In my paper, I focus on the former high altar from the Maribor Cathedral, which is believed to be the most significant baroque masterpiece of its kind from the 17th century in Lower Styria. I point out some overlooked similarities between this altar and the altar from St. Ana near Teharje. Finally, I also propose new authorship and dating for the former high altar from the Maribor Cathedral.
INTRODUCTION
In my paper, I will discuss the former high altar of Maribor’s Church of St. John the Baptist. It is believed to be the most significant masterpiece of its kind from the 17th century in Lower Styria. In the first part of my paper, I will focus on the history of the high altar and also provide its short description. From this point of view, I will go on to discuss proposals for its dating and the question of its authorship. I will finish by comparing it to the high altar from the Church of Saint Anna in Teharje. This comparison will assist us in getting closer to answering the questions about dating and authorship.

HISTORY OF THE ALTAR
In 1859, Slovenian bishop Anton Martin Slomšek moved the Diocese seat from St. Andra in Lavanttal to Maribor. Consequently, the parish Church of St. John the Baptist was transformed into a Cathedral. At that time, the church was stylistically not homogeneous because of the several building phases and reconstructions in the past. Gaining a new role and much greater importance, the church had to be unified and modernized. During the preparations for the festive occasion, its architecture and furnishings were completely restored. Due to the contemporary views on conservation, it lost most of its baroque furnishings: several altars were removed, among which was the high altar. Fortunately, in the following decades, that altar was moved to Heiligenkreuz am Waasen in Upper Styria, where it remains until today.

THE ALTAR’S DESCRIPTION
The altar is divided into three parts horizontally as well as vertically. In the central part, there are large niches which probably had paintings inside. On each side, there are smaller niches with sculptures. In the bottom are the four church fathers: Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine, Saint Gregory and Saint Jerome, Saint Peter and Saint Paul are in the middle. Finally, Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Jacob are on the top. The entire altar is decorated with angels and angel heads, and with ample vegetal and other ornaments.

THE ALTAR IN PUBLICATIONS
In literature, only a few notes regarding the altar can be found, mostly in scientific contributions concerning the rebuilding of Maribor Cathedral and in the reviews of baroque art. Not many historical facts were known and cited before Polona Vidmar’s article which was published in 2010. Her work is partially devoted to the high altar and represents the first extensive publication about it.
The issue of dating the former high altar of the Maribor Cathedral seems to be particularly important, since it introduced innovations in the development of Slovenian altars. That is why we are so interested in uncovering the precise date of its construction. Unfortunately, there are no archive notes directly related to its origin. Therefore, researchers are mainly forced only to draw parallels with contemporary works in this area.

However, there is one archive note stating that on April 11, 1647 Bishop from Gurk forbade the town priest to hold the holy Mass at the high altar with Maribor’s coat of arms. This ambiguous statement is interpreted in different ways by different researchers. Ignac Orožen assumed that the old high altar with the city coat of arms was in such a bad condition that the Bishop thought it was no longer suitable for the celebration of the holy mass. Consequently, the Bishop had it removed and a new one raised in its place after the year 1647. Vidmar, on the other hand, presents a different opinion suggested by Arnold Luschin. He assumed that the citizens of Maribor first removed the old altar and then built a new one – it was on this new altar that they put the coat of arms in order to show who paid for it. This act would not have been approved by the Bishop from Gurk, who had patronage rights over the church, especially if it had happened without his permission. We have to conclude that this also might be a possible reason why he forbade celebrating the holy mass there.

Vidmar acknowledges Luschin’s explanation as more plausible than Orožen's, adding that the new high altar was probably already under construction in the year 1647. Of course, it is not necessarily true that all the sculptures and paintings were finished by that time. From Vidmar’s point of view, the coat of arms could have been attached to the altar before it was completely finished.

In my opinion, both of these interpretations adequately explain the archive note. Thus, it is not possible to take it as an indisputable proof for the dating of the altar: we only know that in the year 1647, a large altar with Maribor's coat of arms stood in the Maribor Cathedral. I believe it is also not possible to say which altar it was (a new one or an old one) or when it was made.

