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THE FRESCO BY KRSTO AND ŽELJKO HEGEDUŠIĆ IN THE PALACE OF THE CROATIAN INSTITUTE OF HISTORY ON 10 OPATIČKA STREET FROM THE YEAR 1943: HISTORY PAINTING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA*

Abstract

On the premises of the Croatian Institute of History at 10 Opatička Street in Zagreb, there is a fresco by the Hegedušić brothers, completed in 1943. The fresco, located in the so-called Hegedušić Hall, is named "The Croatian School" and shows a number of prominent figures from Croatian history. The initial part of this paper will summarize the wartime circumstances of the genesis of the fresco, with special reference to the artists' biographies. The central part of the discussion provides basic information about the work, with the aim of identifying the individuals portrayed and conducting a general iconographic analysis. Lastly, the fresco is considered in the context of the implementation of specific cultural policies of the Independent State of Croatia.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Hrvatska škola* (The Croatian School) fresco (**fig. 1**) by Krsto and Željko Hegedušić is located at the Croatian Institute of History in the so-called Hegedušić Hall. It was completed in 1943, as evidenced by the signature in the lower right. The fresco was created during World War II, at a time when the seat of the Ministry of Education of the Independent State of Croatia could be found there. Before the war, the Department for Education of the Banate of Croatia was located there, which from 1918 to 1939 functioned as a branch office of the Central Yugoslav Ministry of Education in Belgrade.

Earlier, during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the building at Opatička 10 was converted from a noble palace into state's Department for Religion and Education. It was then thoroughly renovated under the direction of the head of the Department at the time, Izidor Kršnjavi, and the architect Hermann Bollé. Its renovation and decoration aimed to emphasize Croatia's role in the development of European and Austro-Hungarian culture on the basis of a heritage which could be denominated as classical, Christian and humanistic. The Hegedušić brothers' fresco abided by such concepts in its content, although

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Fig. 1. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School*, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.

under completely different historical circumstances.¹ From 1945 to 1998, the fresco was allegedly covered with a cloth. Upon completing the renovation of the palace in 1999, the cloth was removed and the fresco has thus been made available to the public ever since.²

THE FRESCO IN VARIOUS SOURCES AND LITERATURE

276 Data on the fresco in the literature so far could best be described as scarce, and often unreliable.³ In Darko Schneider's monograph *Krsto Hegedušić* (1974), this work is mentioned under one entry. It gives the name, year of creation and technique used in creating the fresco.⁴ In the foreword to the catalogue of Željko Hegedušić's works (1999), the same author also mentions the fresco in one sentence, stating how Željko served as a model for the characters of Nikola Božidarević and Marin Držić in the *Croatian School*.⁵ In 1997 Biserka Rauter Plančić proposed that Krsto portrayed Ivan Generalić in the form of Marin Držić.⁶

The most extensive text on the fresco was published by Meri Štajduhar in the *Cicero* journal (1999). In a short review, she presented the historical context and offered an iconographic interpretation of one group of the motifs

1 Gordan Ravančić, "Hrvatski institut za povijest – 60 godina suživota historiografije i *Gesamtkunstwerka* u Opatičkoj 10" [Croatian Institute of History – 60 Years of Coexistence of Historiography and *Gesamtkunstwerk* in 10 Opatička Street], in *Povijest i umjetnost na zidovima palače u Opatičkoj 10 u Zagrebu*, ed. Petra Vugrinec (Zagreb: Galerija Klovičevi dvori, 2020), 12–13.

2 Ibid., 12–13.

3 I would like to thank Matea Brstilo Rešetar, Snježana Pavičić and Kristijan Gotić from the Croatian History Museum for their help with this research.

4 Darko Schneider, "Kronika" [Chronicle], in *Krsto Hegedušić* (Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1974), 116–117.

5 Darko Schneider and Ana Medić, *Željko Hegedušić: retrospektivna izložba* [Željko Hegedušić: Retrospective Exhibition] (Zagreb: Galerija Klovičevi dvori, 1999), 27–28.

6 Biserka Rauter Plančić, "Krsto Hegedušić," in *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.–1945.*, ed. Darko Stuparić (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 154.

present.⁷ To this day, this remains the only, although short and informal, research paper produced on the *Croatian School*. Later texts continued to mention the fresco only marginally. The biographies of Krsto and Željko Hegedušić from the *Croatian Biographical Lexicon* (2002) mention the fresco's name with the year of its creation, stating that it shows the most significant individuals from the Croatian cultural circle.⁸ In the catalogue made for the exhibition on Krsto Hegedušić (2011), Igor Zidić mentions the *Croatian School* in the context of the painter's compromises with the authorities, citing the existence of preparatory cards, although without any further explanation given.⁹ Somewhat later, Mira Kolar Dimitrijević mentions the fresco on two occasions. In the first article (2010), she points out that it was created by following in the footsteps of Vlaho Bukovac's *Dubravka* and Izidor Kršnjavi's vision of an artistic gathering of famous Croats; she also gives information on how it depicts the medieval elite. Among them, she singles out the Franciscans Antun Bačić and Andrija Kačić Miošić.¹⁰ In the second article (2013), Marko Marulić, Ivan Gundulić, Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan stand out among the presented characters. She interprets the painting as an artistic achievement that emphasizes the connection between the Croatian north (humanist Zagreb) and the Croatian south (renaissance Dubrovnik).¹¹ Finally, in an article dedicated to Hegedušić's frescoes in Marija Bistrica (2015), Iva Kožnjak mentions this work as a fresco composition created at Opatička 10.¹²

