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The Role of Copies in the Collections Belonging to the Bohemian and Moravian Nobility. The Specific Case of Christian Schröder's Copies for the Libochovice Castle (CZ)

The Ph.D. research project is oriented toward the study of the Baroque collections of paintings belonging to the nobility in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, with particular attention to the predominance of copies after Italian paintings of the 16th and 17th century. The research aims to investigate the figures of the most important Bohemian and Moravian collectors such as Humprecht Jan Černín, Karl II Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn, Václav Eusebius František of Lobkowitz, Jan Jiří Jáchym Slavata, Gundakar Dietrichstein, analyzing the results of their activity as collectors and patrons of the arts and demonstrating the reasons of the predominance of Italian art in their collections.

Since the contribution of Norbert Elias there is no doubt about the importance played by the building and the interior furnishing of estates in the framework of the self-representation and self-promotion of the nobility. The new families attempting to rise in rank and become ennobled, needed comparable collections in order to acquire a lineage through their possessions. The material wealth could irrefutably show nobility of spirit, more than the not always direct noble genealogies.

What is the role of the copies in this context?

Looking at the inventories of the collections the high percentage of copies results evident. A phenomenon that, far from being unusual for other context -Italian collections for instance- has been long time overlooked in the case of the Bohemian and Moravian collections.

With the rediscovery and the celebration of the Aristotelian virtues of liberality and magnificence with which the Bohemian and Moravian young noblemen became acquainted during their *Grand Tour* in the Italian courts, Italian taste had become the reference point for the Czech nobility. But the increment of the demand and the diminishing of original paintings in the market, in addition to the high cost of the rare originals, deviated the nobility's attention to the acquisition of copies which came to absorb and fulfill a wide range of duties.

In the Ph.D. thesis the role of the copy is contextualized and analyzed as a distinguishing instrument of exaltation and promotion of the noble families and the choice of the copied subjects is debated as a matter of strategy or taste.

An emblematic case is represented by the Libochovice collection, to which a higher attention is dedicated.

In 1689 Gundakar Dietrichstein commissioned to Christian Schröder, court painter at the Prague Castle, a series of 43 copies painted from originals at that time located in the Prague castle gallery, in order to furnish his castle in Libochovice (CZ).

The Libochovice case is quite rare, as it is the only known example in which the furnishing of a castle is constituted only by copies. Also the choice of copied originals is interesting: 30 of the 39 survived paintings are copies after Italian painters. The Venetian Masters appear 18 times out of 30. Among the copies there are famous original paintings such as: the *Supper at Emmaus* after Titian, the *Flagellation of Christ* after Jacopo Tintoretto, *Spring, Summer, Autumn* after Francesco Bassano, the *Christ and the Adulteress*, the *Christ and the Centurion*, after Palo Veronese and Workshop, *Rebecca at the Well*, *Susanna and the Elders* after Paolo Veronese, *St Jerome* after Guido Reni, *The Martyrdom of St Bartholomew* after Mattia Preti, *An eating and drinking party with a lute player*, *The fortune teller with backgammon players* after Bartolomeo Manfredi, *Christ on the Mount of Olives* after Domenico Fetti, etc...

The Libochovice's series of copies gives the possibility to compare originals and copies with consequent interesting discoveries on the originals concerning changes or repainting during the centuries. Where the old inventories lack of precise information, the copies are not less than a fundamental instrument to confirm the presence of a number of paintings in the collection of the Prague Castle in the 17th century, at the time when they were copied by Schröder.

It is obvious that in this process of a certain "standardization" of the composition of the Baroque collections in the Bohemian Kingdom, the inflation of the famous names (Titian, Veronese, Bassano, Guido Reni), helped by the collectors' demand, inevitably lead to the increasing of the production of copies. Aristocratic collectors deliberately commissioned copies as a replacement for the originals, more and more impossible to access. The presence of a particular art work, or rather, its ideal value as it was in the form of a copy, was preferred to the total lack of it, or its substitution with an original work by an unknown painter. Inevitably the presence of famous painters' names in the noble collections established the immediate recall to the great collections of the moment - *in primis* Prague and Vienna -

becoming guarantees of richness, respectability, dignity... Characteristics extremely needed for noblemen's power legitimization.

In this context of a general conservatism of the noble collectors, often little space was left to the creativity of the artists who easily tend to surrender, conforming themselves to the needs of their patrons, limiting their activity merely to the production of copies.