Besides this archive note, some researchers date the Maribor altar on the basis of comparisons with other altars. It was Sergej Vrišer who dated the altar of Maribor Cathedral in the 1650s. He relied on similarities between this and some others, but he also pointed out the characteristics that set them apart. Vrišer emphasized that the first signs of the Baroque era can be seen in the altar: figures are no longer dependent on the architectural structure, they move freely and the creases on their clothes are elaborate and rich. The strict architectural layout is
softened by lavish ornaments.

In contrast, Austrian experts Christine Rabensteiner and Gottfried Bidermann date the altar in the third quarter of the 17th century. They did not explain their reasoning, but according to their whole contribution, it can be concluded that they base it on comparisons with other unspecified altars from the Austrian area.

**COMPARISON WITH CONTEMPORARY WORKS**

If we are searching for a similar work from the early Baroque era in the Slovenian area, we have to take into consideration the high altar in Saint Anna’s church in Teharje (near Celje). According to the text written on the altar’s plate, it dates from the year 1651. The writing tells us that the altar was originally dedicated to St. Mary and not to St. Anna. From this, we can conclude that the altar originated from the pilgrimage Church of Saint Mary in Petrovče and was only brought here afterwards. The inscription also tells us that it was Christophorus Wollich who ordered the construction of the altar. He was a parish priest in Žalec between 1614 and 1660.

The similarities between the two altars, especially in their architecture, were first mentioned by Polona Vidmar. She pointed out the unmistakeable resemblance between the Maribor altar and the altar of St. Anne from Teharje. This resemblance can be seen in the architectural composition and ornaments. In addition, I believe that the same master worked on both altars – in Maribor and in Teharje. If we look carefully enough, we can see that the angel heads are also shaped similarly.

All angel heads have a special physiognomy; cheeks and chins are bulging, all shaped with dimples. Even their ringlets are curled in the same manner.

Besides the authorship, which I will talk about later, this is an indication that the two altars might have been erected simultaneously (around the time of the mid-17th century, as proposed by Vrišer). If this is correct and if the Maribor altar was made first, we can assume that Maribor Cathedral played an important artistic role: new innovations spread from there.
The authorship of the former high altar of the Maribor Cathedral has not yet been given enough attention from researchers, but we can discover some hints and assumptions in this regard.

Rochus Kohlbach reported that Reinhofer, the priest from Heiligenkreuz, asked about the authorship of the altar when the altar was moved to the Heiligenkreuz. Ignac Orožen provided him with the fact that the altar was made by an unknown sculptor of the mid-17th century. Kohlbach agreed with Orožen’s response, but added that the author might be some foreign master who was not a citizen of Maribor. He went on to speculate about the sculptor’s actual name. He mentioned Gärtschitsch and Adam Niederl. Finally, he assumed that sculptor Adam Niederl was most likely to have been invited to Maribor in order to make the altar. There are not many known facts about sculptor Adam Niederl, and we are not aware of any of his works that might be compared with the Maribor altar. He was mentioned in 1646 in Judenburg and in the years 1653 and 1660 in Graz. We also know he worked in Michael Hönel’s workshop, but at present Hönel’s works are also not researched well enough: it is not possible to set apart works by Michael Hönel from those by his workshop.

Sergej Vrišer also tried to discover the author among the Maribor artists. Again, Janez Gerčič (Gärtschitsch) and Adam Niederl are mentioned, as the latter lived in the area at the assumed time of altar construction. Janez Gerčič is mentioned in the archives in 1647, and Adam Niederl between 1641 and 1688.

Polona Vidmar believes that Janez Gerčič was involved in the building of the Maribor high altar, because in the year 1647 he received the order to create sculptures for Maribor’s Freiung. Nevertheless, the sculptor cannot yet be identified.