In the periodicals of that time, the fresco is mentioned only once. In the weekly *Readiness – the Thought and Will of Ustasha Croatia* (1944), a reproduction was printed in two parts (the left and right sections of the fresco on two different sheets), entitled *Hrvatska kultura* (Croatian Culture). Besides this, no other information is provided.¹³

The archival sources and personal files of Krsto and Željko Hegedušić have proven both sparse and, it seems, thoroughly used.¹⁴ While the files belonging

7 Meri Štajduhar, "Ratni zadaci Krste Hegedušića – Tko je tko u Hrvatskoj školi" [Krsto Hegedušić's War Tasks - Who's Who in the Croatian School], *Cicero*, no. 3 (1999): 31–33.

8 Višnja Flego, "Hegedušić, Krsto", in: *Hrvatski biografski leksikon* (2002), accessed September 28, 2021, <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=56>; Višnja Flego, "Hegedušić, Željko", in: *Hrvatski biografski leksikon* (2002), accessed September 28, 2021, <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=7376>

9 Igor Zidić, *Krsto Hegedušić* (Rovinj: Galerija Adris, 2011), 13.

10 Mira Kolar Dimitrijević and Elizabeta Wagner, "Izidor Kršnjavi i povijesne slike u zagrebačkoj Zlatnoj dvorani u Opatičkoj 10" [Izidor Kršnjavi and Historical Paintings in Zagreb Golden Hall on 10 Opatička Street], *Godišnjak Gradskog muzeja Sisak*, no. 10 (2010): 273–314, 279, 293.

11 Mira Kolar Dimitrijević, "Izidor Kršnjavi i simbolika zagrebačke Zlatne dvorane" [Izidor Kršnjavi and the Symbolism of the Zagreb Golden Hall], *Kolo*, no. 5 (2013), accessed September 27, 2020, <https://www.matica.hr/kolo/401/izidor-kršnjavi-i-simbolika-zagrebacke-zlatne-dvorane-22926/>.

12 Iva Kožnjak, "Borba za život i umjetnost Krste Hegedušića. Predložak za fresku Golgota i njezina realizacija" [The Struggle for the Life and Art of Krsto Hegedušić. Template for the Fresco of Golgotha and Its Realization], *Radovi Zavoda za znanstveni rad HAZU Varaždin*, no. 26 (2015): 271–272.

13 *Spremnost – misao i volja ustaške Hrvatske* [Readiness – The Thought and Will of Ustasha Croatia], no. 107, March 12, 1944, 1, 3.

14 Ljiljana Kolečnik states that the archives of Krsto Hegedušić have undergone a process of significant 'purification' and that the associated materials today are either inaccessible or unreliable. Compare: Ljiljana Kolečnik, *Između Istoka i Zapada* [Between East and West] (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2006), 220.

to other important names from the archives of the Ministry are often quite detailed, this is not the case with the files related to the Hegedušić brothers. Krsto's files contain only the official tribunal gazette of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with basic information about the artist,¹⁵ while Željko's files consist of only one page – also containing overview information about the artist.¹⁶ The Archive of the Croatian Society of Fine Artists is also modest and too unspecific in this regard, and does not reveal anything further.¹⁷ According to Darko Schneider, in the aftermath of World War II, Krsto submitted a report on his public activities from the period of the existence of the Independent State of Croatia.¹⁸ However, no trace of this can be found in the sources.¹⁹ Just as there is no trace of a preparatory document with a list of characters, nor is there a contract by which the Independent State of Croatia government commissioned the creation of the fresco.²⁰

KRSTO AND ŽELJKO HEGEDUŠIĆ DURING WORLD WAR II

Even before the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia, Krsto (1901–1975) and Željko Hegedušić (1906–2004) were known as left-wing, socially engaged artists. During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Krsto was arrested in 1931 and again in 1932. Grupa Zemlja (The Earth Group), of which Krsto was a leading member and Željko an associate, was banned by the authorities in 1935.²¹ In the so-called conflict on the Left, the Hegedušić brothers were opponents of social realism in art. Among some members of the Communist Party, such an attitude caused a feeling of aversion. Therefore,

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15 The following is quoted: ethnicity “Croat”, religion “Roman Catholic”, residence “Zagreb”, under the official civil service title of “Civil servant trainee”, “appointed at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb”, and at the end of the document are the date of “21st August 1937” and the place of “Zagreb”, along with the handwritten signature of Krsto Hegedušić and the seal of the Academy. Compare: Hegedušić, Krsto, no. 2532, II A - Ž, HR-HDA-216, Ministry of Education of the Independent State of Croatia, Croatian State Archives in Zagreb.

