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Politics of visual Representation and Habsburg noblemen of Serbian ethnic origin in the 18th Century

From 1690. to 1790. about 100 Families of Serbian ethnic origin were ennobled in the Habsburg monarchy. From the perspective of Habsburg Court all of these 100 Families were part of the same group: lesser nobility that is located at the base of a nobility Pyramid. However, among these can be distinguished a handful of Families that formed the elite of Serbian ethnic circle – or better to say of Orthodox oriented subjects in Habsburg monarchy. These elite Families were often connected between themselves by the marriages and they left to us portraits, beautiful buildings and other testimonies about their lives as a Habsburg noblemen.

The main question of this research is – did the Noblemen with a Serbian ethnic background used art and visual culture to contribute to their aristocratic status in the same way as the Habsburg dignitaries whom they were surrounded? There are many other questions that concern Serbian noblemen in Habsburg Monarchy that have not yet attracted interest of the scientific society or were barely mentioned, such as that the Serbs were officially a religious minority, which had a significant effect on their positions on the social ladder. The starting hypothesis for the research is the traditional insight that Serbs adopted “the baroque” as a dominant cultural model after their immigration to the Habsburg Monarchy in 1690. The appropriation of the baroque world view to Serbian culture was accomplished, mainly, by social linking of the most notable members of the Serbian ethnos with the Monarchy’s dignitaries.

The term representation signifies one of the most important concepts in Art history, but at the same time it is a philosophical, juridical, theological and psychological term. Hence, putting the visual representation in the focus of this research implies the methodological approach that uses the results of different humanistic disciplines. Researching the ideological background for production of art and visual culture created for the nobility of serbian ethnic origin in Habsburg monarchy, requires phenomenological approach which includes both formal analysis and the

analysis of function of art products. In that way, portraits, buildings erected by nobility and other noble activities they carried out, are sources, like a written sources too, on which is going to be tested the hypothesis that noblemen were creating their public images in accordance with their belonging to the nobility rank, or to represent themselves as a worthy to become the part of it. Noblemen of serbian ethnic origin in Habsburg monarchy saw themselves as a public persons – *publične persone* is the term in the 18th century Serbian language, who were active participants in the public sphere - outside the limits of satisfying their personal needs. Hence, they used portraits, architecture and other elements of visual culture very carefully and prudently for a self-affirmation and at the same time to build up a desired public image. Today are known about 30 portraits representing different noblemen of serbian ethnic origin, painted during the 18th century, that are characterized by a formal uniformity because their formal shaping comes from the experience of the European royal portrait-making practice. These portraits are belonging to the group of baroque representative portraits painted with the aim to perpetuate the reputation and public activities of portrayed person – which was accomplished with the usage of already defined accessory symbolism and iconographical solutions. Mechanism of creation and usage of the visual culture and art for the sake of advocacy of the virtues of the notable members of habsburg aristocracy of serbian ethnic origin can be recognised in the activities such as erecting new palaces or beautiful houses or new belfries and churchis under the jurisdiction of Karlovci Metropolitanate, which I am going to discuss in this research.

Researching how the strictly hierarchical social system and stratification within the very aristocratis class determined the overall social social structure of the Serbs that were aspiring to acquire the noblemen's status, starting with the way they conducted themselves and the wardrobe they wore, social events they appeared on, contacts they made and maintained, to the way they perceived themselves and their position, represents an important step towards the broadening of knowledge of cultural activities in a multi-ethnic Habsburg Monarchy.