Fig. 5 | The sculpture group of Annunciation, detail from the St. Anna’s church high altar, Vrhe nad Teharji

CONCLUSION
To conclude, I would like to point out that in my opinion the former high altar from Maribor Cathedral can be dated in the 17th century. Although the Maribor altar is more elaborate in comparison to the one in Teharje, there is an incredible resemblance in details between both altars, which I pointed out in this paper. Some parts of the altar from Teharje are also very well made, for example the sculpture group of Annunciation, so its master was also of a solid quality. Having this in mind, I believe that the same master (or somebody from the workshop) worked on both altars I discussed – in Maribor and in Teharje.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid.


6 Sergej Vrišer made a comparison with an altar from the Church of the Holy Trinity in Rogška Slatina that is dated from the 3rd quarter of the 17th century. Vrišer, Baročno kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem, 15.


10 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Vrišer, Baročno kiparstvo, 7; Vrišer, Baročno kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem, 12.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.


18 Vrišer, Baročno kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem, 12, 18.

19 Vidmar, Baročni oltarji v mariborski stolnici, 594.

21 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


26 Neubauer-Kienzl, Barock in Kärnten, 41; Kohlbach, Steirische Bildhauer, 332.

27 Vrišer, Jožef Holzinger, 8.

28 Ibid.

29 Vidmar, Baročni oltarji v mariborski stolnici, 594.

ALLIGEMENT


- Rabensteiner, Christine and Gottfried Biedermann. Plastik und Stuck der Barockzeit in der Steiermark.

- Baročno kiparstvo na slovenskem Štajerskem, 12.

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FIGURES

- The former high altar from Maribor Cathedral, around 1650, photo: Valentina Pavlič.

- The high altar from the Church of St. Anna, Vrhe nad Teharji, 1651, photo: Valentina Pavlič.

- Comparison of angel heads, left: the former high altar from Maribor Cathedral, around 1650, right: the high altar from the Church of St. Anna, Vrhe nad Teharji, 1651, photo: Valentina Pavlič.

- The sculpture group of Annunciation, detail from the
high altar from the Church of St. Anna, Vrhe nad Teharji, 1651, photo: Valentina Pavlič.

5 Saint Jerome, detail from the former high altar from Maribor Cathedral, around 1650, photo: Valentina Pavlič.

6 Comparison of angel heads, left: the former high altar from Maribor Cathedral, around 1650, right: the high altar from the Church of St. Anna, Vrhe nad Teharji, 1651, photo: Valentina Pavlič.
SAŽETAK  
NEGDAŠNJI GLAVNI OLTAR KATEDRALE U MARIBORU

U radu obrađujem negdašnji glavni oltar iz mariborske katedrale koji se smatra najznačajnijim baroknim djelom altaristike 17. stoljeća u Donjoj Štajerskoj. Krajem 19. stoljeća oltar je premješten u Heiligenkreuz am Waasen u Gornjoj Štajerskoj gdje se i danas nalazi.

U literaturi se oltar samo usputno spominje, uglavnom u tekstovima koji se bave pregradnjom mariborske katedrale i pregledima barokne umjetnosti. Do članka Polone Vidmar (2010.) koji djelomično obrađuje glavni oltar i predstavlja prvi opsežniji rad o njemu, bilo je poznato svega nekoliko povijesnih podataka.

U prvome dijelu ovoga rada pozornost sam usmjerila na opis oltara i njegovu ikonografiju. Iz ove točke gledišta prelazim na raspravu o dataciji oltara. Sergej Vrišer oltar je datirao u sredinu 17. stoljeća, dočim su austrijski kolege Rabensteiner i Bidermann njegov nastanak smjestili u treću četvrtinu 17. stoljeća. Po mome mišljenju, prikladna je datacija S. Vrišera zbog osobite sličnosti s oltarom u crkvi sv. Ane pokraj Teharja koji je natpisom precizno datiran u 1651. godinu. Također, otvaram pitanje autora oltara.

Konačno, istim neke previdene sličnosti između ovih dvaju oltara i predlažem novo autorstvo i dataciju za glavni oltar mariborske katedrale.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI | barokna skulptura, glavni oltar, katedrala u Mariboru, 17. stoljeće