16 The following is quoted in the excerpt: title and place of office (“professor”, “The First State Men’s Real Grammar School in Zagreb”), nationality and citizenship (“Croatian, Independent State of Croatia”), military service and rank (“lieutenant, card 26. VIII. 43, no. 1550”), service in the war (“from March 8 to April 14, 1941 in the 57th Infantry Regiment”) and annual grades (very good grades for 1941 and 1942) and promotions. The facticity of the citations in the document dating from March 24, 1944, is confirmed by the signature of two professors and the principal of the First State Men’s Real Grammar School in Zagreb. Compare: Hegedušić, Želimir, no. 11429, II A - Ž, HR-HDA-216, Ministry of Education of the Independent State of Croatia, Croatian State Archives in Zagreb.

17 There is no significant information to be found among the sources belonging to the Archive of the Croatian Society of Fine Artists regarding the activities of Krsto and Željko during the war. Member descriptions are brief and formal. Among the founders of the Association of Visual Artists of Croatia from the 1945 register, Branka, Krsto and Željko Hegedušić can be found (under numbers 18, 19 and 20). Compare: Commission for admission and revision of members 1946–1992, lists of members of the Society 1945–1990, box 74, HR-HDA-1979- Croatian Society of Fine Artists.

18 Darko Schneider, “Kronika,” 116–117.

19 Vladimir Crnković believes that Krsto did not mention the fresco after the war for two reasons. First, he was a staunch leftist and during the war he painted in an effort to save his own life and the lives of his colleagues. Second, he was generally extremely self-critical of his work. As the fresco had only documentary and not artistic value, he did not talk about it further. I thank Vladimir Crnković for the information provided.

20 I thank Darko Schneider for the information provided.

21 Višnja Flego, “Hegedušić, Krsto,” and “Hegedušić, Željko.” For more on the “Earth” Association of Artists and the national artistic expression, compare: Petar Prelog, *Hrvatska moderna umjetnost i nacionalni identitet* [Croatian Modern Art and National Identity] (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2018), 213–274.

it cannot be argued that both Krsto and Željko enjoyed unreserved support and trust from partisan circles, even during the war, despite unambiguously declared political views.²²

With the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, and especially with the intensification of armed conflict, both Krsto and Željko came under government surveillance. In 1941 alone, Krsto managed to avoid the possibility of imprisonment or execution on three occasions thanks to the intervention of Đuro Vranešić's (1897–1946).²³ Vranešić intervened for the first time in April 1941, preventing Hegedušić's detention. The second time, he pulled him out of Lika – away from the shootings at Gospić and Jadovno. The third intervention happened with the help of Slavko Kvaternik (1878–1947) after a partisan attack on the members of the 13th Assault Company at the botanical garden in August 1941.²⁴ After that, Krsto was placed under house arrest. Đuro Vranešić gave him refuge in his sanatorium in the district of Zelengaj, where other political dissidents were also in hiding.²⁵

Željko, who also stayed there in 1942, testified about the days in the sanatorium when he and Krsto, out of gratitude and as a sign of friendship towards Vranešić, made a fresco on the front of the sanatorium with the Hippocratic oath as the fresco's theme.²⁶ For a more precise dating of the *Croatian School*, it is important to note that the fresco *Hippocrates* was made in August 1942, which means that they started working at Opatička 10 in September or October of the same year at the earliest.²⁷ Željko pointed out that for *Hippocrates*, he chose the colors because, as he claimed, he was better at assessing what the paint on the wall would look like after it had dried.²⁸

During the war, both Krsto and Željko continued to work as professors of drawing (and painting) in Zagreb.²⁹ Krsto participated in the first and second exhibition of Croatian artists held during the existence of the Independent

22 Krsto, for example, was kept under surveillance by an OZNA agent who, in a report, called him and Krleža party “defectors”. Compare: Frano Glavina, “Nadbiskup Stepinac i nacionalsocijalizam u svjetlu izvješća Gestapoa” [Archbishop Stepinac and National Socialism in the Light of the Gestapo Report], *Croatica Christiana periodica*, vol. 21, no. 40 (1997): 90.

23 Milan Gavrović, *Čovjek iz Krležine mape, Život i smrt Đure Vranešića* [The Man from Krleža's Map, The Life and Death of Đuro Vranešić] (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2011), 249.

24 The attack at the botanical garden was followed by persecutions, regardless of involvement in the attack. Slavko Kvaternik wrote about intervening on behalf of Krleža and Hegedušić in his memoirs. Compare: Nada Kisić Kolanović (ed.), *Vojskovođa i politika: sjećanja Slavka Kvaternika* [Military Leader and Politics: Memories of Slavko Kvaternik] (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1997), 207; On Vranešić's interventions on behalf of Krsto, see: Milan Gavrović, *Čovjek*, 88 (about the first intervention), 95–96 (about the second intervention), and 157–158 (about the third intervention).

