mal sie heimische Zeich und dergleichen freihet, das sonst keimer in Pergstäden, als sie maheln solle," - which were respected by painters in their work. The other and quintessential confirmation from the 18th century is a request by the painter Georg Riemar from the 23rd of March 1733: not the guild of painters but the Kremnica town magistracy was the arbiter to which Riemar submitted his own work prepared for Friedrich Schröter, and which had to allow the opening of Riemar’s painting workshop. He upheld this official request with his birth and education certificates "... daß selbter mit reine Beibringenschaft verhaftet,...".

Similar conditions were valid also for other painters and sculptors who decided to settle in this free Royal capital mining town in the first half of the 18th century: in 1714 Johann Philipp Mennick submitted to the town magistracy only his birth certificate. Andreas Komkovič was accepted by the Kremnica society on the basis of his proper confirmation. The painters Joseph Anton Podner and Stephan Zareczky were married in Kremnica, and both of them automatically received in 1731 and 1736 Kremnica town’s civic rights. The sculptor Michael Rässner, a new inhabitant of the town of Banská Štiavnica (Schemritz, Selmecbánya) from 1733, six years later decided to buy a house in Kremnica from the Royal chamber, and this sale also included townsmen’s rights. But this type of urban inclusion was never followed by information about entry to the guild. Similarly, we have no information if any applicant was included as a master in the existing guilds of the former Habsburg monarchy, or in any other European country.

Although the urban artistic community in Kremnica in the first half of the 18th century did not have an officially codified status similar to the guilds articles, the representatives of two allied professions - painters and sculptors - were very closely inter-related, and they were allied with each other within the internal social structure of the town. They were not only friends who made reciprocal visits, but they also gave testimonies during weddings, when the older generation vouched for its younger disciples, and also during baptisms of
their children: the artistic community represented another class, which in its ordinary structure, and especially in its way of life, did not differ that much from the guilds. On the other hand, it seems that the opening of a painting or sculptural studio was dependent on the decision and agreement of the town magistracy, which assumed the right of regulation of the number of town artists: the town magistracy accepted an applicant into the union of Kremnica town after the purchase of the house, and these were two necessary and mutually sustaining postulates for the performance of every type of profession in the town. This process ran most smoothly if an artist married into the family of an estimable townsman, often Ringburgers.

For reasons which are not fully clear, there was an extraordinarily large concentration of artists in Kremnica approximately between 1720-1740: even in the short period 1723-1736, which is covered by the narrative in the first chapter, eight painters and four sculptors were working to some degree in the Kremnica setting. Although not all of them were active in the town, it would have been simple to create a guild of Kremnica painters or sculptors. The most important question is, whether for the execution of these two artistic professions real guild organisation was indeed necessary?

In my reflections concerning the social status of the Baroque artist in the Early Modern town society I stress the importance of accepting another key fact, which partially answers the question of the absence of artistic guild structures in our territory: the political, ecclesiastic and industrial situation of the 17th century was extremely complicated, and a probable consequence of this was a low concentration, and higher mobility of artists. It followed that a guild of painters or sculptors was unnecessary, useless and insubstantial, and afterwards in the 18th century, when the country was consolidated and became inviting and alluring to artists as never before, there were no already-established art-guilds. It could be a misunderstanding to connect the codification of the status of the town artist with the age of the Late Baroque, as in the case of the academic artist from the incubator of Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts after 1726. For instance, the authority of the town painter - Stadtmaler - has its precedent in the Middle Ages, being a copy of the position of court artist and its privileged status. From the current point of view the position of town painter or sculptor seems so prestigious that it was the peak of the career of artists settled in the urban society of the 17th and 18th centuries.

A miserable fate may befall not only people but also things, and especially art: only a meagre part of those artworks which could have borne witness to the events and persons, described here, of
Kremnica between 1723 and 1736, has survived to the present day. Looking at this from a different point of view, in the 18th century the covering and uncovering of artworks with newer layers became absolutely natural, and did not present any problem for donors and patrons - the town society of Kremnica. This problem could arise only in the secondary formalistic way of thinking of art historians, who are working and interpreting the art historical material on a purely visual basis. Not always, and not for every decade of the past centuries, is this approach valid: the general negation of certain periods on the basis of the present-day absence of illustrative artworks is very dangerous, if our intention is to move, even if of course only partially, towards the historical reality. The aim of the microhistorical investigation within the artistic community in Kremnica between 1726 and 1736 is to focus on the problem of interpretation of our cultural history using another type of spectacles: it is a mosaic, with missing parts, of the authentic events composing the image of the daily life of a Baroque artist in the urban society of the Early Modern period. Not only the stratification of human society, but also human individuality, is reflected in the present microview: the artistic community in Kremnica was made up of artists with different natures, different mentalities and different life destinies. But every one of them had an opportunity to reveal his personal identity, and every of them was, in spite of certain common rules of the urban society of the Early Modern period, creator of his personal happiness.

The world wide, no less than art history, has no definitive and changeless image: the development of knowledge is changing the types of lenses in our spectacles, which we use to search the surrounding space and extend our field of vision by drawing in vistas that until now were blurred and foggy. But dioptric glasses focussed on these areas certainly do not make them colourless: human society in the 18th century of our country was not only black and white, nor merely grey. And also in the present time, regarding certain centuries, it could show us the richness of many influences from the different sides and at different levels, in an unexpected tolerance and acceptance of the older and the unknown. Observation and knowledge of that world, and observation of that human individuality, - especially given the fact that in the final analysis everything may end up different from what it seems to be at first sight - could be a source of learning also for the contemporary observer, who might be a reader of this book.