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Portrait silhouette in the Czech lands from the 18th to the 19th century in context of Western European silhouette making

This paper is based on my dissertation project "Portrait Silhouette in the Czech lands from the 18th to the 19th century". The aim of my dissertation is to chart the phenomena of silhouette making in the Czech lands and fill the gap in domestic art history. Portrait silhouettes are a specific part of visual culture. They range from the leisure-time product of dilettantes to high-quality and cultivated art expression of specialists. They can be created with different techniques like painting, cutting, verre églomisé or mechanical tracing the shadow, which contributed to the diversity of this art.

Above all art historians in England, Germany and nowadays in the USA give considerable attention to them, but they were naturally focused only on the domestic scene. In the Czech lands, nobody has been systematically interested in silhouettes and if some brief texts appeared, they were similarly focused on domestic visual material. This means, that there were not much attempts to compare silhouette making in Eastern or Central Europe with situation in Western Europe. Concretely I am talking mainly about silhouette making in the Czech lands versus silhouette making in neighbouring Germany, Great Britain and France. I would like to show, that here are many points of contacts between "Western" and "Eastern" silhouette making; such as terminology, mutual influencing and inspiring, silhouetteurs travelling around Europe, period taste and so on. The boom of silhouette making appeared in the eighties of the 18th century and immediately spread across the Europe. But do these simple black-and-white profile portraits offer space for nuances and national characteristic features? This is probably the main question, which has not been already asked. I would like to check out, if there are any specific features of silhouette making in the Czech lands in comparison to the Western cradle of silhouettes. Can we find any special Czech techniques or different marketing strategies of silhouetteurs in advertising? Is the range of portrayed persons and of silhouetteurs similar or not? Is the theoretical interest and interest in publishing of handbooks as strong as in the Western Europe? I can reveal in advance, that during my study I have already found some Czech curiosities in silhouette making, but are they just curiosities in general or are they a evidence of Czech character of silhouettes?

In order to answer those questions I have examined the main Czech gallery's, museum's and castle's collection of silhouettes, such as the National Gallery in Prague, National Museum, National technical Museum, City of Prague Museum, West Bohemian Museum, Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague etc., together with collections of castles in administration of the National Heritage Institute. By this comparative method I would like to ask the pressing question for my research which sounds: "Can we talk about *Czech silhouettes* or should we rather talk about *silhouettes in the Czech lands*?"