25 Miroslav and Bela Krleža, Branka Hegedušić and Milan Sachs also found refuge in the sanatorium. In total, Vranešić hid 78 people, some even according to the will of the Party. He was shot after the war, despite Krleža's intervention with the authorities. See: Meri Štajduhar, “Hipokrat i hipokriti: zagonetka Hegedušićeve freske” [Hippocrates and Hypocrites: the Riddle of Hegedušić's Fresco], *Cicero*, no. 2 (1998/1999): 51–55, 53.

26 *Ibid.*, 53–54.

27 Željko Hegedušić testified that there was a photograph of him and his brother making a fresco under a cloth curtain due to the unbearable summer heat. Compare: *Ibid.*, 51.

28 *Ibid.*, 55.

29 Flego, “Hegedušić, Krsto” and “Hegedušić, Željko.”

State of Croatia, and he also took part in the exhibitions of Croatian art held in Berlin, Vienna and Bratislava.³⁰ For a more precise dating of the fresco, it is equally important to emphasize that at the end of 1943, Krsto, in agreement with the sculptor Antun Augustinčić (1900–1979), accepted an offer to paint the Sanctuary in Marija Bistrica.³¹ The press of that time briefly reported on the progress of the work.³² It was actually a cover by means of which Krsto, his family and a total of 35 painters and students were placed under the protection of the Catholic Church and thus made exempt from mobilization and shielded from persecution. The entire activity took place under the supervision of the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac (1898–1960).³³ After the war, Krsto continued to work as a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, and in 1950 he founded and thenceforth led a master class within the frame of postgraduate painting studies. Željko continued to work as a drawing teacher in a grammar school until 1950, when he became employed as a professor at the Zagreb Academy of Applied Arts. Therefore, their pragmatic attitude during the war did not put their professional reputation in peril, nor did it threaten their chances of survival in any significant way.³⁴

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE FRESCO

280 Based on the few sources available, it can be said with certainty that the brothers Krsto and Željko Hegedušić completed the *Croatian School* fresco in 1943. This is ultimately confirmed by the signature found on the fresco (“K Heg / Ž Hg / 1943”) (**fig. 2**). Judging by the location (Opatička 10) and the year of its creation, it can be stated that the contracting entity was the Ministry of Education of the Independent State of Croatia, under the auspices of minister Mile Starčević (1904–1953),³⁵ who was head of the Ministry from October 10, 1942 to October 11, 1943.³⁶ In August 1942, Krsto and Željko painted a fresco in Vranešić’s sanatorium. The fresco at Opatička 10 was, therefore, created in the period between (at the earliest) September 1942³⁷ and (at the latest) November 1943, when the Hegedušić brothers began work on the frescoes at Marija Bistrica.³⁸

30 Rauter Plančić, “Krsto Hegedušić,” 154.

31 Ivanka Reberski, “Zidne slike u crkvi Uznesenja Bl. Dj. Marije u Mariji Bistrici” [Wall Paintings in the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Marija Bistrica], *Peristil*, no. 52 (2009): 181–196.

32 “Freske hrvatskih umjetnika u Gospinoj bazilici na Bistrici” [Frescoes by Croatian Artists in Our Lady’s Basilica in Bistrica], *Hrvatski narod*, May 28, 1944, 4.

33 Schneider, “Kronika,” 117–118; Ivanka Reberski, “Svijetli put vjere i nacionalnog identiteta” [The Bright Path of Faith and National Identity], *Glas Koncila*, April 2, 2009, accessed October 10, 2021, <http://www.ktabk-bih.net/hr/iz-katolickog-tiska/glas-koncila-19883/19883>.

34 Flego, “Hegedušić, Krsto” and “Hegedušić, Željko.”

35 Briefly on Mile Starčević: Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* [History of the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2002), 270–271.

36 Jere Jareb, “Svjedočanstvo hrvatskog književnika Gabrijela Cvitana iz jeseni 1944.” [Testimony of the Croatian Writer Gabrijel Cvitan from the Autumn of 1944], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2003): 973–994, 976.

37 Štajduhar, “Hipokrat,” 53–54.

38 Reberski, “Zidne slike,” 181–196.

Fig. 2. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School*, signature, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.



In 1942, Vladislav Kušan's book *Artworks in the Building of the Ministry of Education* was published in memory of Izidor Kršnjavi and printed by the Ministry of Education. The book talked about the history and arrangement of the rooms at Opatička 10, and the paintings from the so-called Golden Hall were described and interpreted.³⁹ Perhaps it was this book that prompted the commission of the *Croatian School*. The name *Croatian School* as well as the choice of colors might indicate that Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens* (1509–1511) from the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican served as a model from which the artists drew inspiration. The presence of a lyre motif indicates a certain influence on the part of Raphael's *Parnassus* fresco (1509–1511), also from the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican (compare Apollo or Orpheus with a lyre on the Hegedušić brothers' fresco with Terpsichore holding a lyre on Raphael's fresco).⁴⁰

The thematic invocation of the Croatian north and south (through motifs from Ragusan and Dalmatian history on the left and characters from the history of Zagreb and continental Croatia on the right) could find a model in the works of earlier Croatian painters. It is known that Vlaho Bukovac painted *Dubravka* in 1894 for the Golden Hall. However, this painting ended up in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, so painting the *Croatian School* almost half a century later might represent a kind of recovery for a settlement loss that had taken place much earlier.⁴¹ Minister Starčević viewed the Croatian north (Zagreb) and the Croatian south (Hvar and Dubrovnik) as “two hotspots around which Croatian art rose to its highest point,” as he stated in his speech

39 Vladislav Kušan, *Likovna djela u zgradi Ministarstva nastave* [Artworks in the Building of the Ministry of Education] (Zagreb: Ministarstvo nastave, 1942), 5–27.

40 “Room of the Segnatura,” accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/stanze-di-raffaello/stanza-della-segnatura.html>.

41 Olga Maruševski, *Iso Kršnjavi: kultura i politika na zidovima palače u Opatičkoj 10* [Iso Kršnjavi: Culture and Politics on the Walls of the Palace on 10 Opatička Street] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2002), 166.

at the opening of the “Croatian Art Day” on August 10, 1942, just two months before becoming Minister of Public Education.⁴²

Presumably, a contract for the commission of the work once existed. It has not been found yet, and perhaps it was not even preserved. Since both Krsto and Željko hid in Vranešić’s sanatorium before performing this task – and with their political and dissident status in mind – it is possible that they conducted the work on the basis of verbal agreement with the leading members of the Ministry. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that such a significant and large assignment (measuring approximately 2.7 x 5.6 meters) would be done without legal regulations or a written agreement, moreover, in the very center of the city and in a historically prominent building.⁴³ The lack of sources leaves too much room for speculation, so it is not possible to claim anything definitively. It is not known whether the Hegedušić brothers attained the commission through their contacts with Vranešić as their earlier benefactor or Stepinac as their later benefactor. Whether they were paid for the task or used it to buy time with the authorities is also an enigma. Mile Starčević maintained contacts with Stepinac in the earlier years, and it has often been pointed out that he negotiated with the leaders of the Hrvatska seljačka stranka (the Croatian Peasant Party; HSS) about joining the government of the Independent State of Croatia, and also with Miroslav Krleža regarding his potential intendency at the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb.⁴⁴ This information is all the more interesting when one takes into consideration the fact that the HSS retained a certain influence over the educational sector and the administrative bodies of the Ministry during the war years, too.⁴⁵

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ABOUT THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE FRESCO

It is not yet known whether the authors chose the characters at their own discretion or whether they were limited by a list of historical figures included in the contract. Therefore, the question of “Who is who?” in the *Croatian School* fresco remains relevant (**fig. 3**). While the literature primarily emphasizes the thematic connection between Dubrovnik and Zagreb, according to the characters shown (as will be presented below) the fresco is more about the thematic connection of the entire coastline, led by the city of Dubrovnik, and the entire continental area, led by the city of Zagreb.

To determine the iconography of the fresco, one should start from the architectural backdrop. On the left, there are the capitals of the Rector’s Palace and the fortress of St. John in Dubrovnik, while on the right are the Old Capitol Town Hall and the Bakač Tower in Zagreb. The motifs of Dubrovnik and Zagreb exteriors are separated by a sculpture of Apollo or perhaps Orpheus

42 Mile Starčević, “Hrvatska kulturna posebnost” [Croatian Cultural Peculiarity], *Prosvjetni život*, no. 3, September 1942, 97–99, 98, my translation.

43 Štajduhar, “Ratni zadaci,” 33.

44 Matković, *Povijest*, 270–271.

45 Jareb, “Svjedočanstvo,” 981, 985–986.



Fig. 3. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School*, numbered characters, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.

with a lyre (similar to Apollo from the Pio–Clementino Museum in Rome).⁴⁶ On the pedestal of the statue there is a distich (**fig. 4**) by the famous Renaissance poet Ivan Česmički, i.e. Janus Pannonius (1434–1472), taken from the Elegy in Tabor (*Hic situs est Ianus, patrium qui primus ad Istrum / Duxit laurigeras ex Helicone deas*; translated by Nikola Šop as: There lies the poet Ivan / who brought first a poem / from the divine Helikon / to the native Danube).⁴⁷ The elegy was written on the battlefield a few years before the poet's death, and was probably chosen for its melancholy expression, war symbolism and the prominent role of Ivan Česmički in Croatian and European Renaissance literature.⁴⁸

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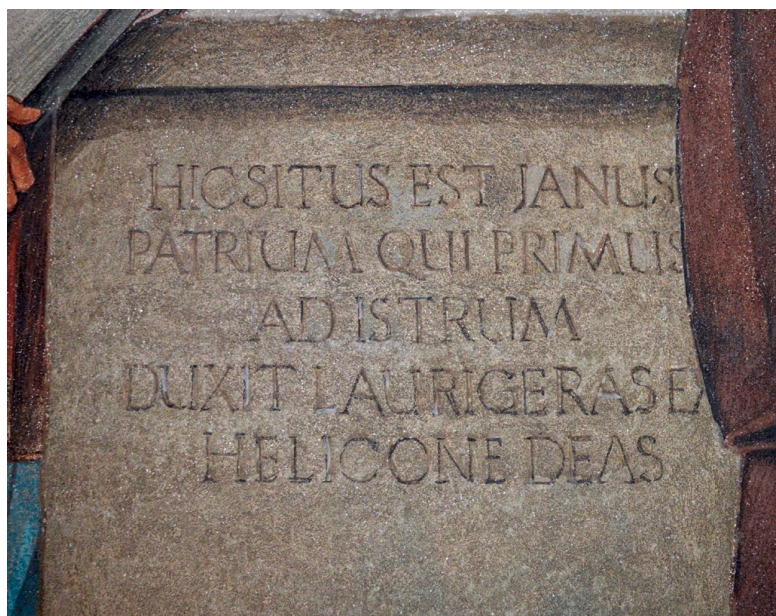


Fig. 4. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School*, detail with verses on the pedestal of the monument, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.

Most historical figures can be identified by their physical characteristics or other specific attributes. On the right side of the painting under number 1, judging by her face and the treatment of her hair, the Ragusan poet Cvijeta Zuzorić (1552–1648) can be found. Under number 2, the Ragusan writer Nikola Vitov Gučetić (1549–1610), Cvijeta's friend, can be seen in her company. He pointed Cvijeta out as a prime example of intellect and beauty, that is, goodness, thus defending her from the unfavorable environment of the city of Dubrovnik. For this reason, it can be concluded that he is placed under number 2, despite the fact that the character

⁴⁶ "Apollo Musagetes," accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.theoi.com/Gallery/S5.7.html>

⁴⁷ Štajduhar, "Ratni zadaci," 33.

⁴⁸ Francesco Coppola, "Tema smrti u Elegijama Jana Pannoniusa (Ivana Česmičkog)" [The Theme of Death in the Elegies of Jan Pannonius (Ivan Česmički)], *Dani Hvarškoga kazališta: Građa i rasprave o hrvatskoj književnosti i kazalištu*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1992): 184–200.

was obviously made according to the likeness of the Dubrovnik poet Junije Palmotić (1607–1657).

On their right, under numbers 3, 4, 5 and 6, there is a group of Ragusan and Dalmatian writers and poets, and perhaps painters, too. Among them are the faces of Ivan Gundulić (1589–1638) with a book in his hands, under number 5, and Marko Marulić (1450–1524), whose appearance is among other things revealed by the recognizable cover of his poem *Judita* (Judith), under number 6. It is not yet possible to determine who the characters under numbers 3 and 4 are. It is known, for example, that Željko Hegedušić was the model for the Ragusan painter Nikola Božidarević (ca. 1460–1517/18). However, it would be more logical for Božidarević's character to be placed to the right of this group, in the company of other painters, sculptors and builders. Perhaps number 3 could be Marin Držić (1508–1567), for whose depiction Željko also served as the model. Meri Štajduhar thought that Petar Zoranić (1508– before 1569), Šiško Menčetić (1457–1527) or Džore Držić (1461–1501) could be hidden in the fresco too.⁴⁹ However, she did not explain her proposition of the presence of the latter characters in more detail.

On the right side, from number 7 to number 10, there is a group of painters, sculptors and architects. Among them is the face of the miniaturist Julije Klović (1498–1578) under number 8. Other characters, however, are not as easy to identify, especially since two of the four characters (under numbers 9 and 10) are painted without any clear attributes, or from the back. The artist under number 7 is holding a draft of a building under his feet, probably the dome of the Šibenik Cathedral, which would mean that a portrait of Juraj Dalmatinac is included in the fresco (ca. 1400–1473/1475). The figure under number 9 is holding an empty flat work object in his hands and is standing on a grave without a completely visible coat of arms (next to that grave there is another grave with a blind coat of arms). To his right, there is a similarly dressed Renaissance figure (under number 10), but without any attributes. Whether it is Lucijan Vranjanin (ca. 1420–1479), Franjo Vranjanin (ca. 1430–1502) or Andrija Aleši (1425–1505) remains unknown.

The next group (from number 11 to number 14) consists of monks, three Franciscans and one Jesuit. The first Franciscan on the left, under number 11, might be Marin Držić who, as Štajduhar noted, is holding chains in his hands as a symbol of his burdensome fate. Držić, however, is not considered to have been a Franciscan, so this thesis remains questionable. The other Franciscan on the left (number 13) is holding his hands folded and is painted without any attributes, so it is not possible to determine who he is either. Štajduhar and Kolar Dimitrijević have proposed a number of individuals, including Filip Grabovac (1697–1749), Antun Bačić (ca. 1690–1758), Matija Petar Katančić (1750–1825) and Juraj Dragišić (ca. 1445–1520).⁵⁰ However, it is not yet possible to say who

49 Štajduhar, "Ratni zadaci," 33.

50 Ibid., 33; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Izidor Kršnjavi," 279, 293.

is who. The third Franciscan on the left (number 14) is holding a piece of paper in his hand on which there are verses written in two columns, so it is probably Andrija Kačić Miošić (1704–1760). The Jesuit, under number 12, may be the physicist and philosopher Ruđer Bošković (1711–1787), although this is not certain either. This group of characters is located above a grave with the Rama coat of arms, representing Bosnia (with the depiction of a hand with a sword), which could suggest a close connection between the Franciscan order and the Bosnia and Herzegovina area. Generally speaking, this is the most demanding group in terms of identification.

On the right side of the above-mentioned monks there are four more figures, one of whom (number 18) has his back turned, so it is not possible to establish his identity. The other three are, as is evident from the depiction of faces and clothes, respectively: Fran Krsto Frankopan (1643–1671), under number 15, Petar Zrinski (1621–1671), under number 16, and the Ottoman statesman Mehmed-paša Sokolović (1506–1579), under number 17.⁵¹ Such a choice of characters corresponds to the then current socio-political situation and particularly to the social position of Muslims in the Independent State of Croatia and the strong cult of the Zrinskis and the Frankopans as fighters for Croatian independence.⁵²

On the far right under number 19, a picture inside of a picture can be noticed. Bernardo Bobić (? – ca. 1695) is probably depicted as he is painting an image of the construction of the Zagreb Cathedral, perhaps with St. Ladislav in the foreground. Painting accessories are located nearby, a clue which together with the illustration on the canvas facilitates the process of identification in this case, given that the character has his back turned. This choice is in line with the righthand, predominantly Zagrebian part of the exterior. Under number 20, as can be seen by the face, Baltazar Adam Krčelić, theologian and historian, can be found (1715–1778). By his side, under number 21, judging by the white pen, there is another Enlightenment writer, Matija Antun Relković (1732–1798).

The character under number 22 is a kind of a riddle. According to the monk's (Pauline) clothing, it could be the satirist Tituš Brezovački (1757–1805). There is a fly close to his feet (**fig. 5**); it is not certain whether this has anything to do with the character, the theme of the painting in general, or whether it is connected to both of these things. Brezovački's comedic status and the symbolism of the fly could indicate the Hegedušić brothers' political distancing from the fresco and the work in the Ministry. *Musca domestica* would therefore be associated with mortality and an unwanted compromise with the authorities.⁵³

51 Mehmed-pasha Sokolović was considered a Croat, as evidenced, for example, by the "Famous and Deserving Croats" lexicon from 1925. Compare: Emilij Laszowski, ed., *Famous and Deserving Croats* (Zagreb: Committee for book publishing, 1925), 242.

52 Matković, *Povijest*, 132–134.

53 On the symbolism of the fly in general see: Ivana Podnar, "O simbolizmu životinja" [On the Symbolism of Animals], *Vijenac* (November 19, 2009), no. 410, accessed October 10, 2021, <http://www.matica.hr/vijenac/410/o-simbolizmu-zivotinja-2805/>.

The figure with the book, under number 23, would be a continuation of the characters from the Enlightenment period and could represent their predecessor, the historian and diplomat Pavao Ritter Vitezović (1652–1713). In the characters next to him (numbers 24 and 25), Štajduhar saw Faust (1551–1617) and Antun (1504–1573) Vrančić. While Faust, in her opinion, is leaning on a crosier, his uncle Antun is holding his book *Illyrica historia* in his hand.⁵⁴ However, as the cover of the book proves, it is not about Antun Vrančić, but about Antun Vramec (1538–1587), a priest and writer, who is holding his work *Kronika vezda znovich zpravliena Kratka Szlouenzkim iezikom* (A Chronicle written in the Slavic Language) in his hand. The figure next to him, sitting on a tombstone identical to the one from the Radmilja necropolis, does not represent Faust Vrančić, but the Lutheran reformer Matija Vlačić Ilirik (1520–1575). This is evidenced by the recognizable clothes, hat and an ordinary old man's stick (**fig. 6**).⁵⁵ This choice is interesting in the context of the Axis cooperation with the Germans and the political status of Istria of that time.

286 The last three characters (numbers 26, 27 and 28) prove once again that an important segment of the picture is provided not only by characters from



Fig. 5. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School*, detail of a fly, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.



Fig. 6. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School*, Antun Vramec and Matija Vlačić Ilirik, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.

54 Štajduhar, "Ratni zadaci," 33.

55 Laszowski, ed., *Znameniti*, 80–81.

Fig. 7. Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, *The Croatian School, St. Jerome*, 1943, fresco, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb. Photograph by Ivan Kokeza.



Dubrovnik, but also by figures from Dalmatian history in general. Their appearance in the context of the capitulation of Italy in 1943 is all the more interesting. By painting famous people from Dalmatian history, the historical affiliation of the eastern Adriatic coast to the Croatian state was emphasized. This narrative was popularized anew in public during 1943, when the Independent State of Croatia took over the Adriatic coast with the help of the German army (*Wehrmacht*).⁵⁶

Judging by the habit, the relief of the lion (the saint's attribute) and the crescent (a symbol of Illyricum as the birthplace), St. Jerome (ca. 342–420) is found under number 26. Next to his feet there is an unknown (only partially visible) sealed document and a depiction of Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić (ca. 1350–1416) from Hrvoje's missal (fig. 7). In addition to St. Jerome there is also a piece of an altar rail on which Duke Trpimir's inscription (*Pro duce Trepim/ero*) is engraved. This fragment originated from the Benedictine monastery in Rižinice near Klis, and also appeared on the cover of the *Journal of Croatian History* from 1943.⁵⁷

Illustrating St. Jerome (with allusions to the area of his birth), Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and a fragment with Duke Trpimir's inscription confirms that the fresco covers the wider area of Dalmatia and Bosnia with its motifs. The meaning of the fresco, in short, is not only a symbolic connection between Dubrovnik and Zagreb, but also the entirety of their regions and hinterlands, i.e. all the territories under the real or at least nominal rule of the Independent State of Croatia.⁵⁸ This narrative also includes areas that were claimed in

⁵⁶ On the culture of the Independent State of Croatia, see: Matković, *Povijest*, 135–150.

⁵⁷ *Časopis za hrvatsku povijest* [Journal of Croatian History] (Zagreb: Hrvatski izdavački bibliografski zavod, 1943), 1–2.

⁵⁸ Such a narrative was also present in other artistic fields, as evidenced, for example, by the reviews of the Zagrebian and Ragusan theatrical traditions of the time. Compare: Dušan Žanko, "Kulturno sjedinjenje našeg XVI. i XX. st." [The Cultural Unification of Our 16th and 20th Century], *Spremnost: misao i volja ustaške Hrvatske*, December 24, 1942, no. 44, 45, 12.

a political sense (the example of Vlačić Ilirik and Istria).⁵⁹ That this is so is also confirmed by the characters under numbers 27 (master Radovan works on a sculpture of Eve for the portal of the Trogir Cathedral) and 28 (master Andrija Buvina observes a fragment from the bottom of the door of the Split Cathedral). Both artists lived in the 13th century and worked in the Trogir and Split areas, which were ceded to the Kingdom of Italy by the Treaties of Rome in May 1941. Their appearance on the fresco from 1943 represented a kind of claim or symbolic demand for the recovery of these areas.

CONCLUSION

The *Croatian School* fresco was created in the period between September 1942 and November 1943 by order of the Ministry of Education of the Independent State of Croatia, under the authority of minister Mile Starčević. The authors of the fresco, Krsto and Željko Hegedušić, were known as political dissidents and sympathizers of the Communist Party. It is not yet known if this fresco represents a kind of deal with the authorities of the time, and whether it was created in order to protect its authors from further detention.

288 The authorities of the Independent State of Croatia did not work in a systematic and disciplined manner on a new vision for the fine arts, as Hitler's Germany did, for example. This is proven, among other things, by exhibits from exhibitions of Croatian artists in the Independent State of Croatia in 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944. The fresco of the Hegedušić brothers is an integral part of this stylistically heterogeneous wartime period. In public commissions, the political structures of the time often relied on renowned painters and sculptors, or at least on the tried-and-tested artistic practices of the first half of the 20th century. At the same time, as in the case of the *Croatian School*, the emphasis remained on national content, and less on artistic form, for the creation of which (following the examples of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy) there was neither logistics nor time under the conditions of constant war.

Although the concept of the arrangement of the rooms at Opatička 10 originated from the times of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the choice of motifs and iconography correspond primarily to the era of the Independent State of Croatia. The theme of the work does not refer exclusively to the connection between Dubrovnik and Zagreb as two cultural hotspots, but is also inclusive of other areas of the state of that time. In this regard, motifs from the histories of Bosnia and Dalmatia, in particular, are represented. The background of the painting with the sights of Dubrovnik and Zagreb is an architectural backdrop under which important figures from Croatian history are gathered from the whole region. The ideological and territorial consolidation of that area was an important part of the educational and cultural policy of the new authorities. In this respect, the Hegedušić brothers' fresco was symbolic, and, within

59 During World War II, Istria was part of fascist Italy (first the Kingdom of Italy, and later the Italian Social Republic - when it was also an integral part of the German operational zone).

the framework of historical painting, their only contribution toward such aspirations. During the war, the fresco was not given special attention. It seems to have carried the burden of the ideological unsuitability of its authors. After World War II, in the context of socialist Yugoslavia, both the commission and the content were controversial. Neither Krsto nor Željko Hegedušić wanted to remember the compromise by which they put their own political and artistic convictions to the test.

